

Bible Students International Convention 2000

Welcoming Address-Pawel Suchanek, Poland

Dear brothers and sisters, beloved in our Lord and Saviour! Dear Friends! It is my privilege to welcome you. I cannot do it otherwise than through the words which our Lord once addressed to his disciples: 'Peace be unto you.' I would like these words to sound during this convention. May they always sound in our hearts during all the moments of our lives. 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'. { *Hebrews 12:14* }

Today the tenth—Jubilee—International Bible Student Convention is being opened. Thanks to the grace of our Lord, I would like to greet you, beloved, cordially, warmly; and to welcome you to 'our Lord's table,' to a spiritual feast. I welcome you in the name of the organizational committees: American, French, and Polish. Their work has been organized differently this time. Bretheren who as organizers have been working for us tried to do their best. It is their wish that you be glad and 'enriched in spirit.'

But has this been accomplished? If any shortcomings happen to occur, please treat them as a result of our human imperfection. For our main and most important aim is to unite all our voices into 'one choir,' to sing a hymn of praise to the glory of our omnipotent God and our Saviour. We are to unite all our efforts to nourish one another, to admonish, to encourage to spiritual growth, to make our calling and election sure (as the apostle Peter mentions in 2 Peter 1:10).

We all have been waiting and longing for a possibility to participate in this spiritual feast. We are very grateful to our heavenly Father for this privilege. We would like to benefit from it as much as we can.

Our Homeland

You have come here from different parts of the world, from different countries which, in a human sense, are your homelands. Some of you have come to Poland as to a homeland of fathers and forefathers. Perhaps you have not been in this country before. Once the apostle Paul wrote, 'For our homeland is in heaven; from hence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself'. { *Philippians 3:20,21* }

We look for this because now we are being 'subjected to like hardships as other people.' We long for this So that when 'this tabernacle is dissolved, we shall not be found naked' { *2Co 5:1-3* } . We shall be clothed with a body prepared for the church, the same body that Christ himself has. And that will be a reward for our fight and battle, for our victory.

'Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown'. { *Revelation 3:11* } 'That which you have' is a new mind, a new will, a new creature. 'Hold that which you have' means our consecration, our sanctification, our justification through the merits of Jesus Christ. 'Hold that which you have' So that you shall not be found naked; if anyone 'have counted the blood of the covenant as though it were common and insulted the spirit of grace,' this blood of covenant which speaks better things than that of Abel. 'Hold that which you have' and you will be clothed with a new body, raised in power and in incorruption.

Your feeling of living in a heavenly homeland may be a reality even now, and this is by faith. For now 'we know in part, and we prophesy in part.' Then we will know. Crossing the borders of our heavenly homeland means death of the human body. This change of nature is possible if we hold 'the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' 'Hold your confidence to the end.' 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.'

Now we fight; now we are tempted. The apostle Paul writes, 'I do what I do not want... I see in my members another law at war with the law of spirit.'

'Now we are called God's children; what we will be has not been revealed'.{ *1 John 3:2*} We are called: 'Son, give me your heart.' Son! It's you, you who seeks, who strives, who tries. Son! It's you who falls and rises again. Son! It's you upon whom come trials, experiences, even chastisements. For 'what son is he whom the father chasteneth not.' It's you, dear brother, dear sister, who rises after each stumbling. You rise because the Lord helps you with the power of his grace to get up again. Let your face shine and Christ will shine for you, in full in glory, now as in a glass.

Let us now learn the language of our heavenly homeland, 'speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.'

This language is a difficult language of paying heed to a brother, of understanding another person, of kindness. It's a language in which our Lord spoke, a language of bearing adversities in humility. 'Recall those earlier days when, after you had received the light, even though it meant terrible suffering... and sometimes you were companions of those So treated'.{ *Hebrews 10:32,33*}

Dear brethren, many of you endured persecutions, adversities, fights of faith, when different circumstances tried to tear out from your heart the hope and trust of faith. The apostle writes that you have been able to endure all this, or even better, that you are able to endure all this, because you look up to the heavenly homeland; looking up you look 'not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen'.{ *2 Corinthians 4:18*}

The Lord said, 'Trust, I have overcome the world.' He, our great Saviour, who walked the way of self-denials and trials, the blameless one, pointed that way, left his footsteps. We are to find them, and taking hold of the remaining steps, move forward. At the

same time we are to walk 'lifting our eyes upward where the Lord is calling his faithful.'

'So we do not give in to doubt, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' —2Co 4:16,17???

'This banner builds our strength that even though this path is already short, and the shadows of the night are falling, the trouble is close at hand' says one of our hymns. This trouble is going to divide the world of the flesh from the world of the spirit. It will divide those who look up from 'those who gather their treasures on earth.'

Dear brother and dear sister, dear friends! You look up with eyes full of faith, hope, and love but you need help too. You will find it in another brother and in another sister, who likewise are on their way to heavenly Canaan. They are going there too; use their experience.

When you become weak, light again the fire of enthusiasm by looking at the zeal of a co- believer. 'Call to remembrance the former days,' the days of zeal and enthusiasm, when nothing was too difficult, nothing was impossible. Call to remembrance the words of the apostle Paul: 'When I am weak, then I am strong'. { 2 Corinthians 12:10}

When your flesh does not feel well, when you are bed-ridden because of your illness, when you cannot find strength, it is then that the apostle Paul says you are strong because 'I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.' This is why we need So much these spiritual havens, our places of fellowship. Here we grow calm. Looking around at brethren from different countries, of different nationalities, different skin color, let us look at ourselves, as a little particle of God's great grace, the Lord who made himself known to us.

The apostle wrote about himself as 'one born out of due time.' How do we look at ourselves, at the Lord's grace? Let us see that his grace towards us has not been in vain. Let us strive. Striving, building ourselves, supporting each other, helping each other to climb up this difficult path full of self denials, may we reach our goal which we call 'salvation of souls.' For what profit is there if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul.

Yes, beloved, let us aim above, where the Lord lives. The Lord wants to help us. So 'let us come unto the throne of grace with confidence, that we may find help in time of need.' 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.' He wants to attribute his merit to us, but we need to want to endeavour, to strive, to exert our strength.

Welcome Beloved Brethren

So we welcome you, beloved, very warmly here in Polanica Zdr&ocute; j at the tenth International Bible Students Convention. May the Lord send his grace upon our fellowshiping, understanding, agreement, and love, So that being filled with knowledge we practice it every day. 'Fight a good fight of faith,' take hold of eternal life, remembering we are called to it.

May this convention become for us, pilgrims on a way to our homeland other than our earthly one, an oasis, a little reviving in the middle of our hardships of the journey of our life. May it be a rest in our way full of difficulties, sorrows, griefs, and burdens heavy to bear. We have an occasion to divert our attention from our daily duties, to isolate ourselves from the world and its influences, to experience a few blessed moments through fellowship with our God and our Saviour.

We are in an environment which we do not have every day; we breath a unique atmosphere. But it is us who should create this atmosphere, to create a microclimate for our hearts and minds, to experience a meeting with the Lord. Even if you try to build and strengthen yourself by reading and studying the Word of God, a meeting like this is an opportunity to get even more strength. But it depends on you, too, whether this can be accomplished.

Perhaps we will not be able to communicate freely with everyone because we are divided by language barriers. But we are aware that a true brotherly fellowship has no such barriers. It has an amazing strength. We are united by one purpose for, thanks to the enormous grace of our Lord, we abide by 'the hope of our salvation.'

Let each of us add something from himself to this atmosphere, something you delight in, a gift which you have. A smile costs nothing but exerts such a good influence upon the one who receives it. A handshake, a brotherly kiss of love: with them one does not need words to show a state of one's heart. A good word of comfort, So important for those whose hearts are heavy, or burdened with fear, sorrow, grief, or experiences. Unselfish love

which will emanate beneficial warmth, So sought after and appreciated by us all.

Perhaps you have a different gift which can give to others 'peace and love in the holy spirit.' Share it. And remember that you create a part of a fellowship according to 'the same rule.'

Are not we all brothers and sisters? Let us be aware of this responsibility and connected with it tasks which are being given today by the Lord. God will protect us. The Lord will be with us if we are gathered here in his name, from our whole hearts. Let nothing disturb our brotherly fellowship.

We are happy we are here together. We do not know if we will see each other in similar circumstances again. We remember what we have experienced So far. What is before us we do not know. Let us try, then, to make this convention an unforgettable, moving, blessed experience. Let us glorify our God through our presence, conversation, our hymns.

Looking at pictures from previous conventions, let us recall those who blazed the paths of our fellowship and who, perhaps, are not among us because their pilgrimage has come to an end. Let us create here, starting today, a foretaste of the heavenly feast to which we have been invited, where we all are going to meet together to sing together a song of joy and glory.

May the important words of our Lord, 'Peace be with you,' fill each of our gestures, words, hymns, and conversations on different subjects. May the words of the apostle Paul be realized: 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'. { *Philippians 4:7* }

Let us spare no effort to give praise from our hearts to the Lord our God and his Son, now and forever. Amen.

Lord, let it please thee to abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Glory and honour be to thee and thy holy Son, now and forever and ever. Amen.

Loving in the Truth, Loved in the Truth-Ioan Stan, Romania

Beloved brothers, sisters, and friends in the Lord! 'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord. According as his divine power hath given

unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue'.{ *2 Peter 1:1-3*}

I would like to greet this precious gathering by reminding us of the apostle Paul's words: 'Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place'.{ *2 Corinthians 2:14*} I believe this holy gathering would not have been possible if in our hearts we did not have burning this love for 'the savour of his knowledge.'

Our subject, as well as all the other subjects taken from the divine truth and presented before us by the servants of the Lord, we wish to be like a pleasant savour, that should cause a greater love for the Lord, his truth and his brethren. This way our beloved heavenly father may find his pleasure in each and every one of us.

Chosen in Belief of the Truth; Tried Concerning the Love of the Truth

'But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth'.{ *2 Thessalonians 2:13*}

We give thanks to God and worship him because he has made known unto us his truth, and his plan; he awakened us from the bad dreams of vain teachings, he delivered us from the bondage of Satan whom he will 'crush under [our] feet'.{ *Romans 16:20*} We all must take into consideration how the truth corrects and discerns the heart and also the fact that it makes a separation.

The purpose of the Lord is for the truth to only draw one class, those pure in heart, true Israelites; and separate and reveal those who are not in the proper condition of heart, but are motivated by other interests, even in their religious life. Not all are ready for present truth. Now the Lord is specially using present truth to separate wheat from the tares, gold from dross. We cannot expect him to do otherwise. That's why our prayers and endeavors should be in the line of complete honesty with the Lord, the brethren, and his truth; the love of the truth assisting us in all the things of our consecrated life.

Our Lord's statement regarding the class that is to fall during this time of testing is that he will allow strong delusions, that they will

believe a lie because ‘they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved’.{ *2 Thessalonians 2:10*}

Telling the Truth in the Heart

It is our turn to be tested and judged now during the time when the beautiful truth about the divine character and plan is clearer than ever before, a great happiness counterbalanced by equal trials. The psalmist David asked the Lord, ‘Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?’ The answer: ‘He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart’.{ *Psalms 15:1,2*} This means that he will in due time try all the motivations and inclinations of our hearts. The eye influences the heart, and this can be well known by the way we look at the things around us and how we act.

We think it is proper to remember here the *Manna* comment of June 17. ‘[Are our actions influenced by] present advantage, or worldly policy, or personal friendship, or earthly loves—of husband, or wife, or children, or love of ease, or love of peace at any cost; or whether, on the other hand, we are controlled by the naked principles of truth and righteousness; and whether we will defend these principles with zeal and energy at any cost of labor or suffering, or both, and So fight the good fight of faith to the bitter end—even unto death.’

May our treasure be in heavenly things because the Lord Jesus said, ‘Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also’.{ *Matthew 6:21*} During the entire Gospel Age there has never been a period of such complex problems as the period we are going through. The freedom we enjoy gives us the opportunity to choose between what is right and what is easy. We shouldn’t wonder at those who choose the easy path. But how many of us will choose the right path?

The apostle Paul had but one goal. He reminds us of a very important factor that will be decisive for our walk in the narrow way—the singleness of goal. He says, ‘This one thing I do’ (Philippians 3:8-14 ; *Manna* for June 12). He didn’t try to cultivate more things. He dedicated his life to only one purpose—the prize of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. He counted all the other things as but ‘rubbish.’ He declares that he had been chosen to be an apostle and preacher of the truth to the Gentiles. ‘I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not; a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity’.{ *1 Timothy 2:7*} He had a heart full of love and zeal in defending the principles of the truth to which he had been called.

We might say that we can realize this singleness of goal by appreciating more and more the truth, and living according to it.

Freedom and the Truth—a Test

We live at the close of the Gospel Age and we cannot know how long this period of freedom and opportunity of working according to the truth will last. But however long it might be, we must appreciate this period as a blessing arranged by the Lord for us. We see that freedom is the best way of examining our hearts—better than deprivation of freedom.

A characteristic phenomenon of our time is represented by the separations and associations among those in the 'household of faith.' Associating or not with a certain group—a decision made in circumstances of freedom according to our own consciences—will be a visible confirmation of our heart condition, and it will definitely determine our future.

The proverb of the wise man says: 'Those alike gather together.' Our Lord predicted this work in the parable of the seed sowed in the field, and of the 'harvest' which finally makes the selection. During the harvest among those who have come out of 'Babylon'—false Christianity, even among those consecrated—we notice that the present truth with all its aspects is more and more a test, producing separations and associations just as the first presence of the Lord with all its aspects had been a trial during the Jewish harvest time.

The Bible—the Book of the Truth

The Bible offers to us the manna of the divine truth. The truth must be found, treasured, and harmonized; but it is given by God. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 we read: 'from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' Because God 'will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth'. { 1 Timothy 2:4 }

As the spirit of God draws our hearts into a closer fellowship and sympathy with the divine mind, the value of his precious promises becomes better and better understood to the point where in our hearts will burn the same enthusiastic spirit that filled our Lord's heart and later of his apostles. Thus it was prophesied about our

Lord in Psalms 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.' This Scripture has been fulfilled in our Lord's life and So it must be with his faithful followers.

Through this great work accomplished by our Lord he opened a 'new and living way.' This is the way in which we are to walk according to our covenant of consecration. The truly consecrated are wholly different from Christians only in name who never consecrated and never received the holy spirit of truth. The true child of God only bows before Jehovah's will, bringing his own self and life as a living sacrifice, unconditionally and unreserved, on the Lord's altar.

Precious Are the Words of Truth

Let us pay attention to our Lord's words over and over again So that all their full significance might deeply penetrate in our hearts and yield their blessed fruit in our lives. Our Lord Jesus admonishes us through his words: 'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life'.{ *John 5:39*} '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'.{ *Matthew 11:29*}

The prophet also exhorts us through the spirit of the Lord saying, 'My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.' 'Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.' 'So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God'.{ *Proverbs 4:20-24 23:23 2:2,5*}

'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent'.{ *John 17:3*} May the beautiful truth presented in the holy Scriptures cheer us in every dark hour of trial and refresh our wearied strength with renewed vigor, renewed courage and zeal So that we might progress in this narrow way until 'we shall be like him' in reality. {*1Jo 3:2*}

Thy Paths Under My Eyes

Our joy depends much on the studying of the precious word and on the knowledge of his precious promises which it contains. The

prophet David, a 'man after God's own heart,' was greatly tested by the Lord. He was the most important king of Israel, a forefather of our Lord Jesus according to the flesh. The name David means 'the beloved,' 'the one who loves' or 'the one who makes a connection,' 'the one who unites.' How much these qualities match those of our Lord Jesus, who has many significant names. David is in certain respects a type of our Lord Jesus.

There are many words of teaching, comfort and blessed consolation offered by the psalmist David. We read his words in Psalms 119, verses 13-20: 'With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' (verses 140-142) 'Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.' (verses 151, 160) 'Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.' (verse 106) 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.'

Blessed is the man who approaches the Word of God with a sincere faith and a pure and humble heart, that continues prayerfully in the depth of the things he has read. He will find the life-giving truth and will be comforted by any word written in the holy pages.

Appropriating the Truth We Grow in Grace

After appropriating the truth in our minds and hearts, both time and a continuous use of faith are required to appreciate correctly the promises of God and to appropriate them. This is Scripturally called 'growth in grace and knowledge'. { *2 Peter 3:18* }

'We grow in knowledge as we take note of the promises of God, and by faith apply them to ourselves, and seek to discern in our lives the fulfillment of those promises. We grow in grace simultaneously, for unless each item of knowledge be received into a good and honest heart, and bring forth its measure of obedience and righteousness (grace), we will not be prepared for the next step

of knowledge, and would thus be stopped, or possibly turned back.’—*Manna*, March 25.

The Word Has the Power of Changing

The language of our great High Priest should be the language of each member of the royal priesthood: ‘not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me’.*{ John 6:38}* These become partakers of the holy spirit. Those who have entirely consecrated their wills, receiving the word and the will of God through Christ, are those who have heavenly or spiritual inspiration or quickening. They are So transformed, So different from their previous earthly state, that they are called ‘new creatures.’ But this name would not fit them if nothing else than the fundamental change of their hearts and wills is meant. But this means much more: it means that those now chosen from the world by the holy spirit of the truth, and those who approach God in the ‘new and living way’ opened unto them through the great sacrifice for sin, are indeed ‘new creatures’ in embryo state and will be made perfect at the ‘first resurrection’ in divine bodies. *{Re 20:5,6}*

The Word—the Agent of the New Birth

Whatever man is, he is not what he was meant to be according to Genesis 1:26-31. And for the Gospel Age calling he must change So radically that this change cannot be better described than being ‘born again,’ and the word is the first agent in this extraordinary change.

‘But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us’.*{ 2 Corinthians 4:7}* The word must be kept as a priority of the mind, must be meditated upon at all times So that it might not be lost, because it can get lost in the earthly things or in sin.

In the Old Testament the Word of God is not just a sound, it is an efficient cause. In the account of creation, the Word (in Greek, *Logos*) of God created: ‘And God said, Let there be light: and there was light’.*{ Genesis 1:3}* This is confirmed by other Scriptures: ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made... for he spake, and it was done’.*{ Psalms 33:6-9}* ‘He sent his word and healeth them’.*{ Psalms 107:20}* ‘My word shall accomplish that which I please’.*{ Isaiah 55:11}*

In the New Testament it is spoken about the Word (*Logos*) in John’s gospel, chapter 1, particularly verses 14-17: ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth... For

the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'

Notice the close connection between Genesis 1:3—'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light'—and John 1:4—'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' This connection is also supported by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where we read: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts.'

In Genesis 1 the Word has worked for creation; in John 1 the Word works for re-creation. John is the first to talk about being 'born of God', { *John 1:12,13* } which the apostle Peter calls 'being born again'. { *1 Peter 1:23* }

The other evangelists wrote the things as they appear outwardly, but John wrote of them as they appear inwardly. In calling Jesus the Word (the *Logos*) he said many things about him.

Through Jesus works the creative power of God as designed for men. He did not limit it to only expressing the Word of knowledge, he IS the Word of power. He did not come only to teach us, but rather to do something for us.

The *Logos* was the direct expression of the Father's creation—as John also mentions the Word (the *Logos*) for the purpose of making known the one through whom all things were made before he was made flesh and dwelt among us. He uses the same title for the Lord after his resurrection, calling him the *Logos* or the Word of life. { *1Jo 1:1* }

John, 'The Disciple Jesus Loved'

John occupied a specific place among the twelve, who were all loved by Jesus. Even looking only superficially to his writings, they show that his mind was always directed toward the essential features and facts of Jesus, and this is probably the reason why he was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. { *Joh 13:23* }

The name John, like many other names from the Bible, has beautiful meanings that are not to be neglected: 'a rich gift from Jehovah's mercy,' 'Jehovah really is,' 'the Lord is mercy,' 'loved by God,' 'pleasing to Jehovah,' 'child of mercy,' 'rich in grace.' Here are some meanings that we would like to applied to ourselves as well.

John is attracted by the great principles of being 'born again' and the right to be a son. But he particularly marks the essential feature of Jesus' character: 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth'.{ *John 18:37*} John uses the word 'truth' over 20 times, whereas the other evangelists use it only a few times each. John wrote his gospel after the other three evangelists and gives many teachings and facts of our Lord Jesus of which the others made no mention.

'To This End Was I Born'

Even those appointed by the authorities to catch him came back without fulfilling their mission and declared full of admiration, 'Never man spake like this man'.{ *John 7:32,45,46*} We wonder and greatly rejoice, we who are so insignificant in the world's eyes, but loved by the Father and our precious Redeemer. We thank our beloved Father that he gave us such a wonderful gift—Jesus who was 'made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption'.{ *1 Corinthians 1:30*}

Who else could have made such a statement as that made before Pontius Pilate: 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice'.{ *John 18:37*} Here is presented an important condition: to be able to hear his voice we need not only to theoretically know the truth, but be 'of the truth,' to have the truth not only in mind but also in heart.

Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' Jesus did not respond. Pilate probably thought to himself, 'No one can know what truth is.' From that time until today most people think nobody knows what truth Jesus was speaking about. During the three and a half years of public life Jesus proved that he was never preoccupied by the many 'truths' of this world. We find that he always quoted the prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, David, Isaiah, Daniel and others. He said, 'Search the Scriptures'.{ *John 5:39*} Only a detailed and earnest knowledge of the plan of God revealed in the 'holy Scriptures' brings true happiness and joy, setting the mind and the heart free of superstitions and useless concerns that press upon the people.

Jesus said, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'.{ *John 8:31,32*} These words of the Lord make a distinction between the true disciples and those only in name. If we want to be and to remain his true disciples, let us pay attention to his

requirement, that is to continue in his word. Let us not make the mistake to forget or neglect the Lord's word, to mingle truth with error, or not to rightly divide the word of truth. {2Ti 2:15} Let us not be like those of whom Paul says that they always learn and never reach full knowledge of the truth. {2Ti 3:7}

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

To the end of his earthly life, our Lord Jesus spoke about his leaving to return to the Father and told them that he would leave first and then return and take them also. And then he said: 'You know where I go and the way'. {John 14:1-6} But Thomas, being less willing to walk by faith like the others, but being honest, asked: 'Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?' Jesus said: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'

Yes, the Lord tells us that he is the only one by whom we can get to the Father and become his sons. From that time until today, those who want to become sons of God must know that the Father only receives as sons those who come to him through the merit of Jesus, his son, and walk with joy in the 'narrow way' in his footsteps.

To these are addressed verses 15, 16, and 17 of John 14: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him.'

But if we have received the holy spirit of the Father in our hearts and walk according to his plan and word, we are able to appreciate the deep things prepared by God for those who love him, for those who walk by faith. {1Co 2:9-10}

Love for the Truth, Love in the Truth, Faithfulness to the Truth, Walking in the Truth

I will close with a few statements of the same apostle John, from his epistles.

'You have an anointing from the holy one; you all know it. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it'. {1 John 2:20,21, Diaglott}

‘The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth. For the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever’.{ 2 John 1,2}

‘For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth’.{ 3 John 3,4}

Beloved brethren, I believe nothing is of more value to the Father and his son than knowing and loving the truth, faithfulness to the truth, and walking in the truth.

If we do so, we will love in the truth and we will be loved in the truth. May the Lord help us in all these things. Amen!

The Reality of Tentative Justification-Jerry Leslie, USA

Justification is correctly defined as ‘making or declaring just or right.’ It indicates a decision in a person’s favor. In Adam’s case before the fall, he was actually just. In Jesus’ case he was also actually just, right, perfect. In the case of mankind under the mediator, they will actually be cleansed and made righteous. In this situation, justification includes first the lifting of the sentence against Adam and the race, next the process of being made righteous, and finally the finished result of perfection. {Ro 5:16,19 Hebrews 12:23}

This is all based on the most legal application of Jesus’ blood. However, justification is also used in respect to others before this blood. Such was Abraham. {Ro 4 Galatians 3:6,8 James 2:23} This is a case of God’s prerogative to ‘call those things which be not as though they were’.{ Romans 4:17} Paul calls Abel righteous using the same word translated ‘just’.{ Hebrews 11:4} Noah is called just. {Ge 6:9} Bible Students call this ‘reckoned justification.’ It describes this special use of justification based on faith resulting in friendship with God. It describes how God considered or regarded them, though they were not actually or legally perfect. The word ‘reckoned’ is a Scriptural term meaning ‘accounted’ and is used both in reference to those before and after the blood of Christ. {Ro 4:3-11 6:11} But before the shedding of blood, there could be no legal or vital basis for this friendship.

Le 16 describes the justifying ceremony of atonement for Israel. We call this ‘*typical justification*, ’ again not because it is a Scriptural term, but because Paul says the shadow of things to come can never make the people perfect and the blood of bulls and

goats can never take away sin. {*Heb 10:1-4*} Paul uses the Greek word 'typical' in 1 Corinthians 10:6,11 where he says these things were types.

Coming to the Gospel age, we use the phrase '*vitalized justification*' to distinguish a life-giving relationship based on the blood of Christ although not physically or actually perfected in the flesh as will be the case with '*actual justification*' for the world in the kingdom. {*1Jo 1:7 Romans 5:9 1 Corinthians 6:19,20*}

Thus we see the usefulness of adjectives in describing the broad uses of justification in the Scriptures. In acknowledging a Christian's vitalized justification, which can occur only upon God's acceptance of a full and unreserved consecration unto death, we also respect the broader uses of the term in God's program. Brother Russell used the simple phrase '*justification*' in his early writings to describe all who trusted in the blood of Jesus, either in a broad, nominal sense or in a fully consecrated sense. Therefore he pictures both in the Chart of the Ages on or above plane 'N.' Nevertheless, in *Tabernacle Shadows* he always distinguishes the general services of the Levites from the sacrificial work and acceptance of priests. It was sufficient for him to describe the Household of Faith and the Church as both having their services based upon justification.

As the subject of justification became clearer in its beauty and detail, Brother Russell wanted to show that the Scriptures allow only one trial for life based on this '*vitalized justification*.' But one definition was not sufficient for all the references to justification in Scripture. Others who enjoy a broader favor while counting the cost are also termed justified, but in another sense. In Volume 6 and in several articles, he termed this '*tentative justification*.' The purpose of the adjective 'tentative' was to show a conditional, provisional, or trial status. The term describes those seeking and approaching justification which will require the merit of Christ but which is conditional upon their sacrifice to die with Christ. A person could reevaluate his opportunities and never go on to full consecration of sacrifice. He may decide to return to the unprotected entanglements of the world. Or perhaps he would be satisfied to live a devout life and wait for the earthly kingdom. On the other hand, he may go forward to lay all on the altar of sacrifice, and then, covered with the blood of Christ, enters into a life-and-death contract that is irrevocable. Brother Russell termed this '*vitalized justification*.'

But do the Scriptures make such a distinction? We think they do. In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul calls the children of the consecrated not unclean but holy. We do not see the word *justified* here, but clearly the idea of 'cleanness' and 'holiness' is used to describe a non-consecrated member of a family.

Then there is Romans 12:1, one of the most used texts by Bible Students. Paul does not urge aliens and strangers to present their bodies, but rather 'brethren.' Further he urges them to present a holy and acceptable sacrifice. There is no acceptable sacrifice unless it is first holy, clean, justified.

In Hebrews 9:14 we learn that the work of the blood of Christ will cleanse the conscience from dead works leading to the service of the living God. This shows that there is a cleansing before the commitment of full consecration.

In the next chapter, Hebrews 10:19-22, Paul describes the confidence to enter the holy place. He says this is based on our drawing near with our hearts sprinkled (with blood) from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (of truth). This cleansed and washed condition then encourages confidence to enter the Holy Place. It is this court-condition, prior to entering the Holy, that Brother Russell describes as *tentative justification*. For this reason the Levites were allowed services in the Court but not in the Holy. Only sacrificing priests could go further. {*Heb 9:6 Matthew 12:4*} James describes this progressive relation as 'draw near to God and he will draw near to you'. {*James 4:8*}

This favor or grace period is further used by Paul in 2 Corinthians. In 5:20 he urges a class to be reconciled to God, not ones who are already reconciled. 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' In 6:1 he urges them to receive not the grace of God in vain. 'We then, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.' What is this grace? If it is vital justification, then his audience has already been reconciled. But as a conditional standing near the holy things, they do consider the great sacrifice made on the cross and do wash at the laver of truth. But if not used for the special Gospel age offering, then this grace is indeed in vain! Romans 2:4 describes this grace as the goodness of God that leads to repentance, therefore it is a special favor that precedes full repentance and consecration.

Consider Cornelius prior to his baptism and receiving the holy spirit. {*Ac 10:4,10-14,28,31,35*} Before Cornelius received the spirit, his 'prayers came up for a memorial before God.' These were

righteous and just prayers, otherwise they would not have been heard. Peter was told that God had 'cleansed' some who Peter considered unclean. Then Peter understood that those from every nation who fear God and work righteousness will be accepted (verse 35). Such cleansing of Cornelius and others prior to receiving the holy spirit can be considered a qualified or *tentative justification* or a counting as righteous only in proportion to their understanding. However, begetting of the holy spirit is granted only after one is fully instructed concerning the blood of Christ and makes an unreserved consecration; a *vitalized justification* is secured under that blood.

Now one might say these texts do not use the word 'justification.' However, Romans 5:1,2 does use the word '*justification*' which brings peace with God through Jesus who provides introduction into 'this grace.' It is a form of justifying grace that brings the peace of verse 1. Yet it is not until verse 9 that Paul says, 'Much more then, now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.' His treatise progresses from the faith-justification that brings peace to the blood-justification that removes the curse. It is this first step of faith that Brother Russell described as '*tentative justification*' to distinguish it from full trust in the blood for life.

We also find this word used in Proverbs 4:18 where the path of the just or righteous shine more fully toward the perfect day. Here we understand it is not knowledge that is being further enlightened, but the 'path of the just,' the progressiveness of justification which leads to the absolute perfect day. This progressiveness is described in Romans 1:17, 'The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith.' This gift of grace, the 'path of the just,' begins with a measure of faith, but the 'perfect day' is not reached 'until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ'. {*Ephesians 4:13*} Paul distinguishes this progressiveness as *servants, friends* and then *sons*, all of which have a progression toward the most vital justified relationship. {*Joh 15:14,15 Galatians 4:7*}

If we return to the type found in Leviticus 16:6, we find that Aaron offered his bullock 'which is for himself, and made an atonement for himself, and for his house.' We understand that Jesus is represented in Aaron, and needed no atonement. Therefore we understand 'himself' to represent his body members who make up 'the Christ.' Yet, who is the 'house'? It is all the other believers trusting in some measure in the Redeemer. These include those

‘counting the cost’ {*Lu 14:28*} and are considered as included in the word *tentative*.

This ‘house’ is shown in another picture that embraces both primary and secondary relations to the blood. Exodus 12:7,13,22 describes the blood protection over the household of the firstborn at the exodus. Life or death jeopardy was only upon the firstborn. Yet it is explicitly stated that ‘none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.’ That is to say there was a blessing for the whole family who stayed under the blood in connection with the firstborn, though others were not of that class. This also expresses a measure of favorable divine protection for other righteous ones, but only as they remain near the lamb and its blood. All outside the house were subject to the plague and those inside were considered protected by the blood and righteous enough to be passed over—but not all were first-born. (For additional references see R3605, 4656, 5206-8, 5316, 5959; Fiii, 116-126, 151-152, 447-448, 693.)

Justification Is Not Tentative-Homer Montague, USA

Tentative justification is not a Scriptural term. Therefore, in discussing this subject, it would be helpful to obtain the meaning of both words used in this expression.

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines ‘tentative’ as:

1. Of an experimental nature; provisional.
2. Uncertain

Since the word ‘justification’ is found in the Scriptures, we will quote from *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* which provides these definitions:

dikaiösis (1337) denotes ‘the act of pronouncing righteous, justification, acquittal.’

dikaiöma (1347) has three distinct meanings, and seems best described comprehensively as ‘a concrete expression of righteousness’; it is a declaration that a person or thing is righteous, and hence, broadly speaking, it represents the expression and effect of *dikaiösis*.

Before analyzing the expression ‘tentative justification,’ we will consider the Scriptural philosophy related to the subject of justification.

In his original state, man was just or right. As a result of Adam’s disobedience in Eden, the entire human race inherited the effects of sin. We read, ‘For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God’.*{ Romans 3:23}*

Furthermore, in accordance with God’s attribute of justice, none could escape from the penalty imposed upon the first pair without the payment of a corresponding price, a ransom. The giving of a perfect human life was necessary to redeem Adam and his posterity. As an attestation of Jesus’ faithfulness in giving his perfect humanity for this purpose, we note the following Scriptural testimony: ‘For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time’.*{ 1 Timothy 2:5,6}*

Justification is a condition that is attained when a former sinner is deemed right by God and is no longer under condemnation. The object of justification is that the individual might have life. ‘Therefore as by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even So by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life’.*{ Romans 5:18}*

Before Christ came to be the Savior of the world, faithful and obedient individuals such as Abraham had a relationship with God. ‘Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness and he was called the Friend of God’.*{ James 2:23}* Although Abraham’s justification (righteousness) is mentioned in this connection, it was not a justification to life but to friendship. During the Gospel Age, none could have this same experience of justification to friendship. Undoubtedly, if Abraham and other faith heroes of the past lived during this time, they would be among the fully consecrated and spirit-begotten members of the Church who are justified to life, but as we read: ‘And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise. God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect’.*{ Hebrews 11:39,40}*

Justification to life, began in the Gospel Age based upon the import of what Jesus did. ‘But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification’.*{ Romans 4:24,25}* This was manifested when

‘He appeared in the presence of God for us’.*{ Hebrews 9:24}*
Following the imputation of the merit of Christ’s sacrifice, consecrated believers in Jerusalem were justified to life and received the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

A cardinal principle regarding justification is: ‘It is God that justifieth’.*{ Romans 8:33}* In other words, it is the Heavenly Father who certifies as to an individual being deemed right. As indicated previously, Abraham by reason of his demonstrated faith, consecration and obedience was considered a Friend of God. During this Gospel Age, God justifies consecrated believers, based upon their acceptance of the imputation of the covering merit of Christ’s ransom sacrifice and begets them by the holy spirit. However, all access to God is through Jesus. ‘Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me’.*{ John 14:6}*

Nevertheless, even though the sinner must come to God through Jesus, such a one must first be seeking after righteousness and become acquainted with Jesus through a study of God’s word. ‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him’.*{ John 6:44}*

After we learn something of God’s divine plan and hear the terms of discipleship as being a full consecration unto death, we may then fully acknowledge our undone, sinful condition, recognizing that the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary is the basis of our salvation. When we vow to follow in the Master’s footsteps, the Savior is able to impute his righteousness to cover our blemishes, thus making us acceptable to the Father who will justify us and provide us with the earnest of spirit begettal, an instantaneous act.

With the world of mankind, as they come into subjection with the righteous rule that will exist throughout the Millennium reign, they will gradually progress up the highway of holiness under the ministration of the Christ, head and body. ‘And the Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’.*{ Revelation 22:17}*

All who attain until the end of this thousand-year reign will be tested in the Little Season by divine Justice. Those who are wicked will be destroyed, but the vast majority will demonstrate righteous obedience and be counted worthy to receive everlasting earthly life. It is God that justifieth.

There can be no denying, however, the expression 'tentative justification' is found in Brother Russell's writings in relation to the believer's course from the gate of the court to the door of the holy, prior to God's acceptance of his consecration. In line with the definitions given for 'tentative' and 'justification,' a question to be asked is whether the Pastor was suggesting that such an individual is considered provisionally righteous before God accepts his consecration. A review of the Harvest message suggests Brother Russell's latest thoughts on the subject of justification were intended to emphasize the sinner's course as being 'tentative' until he fully makes the decision to consecrate his all. We do not understand that the Heavenly Father 'tentatively' or 'provisionally' regards the sinner as righteous during this Gospel Age before being covered with Christ's merit. Excluded from this consideration, however, are the children of New Creatures, up to the age of accountability. {1Co 7:14}

In support of the premise that it is the sinner's course as opposed to any action by God which is tentative, we quote the following excerpts from the Question Book (1916), page 139, paragraphs 2 and 3:

'The merit of Christ does not justify tentatively at all.... When he begins to see that he is a sinner, and to turn from sin to seek God and to seek righteousness, he is taking what we might term a tentatively justified course.... He has no blessings except those coming to him because he has taken the right course in turning toward that which God approves.... But he has not come into the family of God, and his sins are not forgiven. The blessing he enjoys has come to him from taking the course of faith and obedience to the Law of righteousness—much or little.

'The individual coming into the Court is not justified, but is approaching the justified condition. He sees the altar, and has a blessing through the realization that Christ died for our sins. He is not justified yet, but merely sees the divine provision. He says, 'I believe it,' and has a corresponding blessing. The next step is one of cleansing by washing at the laver. That signifies the putting away of the filth of the flesh, or striving to do so. It does not mean that he is now justified. If a person has been living an immoral life, and tries to put away those sins and live properly, he is getting nearer to God, and he will be bringing himself more peace of mind. If he has the right disposition he will continue on otherwise he will turn back. But if he goes on he will come to the door of the Tabernacle. He can go no further by any power of his own. He is represented here by the Lord's goat, tethered, or tied, at the door of

the Tabernacle. He has been approaching as a believer; he has cleansed himself from outward sins; and as he now sees the privilege of sacrifice, he ties himself at the door. This means that he devoted, or consecrates, himself to the Lord. He gives up his own will. But still he is not justified. He is merely seeking justification. He has been taking the right course, however which we call 'tentative justification,' because he is on the way, and getting more of the experiences necessary to bring him to actual justification. He cannot justify himself. He can only tie himself at the door. What will justify him? Here the priest accepts him, but even this does not justify him. 'It is God that justifieth.' The high priest comes and imputes his merit, and then divine acceptance is indicated by the begetting of the Holy Spirit.'

Thus, the expression 'tentative justification' relates to the tentative attitude or course of the sinner who wishes to come into a relationship with God during this Gospel Age. It seems the clarified intent of Brother Russell's use of the term 'tentative justification' is not meant to suggest that God considers such a one to be provisionally righteous. We close with a final quotation from the *Question Book* (1916), page 412, paragraph 1:

'In mercy, therefore, the Lord does not recognize any one until he has taken all these steps in just such a tentative justification, has thoroughly decided that he wants to be the Lord's disciple, and has truly said So after he has sat down and counted the cost. Until he has come to this point of decision, the Lord will have nothing to do with him. But if he will bind himself up to that door by way of making a covenant with God, then the Lord will take charge of him and make everything work together for his good—but not until after he has taken that step.'

Joseph's Silver Cup-Eugene Burns, USA

The story of Joseph is one of the longest in the Old Testament (14 chapters from Genesis 37 to 50). It is a soul-searching story mixed with villainy and great character. Both hatred and love drive the story while divine providence moves to fulfill God's purpose. In the end love wins out. The beautiful part of God's plan is that love triumphs in the end. There is also a happy ending for Jacob. He believed Joseph was dead only to find him alive in Egypt. When Jacob's life ends, in God's tender mercy, it is Joseph who closes his eyes. {*Ge 46:4*} Jacob's body is carried back to the Promised Land and is buried in the cave of Machpelah with Abraham and Isaac. This confirmed his hope in God's promises.

Jacob's Love for Joseph

Joseph was the child of Jacob's beloved Rachel. He was younger than most of his brethren because Rachel had been barren for some time. When Rachel finally gave birth to Joseph, this tended to make him especially loved. And even more importantly, he was a delightful child. Consequently, they tended to spoil him. This may have been fine for Joseph, but it created jealousy among his brethren. However, it is important that we understand Joseph's close association with Jacob was the very means by which he came to learn and appreciate his heritage in the Abrahamic promise. In all the years he spent in Egypt, probably not a day passed that he didn't recall these treasured promises. Perhaps he may have felt that in becoming the Savior of Egypt the Abrahamic promises were beginning to have a fulfillment.

Jealousy Is as Cruel as the Grave

Once jealousy starts to grow it can turn a normally good heart into an evil one. We all remember how Joseph's brethren hated him and finally plotted to kill him. Reuben, the oldest son, would not let his brothers kill Joseph. He suggested they throw Joseph into a pit hoping later to rescue him. Here we see how God turns the wrath of man into his own glory. God wanted Joseph in Egypt. He allowed the wrath of Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. This was a mean and despicable thing to do. Brothers are supposed to stick together and help one another. That is one lesson we should keep in mind. If we ever find ourselves wishing to injure another brother or sister, we certainly have not passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. The highest injury we do when love fails under the test is to ourselves. We must love our brethren. It may not always run with the grain of our old nature, but without love we are nothing. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver, which was the price of a slave under 30 years of age—Joseph was seventeen years old at the time. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver because he was a mature man. The lesson is the same, except that we have allowed for an age difference. We are not told how they divided the money. In that there were ten brothers, each would have received two pieces of silver if divided equally. Perhaps some refused the money when the pangs of guilt began to trouble them.

Joseph Did Not Allow His Environment to Shape His Character

Modern thought tends to expect individual performance to be governed by environment. It is explained that people behave badly

or well because of their environment. No matter what environment we are in, we can live on the higher plane of our ideals and hopes. That is the lesson of Joseph. He did not become a criminal because he was in jail with criminals. Because his brothers were mean and spiteful did not make Joseph that way. He maintained his integrity when there was no reward for doing so, only punishment. Why? Because he lived on a higher plane and would not allow himself to descend to the plane where tooth and claw governed. He did not plan to get even with those who had mistreated him. He had plenty of cause to be bitter and vengeful. He had been badly treated by his brothers, by Potiphar and his wicked wife, and then by the butler who forgot to mention him to Pharaoh for two years.

The Genesis account tells us that God was with him and he prospered in all that he did. It might not seem God was with him when being carried bound to Egypt. It may not seem that God was with him when Potiphar's wife accused him falsely. It may not seem that God was with him in jail for two additional years. Yet God was with him and he prospered in jail. He was a man of impeccable character and amazing ability to organize and supervise in a fair and brilliant way. Yet there he was in jail, spending some of the best years of his life as a slave or criminal. How many of us would be able to overcome under such adverse conditions? It is human to want God to remove the mountain for us, but God wants us to climb the mountain while he grants strength to do so.

You know how Joseph was taken from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream and then became ruler over Egypt. In Genesis 41:44 we read: 'I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.' Pharaoh here pictures God. Joseph pictures Christ. What a marvelous relationship came to exist between Pharaoh and Joseph. Think of what awesome power was held by a man who was just about thirty years old, who had languished as a slave and prisoner for 13 years. Imagine how far reaching was the power given him, that no one could lift up his 'hand or foot' except by Joseph's consent. Of course this was exaggerated language, but it meant to one and all that Joseph was in complete power and authority.

The seven years of plenty picture the grace and bounty of God laid up in Christ during the Gospel Age—the time of grace. The seven years of famine represent the Mediatorial Kingdom where Christ will reign supreme. In that time no one will be able to stand in his own righteousness. The Mediator will shelter them from the exact demand of righteousness. Christ will sustain them. As the famine

worsened, the people had to sell their possessions and themselves to be servants of Pharaoh. This pictures how all men will have to consecrate to God and will be totally consecrated to him when Christ delivers the Kingdom to the Father. Their only chance for survival will be accepting the terms that antitypical Joseph places upon them. The world will need to be provided for by their Mediator whose righteousness will shelter them from standing before Jehovah's throne until they attain their own human perfection. Without antitypical Joseph's provisions they would all perish—they could never attain perfection or their own righteousness.

We, by way of contrast, are able to consecrate our lives now. We gave up our possessions and our wills to God during the period of grace and hence our place will be with Joseph. Our task in the kingdom will be to make men poor to self-will and bring them under the will of God. In order to get Joseph's stores of food (which as they eat this food they will grow in righteousness), they shall have to unload themselves of their treasured resources and finally yield totally to God's sovereignty. {*Ge 47:24,25*} Israel had to give one tenth (a tithe) to the priests and Levites. Joseph made the Egyptians give one-fifth to Pharaoh—a double tithe in God's Kingdom.

I know none of this sounds very generous of Joseph, but these are the terms for everlasting life. The 'goats' will not like this arrangement. They will chafe a little under the Kingdom rule, and be eager to create better terms for themselves. What we must understand is that actually mankind will have four-fifths, which is abundantly more than they can ever use. If mankind would only devote one-fifth of their labors to the general good, how rich this world would be. Has God ever taken as much as a penny from earth? No! And he never will. However, God and Christ will count what is offered to benefit mankind as done unto them.

'Thou art even as Pharaoh'. {*Genesis 44:18*} These are Judah's words to Joseph. Yes, Christ exercises power and authority given by God. The Egyptians probably resented Joseph being in such power. I am sure they tried to by-pass his authority. However, Pharaoh would not let one Egyptian get out from under Joseph's authority—not one. Christ is our head now. We cannot expect the world to accept his headship then if we are not keeping the head now. Those who would aspire to be the bride of Christ must be eager to accept the headship of Christ now and forever. Those otherwise minded need not hope to be his bride.

The Struggle for Supreme Authority

Much of the pain and suffering in the world comes from selfish men and the Devil trying to have authority. Nimrod's tower of Babel was built as a quest for world dominance and authority. God had to intervene and end that project which was driven by ambition. Nations have been at war as long as we have had human history. The mighty nations preyed on the weaker nations, dominating them and enslaving them. We see a similar spirit even among the apostles before Pentecost. In Mark 9:33,34 we read: 'What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.' They were ashamed to tell the truth of their discussion to the Master.

It should not surprise us to see that later in the Christian Church a rivalry occurred among the bishops. As the bishops multiplied, the question soon arose as to who would be the bishop of bishops. Emperor Justinian ended the struggle by declaring the bishop of Rome to be head of all the holy churches. From there the world sank into the Dark Ages ruled by priestcraft and kings bent on controlling the world and men's minds. Satan has been represented in that cruel and bloody rule. The authority being exercised in this world is fatally flawed by sin. Consequently some have come to the conclusion that all authority is to be resisted and deplored. This has given rise to excessive demand for human rights and privileges. In this quest for rights it often happens that all authority is resisted and people imagine that human sovereignty must be without limits.

We live in a time when restraints of authority are being resisted and refused. We must not allow the anarchistic spirit in the world to get into our blood. We must remember that God is looking for those who love and appreciate the headship of Christ. Christ is to be our head every day of our lives. Even in the resurrection we will be under Christ's headship unto all eternity.

The lesson of Joseph is that while he exercised total authority yet he kept himself fully under the authority of the Pharaoh, just as Christ always acknowledged the sovereignty of his Father. He had no uncontrolled ambitions. Unrestrained ambition destroyed Lucifer. It will also destroy any Christian not keeping the head.

Ge 45:8 reads: 'So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.' This is a

beautiful Scripture. Joseph had become the father of the nation—they lived only because of him. Christ will be the everlasting Father of the world. He will ultimately bring them to God. Did Joseph's fatherhood begin only in the famine? Did it begin in the years of plenty? Did it begin while he was enslaved and imprisoned where he had to learn to follow God's leading in harsh and painful conditions? Before greatness is humility. As the Lord's people we need to have the true nurturing spirit even now. How thankful we should be that we can share the common sufferings of the world in these years of grace and favor. This will enable us to bring the world to consecration. The practical lesson we learn from Joseph is that he was tough-minded with the people. His dealings with the people were to bring them into total subjection to the Pharaoh. This is not the permissive love now being advocated. Remember Romans 11:22: 'Behold the goodness and severity of God.' The modern concept of God is that he is all kindness without any severity. The God we represent is both god and severe. Let us keep this lesson before us.

Joseph's Rough Treatment of His Brethren

Joseph first accused his brethren of being 'spies' when they appeared before him. They had come to buy grain and found themselves in a lot of trouble. In Genesis 42:17-19: 'He put them all together into ward [prison] three days. And Joseph said unto them the third day: This do and live; for I fear God. If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses.' Here we see how our Lord had placed his Hebrew brethren in Diaspora for three days (parts of three thousand-year days from Jesus' rejection of the nation until his second advent), and on the third (Millennial) day he lets them return to their homes to feed their families. This would cover the time from Christ's death until his return when he focuses on his brethren, again allowing them to return to their homeland with some provisions.

When Joseph released them from prison, they confessed their sin in the Hebrew language, not knowing he understood them perfectly. As Joseph listened to their remorse and guilt he had to turn away as recorded in Genesis 42:24 because he could not hold back his tears. In our time I wonder how often many Jewish people have looked back on their painful history with sadness at what had happened to Jesus. I am sure there is remorse in many hearts, but they cannot openly confess this to Gentiles. It is only in the Hebrew tongue that this remorse is heard. Confession precedes true forgiveness. We believe that process has started covertly and will

reach its fulfillment in Zechariah 12:10: 'And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.' This will be the moment when Joseph says to them: 'I am Joseph your brother.' What a happy reunion that was. In antitype it will be a great moment when Christ reveals himself to Israel and they fall into his open arms.

However, Joseph does not reveal his true identity to his brothers when he let them out of prison. He does something very harsh. He singles out Simeon in Genesis 42:24 where we read he 'took Simeon and bound him before their eyes.' Why Simeon? Why should he be bound and cast into prison while the other brothers were allowed to return to their families? That was very painful and demeaning. Reuben is the only one who was innocent among the brethren. He declares his innocence in Genesis 42:22. Why didn't Joseph bind Judah who suggested they sell him into slavery? *{Ge 37:27}* We are not absolutely sure, but we think it was Simeon who bound Joseph when they sold him and who was the least inclined to pity Joseph as he pleaded with them. Now, Simeon himself was to feel the pain of being bound. He was to see his brothers return home free and he was confined in prison and bound. He was going to drink some of his own medicine, and it was not pleasant. Perhaps also Simeon had not shown sufficient contrition of heart and Joseph used this stern treatment to help him come to a truly penitent heart. Please notice one thing here: Judah and his brothers make no plea on behalf of Simeon; no one offers to stand in for him.

In the antitype, we know who bound Jesus (typed by Joseph). It was the religious leaders who hated Jesus and sought on many occasions to kill him. Finally, with Judas' help they bound Jesus, delivering him to Pilate. Then they badgered Pilate into crucifying him. Five times Pilate said 'I find no fault in him.' Yet the religious leaders not only succeeded in binding Jesus, but also ridding themselves of him at least until he was resurrected.

Who might Simeon represent in our time, when the brothers of Joseph (Jesus) stand before him after being let out of the prison of Diaspora? In thinking about this it seems there is a class of Jews in our time who need some additional hard experiences. All the Hebrews standing before Joseph had rejected him. Simeon was put upon to receive additional harsh treatment. *{Ge 42:24}* Who could he represent in our time? It seems that Jews who join the nominal church, the false representation of Christ's Kingdom, are going to have extra trouble. They are going to be bound in Egypt or in Babylon. Now, I am not speaking of the Messianic Jews who

accept Jesus as the Messiah but who do not want to affiliate with the churches and their historic cruelty to the Jews. They just want to believe in the Messiah apart from Christendom and apart from the Trinity concept. We think Simeon might represent Jews who accept the Trinity Christ, the burning hell-fire Christ, and the desire to make common cause with the false Christian churches, mostly in the evangelical churches.

The Jews who have become a part of Babylon will find themselves in extra hardship when it collapses. They will be bound in that system incurring God's judgment. They may indeed picture Simeon in our time. Yes, the Simeon class is bound in Christendom while his brothers are back in their homeland feeding their families and Jacob. The nine brothers are sent home with the proviso that they bring Benjamin back with them.

The Second Meeting

The next meeting with Joseph occurs when they stand before him with their brother Benjamin, Joseph's full brother. The requirement that they bring Benjamin was most difficult to fulfill. *{Ge 42:16,19}* You know how it broke Jacob's heart to have to send Benjamin to Egypt, but the famine left him no choice. Benjamin pictures the Great Company just as Joseph pictures Christ. Joseph singled out five brethren to represent ten of his brethren. *{Ge 47:2}* We read: 'And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.' This confirms the rich man and Lazarus story where five brethren depicted ten tribes. *{Lu 16:19-31}*

This second meeting of Joseph's brethren with him takes place in antitype when the antitypical Benjamin, the Great Company, comes before Christ (Joseph) in conjunction with the nation of Israel. It is interesting to notice that Benjamin, while he represents the five foolish virgins, did not reject his brother Joseph. He was innocent of the crime of his brothers. Benjamin loves his brother Joseph, just as the Great Company loves Christ and they also build on that Rock. The five portions Benjamin received in Joseph's festive hall pictured a mark of special favor. *{Ge 43:34}* Notice how Joseph when he laid eyes on Benjamin said, 'God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother'. *{ Genesis 43:29,30}* Here we see Christ yearns for his brother, the Great Company. However, he is not ready to reveal himself to them.

Joseph's Silver Cup

The plot thickens here. Joseph fills his brothers' bags with money but lo and behold, he puts his silver cup (probably the word of truth concerning natural Israel and the Promised Land) in Benjamin's bag. This is devastating to everyone. They are all arrested and it now looks as though they must return without Benjamin. Judah, the very one who suggested they sell Joseph into slavery now puts his own life on the line. Joseph insists that the one who possessed his cup would be his servant. We know the Great Company will serve before the throne 'day and night in his temple.' In Genesis 44:18,33,34 we read: 'Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee speak a word in my lord's ears, let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.... Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? Lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.' This was the moment Joseph waited for. Judah confesses his sins to Joseph in Genesis 44:16. His willingness to take Benjamin's place as a servant overcomes Joseph. Remember that it was Judah who originally suggested they sell Joseph into slavery, but now he has matured into a beautiful person. He cares about his father Jacob and his brother Benjamin. It took great character to offer himself in slavery in Benjamin's stead. Remember that no one offered to stand in for Simeon. Of course, Judah does not have to go into slavery. His beautiful heart condition at last frees him.

This is rather exciting. In Revelation 16, 'seven angels' pour out 'seven golden bowls'—these all come from the temple 'filled with God's glory.' The 'seven angels' are then given 'golden bowls' of divine judgments. These fill up the wrath of God. Benjamin is not included in the work of these 'seven angels' who come from the temple—the true Church of God. Gold is associated with the divine. Notice that Benjamin, picturing the Great Company, is given Joseph's silver cup. Hence silver is identified with the Great Company. In Revelation 16:15 we have our Lord's message to the Great Company: 'Behold, I come as a thief, Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.' This is a message to the Great Company to keep on their robe of righteousness when everything around them is collapsing. Now we see Joseph planted his silver cup in Benjamin's bag just as Christ does with the Great Company. It created a great time of trouble and perplexity for Benjamin. He seemed doomed because he had Joseph's silver cup. The Great Company also will be in great trouble because of the 'silver cup' truths planted in their 'bag.'

Just as the silver cup is hidden in Benjamin's bag, So Christ will plant his silver truths on the Great Company, and they will be in possession of some important truth, which normally belonged only to Joseph—Christ. What might this be? I think the truth the Great Company will have is the truth pertaining to natural Israel. Hence the Great Company will know that any attempt to destroy Israel will be doomed. When Gog and Magog come down against Israel, the churches will bless this doomed invasion. However, the Great Company, will know this mission is doomed to failure. They will speak out against this and bring down wrath upon themselves.

Where does Judah come in? The faithful ones in natural Israel picture Judah, who at some point, may speak out and try to shield the Benjamin class, the Great Company, from harm as the nominal systems turn against them. This will be the great turning point, when the antitypical Joseph sees the remorse in Judah's heart and he can no longer hide himself from his natural brethren. We read in Genesis 45:1,2: 'Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.' He then says to them, 'I am Joseph your brother.' Joseph tries to hide his yearning for his brethren from the Egyptians, the world, but soon all realize that Christ has revealed himself to his natural brethren. Isn't that beautiful?

When Gog's invasion collapses, the Great Company will leave this earth in great tribulation. Then we read in Ezekiel 38:23: 'Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.' Thus Joseph's [Christ's] love for his natural people will come to be known to the entire world. Notice that it is not until Judah [natural Israel] tries to shield Benjamin [the Great Company in some unique way], that Joseph [the antitypical Christ] will reveal himself to his brethren.

Christ prepares his natural brothers in the flesh, Israel, over a long period of time to receive him. However, our lesson indicates that at the end he reveals himself very suddenly and spontaneously to his natural brethren. Joseph seems to have singled out Benjamin for special trial in possessing his silver cup of truth concerning natural Israel. He also seems to give his brethren both blessings and grief up until the time that Judah offers to take Benjamin's place. (Remember, Benjamin is Joseph's full brother, a part of the Church

of the firstborn.) This story seems to warrant expecting antitypical Judah to make some noble effort to modify the sufferings of the Great Company.

I mention this to open another window to prophecy that lies immediately before us. There is little doubt that the story of Joseph is a type in many ways. Perhaps the typical story was given to help us understand the relationship between the Great Company, Christ, Judah, Gog's invasion and Armageddon. What better way could 'Judah' show its true remorse and beautiful heart condition but to act in a noble way to shield Christ's brethren, the Great Company. This action will not save the Great Company. Remember Joseph said 'the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant'. { *Genesis 44:17* } The Great Company will serve God in his temple before the throne. It is Judah's plea that causes Christ to open his heart to his natural brethren.

No Sowing or Planting for Seven Years

It is important to know that one of the reasons they survived the seven years of famine is that they did not sow or plant for seven years. If they had done so, they would not have survived. I am certain that panic gripped the hearts of the Egyptians as the famine deepened. It would be natural for them to want to plant grain hoping for a harvest. Only by being subject to Joseph could they survive. In *Genesis 45:6* we read: 'For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing [plowing, RSV] nor harvest.' Then when they do plant at the end of the seven years of draught, we read in *Genesis 47:23*: 'Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land.' That is when they must give a fifth of their harvest to Pharaoh, to God, or really for the common good.

One last comment comes from Paul in *Hebrews 11:22*: 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.' This was a significant gesture on Joseph's part. He could easily have had a great monumental burial in Egypt. His name was great and the nation owed him their lives. However, Joseph had never forgotten the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Under no condition was he going to rest in Egypt.

The story of Joseph proves that people who once turned mean and ugly can be turned around into beautiful caring people. What a

man is should not interfere with what he might be once he chooses to repent and reform. The poet has said: 'The saddest words of tongue or pen, are the words it might have been.' What people are, and what they might be, may be two different things. Everything depends on making the right choices and the right decisions. People who make the wrong choices and the wrong decisions will look back with broken hearts at what might have been had they done differently. We do not want to be 'what might have been' Christians.

Getting Back to Benjamin

We are actually more concerned with Benjamin than with Simeon. After all, Benjamin is our brother in Christ. Why would antitypical Joseph plant his silver cup in Benjamin's bag to bring such distress upon him and all the natural Israelites? Remember when Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, his soul yearned for him and he had to leave the room to seek a place to weep. {*Ge 43:30*} He thereafter gave five portions to Benjamin his brother! He seemed extravagantly pleased with Benjamin. Then he places his silver cup in Benjamin's bag, making him look like a thief. None of this seems to add up. Benjamin was not really in danger of literally being a slave to Joseph, was he? Joseph surely would not allow any harm to come to his brother whom he loved. Joseph knew that his brothers had brought Benjamin to them under great restraint from his father Jacob. Certainly Joseph was not going to do anything to give his father further pain. This silver cup was planted on Benjamin to test his brothers. What would they do if it looked like harm were to befall Benjamin?

To Joseph's great pleasure Judah, his very own brother who suggested they sell him into slavery, turned into a loving and caring person. When Judah realizes they might have to return without Benjamin, he fears for his father Jacob. They robbed him of his son Joseph. They cannot return without Benjamin So Judah offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin. At this point Joseph cannot hide himself from his brothers for another moment. While he orders out all the Egyptians, he cries So loud that everyone in Egypt hears him.

This, of course, is a type of Christ. The antitypical Joseph apparently waits to see his natural brother, Judah, the leading tribe of Israel, not only show verbal remorse, but express a willingness to suffer as a bondsman, to save his brother Benjamin. That is the moment when Christ will reveal himself to all his brethren and to the world. Remember, up until this point Joseph had been a little

hard on them. He repeatedly had placed them in stressful and worrisome positions, even though all the while he proved to be a great benefactor to them. It was only through his generosity they had provisions to live on.

How this might develop in the days ahead we may not be sure. It is possible that when the Armageddon climax is reached and the nations of Christendom are about to descend upon Jerusalem, that the truth about Israel will be found coming forth from Benjamin's [the Great Company's] bag. The nominal churches will be distraught with the Great Company for censuring their crusade against Israel and Jerusalem. It may be at this very moment that some of the faithful in natural Israel will speak up in defense of the Great Company. It will not save the Great Company because they must come up through 'great tribulation' to finally overcome and stand before the throne of God.

The whole point of this lesson is that Christ will not reveal himself to natural Israel and to the world until 'Judah' picturing the faithful in natural Israel offers to stand in for Benjamin, the Great Company. That is the great moment when Christ will say, 'I am Joseph your brother.'

In conclusion, dear brethren, remember why we are here today. The truth of God is everything to live for, and it is also everything to die for.

Elisha and His Work-Stefan Tarcea, Romania

Elijah the prophet by his work admirably reflected the work of the Church during the Gospel age. Elijah's ministry seemed to have reached a disappointing end on Mount Horeb, according to 1 Kings 19:10-14, where it is written: 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'

But the Lord had planned important missions for Elijah, since on that occasion he told him to anoint Hazael as king over Syria, Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel and Elisha, the son of Shaphat, as prophet in his place. The first of these three anointings was Elisha's, which was performed by Elijah. The other two anointings, Hasael's and Jehu's, were not performed by Elijah personally, but under the supervision of Elisha. {2Ki 8:13 9:3}

The mission of the prophet Elijah was not diminished by this, but it was strengthened through the work of Elisha, who had asked a double portion of Elijah's spirit when they parted. {2Ki 2:9,10}

Elisha, the son of Shaphat, was found by Elijah plowing the field with 12 yoke of oxen. {1Ki 19:19} Elisha's work in the field with the 12 yoke of oxen may be likened to the present work of the last members of Elijah's class and its transfer to the Elisha class. The number 12 makes us think of the 12 tribes of Israel and the fact that the antitypical Elisha has as a foundation the teachings of the 12 apostles, whose cornerstone was our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throwing of the mantle by the prophet Elijah upon Elisha marks the beginning of Elisha's activity in the service of Elijah. He was ready to sacrifice immediately after recognizing the importance of Elijah's work and the wonderful ministry with which he was to be entrusted.

So also the Lord Jesus Christ's robe of justification must wake up our interest for consecration and activity in the Lord's service. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service'. {Romans 12:1}

The name Elisha means mighty deliverer, and Elisha's work was a work of restitution. We believe that Elisha through his work symbolized two classes: first he symbolized those who now are associated with Elijah class (Great Company), then, after Elijah was taken up and after crossing Jordan the second time, he symbolized those who will have under their care the dispensing of the restitution blessings during the Millennium (the ancient worthies).

So we see the work of Elisha class described as principles by the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, a king will reign in righteousness and princes will rule with justice'. {Isaiah 32:1} Similarly Psalms 72:1-2 says: 'Give the king your judgements, O God, and your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.'

Elisha's journey with Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, then to Jericho and finally to Jordan, represented important points, but measurably disappointing. Nevertheless, Elijah and Elisha were not discouraged, but they went further to Jordan, which represented the end of Gentile Times, in the parallel of the two classes, type and antitype.

We do not know exactly how long the journey of the two lasted on the other side of Jordan, but we know with precision that the mantle which fell from Elijah during his being taken up in the chariot of fire, which was picked up by Elisha, represented the divine power that worked through him and similarly God's power that works through his elect now.

The double portion of Elijah's spirit, asked for and received by Elisha, which we can notice now during the time of the end, is double compared to other people and other times; and we believe it may also be illustrated by the prophecy of Daniel 12:4: 'But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase.' Truly, the Lord's people today have a special knowledge of God's plan, of the common work of Elijah and Elisha classes in the present time and their work in the future.

Beloved brethren, let us gird up the loins of our minds, be sober and cooperate in the fulfillment of the divine plan and rest our hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. *{1Pe 1:13}*

We are expecting also that day after day the minds of the earnest and thinking people will be opened to realize more and more of the truth. As never before, they will have need of the Lord's saints to show them the direction and bring the Scriptures to their attention and different helps for Bible study, which the Lord has provided and which are in the hands of many for more than 100 years now.

The Healing of the Waters of Jericho *{2Ki 2:19-22}*

Jericho as a city had a good location but in its area the waters were bad and the land unfruitful. The earth and human society also have a good location and are well thought of by the Creator, but their administration and laws are based on selfishness. Elisha's intervention with casting of salt at the springs of waters resulted in the waters being healed of two plagues: death and unfruitfulness.

Our Lord Jesus Christ explained to the Samaritan woman about the effect of life-giving waters: 'Whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst. But the water I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life'.*{ John 4:14}* The river of water which will flow during the Millennial age pictures the truth. Today we observe that this water is set to flow through the field into the sea, So the waters will be

healed. Every living creature that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. {*Eze 47:8-11*}

The salt cast into the spring brings to mind the words of the Master concerning his true followers: ‘You are the salt of the earth.’ {*Matthew 5:13*} The blessing, ‘the river of truth,’ will come through the glorified salt of the earth, to human refreshment for a thousand years. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the depth of the sea. ‘They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.’ {*Isaiah 11:9*}

The Battle Against Moab

{*2Ki 3:4-27*}

The campaign of the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom against Mesha, the king of Moab, seemed to end in a failure. After a seven day journey, the water for the army and the cattle that followed them was finished. Jehoram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, was sure the Lord delivered them into the hands of Moab. However, one of the king’s servants suggested that the Prophet Elisha be consulted concerning the chances of victory for the three kings allied against Moab—Jehoram, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was the reason for Elisha’s intervention on behalf of the army—verse 14.

While the musician was playing his harp, the hand of the Lord was upon Elisha. All the ditches dug in the valley were filled with water, sufficient for the army and the flocks that were with them—verses 15-20.

The song of the bridegroom and the bride heard and appreciated by Elisha class will be a praise to our God; when the many will hear and accept the message of the antitypical Elisha, they will trust in the Lord. {*Ps 40:3*}

The Oil Increasing {*2Ki 4:1-7*}

A poor widow in distress because of her debts called upon Elisha for help, her resources being exhausted, except for some olive oil. Elisha asked her to bring all the vessels she had, to even borrow from the neighbors and pour oil into them until they were full, then to sell it for money and pay her debts, the remaining oil to be used for her living—verses 3-5.

This story may picture to us the blessed rewards of the faith which the Lord will grant during the Millennium. It shows also the general principle of justice on which basis the Lord works. The debts must be paid, justice must not be trespassed against. The Lord will bless the people according to their faith, and their property will increase according to the faith exercised; all of their needs will be met.

The Lord illustrated some of the great blessings in the Millennial Age. How comforting it is to know the fact that our Lord's first miracle at his first advent was to cause joy at a wedding. 'This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him'. { *John 2:11* } Yes, he brought joy; his labor of love according to the will of God is the good tidings for all.

Another miracle of his was the feeding of the five hundred people with only five loaves of bread and two fishes. It was as if he would have told us, among other things, to use what we have available, asking the Lord's blessing, not doubting of anything. The Lord rewards the faith.

In this widow's case, the oil was enough to fill her own vessels and those she had borrowed.

Death in the Pot {*2Ki 4:38-41*}

While the famine was sweeping over the land, the sons of the prophets prepared a stew of wild vine. The food was not edible because of its poisonous contents. Elisha came in, cast flour in the pot and the stew became good enough to eat. Theologians' death-bringing stew will be healed by the word of truth.

We believe that the truth will have a greater and greater effect of removing the veil that covers the nations. 'And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees'. { *Isaiah 25:6* }

Naaman Healed of Leprosy {*2Ki 5:1-19*}

In the East leprosy is one of the most terrible illnesses and it is generally accepted as being incurable. The Bible seems to refer to it as an illustration of sin because it is incurable, unless it is removed through a divine miracle. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian king's army, was a leper. There was a Jewish young girl in his family who was brought as a captive after one of the battles

between Syrians and Israelites. She noticed the condition of her master and she brought to the attention of her mistress concerning a great prophet in Israel who could heal him of his leprosy.

During the Millennial age the eradication of the leprosy of sin will be performed on the basis of keeping the divine laws received from Zion (the Christ—Jesus and the church in glory) and administered from Jerusalem (the ancient worthies of Israel). *{Isa 2:3}* Naaman's Jewish girl servant suggested the idea that salvation is of the Jews which is clearly stated by our Lord Jesus: 'You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him'. *{John 4:22,23}*

What seemed but empty words, were taken into consideration by Naaman as his last and only hope. He obtained from his king a letter of recommendation to the king of Israel, which said in essence: 'I send this letter with my servant Naaman to heal him of his leprosy.' The king of Israel was struck with panic knowing he had no power over the illness. He concluded the Syrian king was looking for strife with him, and after the custom of the time he tore his clothes.

When Elisha, the man of God, heard this, he sent word to the king not to be troubled but to send Naaman to him. Naaman arrived at the prophet's house with expensive gifts and sent word to the prophet concerning his purpose and that he was sent by the king. As an answer, the prophet sent him to bathe seven times in the Jordan. Naaman was angry, thinking he was not given attention according to his position; he said there were rivers in Syria with better water than Jordan and started his way back home full of anger.

Finally, Naaman let himself be persuaded by his servants and dipped seven times into Jordan as he was advised by the prophet. The result was a miraculous healing. Naaman returned to the prophet to give him the gifts he had brought and thank him, but the prophet did not accept them. He was only acting as a divine representative, his powers were not for sale, they were divine blessings. Naaman recognized that fact before God. He testified that no god except Jehovah could do such a miracle—verse 15.

As Naaman could be healed in no other way than in Jordan, So also during the Gospel Age the followers of Jesus take their teachings from a unique source, the divine word, the Holy

Scriptures, to gain everlasting life. No other source, no other theory could replace the Word of God. This principle of uniqueness will be maintained during the Millennial Age also; all the people will have to turn to one direction, to Jerusalem, and follow the regulations given by the Elisha class—the ancient worthies—to be cleansed of sin and released from death.

We notice also that Naaman's freedom of conscience and choice was fully respected by Elisha, of which we may admirably recognize the principle of free will applied by God, included in the atonement of man with God through the merit of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. God doesn't force us, but he advises us like a good father, as we find in Micah 6:8: 'He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.'

Blinding of the Syrians

{2Ki 6:8-23}

When the Syrians were blinded, the servant of Elisha the prophet, frightened by the army which surrounded the city with a purpose to catch Elisha, said: 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' And the prophet answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' In a miraculous manner the Lord opened the servant's eyes who then saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha—verses 15-17.

Through faith, the true believers observe both the work of the messenger of the covenant, *{Mal 3:1}* called to fulfill Jehovah's plan, and also the fact that righteousness and salvation do not tarry, but are fulfilled according to the planned terms. 'My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, who are far from righteousness: I bring my righteousness near, it shall not be far off; my salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.'—Isaiah 46:10-13

The blinding of the Syrian army and bringing them to the midst of Samaria resulted in their being taken captives without any effort. The opening of their eyes in the midst of Samaria (State of Israel) and Elisha's recommendation not to slaughter them, but give them bread and water to eat and drink, then set them free, is in harmony with the wonderful prophecies concerning restoration of mankind, of which we quote but a few:

‘And he will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations’.{
Isaiah 25:7}

‘It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways and we shall walk in his paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’.{*Micah 4:1-3*}

The Shunammite Helped by Elisha

{*2Ki 8:1-6*}

Restoration or restitution of the rights forfeited by our forefather Adam in Eden is found admirably described in the case of the Shunammite, helped by Elisha at her symbolical return after the night of sin (seven years of famine). Elisha recommends the king to restore to the woman all that she had, from the day she left the land to her return—verse 6.

Mankind in general will be blessed by means of the New Covenant which will be made with Israel and through it with all mankind, with the purpose of lifting up the land (ceasing the curse) and the imparting the desolate heritages (lost rights). ‘Thus says the Lord: In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you; I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; that you may say to the prisoners, go forth, to those who are in darkness, show yourself. They shall feed along the roads and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.’—*Isaiah 49:8,9*

The glorious finale of this great present battle, is fought by our returned Lord Jesus and his Church, in a manner obscured to the natural understanding: ‘But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils’.{*Luke 11:22*}

Conclusion

The opinion on the subject here presented is the result of harmonizing a number of studies concerning the classes represented by Elijah and Elisha in the literature of *Studies in the Scriptures* to which we had access.

I think that the events that mark the work of the Elisha class may trigger very rapid changes in the world. Therefore, a more vigilant watching is required in us during these times when we witness the final and complete overthrow of the systems invented by the evil one. We believe that soon we will witness the revelation of divine providence when the earth is made Jehovah's footstool.

Beloved brethren, let us be more and more responsible to our privilege of becoming new creatures and cooperate, now and in the future, to the progress and grand culmination of the loving plan of our Heavenly Father, to restore mankind and the earth! May God bless you.

Amen.

Historical and Spiritual Israel in the Plan of God-Avel Lupsor, Argentina

The people of Israel are linked not only to the sacred book, but also to the holy land, Palestine. These are the elements prepared by God to carry out his plan of salvation, the Messiah being the central figure that would bring it to fulfillment.

Israel is the only people of the land that God recognized as his people. *{Am 3:2}* God selected Abram as its founder and began to form the people of Israel with Jacob, the head of the 12 tribes. God changed the name of Jacob, calling him 'Israel'. *{Genesis 32:28}*

The name 'Jews' is derived from Judah and was applied first to the inhabitants of Judea; later it was generalized to all the descendants of Jacob. *{2Ki 16:6}* With respect to the name 'Hebrews' there are doubts as to its origin; it appears for the first time in Genesis 14:13 and is applied to Abram. Generally it is supposed that it is derived from 'Heber,' an ancestor of Abram, but others suppose that it is derived from the word 'Abar,' which means 'to pass over' and which was applied to Abram by the Canaanites because he was the man who came from beyond the Euphrates.

Obedying God's call Abram left the city of his birth, Ur of the Chaldees, and crossing the River Euphrates he moved to the land

we know today as Palestine. *{Ge 12:1-3}* In Genesis 12:7 God promised Abram that he would give that land to his descendants forever. Years afterward God appeared before Abram and renewed this promise, announcing to him the birth of a son whose descendants would form a nation that would possess the country perpetually. To seal this covenant God changed the name of Abram to 'Abraham' *{Ge 17:1-16}* which means 'father of a multitude,' and he ordered him to circumcise his descendants as a sign of the covenant. At the time appointed the promise was fulfilled and Sarah gave birth to a son of Abraham. *{Ge 21:1-3}*

From this covenant which God made with Abraham arise several facts of vital importance both for his descendants and for the nations in general: 1) the land of Canaan would be given in perpetual possession to his descendants; 2) in his seed would all the nations be blessed; 3) his seed would be as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. *{Ge 22:17,18}*

It is a notable fact that God would separate the descendants of Abraham into two classes, one heavenly and the other earthly, each represented respectively by the stars and the sand. We should remember that only promises of earthly or natural blessings were made to earthly Israel since the door of the heavenly calling was opened after the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. *{Ga 3:16,29 Hebrews 3:1 Ephesians 4:1-4}* So it is that with Christ was initiated the formation of spiritual Israel. *{Php 3:20}*

The carrying out of the promise in its earthly aspect was also delayed a while. The Scriptures reveal to us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived as strangers in the land of Canaan. *{Ac 7:4,5}* In the days of Jacob there was a scarcity of food in the east, and therefore Jacob sent his sons to Egypt in search of wheat. There Joseph showed himself to his brothers and in these circumstances Joseph moved his father and his descendants to Egypt.

Before dying Jacob announced a future full of hope for the descendants of his son Judah, the head of the royal tribe, from which would arise the Messiah. Thus we read in Genesis 49:8-10: 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise:... The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.'

After the death of Joseph and of the fall of the dynasty of Pharaohs that favored the people of Israel, the descendants of Jacob were submitted to hard slavery. Then God raised up a liberator in the

person of Moses to whom God presents himself as ‘the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ and also as the Eternal: ‘I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you.... Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel: JEHOVAH... hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations’.*{ Exodus 3:6-14}*

In verses 6 to 8 God announced to Moses that upon liberation Israel would be converted into his people and the covenant made with Abraham would be fulfilled. This liberation was produced in an irresistible manner, and all who are familiar with the Scriptures know the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the manifestation of power and glory on Mount Sinai. In this mount God makes a covenant with Israel, giving them the ten commandments So that the children of Israel linked forever their destiny to Jehovah God, promising fidelity and being depositories of the Law and the Word of God. *{Ro 9:4,5 3:1,2}*

For centuries they were the messengers of the one God when all the peoples of the earth practiced idolatry, polytheism, and the cult to the demons. Thus was initiated with Israel a period of preparatory testimony for the coming of the Messiah. From the call of Abraham to the death of Christ, Israel was the only people recognized by God, witness of the one God, and custodians of the Torah, this marvelous law which structured and differentiated Hebrew society from all the other nations.

To comprehend the mission of Israel we need to know the law of Sinai and its wonderful utility and influence over later civilizations. With the alliance at Sinai God gave other laws or standards to the people of Israel—spiritual, judicial, social, moral and ceremonial standards, which would have the purpose of establishing the Decalogue. For example, the first commandment gives us the thought of one God: ‘I Am the LORD thy God thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ But the declaration of Deuteronomy 6:4, which says ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD,’ leaves no room for doubt. God is one, not three gods in one. *{Ne 9:6 Isaiah 45:5-7}*

The sixth commandment (‘thou shalt not kill’) has standards for its application which differentiate between premeditated homicide, manslaughter, or where there is culpability. *{Ex 21:12-27 22:2 Numbers 35:9-28 Deuteronomy 19}* The tenth commandment establishes the right to private property; it speaks of personal goods

and considers possible damages to these goods or to animals establishing a compensation.

The jubilee was a most important standard which regulated the right to property, servitude, and payment of debts. The fiftieth year was the year of jubilee in which debts were canceled and properties were returned to their original owners. In this way the universal Grand Jubilee is symbolized, the times of restitution of all things. *{Ac 3:19-21 Revelation 21:4,5}*

There are also the law of remission, standards of worship, ceremonies, the priesthood and sacrifices, tithes and offerings, all of which are shadows of good things to come. *{Heb 10:1 Exodus 21:1-11,28-36 22:1-15 Leviticus 25}*

The faith of Israel in the one God was put to hard trial because the people who surrounded Israel were very corrupt. God demanded absolute dedication and obedience; noncompliance was punished severely. Therefore when the people accepted the covenant, God placed before them blessings and curses. *{De 28:9-13,58-68}* Verse 64 tells us: 'The LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.'

The people of Israel were punished in many ways until they were finally carried captive to Babylon. The Scriptures say that the Israelites were punished 70 years for not observing the laws and standards given by God. *{2Ch 36:21 Jeremiah 25:11}* After 70 years a remnant of the children of Israel returned to their land and rebuilt their national unity; but they could not regain their dignity and liberty as a nation. Throughout their history the Hebrews were a very difficult people to govern. They were in continual rebellion against the Roman Empire until finally in 70 AD Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed as Jesus had foretold years before. *{Mt 24:1,2 Luke 19:41-44}*

Moses and other Hebrew prophets who foretold the dispersion also foretold the return of Israel to the land of their fathers. The return did not take place in any era except the last days of the last time, in the end of the Gospel age *{Ac 15:15-18 Deuteronomy 4:30 Ezekiel 38:8}* .

Today we are witnessing the fulfillment of these prophecies. Christianity in general (except for some small groups) considers that the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine has nothing to do with the fulfillment of these prophecies; they think that these were

fulfilled by the return from Babylon. But the Word of God tells us otherwise. In Amos 9:14,15 we read: 'I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them.'

Nevertheless in 70 AD the Jews were pulled up out of their land; therefore these prophecies have their fulfillment in our time. Both the ordinary man and the political and religious leaders consider the formation of the modern State of Israel as a political circumstance of the time in which we live.

It is also a very widespread error to consider that Zionism is a creation of imperialism. The word Zionism is derived from Zion, the mount which is found to the southeast of Jerusalem. It is encircled on three of its sides by deep ravines and on the remaining side by the Tyropean Valley which separates it from Mount Moriah where the temple was established. Jerusalem is built around these mounts which symbolize the earthly and spiritual phases of the kingdom of God.

Zionism was organized by Theodore Herzl who formulated a complete plan for constituting a Hebrew State in Palestine in his famous pamphlet *The Hebrew State*, published in Vienna in 1896. In the year 1897 the first Zionist congress was convened in Basel where goals were proposed for carrying out the establishment of the Hebrew State in Palestine.

This would be a good moment for making a little commentary on the interpretation of these facts by the first Bible Student brethren. Seven years before the first Zionist congress took place, these students foretold the return and restoration of the people of Israel to Palestine in volume three of *Studies in the Scriptures* (entitled *Thy Kingdom Come*) written by Brother Russell and published in 1890. Our brethren have been pioneers in this matter.

Now we ask: Why does Zionism arise? Our reply is that it arises to fulfill the prophecies. Really very few are in agreement with this thought, but God used Cyrus, King of Medo-Persia, to free the Israelites from Babylon, and in the same way he used Zionism to make possible the return of the Jews to Palestine. In the light of history we see Zionism in its beginning carried out a task of persuasion to get Jews to return to the land of their fathers. At the

same time Jews began to buy lands in Palestine to found agricultural colonies and began to build houses.

Today the State of Israel is a reality and the prophecies that foretold these facts have been fulfilled. In Jeremiah 32:44 we read: 'Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD.'

The prophet Jeremiah, after foretelling the dispersion to a land that neither they nor their fathers had known, tells us: 'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north [Russia], and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.'—Jeremiah 16:13-16

We can compare the Zionist movement with the methods of the fishers; the hunters are the persecutors, anti-Semitism with its persecutions, first in Russia and afterward in all Europe, which caused the Jews to look back to their homeland. The holocaust, which meant the assassination of six million Jews in the heart of Christian Europe, was a diabolic plan intended to destroy the seed of Abraham and nullify the promise of God. But as the prophet Isaiah tells us: 'So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please'. { *Isaiah 55:11* } Thus all these terrible persecutions instead of destroying the Jewish people, accelerated the establishment of the State of Israel at the end of the Second World War.

The prophet Jeremiah confirms to us the same thing when he says: 'For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.'—Jeremiah 30:11

The official thought of traditional or nominal Christianity is that the mission of natural Israel ended with the first coming of Christ, and that during the present and future age the people of God is

spiritual Israel, that is, the Church. The apostle Paul does not share this thought: 'Hath God cast away his people? God forbid'.{ *Romans 11:1*} Then in verses 11 and 12 he adds: 'Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?' In verses 28 and 29 he assures us that 'as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.'

In verse 25 the apostle Paul predicts the restoration of Israel, and says that hardening in part (that is, for a time) occurs until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. By 'fullness' we understand the call to the heavenly calling, the election of the members of the body of Christ, a little flock separated from the great mass of nominal or official Christianity. This 'election' Paul calls 'the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints'.{ *Colossians 1:25,26*}

In Acts 15:14-20 we see that God did not intend to convert the world during the Gospel age, but he is only electing a people for his name from among all the nations, spiritual Israel. When the election of this people is complete, the tabernacle of David will be built again, So that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom God's name is invoked.

In Romans 11:25-27 Paul cites Isaiah and tells us of a future salvation of Israel when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, saying: 'So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my Covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.'

On speaking of this future covenant with the people of Israel, Paul was citing the prophecy of Jeremiah about a New Covenant which, unlike the old Law Covenant, will not be invalidated by the Jewish people; this New Covenant will be firm and lasting, as we read: 'But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people'.{ *Jeremiah 31:31-33*}

But we know, sadly, that before entering into the New Covenant, Israel will have to go through a great tribulation which will have as its result making sensitive the heart of the Israelites to accept the Messiah. Jeremiah 30:7-11 refers to this period of afflictions

before the institution of the New Covenant, as ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble,’ saying: ‘Alas! for that day is great, So that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it... strangers shall no more serve themselves of him... I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee.’

Let us now see in what circumstances this trial arises for Israel. The Scriptures speak to us of the judgment of the nations, and we read in Joel 3:1-3, ‘In that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.’

Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 describe in detail this great tribulation. In Revelation 16:13-16 we are told of the battle of that great day: ‘And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.’ The word Armageddon means ‘Mount Megiddo’ which is found in the valley of Jezreel and extends from the Mediterranean to the River Jordan.

To Armageddon converge the armies of the world summoned to a sort of holy war. Nevertheless, Armageddon will be only the epicenter of a conflict that will embrace the whole world. Jesus said that the magnitude of this conflict will be So great that ‘except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved’.*{ Matthew 24:22 Mark 13:20}*

In the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and other prophets we find records of God’s intervention in the history of humanity. Once more Jerusalem will be surrounded by enemy armies which will seek to destroy Israel. But when the destruction seems inevitable, liberation will arrive in a miraculous, irresistible manner. In Zechariah 12:9,10 we read: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.’

Jesus completed this prophecy when he said: ‘For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that

cometh in the name of the Lord'. { *Matthew 23:39* } Then God shall say to the people, manifesting glory and power, 'Come, behold the works of the LORD. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; ... I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth'. { *Psalms 46:8-11* }

The time of trouble will bring instability and confusion in the world for the political leaders and financial corporations that direct our planet. The political, military, and religious blocks will be undone; every system that is not in accord with the will of God will be destroyed. { *Heb 12:26-28* } God himself will establish a new world order ruled by Christ and his glorified Church, spiritual Israel, So that all the kingdoms and nations will obey and serve him. { *Da 7:13,14,18,26,27* } As the prophet Micah tells us during this new world order, 'The law shall go forth of Zion [the spiritual part of the kingdom] and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'. { *Micah 4:1-4* }

The visible part of the kingdom will be composed of the faithful servants of God from Abel to John the Baptist. God will make them princes and judges over all humanity. They will be the representatives of Christ on earth. { *Ps 45:16 Isaiah 1:25,27* } This will be a time of restoration of all things during which the peoples will acquire a knowledge of the truth because all the earth will be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the depth of the sea. { *Isa 11:9* } Then God will give to the people pure lips So that all may serve him with common consent. { *Zep 3:9* } For in this mount (kingdom) God will make a banquet for all the people, he will take away the blindfold that covers the eyes of all nations, he will destroy death, and all grief and anguish will be cured for ever and will never again afflict humanity. { *Isa 25:6-9* }

From what has already been said, we see that the people of Israel will have a full participation during the Messianic kingdom. As we have seen, the restoration of Israel is not a product of political circumstances, but of the Divine will, in fulfillment of the promises made by God from the time of Abraham. Today earthly Israel is in the initial phase of its restoration and is not yet prepared to assume the role that has been assigned to it by God. They still have the veil over their eyes, they have not received Christ as the Messiah, and they cannot see the work of salvation prepared by God which now is in progress. { *2Co 3:16* } When the veil is removed, Israel will be the leader nation of all the rest of the nations, and Jerusalem will be the capital of the world { *Jer 3:17 Zechariah 8:22,23* } .

As to the question about what place Christian people will occupy in the kingdom, we find the answer in the two callings: the earthly

calling for natural Israel and the heavenly calling for spiritual Israel. In the Old Testament there are no promises of heavenly reward for the servants of God, from Abel to John the Baptist. Jesus initiated the heavenly calling with his death and resurrection at the beginning of the Gospel age. Life on the spiritual plane during the kingdom of the Father will be the reward of those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior, consecrate their lives to his service, and obey his commandments during this age. This call and election of the royal and priestly class constitute the hidden mystery which has now been manifested to his saints. {Col 1:26} The elect ones of this heavenly class make up the body of Christ, his church, pillar, and bulwark of the truth, spiritual Israel. {1Ti 3:15}

We live in a time of great historical events. By the grace of God the privilege has been granted us of seeing our faith confirmed by all the things that have happened to the Jewish people during the last century. We see, not only with the eyes of faith, but also with the eyes of flesh, how the prophecies so long awaited are beginning to be fulfilled. With great rejoicing we see earthly Israel which has become a nation anew among the nations of the earth, and Jerusalem as its eternal capital. How much firmer should our faith and hope be on contemplating this marvelous sign of the times in which we live!

Beloved brethren, comforted by the love and faithfulness of God, let us with enthusiasm continue declaring the good news of the reconciliation between God and man, awaiting the complete fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham: 'In thy seed I will bless all the families of the earth.'

Certainly we look forward to the future blessings of God which through the spiritual and earthly seed of Abraham he will bring, in his immense mercy, the judgment and the restoration of all things.

The Little Boat-Regis Liberde, France

One day, near the Sea of Galilee, the Lord asked his disciples to have a small boat ready at his disposal so as to not be pressed by the multitude. These words of our Lord are brought to our attention in Mark 3:9. The boat used by Jesus will be an opportunity for us to take a voyage with him on this lake that he loved so much and to hear some of the wonderful lessons he gave on its shores.

Considered by many as the jewel of the land of Israel, the Sea of Galilee is geographically one of nature's curiosities. It is, like the

Jordan River which traverses Israel and finishes its course in the Dead Sea, the only lake in the world situated below sea level. Imagine for a moment that the Mediterranean Sea invaded the Jordan River Valley; here is a map one would see of the countryside. But, happily, God did not wish this to be So and has left us a splendid landscape, a theater of the events and works of our Lord.

One would generally agree that the course of the Jordan River represents the long descent of the world of mankind into death, a death well illustrated by the Dead Sea in which no life is possible. The Sea of Galilee, with its exceptional beauty, seems to be a stopping place, a favorite resting spot.

The Sea of Galilee is a fresh water lake located in northeast Israel. It has the shape of a pear, a length from north-to-southeast of 20 kilometers (12 miles), a maximum width of ten kilometers (six miles), and a maximum depth of 46 meters (150 feet). The lake is 207 meters (670 feet) below sea-level. In addition to the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by the hills of Galilee which sometimes have a gradual slope (as in the region of Capernaum), and at other places having a steeper slope (as on the west side). Other than the city of Tiberius (the only biblical city still in existence by the Sea of Galilee) the Sea of Galilee today is fortunately not urbanized, and its shores have kept their wild landscape of the past.

Despite its importance in the land of Israel, the Sea of Galilee is mentioned only three times in the Old Testament under the name 'Sea of Chinneroth'. { *Numbers 31:11 Joshua 12:3 13:27* } When the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan, it was the inheritance of the tribe of Zebulun. Not one biblical event, not one battle, not one prophetic miracle is recorded on the shores of the Sea of Chinneroth in the Old Testament. On the other hand the Sea of Galilee plays an important role in the mission of our Lord, from beginning to end. So let us discover together these places where the Lord taught, chose his disciples, healed the sick, where he demonstrated on the waters some phenomenal miracles, and where he gave for us some of his most important parables.

Although Jesus grew up in Nazareth, it was at Capernaum where he really became known. Capernaum was the city that he adopted for awhile and where he lived among some of his first disciples. Capernaum was, above all, the city of the apostle Peter. Mark chapter 5 describes Peter's work as a fisherman. The boat Peter put

at our Lord's disposal is remarkably similar to the small boats one sees today on the lake.

'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' said Jesus to his first disciples. The Lord was not afraid to choose these simple men, humble workers along the shores of the lake. Moreover, he is not afraid to call into his service all those who, even to this day, want to do his will. In this great lake that makes up the world, the net he throws out to pull in those who are his own is not merely a simple privation of their liberty, but it gives to them the opportunity of being, for all eternity, workers in his kingdom.

Jesus left us many lessons. Seated in his little boat, he described the kingdom of his Father in parables like those of the sower and the mustard seed. Can we picture in our minds a crowd seated along the peaceful shores of the lake listening perhaps without understanding the description of a future event which in the enigmatic words of the Lord, appeared So easy, So beautiful, and yet So full of difficulty—so difficult to merit.

So in one of his parables he describes the kingdom as a grain of mustard seed. Smaller than many of the grains when it is sown, it is majestic when it becomes a tree. In this way, the Lord wanted to show that this splendid and powerful kingdom for which we are waiting is formed at the beginning by men and women who often seem insignificant, who have accepted, in spite of the difficulties, the invitation to follow the Lord.

Yes, every Christian must expect to encounter difficulties at every point in life even if that life is often calm and peaceful like the waters of this lake because this peaceful lake can also become violent. In Mark 4:37 after Jesus had sent the crowd away and set out on the lake, a violent storm came up as can happen even today in warm weather. Jesus was sleeping in the boat while his frightened disciples said to him: 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' Jesus arose, rebuked the wind and calmed the storm; he said to his disciples: 'Why are ye So fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?'

Yes, our lives can become tumultuous like the unpredictable waters of this lake. Will we know how to remain full of faith among the frightening waves and at all times put our confidence in God? So this little boat well illustrates the position of a Christian in the world: as long as he is in the boat with the Lord, he is out of reach of the raging waves. What comfort, what hope we can have

in the presence of the Lord and in the promises of the Word of God!

But on the shores of this lake, Jesus gives us other lessons. This boat which he used to escape the crowd and which was the working tool of Peter and Andrew was, above all, a swift and practical means of transport from one shore to the other. One day the Lord decided to go from Capernaum to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gadarenes. As soon as he arrived, a man possessed with demons came out to meet him. There in the face of the dramatic hold that Satan had on this unfortunate man, Jesus performed a powerful miracle. In driving out these demons, the Lord demonstrated that he is stronger than the forces of evil, that the prince of this world cannot fight against the might of the Son of God even if his death on the cross seemed to momentarily indicate the opposite to the disciples.

Can we imagine the joy of Legion, this man healed of So many demons, a joy that could not be dulled by the loss of the herd of swine into which Jesus permitted the demons to enter and cause them to plunge down steep slopes into the water. When the time came to leave for the other shore, the Lord gave this miracle a tremendous impact by telling this man to go home and tell all his friends in Decapolis about his healing.

Chapter 5 of Mark's gospel mentions other miracles of the Lord after he recrossed the lake including the one where the woman thought she would be healed just by touching his garment. It was also in the house of Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue at Capernaum, that Jesus demonstrated once again his extraordinary power in raising the 12-year-old daughter to life. How astonished the crowd must have been when they saw for the first time and with their own eyes a dead person restored to life! The Lord would raise two more from the dead, but the shore of the lake was the first witness to this victory over death which, on a grander scale, will see all who have ever lived brought back to life. Soon it will be 2,000 years since the Lord said, 'Talitha cumi, damsel, I say unto thee arise.' How happy we are to know that soon these words will resound in the ears of all mankind.

The lake was a witness to many other wonderful lessons of the Lord. After this awakening of the dead, what a logical sequel we find in the multiplication of the loaves. In Mark chapter 6 we are told that the Lord tried to escape the multitude by leaving in the little boat to find a calm, isolated spot; but in vain. The multitude guessed where he would put ashore and arrived there in advance.

The Lord did not flee in the boat for another spot on the lake but, moved with compassion for these people who seemed to him as sheep without a shepherd, he disembarked and began to preach.

This verdant locale is without doubt the spot where the Lord taught this multitude with this magnificent view of the lake from all sides in the background against the neighboring hills. Jesus began to speak. He spoke once again of his Father's kingdom. No doubt he spoke about the poor in spirit who would inherit it. He healed the sick who were brought to him. Evening arrived and after preaching to the crowd concerning the kingdom of God, Jesus demonstrated another facet of his power and generosity. With only five loaves and two fishes, he miraculously fed 5,000 people. Wasn't this multiplication of the loaves a marvelous picture of one of the important works of Christ in the kingdom? Yes, after Christ says to all 'Talitha cumi' to bring them back from the sleep of death, he will feed them. He will feed them with the words of life which will bring them peace, joy and happiness.

Immediately after this extraordinary miracle, Jesus told his disciples to get into the boat and pass over to the other side alone, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After dismissing the crowd, he went up into a mountain to pray. But at the fourth watch of the night, while his disciples were rowing hard against a strong wind on the lake, Jesus rejoined them by walking on the water.

Let us put ourselves for a moment in the disciples' place seeing Jesus approaching them using once again his supernatural power in a totally unexpected way. After an initial, legitimate feeling of fear, the disciples, believing they had seen a ghost, were reassured by the presence of their Master who had left them alone for part of the night and who rejoined them at the fourth watch, that is between 3 a.m. and dawn.

Are we not sometimes like these disciples without their Master when we come to realize that the Lord would not abandon us? What a beautiful picture the Lord gives us here! His coming to the disciples at the fourth watch of the night, just before the dawning of the day, calls to mind that if Christ is present at the end of this Gospel age, it is not only to prepare for the coming of his kingdom but also to assure us of his care in our lives by faith in the imminence of his kingdom.

Our Lord spent an important part of his life in these areas bordering the lake. He preached, performed miracles and it was here at Capernaum, his city, that the Lord, in his sermon on the

bread of life put up a barrier, misunderstood by the majority, between those who were simply fed, thanks to his presence, and those who were willing to go one step further by accepting him as the bread of life, the son of God come down from heaven to bring life—life in a future kingdom whose doors he had opened to all those who would accept him.

Jesus still preached and performed miracles in other cities in Israel. He finished his earthly ministry at Jerusalem where he was condemned and where he died on the cross to redeem us. But we know that our Lord was raised the third day, in harmony with the prophecy. And after his victory over death, the Lord, before ascending to his Father met with his disciples one more time along the shore of the lake.

This meeting resembled another occasion when he permitted a miraculous catch of fish while seated in the boat. But this time it was not the same Jesus of Nazareth the crowds had listened to. It was also here along the lake that the Lord came to give his disciples some final words of advice before leaving them to rejoin his Father. He shared his meal with them, but the apostles, despite their joy in finding their Lord on these waters where he had so often sailed with them, felt the weight of the events that had occurred just a few weeks before when they were all incapable of accompanying Jesus in his darkest hours. But the Lord forgave; he forgave Peter as well as the others. Can we appreciate to its fullest extent the magnitude of the forgiveness of the Lord toward those who desire to do his will and yet stumble?

Like these disciples, let us arm ourselves with courage. Let us look to the Lord who, along the seashore, nourishes and blesses us. And if in our walk as fishers of men, we stumble, let us remember that our Lord is capable of forgiving our shortcomings as he did so long ago to these men of goodwill along the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

May God bless our walk!

The Melchisedek Priesthood-Marius Kwarciak, France

Dearly beloved brethren, dear young ones and friends of this wonderful truth. On this occasion I would like to convey the brotherly love and Christian greetings of all who meet in the Bollwiller and Staffelfelden ecclesias in the east of France.

I never thought the day would come when in my own native land, I would be speaking in a foreign language in front of such a large audience. But with God's help and a large measure of love and understanding on your part, I would like to carry out my duty and the privilege of this service in the best way possible.

I would like to share with you a few biblical thoughts which we are entitled: 'The Melchisedek Priesthood.' Historically mankind has tried all possible forms of government beginning with monarchies, progressing through religious and military leadership, dictatorships, socialism, communism and ending now with parliamentary democracy. All these forms of governments have failed. They brought mankind neither the peace nor the prosperity to which they legitimately aspire. Those who participated in these forms of government were often motivated by noble feelings, by love for their fellow man, but human imperfection, selfishness, and sin caused their efforts to fail.

Is the present situation, which in several countries verges on anarchy, going to continue forever? Has mankind learned enough from its past to not commit the same errors? Considering all the wars experienced and described in history, will the day come when mankind will give up violence and war? Is mankind's collective memory so poor as to so quickly forget Shoah and racial extermination in Kosovo? Is it not true, as the American philosopher Santayana asserts, that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'? Is there any government able to heal mankind's failing memory and learn from the past? Is there a perfect political and social system that can guarantee order and liberty at the same time?

These questions confront not only well-enlightened Christians but many others as well who are not totally blinded by the prince of this world. As we look in the Bible where the plan of God has been presented in such a wonderful way (although sometimes in a hidden fashion), we discover information on the future form of government, that of the ages to come. To simplify and make our ideas more understandable, we often call this future government a monarchy with Jesus as king.

As we examine some passages in the Bible and study the pictures and types in the Old and New Testaments, a more precise picture can be seen concerning the form of this future government. We discover with amazement that Jesus will not exercise his royal power alone, but will be accompanied by an elect class who will help him in his governmental tasks of bringing mankind into

communion with God. We find a number of pictures in the Bible that represent this particular class. Love, faithfulness, and the selecting of this class have been symbolized in the picture of the bridegroom, Jesus, and that of his bride, the 144,000 members of the Church.

Another picture, which describes a long and detailed construction, is the construction of God's temple. In that picture Jesus is the chief cornerstone and all the members are prepared, individually shaped, and polished like rocks in the quarries of this world to be eventually assembled in heaven, calmly and without the sound of a hammer.

The picture which interests us more specifically today is that of a particular power, a government, which is suggested by the apostle Peter in his first letter: 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light'. { *1 Peter 2:9* }

In this text Peter compares these chosen ones to priests and kings, in other words, to people of high social status, with important responsibility. If we talk about priests, our first thought turns to Aaron and his sons who were priests taken from the tribe of Levi. But the Bible tells us of another priest who is of a different order, not after the order of Aaron. The apostle Paul in the letter to the Hebrews teaches us about another priesthood, one according to the order of Melchisedek. We are now going to study this Melchisedek to better understand the pictures and lessons it contains.

The Historic Melchisedek

Who was Melchisedek? Why was his priesthood special? Whom does he picture?

The name Melchisedek is first mentioned in the Bible in relation to the history of Abraham. In fact, on the way home Abraham, after having liberated his nephew Lot from captivity and won a victory over king Chedorlaomer and the other kings allied with him, meets Melchisedek. We read: 'And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God,

which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.’ { *Genesis 14:17-20* }

According to 2 Samuel 18:18, and with a high degree of probability, we can identify this meeting place as the Kidron valley at the foot of Jerusalem. Even today we can see in Jerusalem the Absalom monument allowing us to identify the valley of Shaveh as the kings’ valley. It is in this valley that Melchisedek went out to meet Abraham.

Ge 14:18 says he was king of Salem, which means Jerusalem. In Psalms 76:2 we have confirmation that the city of Jerusalem was at one time called Salem. In the Hebrew name Yer-oo-shaw-LAH-im, we hear the word shaw-lome, which means peace.

The name Melchisedek means ‘King of Righteousness’ or ‘My King is Righteousness.’ This King of Righteousness gave bread and wine to Abraham and his soldiers. For men exhausted by battle it was certainly a well-appreciated comfort and, coming from the King of Righteousness, this refreshment was surely fitting.

A very important detail, seen also in verse 18, tells us Melchisedek was equally a priest of the most high God. In Hebrew, it is the priest of ‘El-yone,’ of God the highest of all gods. Thus, he performed the double function of king and priest. We all know the function of a king, but let us briefly recall the function of a priest.

A priest after the order of Aaron had to come from the tribe of Levi and from the family of Aaron. He had an important role to play in the nation of Israel. He was simultaneously a spiritual guide, a judge and a mediator between the people and God. At first he was responsible for the service in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, where he officiated over offerings for sin and reconciliation. He taught the people, he communicated the will of God, and he sometimes was a doctor as well, especially in the diagnosis of leprosy. All the people highly esteemed and respected the priestly office. Among the more enjoyable duties of the priest, was the privilege of giving the priestly blessing. It had a special importance and was much more appreciated than a blessing pronounced by anyone else.

Very often we quote these texts of blessing when we send our Christian greetings. Let us read it once more in Numbers 6:24-27, ‘The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my

name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.' This is how Aaron and his sons blessed the people.

In Melchisedek's case we find no mention that he offered sacrifices. His priesthood was different: he blessed! When he met Abraham, Melchisedek pronounced two blessings and by his words we see clearly the function of a mediator. In the first blessing—'Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth'—he seeks a divine blessing upon Abraham. He positions himself as an intermediary between the man Abraham and the supreme being God, asking favor of the great for the small, of the righteous for the unrighteous. In the second blessing—'Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand'—he expresses thanks and Abraham's praise to God for help in the war So recently won.

At the end of these blessings Abraham offers tithes to Melchisedek which means a tenth part of his goods. We can suppose that this tithe had great value because Abraham was returning from war with much spoil.

A function we previously mentioned and which Melchisedek performed simultaneously was that of king. At this time when Israel did not yet exist as a nation, every territory (even the smallest) had a reigning sovereign with the title of king. It is for this reason that Genesis tells us there was a king over the city of Sodom, a king over Gomorrah, and the king Melchisedek, king of Salem or Jerusalem.

Associating both functions, religious and civil, priest and king, in one and the same person was quite unusual. This is the most important characteristic of Melchisedek's function. Even where the Bible mentions the usurping behavior of some Israelite kings who seized the title of priest for themselves, God never approved it. (See the example of King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26:16) Melchisedek was the only one who was simultaneously king and priest. This was according to God's will because it provided a fine picture for what was to come.

Melchisedek in Psalms 110

Another text in the Old Testament that mentions Melchisedek is Psalms 110:4, 'The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' The context of this verse clearly indicates that the psalmist is speaking of Jesus Christ and his millennial reign. In the first verse of this psalm we

read, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.'

These words tell us that it is God who is speaking to Jesus: 'Sit thou at my right hand.' Verse 4, previously quoted, also concerns our Lord Jesus. It is really Jesus Christ who is represented by the king and priest Melchisedek. The New Testament confirms this idea in the words of the apostle Paul given to the Hebrews. That letter provides the key which opens our understanding of the picture hidden in Melchisedek. In this letter the apostle Paul quotes the texts in Genesis and Psalms 110 and adds extensive and interesting explanations about Melchisedek.

First he doesn't call him a priest but rather a high priest, which gives him even more importance and places him on the highest level in the religious hierarchy. We read: 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee'.*{ Hebrews 5:4,5}*

Christ did not become a high priest by usurpation; he received this authority from God himself. He deserved this authority, he won it by his own suffering. In Hebrews 5:5-10, in the middle of the comments about Melchisedek, we see verses 7 and 8 describing our Lord's suffering: 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.'

In this context these verses seem to tell us that it was as a reward for his suffering and for his obedience that Jesus received the glorious title of Melchisedek. God has honored and raised him to the supreme level of high priest to accomplish a special mission, with the help of his bride who is today still being selected. Melchisedek is a symbol of Christ, in his kingdom strength and glory, when he will bless all humanity. It is Christ, King of Salem and King of Peace—Christ, head and body—who will reign righteously over the entire earth. Let us remember that Melchisedek was a king and a priest who blessed but who offered no sacrifice. In like manner Christ will also have this privilege to bless.

In the time of the prophet Samuel the people of Israel wanted to be as the other nations So they asked for a king to reign over them. This offended God who wanted to be their sole king and sovereign;

nevertheless God responded positively to their request. *{1Sa 8:5,7}* Under king Saul, the people of Israel underwent an unhappy experience. Because of his unstable character and his disobedience to the divine arrangements, this king was definitively rejected by God.

The successive kings of Israel and Judah, with few exceptions, were not really better than Saul. They also quickly fell into idolatry and disobedience. That's why God in his plan, links the two functions of king and priest in one, so that this king would also have religious responsibility and be in permanent contact with God. God wants to give power to his religious representatives who serve and revere him, and, at the same time, preside over civil affairs. They will not rule in a merciless and despotic manner. People are born and remain free and equal, independent of any civil authority.

No one has the right to reign over his neighbor in a 'royal' way, with all the abuses and exploitation that characterize royal authority. At all times people must remember they are weak and sinful; they must remember that there exists a unique creator to whom they owe respect and worship. This is why in the Millennium the resurrected will need a government, a strong power represented by a rod of iron, not to make one person submit to another, but to subject all to divine law.

Ac 3:23 reads, 'Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.' It is for this cause, for this purpose, that Melchisedek's office has been foreseen in the plan of God.

The antitypical Melchisedek—king of peace and righteousness—will be watching so that peace and righteousness, equity and happiness will be respected in all the earth. Such will be the noble mission of this new government on the earth.

The Prophetic Melchisedek

In the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 7, the apostle Paul emphasizes the superiority of Melchisedek's priesthood over Aaron's priesthood. Although both priesthoods were established by God, each represented something different. Aaron represented our Lord in his sacrificial work; he symbolized Jesus' earthly mission in his sufferings and death. Aaron through the sacrifices of the atonement day showed the manner in which the merit of Christ's blood is imputed now to the church and how it will be applied to

benefit all humanity in the future. Aaron's sons were priests as well, but of a lower level than Aaron. They represent the members of the church who 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of the body of Christ' {Col 1:24} .

The Melchisedek priesthood was superior to that of Aaron. The apostle notes that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchisedek saying that, accordingly, Aaron and all the tribe of Levi, who were at this moment in Abraham's loins, also gave tithes to Melchisedek (see verses 9 and 10). 'And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedek met him.' In the same way, Aaron received Melchisedek's blessing while in his grandfather's loins because 'without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better' (verse 7).

In Hebrews 7:3 we read: 'Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.' The idea the apostle wanted to explain here was that the Melchisedek priesthood was not hereditary as was that of Aaron, that it couldn't be transmitted from father to son. Melchisedek was born and had a father and a mother just like everyone else. He also died as do others, but his priesthood was of a different order than that of Aaron. It was established on other laws and rules. All this is a type that shows us that the function of priest as exercised by Christ and the church in the Millennium will not be transmitted from father to son, nor to anyone else.

Let us now discuss the beginning and the end of this priesthood. At the moment of his resurrection, our Lord received the title 'king and priest after the order of Melchisedek.' However, he does not exercise this function until his church is complete. This priesthood becomes operative when Christ begins to bless all humanity. In Psalms 110, quoted also in Hebrews 7:17, we read that Melchisedek was a priest 'forever' which does not mean he will exercise this function forever, without end. Jesus will be this priest and mediator as long as necessary, essentially until the end of the Millennium. When he finishes his mediatorial work, when all humanity has been brought back to the perfection Adam had before he sinned, then Jesus will give his royal power to God the Father. Humanity will have no need of a mediator because all will be perfect. All will have direct contact with God and will be directly responsible to him.

The priesthood after the order of Melchisedek was superior to that of Aaron for another reason. The other aspect of this superiority is explained by the apostle in chapter 7, verses 23 to 28. He explains that Aaronic priests were men of a sinful and mortal nature. Before being able to intercede on behalf of the other Israelites, they first had to purify themselves and offer sacrifices for their own sins. In contrast, Jesus was pure, without sin. He offered himself in sacrifice once for all; he has been resurrected and lives forever. 'Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them' (verse 25).

In Hebrews chapter 8 the apostle unveils the mysteries of the Millennial Age from another point of view. Here he presents Christ as the high priest of the new covenant. When the church is complete, when the last members of the Little Flock have passed beyond the second veil, when the members of the Great Company have washed their robes in the great tribulation, when this will all have been accomplished, then the merit of Christ will be applied on behalf of the entire world. At that moment God will set up a new covenant with the people of Israel. At the beginning it will only bless the people of Israel, but later the advantages and blessings of restitution will gradually flow to all. In this picture Christ, head and body, the antitypical Melchisedek, will be the mediator of this new covenant.

Conclusion

Dearly beloved brethren, Melchisedek is very rich in types and teachings. The analysis of this new priesthood, which differs from that of Aaron, opens up new and glorious perspectives for us. As we have seen, we also can aspire to be a part of the church. We also can run in this competition where the overcomers will be rewarded beyond all human imagination. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. { *1 Corinthians 2:9* }

As we look closely at this dual function of king and priest, we are assured that it really pictures this new government, anticipated by all. This king-priest, Christ and his church, will be able to understand and solve all human problems since like Jesus, the members of the church will have acquired great experience during their lives on earth. If we want to belong to this class, our present experiences today must serve as lessons and teach us confidence and obedience to God.

Our goal today is not to try to solve the pressing problems of humanity! Our goal today is not to determine how to eliminate pollution or liquidate problems of misery and unemployment in the world! God knows the solutions to all these problems and he will impart them to us at the appropriate time. We cannot heal the world now because it is still not the time! On the contrary, our goal today is to learn obedience to God, to learn to listen and to love him, to have confidence in him.

So let us be patient in our own sufferings and experiences since we still have many things to learn from Jesus. Let us always take as our example our Lord who, as we previously noted, 'learned obedience by the things which he suffered.'

One of our goals today should be to learn to understand and sympathize with everyone in their weaknesses and at times in their despair, So that we can raise them again to communion with God in the Millennium. 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'.{ *Hebrews 4:15*}

If we want to be a part of this future government, each day we must remember the marvelous promises reserved for the overcomers. Through our study of the sacred Scriptures and our fellowship with the brethren, we should better understand these promises, better carry out our covenant [of sacrifice] with God, improving our characters and giving all diligence to our calling.

'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'.{ *2 Peter 1:10,11*}

Now I would like to end by reading Revelation 1:4-6 where the apostle John also mentions this glorious privilege to become kings and priests. I wish for all you dear brethren, and I desire it as well, that these words may motivate us So that we might be considered worthy to be a part of this class of kings and priests.

'Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his

own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

Guilt—The Voice of Conscience-George Tabac, USA

Brethren it truly is a great joy and privilege for Sister Florence and myself to be with you once again. We bring with us the love of your brethren from the Chicago ecclesia. Our book of memories has many pages filled with the fond memories of the past International Conventions. How blessed to contemplate that the friendships we develop here will continue throughout eternity

To begin our study today we would like to note a similarity between guilt and physical pain. Both are absolutely essential to our life, and truly both are blessings.

Physical pain is chiefly 'a warning of danger.' It alerts us to the fact that something is wrong, it waves a red flag as it were, to tell us we must take some type of action to alleviate something that is harming our body.

Guilt of conscience plays a very similar role for our moral qualities, as pain does to our physical. While this is true for all mankind in general, today we will primarily be considering how it is an absolute necessity for our New Creature's spiritual well-being.

We might look at conscience as a scale on which we weigh all the various things presented to our judgment to ascertain the right or wrong, the justice or injustice, the truth or the falsity of a matter. This scale as we will see could be very lenient or very stringent. It all depends upon how our New Creature regulates it.

Guilt in turn is an effect produced by conscience that disturbs our mental peace of mind whenever we start heading in a direction that conscience disapproved.

Guilt, therefore, just like pain, is for the purpose of being 'a warning sign,' a 'flag waving' as it were, that you are doing or about to do something that if you don't stop, will bring injury to your spiritual life.

I believe the thought of this quotation is powerful, and potentially could be most helpful to our New Creatures, if we can grasp its import and abide by it. 'The voice of conscience becomes really the voice of God, and obedience to it is imperative.'

Now we would like to consider how our conscience communicates with us through the feelings of guilt, and six different ways we might react to these feelings of guilt. The first four are possible reactions to what is in reality the true voice of our conscience. It is guilt that comes to us whenever we fail to follow any of the admonitions of the Lord. We want to think of this guilt as the Voice of our Heavenly Father reminding us, warning us, that there is a better way!

The last two forms of guilt we will consider are not the voice of conscience or the voice of God. They are improper forms of guilt that comes from our own unwarranted self-accusation.

Reaction 1—A Warning Sign

The first way in which we may react to a guilt feeling is the ideal reaction that God had in mind as to what should happen when we feel guilt. We will recognize it as a warning sign, heed it's message, stop doing whatever it was that was displeasing to God, and pray for his forgiveness. Or, it may be, we will start to do what God would have us to do that we previously held back from doing.

More often than not this voice of conscience will not come as a sudden loud thunder clap, but more as an uneasy feeling that comes upon us at the first thought or impulse of something that isn't quite as it should be.

If we are about to do something that will be neglecting the sacrificial aspect of our covenant and be pampering the flesh, we will feel it. If we are about to spend far more money on a car, furniture, a home or what have you, than what would be appropriate for a consecrated sacrificial life, we will feel it. If we are in the process of doing something that is more or less a waste of time, we will feel it. If we are entertaining an unholy, unjust, or impure thought, we will feel it even stronger.

Recognizing the sign, we might then and there seek our Father's guidance, strength and help to overcome whatever is the weakness before us.

What I find helpful for myself on occasion is to do literally what Jesus did when he said, 'Get thee behind me Satan!' For indeed part of our battle is with this mighty foe. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:4, 'The truth is that although we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. Our

battle is to break down every deceptive argument and every imposing defense that men erect [or, I might add, that our flesh erects] against the true knowledge of God. We must fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ.' (Phillips translation)

Yes this is our ultimate goal: to bring every thought and action to the obedience of Christ.

Reaction 2—Rationalization

The second way we may react to guilt is by rationalizing its meaning. That is, we make up a more acceptable reason for why we do something than the real reason. Because our flesh hates feelings of guilt, it makes up an excuse for our new creature that sounds perfectly plausible and spiritually acceptable, as to why it's permissible to do or not do whatever we are contemplating. A few examples:

At our class elections we might be nominated for a committee, or brethren might ask us to help with a certain project, and we know it will involve a lot of extra work. Our flesh doesn't like the idea of doing more work, but this makes it feel guilty. So what does it do? Almost instantly it comes up with a reason that sounds quite plausible, and spiritually acceptable, as to why we should decline. It might say to us: 'You know you really aren't the most qualified for that position. There are others who could do a much better job.' Or it might suggest: 'That's really a Job that would be better for a sister, or a brother, or a deacon, or an elder,' anyone but ourselves. We think about it for a few seconds. 'Yes, that's really true!' So we decline.

Notice what happened. Our flesh really didn't want to do more sacrificial work. But it couldn't say that for how would it look? So it proceeds to make up what is really an excuse, but one that sounds so plausible it actually can convince us that it is the real reason. Thus it makes it easy to decline the request for help or a nomination with no guilt feelings whatsoever. But what we are doing whenever we rationalize guilt is dismissing the voice of God who was trying to speak to us.

Another example: The Scriptures are filled with admonitions along the line of the responsibility we have to be the Lord's ambassadors, to proclaim the message of his kingdom, the most hope-filled message in all the world. But again that takes time, effort, and sacrifice, something our flesh would prefer not doing. This makes

us feel a little guilty. So it may say to us, 'Since there are So few that ever respond anymore, the Lord must be telling us the Church is nearly complete and he will call the few remaining ones. Spend your time in more profitable ways by developing your character.' Again a feeling of guilt is rationalized away and we feel good and justified in our lack of activity.

Almost everything that confronts us that involves more sacrifice will have a counter proposal by our flesh. It has countless excuses ready to divert us aside. They may not always be to shun the sacrifice completely. Sometimes the flesh may suggest that we offer our sacrifice but only in measure, only what fits comfortably within our own pre-determined comfort zone.

It may whisper to us, 'Don't go to an extreme, don't get too tired. Remember you have to preserve your health.' Our flesh wants us to forget the Scriptural admonition to the consecrated: 'He that saves his life shall lose it, but he that loses his life for my sake shall save it.' {*Lu 9:24*}

Brethren, I truly believe one of the greatest deceptions to our New Creatures is the inclination of our flesh to rationalize. Almost everything we do that's wrong, and everything we should be doing but don't, can be rationalized away So we won't feel guilty.

We can justify our lack of love, our impatience, our evil speaking, our reason for not attending a week-night meeting, our lack of zeal, our inactivity, our lack of sacrificing, our pampering the flesh, our purchasing a luxurious house or car. Yes, the flesh can literally justify most anything.

Our flesh can become So skillful in the use of rationalization that we can come to the point where we rarely, if ever, feel guilt. The rationalized response can come So fast the feelings of guilt are actually no longer felt. In fact if we never or rarely feel guilty, we need to be especially concerned. Either we have reached spiritual perfection or we have through countless rationalizations dulled our conscience's ability to warn us.

Knowing our fallen flesh functions in this manner can be a help to our new creature. Knowing that every message of guilt will be immediately followed by our flesh offering an excuse will help us to be better prepared to analyze more correctly the real reason or motive for the decision we finally make.

Our new creature must take command and carefully weigh the alternatives before it. It must base its final decision on the true facts of spiritually-guided reasoning that would please our Heavenly Father and not accept plausible excuses suggested by our flesh or Satan's prompting.

So the next time we experience the uneasy feeling of guilt, let us think, think again, and think a third time. Is the suggestion we hear truly the best alternative for my spiritual welfare or is it an excuse of the flesh or a suggestion from Satan?

Reaction 3—Continuation

A third way we may react to guilt is we continue in that which is wrong knowing full well it is wrong. Guilt may plague us, but because of the weakness of the flesh, we find that the pleasure or comfort we derive from an improper course is greater than our determination to stop.

Some of the causes of this type of guilt are those type of sins that we may think of as being somewhat addictive in nature, that we just can't seem to control try as we may. Examples are alcohol, drugs, smoking, improper sexual behavior, over-eating, and So on.

Those who have these weaknesses may hate themselves because of it, may desperately want to stop, but because of weakness and lack of sufficient determination just continue on. It truly results in a terribly frustrating state of mind filled with guilt.

Much of this is brought on by our present day promiscuous society. Everywhere we turn the implication is given that everything is permissible as long as you enjoy it and it doesn't hurt others. Everyone else is doing it So it must be all right.

We're especially concerned for our young people who are surrounded by this type of subtle suggestion everywhere they turn. It can have an effect upon us all, but especially when we are in our younger, formative years, when peer pressure is the greatest to make us conform to what others are doing.

If we are not careful, this thinking can slowly but gradually begin to make inroads into our minds. As to mother Eve, Satan will tempt by suggesting, 'Go ahead and just try it once. You don't know what you're missing. It's a fantastic experience.'

For this reason we need to be on guard, always thinking ahead, always striving to avoid those circumstances that will lend themselves to our falling into a temptation for which we may have a weakness.

If our defenses are down, our flesh suggests a rationalization: 'Perhaps we should try it just once So we could have first-hand experience of what the world is going through. We'll be better prepared to know how to help others.'

Subtle, subtle are our flesh's and Satan's suggestions, and if followed, can begin a life of misery with our mind soon plagued with guilt, but unable to stop.

Before that happens, you can be sure your conscience will be waving the warning flag furiously. Please, please don't ignore it. Do not fool yourself into thinking it will be all right since it's a weakness I have, that God will understand and forgive.

May we never forget, 'What we sow we shall reap.' Every violation of conscience will leave a scar. Depending on the degree of sin, some of these scars will be quite severe.

Does that mean that God will not forgive? No! God will forgive a repentant heart from sins of weakness. But depending upon the severity of willfulness involved, stripes and chastisements are sure to follow.

We remember the sins of David. He commits adultery with Bathsheba. She becomes pregnant. He then arranges for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle. David pleaded for forgiveness and was forgiven, but for the willfulness involved, oh what severe stripes he had to endure.

The prophet Nathan informed David that he would be forgiven but his child by Bathsheba would die. Other heart-rending experiences followed. Later David's firstborn son Amnon raped his own half sister, and Amnon was then murdered by her brother. Then David's son Absalom rebelled against him, disgraced David, incited a civil war against his Father, and is killed in battle. David wept and cried out, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' { *2 Samuel 18:33* }

Yes, David was forgiven for his weakness, but the stripes which came because of his willfulness were almost more than he could bear.

Let us remember the experiences of David. If we find ourselves in any situation of sin that we know is wrong, but just can't seem to get the determination to stop, often we will be so plagued with guilt that we will feel completely unworthy to even come to God in prayer. It is at a time such as this that we may enter in to the fourth aspect of how we might deal with guilt.

Reaction 4—Unworthiness

Because we may be terribly disgusted and ashamed with ourselves, we may feel completely unworthy to come to God in prayer. Instead we may try to offset our guilt by doing some good works to make ourselves worthy before we can approach God again in prayer.

But may we encourage any who may be going through such a trial that there is absolutely nothing, nothing that we can do in the way of works that can make us acceptable to God. We must acknowledge our wrong and immediately fall on our knees in prayer, remembering Hebrews 4:15,16: 'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.' (New American Standard translation)

Thus coming with confidence, knowing our Lord will understand, we must follow the admonition of 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Yes, there is only one way that our sins can be forgiven and our guilt removed. The first step is acknowledgment and true repentance with a desire to stop sinning with all our heart. We must pray for forgiveness, and then, if we have injured another in the process, seek if possible to undo the hurt we caused.

This is such an all-encompassing, precious promise, so profound in its simplicity: If we confess our sins, he will forgive and cleanse us from ALL, ALL, ALL our unrighteousness. There is no sin that, if we are sincere in our repentance, the Lord can't forgive.

But alas for some—perhaps for all of us at one time or another—we may understand this Scripture intellectually but fail to truly believe it and apply it to ourselves.

This brings us to the next aspect of how we might deal with guilt.

Reaction 5—Self-punishment

The fifth way we react to guilt is to continue to punish ourselves for past sins that were over and done with long ago including sins that we repented of long ago, sins that we pleaded with God to forgive, sins that God did forgive long ago, but yet we just can't let ourselves forget and accept God's forgiveness.

This fifth aspect of guilt together with the sixth—which is imagined guilt—is not the voice of God but of unwarranted inner self-accusation. It is not healthy, for instead of causing improvement, it produces depression that paralyzes us and is very self-destructive.

The original cause of this prolonged form of guilt is often caused by that which greatly affected the course of our lives, or the lives of others. But whatever the cause, we just can't seem to let our hearts and minds forget. We keep browbeating ourselves, going over and over it in our minds. 'Why did I ever do that? If only I would have followed my first impulse, it wouldn't have happened. If only I would have taken a different road. If only I didn't push my children So hard. If only I would have gone to the other doctor.' The 'IF ONLYS' could go on and on and on.

But to what purpose? Brethren, nothing in the world can change what took place yesterday. It is done! It is over! It cannot be changed! All we can hope to do is possibly modify the effects of our actions to some degree, and learn a lesson from it. But all the extended guilt, anxiety, and browbeating of ourselves will not change it one iota. All it will do is depress and discourage us to such an extent that our spiritual life will be paralyzed.

How Satan enjoys to get us in this frame of mind. We must pull ourselves together. We must remember Psalms 103:14, 'For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.'

Our heavenly Father knows we can't live perfectly. All he expects is for us to strive to do the best we can. We will slip, we will fail, but he wants us to pick ourselves up and continue. He has provided the means by which we can come back into harmony with him

through his grace of forgiveness. He has promised to forgive us all our unrighteousness if we will confess our sin. So if we continue to go over and over our sin and guilt, we are in reality rejecting our Father's wondrous grace. We are questioning his promise to forgive.

Another motivation that sometimes accompanies this form of self-induced, prolonged guilt is one that we may or we may not even be aware of. It is a subconscious feeling that we must punish ourselves for our wrong doing. This is also wrong. We know if there was any measure of willfulness involved, our Father will determine far better than we, the appropriate amount of chastisement to be given. In other words, we must leave all in our Father's hands.

Paul recognized this for himself. If anyone had reason to afflict upon himself his own punishment, it was Paul. He was guilty of persecuting the saints and was responsible for the death of many of them. But notice what he says in 1 Corinthians 4:3, 'I judge not mine own self.' Yes, he left the judgment of himself to God. He just went on doing the best he could.

So it should be with us. God will bring us stripes and chastisements whenever necessary as he sees best. When they come, we must accept them and be rightly exercised by them. But let us not feel we must punish ourselves! We are unqualified!

We must pick ourselves up and follow Paul's example of Philippians 3:13, 'I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead' (New Living Translation).

May we forget our past failures except hopefully to learn from the experience and go forward, growing more and more into Christ's likeness.

Reaction 6—Imagined Guilt

Now we come to the sixth and final way we react to guilt, which is imagined guilt. It is a feeling of guilt that we bring upon ourselves that is completely unwarranted. It is guilt that is not the voice of God but comes from our own imagined unworthiness. It is a guilt like the previous one that can leave us spiritually paralyzed.

What do we mean by imagined guilt? It is just that, imagined! It is guilt that should not be there. It is guilt that God is not pleased

with for it is unjustified self-accusation. What causes it? One possible cause is something that may have occurred earlier in our life that left us with an extreme negative image of ourselves, with a general overall feeling of inferiority compared to others. Many factors can contribute to this. Perhaps in our childhood or adolescence someone made us feel extremely guilty about something. A teacher or even our parents may have ridiculed our incompetence in some area, hoping to thus prompt us into doing better. But alas, it left a lasting, negative effect. Or perhaps our parents expected great things of us that we were unable to fulfill and, as a result, we felt we failed them.

But in any case, these as well as many other experiences, could have left us with an extreme inferior view of ourselves, a feeling that we just can't seem to get over. As a result we tend to feel inferior and therefore guilty about most things in our life, things that in actuality we may be doing beautifully, things with which our heavenly Father is well pleased.

If we are having this problem, it truly is an extremely heavy burden. We must strive to recognize what it was, or what it is, that is making us constantly feel inferior, and make a determination to put a stop to it and strive to come to a true realization of self worth,

We truly believe every one of the brethren has qualities with which God is greatly pleased. God would not have called anyone in whom he did not see the potential attributes of character that he desires for his 'royal diadem.' *{Isa 62:3}*

We must pray earnestly that God may help us to gain a proper perspective and outlook in evaluating self. When God says he desires humility in us, it does not mean that we are to feel we have no worth. Rather he wants us to have a true evaluation of self—not overly inflated and not belittled, but one worthy, one that befits a child of the King of the Universe. He would not have called you if he did not see qualities that he desired with all his heart.

Another example of what could cause imagined guilt is when unthoughtful ones make us feel guilty by evil surmising. They could be completely wrong and unjustified, yet their crushing remarks could make us feel that perhaps they're right. 'It's true. I'm not very good. I've failed.'

Another form of imagined guilt can happen to parents when one or more of their children did not follow the path they desired for

them. It can cause them to imagine guilt, feeling that somehow they failed in providing the proper guidance over the years.

But we may have been an outstanding parent. Children choose the path they do not because of poor parenting, but because they have a mind of their own. We cannot force others, even our children, to conform to our desires for them. Each is a free moral agent who must choose his or her own path in life.

However, don't lose hope. It may be they may yet come to see the path you desired for them is in fact the only worthwhile life to follow.

Another example of when we may have imagined guilt is after the loss of a loved one in death. We may have lovingly cared for them until we were ready to drop. God knows and appreciates the thousands of ways we ministered to them with all our being. But how we miss them, and we can begin to imagine guilt. Feeling somehow that if we only could have acted sooner, called another doctor, or were more alert to the symptoms, they would still be with us.

We must remember all our times are in God's hands. There is nothing we can do to alter God's providences. Not even a hair of our heads can fall without his knowledge. We must be thankful for all the years we had together with our loved one, reflect on those precious memories, and be happy we had the opportunity to share them together and to minister to them.

Another example may happen as we get into our older years. We look back and it seems we have accomplished so little with our life. Perhaps we're not able to participate very well in studies any more for our memory is failing. Many brethren who were close to us have finished their course, and perhaps few have close fellowship with us now. We begin imagining maybe it's because I'm unworthy.

Please don't think in those terms. You may be one of the dearest saints of God. Try to remember that it isn't what great works for God that we have accomplished, or how much knowledge we have, or how much witnessing we have done, or how many meetings we've attended, that really matters. It is what we have developed in our hearts and minds.

This is the supreme goal of our spiritual life, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds into the character likeness of Christ.

Brethren it is our prayer that when we reach the closing twilight years of our life, it may be our joy and our blessing to realize the fulfillment of 2 Corinthians 4:16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

Foundations and Illustrations of Fellowship-Roman Rorata, Poland

Dearly beloved brethren in Our Savior Jesus Christ. The amazing grace of our heavenly Father provided this tenth International Convention that gathered us around God's Word and its promises. On this special occasion let us consider the honorable privilege of fellowship with the brethren, that we have thanks to the sacrificial death of our Savior through whom we attained the grace of atonement and fellowship with God.

There is nothing more joyful here, on earth, than knowing that we belong to God's family, being called children of God and brethren of Christ. Therefore, let us consider a few of the foundations and illustrations of fellowship, since it would be impossible to exhaust the fullness of the subject in such a short discourse.

Foundations of Fellowship

In Ephesians 4:4-6, the apostle Paul writes about seven foundations of fellowship. He summarizes them in a few sentences: 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'

Speaking about foundations of fellowship with God, the apostle points out that they can be applied only to the true Christians – sanctified by the holy spirit. He is not addressing worldly people, unbelievers and unjustified, but the justified and sanctified ones in Jesus Christ.

Not all have equal access to God. There is a great difference between the believers and the world, which is removed from the fellowship with God and does not have access to the throne of grace. Believers, however, were atoned with him conditionally through faith, namely through the covenant of sacrifice {Ps 50:5} and they are in fellowship with him through faith. These were 'received in the beloved' and are reckoned as sons of God; they

have the privilege of prayer and enjoy his care and providential overruling. Therefore the apostle gives these seven bases as a foundation of fellowship with God. He lists them: one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. We can summarize them as:

‘One body’ refers exclusively to the members of the Body of Christ, the Church of the living God. They are the seed of Abraham, ‘the stars of the heaven,’ ‘the little flock.’ ‘These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb’.*{ Revelation 14:4}* Only those falling under this description in the Scripture will constitute the body of Christ which will be joint-heirs in heavenly glory and have eternal fellowship with him.

‘One spirit’—spirit of truth, love and holiness is another foundation of the fellowship with God for the members of the Church. They are to be united with one another by the holy spirit under one head—Jesus Christ. We should remember that this desired growth in fellowship with God has to be on the basis of godliness and purity. It would be a sin to assume that we have fellowship with God if our lives were sinful. Those who do that deceive themselves. If we are in harmony and fellowship with God, we will be in fellowship with his children.

Unity of Spirit—this is a secret of the true and desired fellowship for which our Lord prayed. Unity of Spirit is a unity of intentions, will, aspirations and goals. Those who truly understood and received this great calling of the Gospel Age are prompted by one spirit and have the highest goal of eternal fellowship with the Lord.

‘One hope of your calling’—the apostle Paul continues further. The called ones have a hope to be joint-heirs with our Lord in the kingdom—in glory, honor and immortality. There is no greater hope than the one given by God to his called ones. The way leading to the goal of calling is narrow and difficult; it requires self-denial. The apostle describes those requirements as sacrifice and reasonable service: ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service’.*{ Romans 12:1}* By writing these words the apostle intended to encourage the faithful ones so that they could appreciate and take advantage of the offered privileges and through them be able to inherit promises of the high calling. *{2Pe 1:4}* ‘And let the peace of God rule in your

hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful'.{ *Colossians 3:15*}

'One Lord'—one master of the Church, Jesus Christ who is the head of the Church, his body. None of the apostles thought of themselves as a master of the early Church. We do not have any proof that any of them assumed such an honor. According to our Lord's instruction, they all regarded themselves as brethren and servants of Christ. 'Let a man So account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God'.{ *1 Corinthians 4:1*} Jesus was their master, who was exalted to the divine nature and became the Lord of all. They were united with him through the holy spirit and were in fellowship with him and with God. It is similar with the faithful ones of the Gospel Age.

'One faith'—'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'.{ *Romans 5:1*} We conclude that God accepts us into his fellowship on the basis of proper faith and works, not on the basis of what we are assuming ourselves to be. The apostle's speaking about one faith is a warning sign that Christians might be followers of another faith, not the one that brings peace with God. When describing proper faith, the apostle James mentions dead faith. 'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?'.{ *James 2:20*} Therefore only living faith supported by works—faith in the ransom sacrifice of Christ—enables us to have fellowship with God.

'One baptism'—means the symbol of self-sacrifice as a sign of commitment to serve God. (See volume 6, page 452.) The symbol of baptism alone will not bring us to the fellowship with God unless it is followed by a true baptism in Christ's death. Everything depends on a full submission of our wills to the Lord and a sincere and complete fulfillment of our sacrificial vows. Therefore, we are to seek the true fellowship with God and those who earnestly strive to fulfill his will, with those who try to serve his cause and show their fellowship with him through their works and testimony.

'One God and Father of all' is the seventh foundation of fellowship with God. Our Lord Jesus very clearly pointed out this separateness of God the Father from other gods and even from himself in his many speeches. 'Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I'.{ *John 14:28*} Our Lord clearly emphasizes the superiority of his Father. He never assumed the right to be equal with his Father. 'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not

robbery to be equal with God'.{ *Philippians 2:8*} This contradicts the Trinitarian claim that God, the Son and the holy spirit are equal in power, honor, and immortality.

When our Lord asked his Father to grant his followers unity, he meant the unity of intentions, thoughts, and works. 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me'.{ *John 17:11,21*} Every thinking Christian will understand that these words do not refer to the unity of a multiple god consisting of many divine beings since it would imply that the followers of Christ would have to be included in it. There has to be either a hidden or visible bond or fellowship among Jesus' followers, a unity that is one faith, one baptism in one Lord Jesus Christ—the son of God.

The apostle Paul adds to the thought of the separateness of God and his son: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus'.{ *1 Timothy 2:5*} Fellowship between us and our Lord and all who have his spirit is based on our walking in his footsteps according to our abilities and the conditions of the covenant of sacrifice. This spiritual fellowship has no boundaries, does not know nationality, race or social status. Even gender does not matter. Wherever there are the followers of Jesus, on whatever geographical latitude, they all are tied with the bonds of brotherhood. The apostle Paul describes this wonderful status quo: 'For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'.{ *Galatians 3:26-28*} 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new'.{ *2 Corinthians 5:17*}

Looking at the apostle's beautiful lesson for the Church, we notice that this blessed fellowship of God's family is based on strong foundations of unity of faith, baptism, hope, etc. Such oneness, as our Lord said, already exists between him and his Father, but his disciples still aspire to it; we all strive to reach this ideal goal. The apostle's lessons regarding these seven foundations of our fellowship with God encourage God's people to be of one mind in the understanding of these issues which will strengthen even more our fellowship with the Lord and one another.

Illustrations of Fellowship

We have discussed briefly the foundations of fellowship. Let us now look for its illustrations in the Scriptures. The first and most important illustrations of fellowship are the emblems of bread and wine which our Lord used to establish for remembrance of his death. 'And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said: take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'.{ *Matthew 26:26-29*}

Fellowship, or 'communion,' between the Lord and his disciples was shown in the emblems of bread and wine and in the symbolism of eating the bread and drinking from the cup. Fellowship with the Lord, close contact with joint-members of his body and a sincere realization of the meaning of our covenant of sacrifice, is true communion. We are reckoned as part of this bread by being broken daily with our Lord and being sustained continually with his merit.

How wonderful was institution of the memorial. It shows that our Lord's body was this bread broken for the world and the believers of the Gospel age, the called ones. The faithful ones are reckoned as a part of this bread as members of Christ's body if they also are broken. Hence in breaking of the bread as the Lord's sacrifice for us, we see participation of the whole church, all who sacrificed themselves to be broken with him to become partakers in his experiences of self-sacrifice.

Let us notice that the second part of our Lord's memorial is the cup and wine. The words spoken by our Lord ('Drink ye all of it') signify the fellowship of those who offered themselves in the blood of Christ. Throughout the entire Gospel Age the truly sacrificed ones, the faithful 'little flock,' have been participating in the sin offering. Sufferings, testing, shame, and death of those who were received and recognized by the Lord as the members of his body are reckoned as part of his offering because they are connected with him, their head. They drink from the Lord's cup, they desire to bear the insults for Christ's name and want to lay down their lives serving the Lord, the truth, and the brethren. We find the evidence of this in the apostle Paul's words: 'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake'.{ *Philippians 1:27,29*}

The apostle Paul confirms the meaning of the memorial supper: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread'.{ *1 Corinthians 10:16,17*} By referring to the memorial established by our Lord, the apostle affirms the meaning of fellowship of the members of Christ's body in the cup and in the bread. He teaches that the bread represents the broken body of our Lord which was sacrificed for us, and that the cup represents his blood shed for us. But he also points out that the members of Christ's body are joint-partakers of his sacrifice and death and that they 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ'.{ *Colossians 1:24*}

Our Redeemer fulfilled his sacrificial vows on the cross when he said, 'It is finished.' The unfathomable wisdom of his Father did not allow him to doubt, but made him trust in his infinite goodness and grace through which he was always ready to accept everything that led to the ultimate victory of justice and truth. In the same manner believers fulfill their sacrificial vows of death. They have a deep trust in the Father and his faithful and beloved son, that their sacrifice will be accepted and their faithfulness will be rewarded with the first resurrection. Truly this is a blissful fellowship in joy and suffering. Joy comes from mutual anticipation of future glory; the suffering comes from mutual participation in experiences leading to it. The Lord suffered in his humiliation and agony of death. His followers go through similar experiences so that their sacrifices might be fulfilled in giving up their lives for the joint-partakers in the narrow way: 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?' (Mathew 10:24,25).

What a blissful fellowship! Who could add anything to this most wonderful beauty and completeness? Our joy becomes even greater when we learn that we have the privilege of fellowship with the Lord in his sufferings and in his joy, and that like him we can say: 'I delight to do your will'.{ *Psalms 40:8*}

God designed a plan that his beloved son, by fulfilling his Father's will, would become an heir to heavenly glory. This same plan was offered to us and we accepted it; therefore we were invited to become coworkers with God in realization of this plan with faithfulness of our hearts and sincerity of our consecration.

This common goal and work draws our hearts toward the Everlasting because we were called to be joint-heirs with his son and to be partakers in his glory. As all things are his So also are they ours: 'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ'.{ *Romans 8:17*}

Thus God's entire family is bound with a single bond of love, fellowship, trust, compassion, harmony and mutual interests in each other. The honor and glory of one member of that family is the honor and glory for all other members. The Lord wants us to have the same spirit, the same goals and aspirations, So we would take advantage of all our abilities to fulfill God's will diligently and faithfully.

Fellowship of Spirit and Faith

In Matthew 28:20 we read: 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' We should notice that our Lord spoke these words when he was parting from his disciples to ascend to his Father after his resurrection. As a farewell he gives them a strong reassurance that he will always be with them, that his spiritual presence and care for their well being will last until the end of the world, or in other words, until the end of the age when the selection of the church will be complete. 'Even unto the end of the world' means he will be with them always, every day of the week, every month of the year: at home, in a foreign land, during the time of peace and time of war, in prosperity and in depletion. He could not leave them anything more precious than the assurance that his fellowship, which they had enjoyed with him for three and a half years, would continue.

This assurance gave them emotional comfort. They looked to the future without any fear. It gave them a sense of security. When they were filled with the holy spirit at the Pentecost, they bravely went on to face experiences and were certain their master was with them, that they were his and nothing would happen to them without his will. The spiritual fellowship with the Lord was to involve not only his disciples but also all his followers until the time the church was complete. The Lord said, 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'.{ *Matthew 18:20*} These words point toward a spiritual unity of the redeemer with those who stayed on earth after his departure and those who in the following centuries were to become his disciples. They do not speak about a personal contact because the Lord was glorified and sat at his Father's right hand in the heavens.

The Lord's personal meeting with his chosen ones was to happen in the future, during his second presence. We find a confirmation of that in his words, 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also'. { *John 14:3* } Therefore we can bring to him all cares in prayer. In all our needs, experiences, and difficulties we can exercise our faith, trusting in God's might and love and in the love of our savior and the head of the church. There is no such time nor circumstance in which one could not trust the Lord; whatever our needs and difficulties, the Lord will be with us. The more prayers, the more exercising of faith, the more patience in waiting, the more abundant the blessing will be.

The disciples enjoyed this sweet fellowship with the Lord for forty days after his resurrection. He appeared to them and manifested his presence several times. A few times he let them recognize him when he was breaking bread. That was the case in Emmaus: 'And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him'. { *Luke 24:30-35* } It was also at the Sea of Tiberias. { *Joh 21:13* }

This custom was also practiced in the early church: 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. { *Acts 2:42* } 'And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart'. { *Acts 2:46* } 'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight'. { *Acts 20:7* }

The Scriptures tell us that this was the first day after Sabbath, the day commemorating the resurrection of Jesus. 'When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, So he departed'. { *Acts 20:11* }

As we can see the custom that was uniting the faithful ones of the early church was practiced also by the apostle Paul, although he had not witnessed the Lord's meetings with his disciples, nor did he not personally take part in breaking of the bread during any of our Lord's appearances. By breaking bread, the disciples were recalling the Lord's presence in their midst. It strengthened the ties of the first communion with the Lord.

Certainly this bread had a different meaning than the unleavened bread used by our Lord to establish the memorial. The unleavened bread was a symbol of the sinless humanity of our Lord Jesus that was broken for the sins of the world. The bread eaten on the first day after Sabbath did not have to be unleavened; it represents the fellowship of the disciples with their master. It was as if they were meeting the Lord through a piece of bread. They were uniting with the Lord in the breaking of bread which continually reminded them of the Lord's presence with them made possible only through his resurrection. How timely are the words of the apostle Paul: 'Remember that Jesus Christ... was raised from the dead'.{2Ti 2:8}

Fellowship in Service

It is God's arrangement that some have to serve others. He created angels to serve mankind. Even the highest-ranking angel, the Logos, descended to the earth to take up a service of an extreme kind—giving up his own life for men. 'Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many'.{Matthew 20:28}

One of the most beautiful illustrations of service is found during the Last Supper when our Lord washed the disciples' feet. In this washing of feet we find a lesson about how we should serve one another. 'If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet'.{John 13:14} The Lord gives meaning to service, draws its direction, gives it a realistic dimension, opens up a possibility of service for those who will adopt the lesson emotionally and in practice. Therefore the Lord says: 'And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant'.{Matthew 20:27}

A man is a play writer of his own life by influencing his environment. For a Christian it means accepting the feeling of friendship which is a sister to love. The apostle Paul's thought indicates just that when he says that we should serve one another in love. {Ga 5:13} It is necessary for us to have this type of brotherly love where all help one another, cooperate with one another. Without this mutual cooperation we lose the possibility of discovering and using our talents for our brethren in Christ. This is possible because of God's help 'Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit'.{2 Corinthians 3:6} 'Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart'.{Ephesians 6:6}

Therefore my beloved let us appreciate these privileges of fellowship in service to which we were called.

The Vine

Our Lord gave us a beautiful illustration of fellowship in the parable of the vine. {*Joh 15:1-12*} We can see a very close communion between the Father, his son, and the faithful ones. The Lord called himself 'the true vine' and he compared his followers to the branches of that vine. The Lord used this comparison to show our close fellowship with him in bearing fruit which the great vinedresser expects from us. This fellowship is based on certain conditions: 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.'

Every 'branch ' should be personally connected with the Lord. As sap from the vine flows into every branch, So should the holy spirit flow into every follower of Jesus for them to bring forth fruits. This fellowship is expressed in these words: 'Abide in me and I in you.' Our fellowship with the Lord is a personal matter. We have to be closely connected with him, the true vine, if the holy spirit is to reach us. 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.'

We said earlier that this fellowship is conditional. If we want to be members of the true church, we have to abide in Christ: 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.' Thus, there is a danger of being cut off from the vine and being thrown into the fire of tribulation. The main reason for being cut off is neglecting to bring forth fruit.

The Lord continues: 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; So shall ye be my disciples.' This fruit is faith effective through love, shown in our self-sacrifice. These are the fruits of the holy spirit. The spirit of the vine has to penetrate all of the branches and the fruit of the vine has to be on each branch. Then all of the fruits can be called by one name: love.

This fruit has to be on every branch if a branch is to continue in this true vine and its glorious condition in the future. Then the branches of the true vine will be glorified and their fellowship with

the head, Jesus Christ, and God the Father will not be broken. It will last eternally. This is my wish for you and me. Amen.

Why We Must Suffer-Zaharie Chiorean, Romania

Dear brothers and sisters, it is a privilege to be here. I'm thankful to God for everything he has given us and to those who made it possible for us to be here. I bring you love and greetings from the ecclesia in Cluj, Romania, where I meet.

Why must we suffer? A first answer could be that there is evil on earth that causes suffering. But we know from the Scriptures that God permitted the evil for a good purpose. If we look around us, we see that every man's life has its highlights of joy and satisfaction and its shades of sadness and dissatisfaction. These are the threads of daily experiences and the resulting cloth of character will be smooth and beautiful, or coarse and ugly according to the skill, carefulness, and ability of the person in weaving the threads of experience.

Under the present reign of sin and evil, the shades prevail in every life. In such circumstances God properly describes the human family in its present state as a groaning creation. God permits people to have the tough lesson of trouble So they might eventually appreciate his loving character and the everlasting blessings he prepares for the submissive and obedient.

In Romans 8:22, the apostle Paul says that unto this day, the whole creation groans and travails in pain together. The children of God are no exception to this general rule. The same apostle says in verse 23: 'And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.'

Examples of Faithfulness and Suffering

After reminding us in Hebrews 11 of a great number of Old Testament heroes, he admonishes us: 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with So great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth So easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us'.{ *Hebrews 12:1*}

The apostle James also admonishes us: 'Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience'.{ *James 5:10*}

I would like us to remember some of the ancient worthies as examples of lives lived with God. An important example is the prophet Job whom God says had a special character. We read: 'And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?' {Job 1:8}

God had blessed Job with much, but he permitted a great trial upon him: everything was taken from him, then he was struck with a great suffering. Not even his wife was there for him in his pain. After all this three friends came to comfort him but, they instead added to his suffering. In all these Job sinned not and blessed God. {Job 1:20-22}

Job was not discouraged by everything he had been going through. Full of faith in God he declared: 'Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.'—Job 19:23-27

His faithfulness to God brought him double blessings compared to those he had had before and the honor of praying for his friends that God might forgive them for their deeds. {Job 42:7,8} As in Job's day there are today many friends who praise God for righteousness, though they do not know his loving character. Blessed are those who will receive God's praise and approval, like Job. They will have the privilege of praying to God that their friends might be forgiven. Job was a great type both of the Church of the Gospel Age, because of his faith and fidelity to God, as well as of the world of mankind, because of the difficult trial he had sustained.

From those mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11, I would like to refer to the patriarch Jacob, to whom God made a promise, just like unto Abraham and Isaac. {Ge 28:14} Running great risks Jacob bought the right of the first-born which Esau sold So easily, knowing that it had great value and that it would bring him blessings.

In the antitype this right of the first-born has much precious value and blessings, So let us, beloved brethren, treasure it as it cannot be compared to anything else on earth. The apostle warns us in Hebrews 12:16,17: 'Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'

I would like to mention three important stages in Jacob's life:

1. Being afraid of his brother, Jacob flees to Padan-aram. On this occasion God blesses him, renewing the promises made to Abraham. *{Ge 28:14,15}*
2. With suffering and exhaustion Jacob fights for his living and his family's for twenty years in Padan-aram and overcomes. *{Ge 31:38-42}*
3. Fighting with the angel Jacob overcame him and asked the angel's blessing and thus became Israel. *{Ge 32:24-29}*

Dear brethren, from Jacob's life we learn that God's blessing can only be received through a faith which is manifested by activity, suffering and fight.

Another example mentioned in Hebrews 12 that I think about all the time is David, of whom God declares to be a man after his own heart. David had a generous, sincere heart, and he says in Psalms 17:3, 'Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.' Many of David's psalms are proofs of his adoration, respect, and sincerity toward God. As an example, in Psalms 19 there are words of great value that can inspire us as well.

We find many remarkable qualities in David and a significant proof is his friendship with Jonathan, the most beautiful on earth. *{1Sa 18:1-5}* His respect toward God made him deal kindly with Saul 'the Lord's anointed,' even when he acted as his worst enemy (1 Samuel 24 and 26). David could have killed his enemy Saul, but he didn't do it; he was an overcomer in all these tests of faithfulness to God. Eventually David's behavior made Saul declare: 'Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil'. *{1 Samuel 24:17}*

From the time of his anointing as king until the time he really became king, David had many experiences and troubles. With all these in mind we can consider David as a great type of the Church in her life of consecration and suffering (see Manna text for April 17). Indeed, the apostle Paul in Acts 14:22 says that 'we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God' and in 2

Timothy 3:12 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.'

Dear brethren, while we are waiting for our deliverance and we all want to see our trials behind us and ourselves among the overcomers, our daily life experiences, whether of prosperity or adversity, have the most important mission for us. The way we receive them should be our most important preoccupation because according to the way we use them they will bring us blessings or cursings.

The experiences we have that are usually seen as prosperities of our life, have in themselves subtle dangers. If our wealth and our friends increase, or we have a greater measure of earthly joy, then our heart finds its pleasure in these things. But when sadness and disappointment come, when wealth and health are gone, when friends leave us, and enemies assault us, then the natural tendency is to discouragement and despair. But even here is an important part of a Christian's battle. He must fight against the tendencies of the old nature and ask for help to win victories by the power of the Great Captain of his salvation.

The apostle James tells us, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations'.{ *James 1:2*} Let us never give in to these discouragements and trust in our Lord's loving hand. The Manna of February 16 is a guide in this sense.

Sadness Brings Joy

Sadness and trouble may often come as a flood, but the Lord will be our strength and shield in every experience that he permits. The heart that has never known the discipline of sadness and trouble has not found the joy and value of the Lord's love and help. In time of sadness and trouble, when we approach the Lord, he especially draws close to us. How good it is to always hear his loving voice: 'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid'.{ *Matthew 14:27*}

This is how David found comfort when in his trouble he cried unto the Lord: 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!'.{ *Psalms 130:1,2*}

Feeling his own weaknesses and shortcomings, and longing for the full deliverance from every imperfection, prophesizing about the loving provisions of the divine plan of salvation in Christ, he added prophetically in verses 3 and 4 of the same Psalm: 'If thou, LORD,

shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.'

How precious are these assurances of God's Word when one's heart is aware of its own helplessness and incapacity to live up to the requirements of the perfect law of righteousness! What a blessing it is to know that God doesn't count the unintentional shortcomings of our 'vessel' if we go daily to him for cleansing through Christ's merit, our Redeemer. If we do this with thankfulness and sincerity, our failures are not imputed, but forgiven and washed away.

Our Savior's perfect righteousness is our glorious robe, and dressed in it we may always go in the presence of Jehovah. If God ignores our fleshly incapacities and receives us to communion with him as his children, likewise we ought to look at one another. Let us not consider the weaknesses of the flesh of our brother who humbly confesses and who tries to overcome by God's grace.

But the case is different when the weaknesses of the flesh are cultivated and permitted without properly striving to correct them. If the mistakes go on, then indeed they are counted unto us. If we don't take measures at once to correct them, the Lord himself will judge and punish us. *{1Co 11:31,32}*

Dear brethren, throughout all the cares, troubles and difficulties that befall us we have to fully trust in the Lord and keep our hearts through peace and patience. We have to patiently wait for the Lord that he might solve the difficulties of our experiences in his good way. Patiently waiting for the Lord's deliverance, the psalmist goes on to say: 'I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning'. *{Psalms 130:5,6}*

In experience of sadness and trouble, in the tension of the conflicts and biting wounds, when the heart is grieving and the spirit seems to be defeated, God's children should remember that he knows it all, that he loves us and that he cares about everything that comes upon us and that his guardian angel is always near us and he will not allow any trial too severe for us.

Our beloved Father is near the furnace of the experiences and will not allow the fire to become too hot, So that it would injure the precious gold of our character. He loves us too much to permit any useless trouble or grief upon us.

The Reward of Patient Waiting

‘Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.’—Psalm 37:4-7

We must not be discouraged and allow our faith to be shaken when we are being tested by the necessary discipline, even though it takes longer for the peace and outward calm to appear. Our Heavenly Father has not forsaken us, not even when his answer to our prayers seems to be delayed. The peace and outward calm aren’t always the best conditions for our needs as new creatures.

We don’t have to wish for conditions in which the precious fruit of the spirit cannot develop in us. (See Manna for November 28.) Therefore ‘Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice’.*{ 1 Peter 4:12,13}*

The one counting even our hairs cannot remain insensitive and indifferent to our sufferings and needs. How pleasant is the thought of such a caring love. When he gives quietness, who can make trouble? The saints of the Lord have indeed in every trouble and sadness a blessed comfort that the world and even our friends know nothing about. Only the consecrated may know it.

The one who has not enlisted under the banner of the cross, who has not entirely put himself in the hands of the Lord, to be shaped and modeled in his glorious likeness, who has not made any earnest effort to stop the stream of our fallen nature’s tendencies, who has not seriously fought for the truth and righteousness in the midst of a faithless and perverse generation—what can he know about this divine comfort?

It is a precious balm for the broken hearts on the battlefield of life, it is the calming caress of a hand on the forehead of a noble fighter for truth and righteousness. This is the divine comfort, the only comfort we may expect. It is reserved only for those noble hearts that faithfully bear the brunt and the heat of the day in the King’s service.

How loving and kind is our God! His promises have never failed on those who trusted him! God’s saints of all times have learned

the blessing of trouble and sadness through which God has led them. David the psalmist says: 'Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes'.{ *Psalms 119:67,71*}

Christ Made Perfect Through Suffering

Dear brethren, as we know, the Christian age has been the predestinated time of God for the election of the new creation, of those who walk the narrow way. Our Redeemer, Jesus, opened this way and he has walked in it. He has invited all those who have hearing ears to enter it: 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able'.{ *Luke 13:24*}

Walking in this way has required many sacrifices, indeed it is a life of sacrifice. Jesus has lived this sacrificial life, a living sacrifice indeed. In the prophecies it is written, 'Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed'.{ *Isaiah 53:10*}

The apostle Paul exhorts us to look at Jesus: 'For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings'.{ *Hebrews 2:10*} 'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered'.{ *Hebrews 5:8*} 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin'.{ *Hebrews 12:2-4*}

As we notice in the Scriptures, dear brethren, the Lord invited us to walk in his footsteps. The apostle exhorts us to follow him as he was following Christ. He warns us that whoever will live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. Therefore each one of us must be aware when entering this school that there is no other way through which to win the great prize. Our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus provide for all those who run to win this prize with all the necessary means. In Romans 8:28 the apostle says that 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'

The apostle assures us in 1 Peter 1:5,7, 'You, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.... That the trial of your faith, being much more

precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

The Fire that Must Burn Among Us

In 1 Peter 4:12-13 we are told: 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.'

The point is that these fiery trials will test the church and will burn among the Lord's people. These trials constitute a fire which has to accomplish a work of purification among us when we need it. It is a kind of experience that must be personally undergone by all because each one should share in it. This is the reason why this fire is burning among us and will continue to burn to the end. This kind of trial is different from the ones that come upon any other group of people. Its explanation is shown in verse 13, 'ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.'

If we know that each member of the body of Christ has to be tried, we can rejoice when we are touched by its flame. It is then that we can say: We are partakers of Christ's sufferings. When these trials come upon us, let us rejoice that the Lord's providence gave us a share in these. They prove that we are members of Christ's body.

It is proper for us to remember the apostle Paul's words in Romans 8:17,18: 'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if So be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'

It is well that we should have clearly before our minds that unless we partake of his cup and are immersed into his death, we can have no share in his kingdom of glory. Let us then count all things else as loss and dross to obtain the necessary experience. As it comes to us, let us not be fearful, nor think the fiery trials are strange. On the contrary, hereunto were we called, that we might now suffer with the Lord and by and by be glorified together with him. (See Manna for October 22.)

Therefore, dear brethren, let us rejoice knowing that these trials are permitted by the Lord. We have completely committed ourselves

to the Lord and he promised that he would overrule all our interests. So, whatever may come upon us, we can be sure that it is with the Lord's permission for our welfare. If we ever find our trials too difficult, we have access to the throne of grace through our Lord's merit to ask for help. These trials do not always come from the Adversary, but they often come from the weaknesses and imperfections of others. We all admit that the most difficult trials come from the brethren, as these trials are the hardest to bear. This is the secret of our victory against ourselves, the eliminatory test: 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law'. { *Romans 13:10* }

Dear brethren, I'm getting close to the end of this lesson, but not before mentioning some beautiful thoughts from the Word of God: 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever'. { *Psalms 23:6* }

The goodness and mercy which we anticipate beyond the veil has its beginning here already and is thus to be appreciated. Whoever knows nothing of the joys of the Lord in the present time will evidently not be prepared for the joys of the Lord in the Kingdom. The goodness and mercy of the Lord are not to be looked back to as a thing of the remote past but is to be recognized and appreciated as a thing of the present and of the future.

Day by day God's goodness and mercy follow us, refresh us, strengthen us, bless us. (See Manna for September 22.) To receive these blessings from God at the end of our course, we need a heart attitude of thankfulness, humility and meekness, as David manifests in Psalms 23 and in other places.

Concerning the divine blessing, we should not feel that it is to our disadvantage that we live in this time of the end, but on the contrary, we should see it according to necessity.

Dear brethren, as we have seen throughout this lesson, our loving Heavenly Father gives us the lesson of discipline, with the very purpose of developing in us a strong and steadfast character to be able to stand after overcoming everything. We may expect that the end of our journey might be as with Elijah or John the Baptist, a fiery chariot or a decapitation.

'Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them: Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and

see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.’—Matthew 11:2-6

May God help us to see all these in antitype, under the dominion of the New King, present the second time. And if the end of our course brings difficult trials, let us remember Elijah. The fiery chariot in which he was taken represents difficult experiences and the whirlwind a lot of trouble. Let us look forward to getting into the Lord’s chariot. It is best because this chariot will take us home. When this chariot has come, let us not be frightened. Let us trust the Lord that he will be with us until we finish our earthly course.
{Mt 28:20}

I would like to close, dear brethren, with the words of our Lord and those of the apostle Paul: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy’.{ John 16:20}
‘These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’.{ John 16:33}

‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.’—Hebrews 10:35,36,38

May our Lord Jesus Christ’s grace be with you all! Amen.

Question Meeting—Moderator: Aurel Cap (Romania)

Participants: Robert Gray (USA), Piotr Krajcer (Poland), Henri Peau (France)

‘Prove all things, hold fast (only to) that which is good’.{ 1 Thessalonians 5:21} The various topics are meant to bring up to date and emphasize aspects which, lately, are becoming problems. We want to attain this objective not by expanded discussion, but by briefly pointing out the essential aspects of each problem in order to serve as material for study and meditation for those interested.

I. Problems caused by contradictory interpretations

It is desirable that all of us have a single perspective of the truth, but it is not something to expect in the present imperfect conditions. When there are different views upon more important points (for instance, the second presence, the beginning of the kingdom, etc.), that cause continuous strife and trouble, preventing the ecclesia from being built, the problem is difficult. To preserve unity there may have been made some compromise in some ecclesias such as the consent of two parties to eliminate the controversial points from the study—something with negative results for the truth!

Questions: 1. Which are the scriptural conditions or points on which we are to have a complete unity of view in order to preserve the brotherly unity? 2. If the conditions of unity are met but there are still big differences of view concerning other points of the truth, thus causing the situations mentioned above, what scriptural recommendations and practical examples can you give to eliminate the tensions existing in those ecclesias? In this situation, how are we to consider, and what kind of relation are we to have with one another?

Piotr Krajcer: Although we all know the conditions of uniformity described in the sixth volume, sometimes they are not sufficient for us, and we want to understand uniformity in a very special way: everybody must agree with my point of view. Uniformity means for us the same point of view on many things connected with the Bible. But if everybody understood things in the same way, discussion would be completely senseless because everybody would speak the same thing. In my opinion it is good when the community has as much in common as possible, but real uniformity does not mean a common point of view, but a common direction of thinking, common goals.

The thing that destroys uniformity in most cases is ambition, the lack of understanding of another brother. It is caused by a desire to prove that my ideas are much better than others. It means that there is no true love among all of the members of the community. There will be no uniformity when a brother with a different point of view tries to convert another to his idea at every occasion. This kind of habit may become very annoying. On the other hand, there will be no uniformity when the majority tries to convert the brother to their point of view, even though he may remain quiet with his ideas.

My advice is to go and discuss all problems at home, one by one, until there are no arguments left. There is usually not enough time

at the meetings, and both sides are not satisfied and will surely return to the problem. After all arguments have been mentioned, stop the discussion. Start it again under the condition that some new arguments have been found.

Robert Gray: 1. 'Unity of the faith'—if not 'complete unity of view'—is based simply on repentance, appreciation of Christ's ransom sacrifice for our justification, and complete consecration. This is the basis of our fellowship. At a baptism service, the elder will simply ask, 'Have you repented of your sins and accepted Jesus' blood and offered yourself in full consecration?'

But since we need to grow as individuals and ecclesias, we need to be sanctified by the harvest truths now available and taught by elders who are in harmony with the harvest message. To be 'sealed in the forehead' at this end of the age, there are additional truths needed to sanctify us which include close understandings of the more detailed teachings of harvest truths provided to us by our returned Lord. These truths producing closer fellowship would include, for example, understanding the Lord has returned; the Church has a share in the sin-offering; the New Covenant is a future covenant to be made with Israel.

2. Brethren in our fellowship may have honest questions or doubts which are a healthy challenge to our faith. However, differences of view can become a matter of strife among the brethren in ecclesias. But before such strife occurs, wisdom dictates that an ecclesia allow the dissenting views to be fairly expressed. But, having allowed that, it would be good for an ecclesia to require that the matter be put aside. From page 314 of volume 6: 'There should be frequent regular meetings at which reasonably full opportunities would be given to anyone to present what he might believe to be a different view of truth from that perhaps generally held and approved by the ecclesia. Our Elders should endeavor to win their brother (or sister) to a better understanding of the Harvest Message.... {Tit 2:9} If they do not succeed, disorder may indicate that it would be better for those who see matters differently to meet separately.'

Henri Peau: 1. To paraphrase the same thought as the one quoted in volume six, allow me to support my assertions with what Brother Russell wrote in a 1913 Reprint, page 5284 ('Doctrines More or Less Important'). 'The fundamentals which must unite us lie in acknowledging that we are all sinners; that reconciliation with God is only possible by the redeemer's sacrifice; that the Lord Jesus has come to earth to be that sacrifice; that we can consecrate

to God's service on the basis of faith in that sacrifice and that by virtue of that consecration God accepts and begets us with his holy spirit. All those who adopt and follow this process are to be accepted as brethren in the highest sense of the term.'

2. Despite the respect for the points mentioned, there are however frictions in the midst of ecclesias which come upon us as a consequence of a different appreciation of the points of present truth. Brother Russell mentioned this type of situation and he advises us in the same article: 'If it be considered necessary to separate in order to the progress of either of the parties, then doubtless rather than a continual contention a separation would be the wise course. If after considering these matters a class finds that it cannot agree, and would make better progress as two classes, we would concur in that conclusion as a wise one, as much as we would deplore the necessity of a division. Such a separation would not necessarily alienate either class from the Lord's people nor from the Society, because both acknowledge Jesus as their redeemer, and both acknowledge that his blood is primarily efficacious.'

And yet in 1914 Brother Russell wrote in Reprint 5501 ('Christian Liberty Based on Principle'): 'We shall find blessing in proportion as those of one mind (in the basic conditions of unity) can fellowship with each other. Where fellowship is not maintained, the assembly is neither desirable nor in harmony with the divine arrangement.'

Aurel Cap: So there are three basic conditions of unity in Christ, and whoever fulfills them must be considered a brother in Christ even if he sees other points of truth differently. The settlement of this situation is recommended to be done not by compromising the truth, excluding it from the study, but through a peaceful, loving separation, So that each part could see to things which build, and not to 'words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers'. { 2 Timothy 2:14 1 Corinthians 11:19 Acts 15:36-41 }

If the separation is not because of the three basic items of unity, we should continue to consider the other a brother, and we should collaborate with such in those matters where we can, as Pastor Russell says in the two articles quoted by brother Henri. { *Php* 3:15,16 }

In concluding this question, allow me to quote the last sentence from 'Christian Liberty Based on Principle': 'They should consider each other's interests, and do all in their power to provoke one

another to love and to good works.' We warmly exhort you to study these two articles.

II. The enemies and the temptations of our modern time which weaken and destroy God's people as individuals, family, and ecclesia

The adversary Satan has always tried to deceive the New Creation of God, altering his methods according to the season and circumstances, and using for this purpose the fallen angels, the world, and our flesh.

Questions: 1. How does Satan work through the fallen angels, the world, and our flesh? 2. What are the modern temptations coming from these three enemies and how do these weaken God's people endangering it: a) as individuals: in earning one's living, in the activity of recreation, in spiritual activity; b) as a family: in the husband-wife relationship, in educating and taking care of children and in directing them toward consecration; c) as a meeting: in having friends do services (on what conditions), in receiving new members, and in cleansing and keeping the Sanctuary. 3. What kind of methods of defense have you used for yourselves, your families, and ecclesias, and what recommendations could you give?

Henri Peau: To oppose our spiritual growth, Satan uses many tricks. First in our fallen flesh he finds an ally whose weaknesses he knows. He knows how to take advantage of that if we lack vigilance. Second, the world with its spirit of pride and selfishness is one of the chief foes of the New Creation. The world follows its way, whereas a Christian goes in the opposite direction. The wisdom of the Christian is not that of the world. So it is no surprise that the Lord predicted the hatred of the world upon us. Third, Satan has in his service the powers of evil to oppose God's people and the message of truth. The apostle Paul spoke about it in Ephesians 6:12. The influence of these powers of darkness is more and more visible.

Piotr Krajcer: Nowadays the devil and his angels have a better influence on human beings because of the development of the mass media. We should notice that mainly evil is shown by them. Violence, crime and sensational news—who do you think is interested in promoting this kind of information? I think that this is one of the ways he uses—to make us feel comfortable with evil, to make us think it is something normal.

Robert Gray: How does he work? Very aggressively! Why is he So aggressive? Because our Lord has returned, Satan's house is under stress. Our returned Lord has begun to bind Satan and limit his influence. His house is being divided and the fallen angels are acting anarchistically. {2Th 2:9} He works in cooperation with the 'world' and our 'flesh.' Satan is very flexible too. He can even use our strong points and talents against us.

Aurel Cap: We could say that Satan is working in a very shrewd, aggressive, and insistent way, through his traditional methods—'spiritism and occultism'—through which he is trying to convey to us ideas of interpretation of the Scriptures and suggestions of practices clothed in the robe of an angel of light, both directly and through the world which he uses.

Answer 2a (individual temptations):

Piotr Krajcer: Work may not be physically difficult today, but it possesses our mind. If you want to achieve success, you have to give up your Christian ideas because they do not have much in common with earning money and a successful career. You must decide yourself when to stop, which level is too high for you, which things do you not need, what must you give up to find time for meetings, for brethren, for your family, for your spiritual development.

Henri Peau: First a Christian must seek to favor his spiritual interest and therefore to avoid having a Job that hinders his spiritual growth and would run counter to his Christian conscience. A Christian must not earn his living dishonestly. Second, a Christian must satisfy in a reasonable way the needs of those who depend on him. Evidently Satan will take advantage of our weaknesses to push forward the limits of the 'reasonable' So that our time is taken and made unavailable for the truth. It is our duty to be vigilant.

Robert Gray: Satan would like to divert our desire to bless people into community social and political affairs. Some may have a talent with their education for having a prosperous career. Satan would suggest to the flesh to use that talent to make lots of money 'for the Lord' even if it means not being at meetings or spending as much time with the brethren. Speaking of the 'last days,' the apostle Paul lists approximately 18 different areas of temptations in 2 Timothy 3. Even though trials or temptations are necessary for our development, they are times of great danger. Are we stimulated toward wasteful recreation? Rest may be necessary but is being

entertained necessary to new creature growth? Movies, recreational gardening, musical entertainment, sports, dancing, swimming, boating all drain us of time and energy for the service of the Lord and the development of a pure new creature mind. (Of course, we as parents make some exceptions for the benefit of our unconsecrated children, but wisdom would advise strict limits for the consecrated.) Let us consider our hobbies, recreation, or vacations simply to change back and forth our activities in the Lord's service. From studying, for example, we can change to writing letters of encouragement, giving out literature, or visiting and assisting the sick or elderly.

Aurel Cap: Thank you for having identified the categories of the temptations and the areas forbidden by God's Word, and the limits with which a son of God must always be in harmony—not only in earning one's living, but also in the activity of recreation. 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? [How much? All!]' *{Lu 2:49}* A subtle temptation in progress with a weakening effect is the adoption of many new Christian hymns which, although they have a diluted message in many cases, are nevertheless preferred to all the 'chosen hymns' which treat all the states of mind and heart of the new creation, as well as the depths of the truth we need So much to be awake, energized, and effective. Worse than that, a predilection for the 'therapy' of the frames of mind through the 'good music' of this world instead of the music of the 'household of faith—the house of our Father' is a symptom of underdevelopment or weakening! Another Laodicean temptation is the tendency to replace activity by passivity not just concerning active rest, but also regarding spiritual activity, by replacing daily personal study and the great work of the harvest by exclusive auditions and vision programs of the truth.

Answer 2b (family temptations):

Piotr Krajcer: More and more couples are going through trouble. Divorce is no longer a problem of the world. Expectations that are too high for a spouse, and too little contribution from one's self for building common happiness, plus a lack of time for a common spiritual life are the most common reasons for this kind of situation. Very often we want to convince everybody around us, and we either can not or do not have the time or the ability to impart our point of view to our children. Do we not say, 'It depends on the Lord'? But why in some ecclesias or families do almost all stay near the Lord, but not in others?

Henri Peau: Satan likes to sow discord in a couple. Divergences may appear concerning the way of raising children, of spending spare time, about how much time should be consecrated in seeing to our temporal goods. In order to appease this kind of difficulty, it is desirable that each should remain in his natural place, that each should keep the role that falls on him. Brother Russell gives some precious advice in volume 6. If it is true that a woman has the right to express her opinion (and a husband should see that this right is never demeaned), nevertheless the final decision is always the husband's. Concerning the education we give our children, Satan tries to invite us to be moderate, not to go to extremes. The modern method, which avoids correction and consists in allowing a child to blossom according to his natural tendencies, has indeed born fruit. We can see it in the bad effects on today's society.

Robert Gray: Our brethren are even affected by changes in culture which now accept divorce and unscriptural remarriage. Then when differences or stresses arise within a marriage, the temptation is to neglect the opportunity to work out a reconciliation and look to a stranger. There is a temptation for parents to give higher priority to the physical needs and secular education of their children. The result may be that children grow up believing that (in spite of what parents say) material prosperity is really more important than spiritual. Finally, there is a paradox: Parents and brethren may be tempted to either push children too soon to consecrate or be tempted to discourage them when they sincerely show spiritual inclinations—simply because they seem too young.

Some of the principles Sr. Rebecca and I followed were these: 1) We made meeting with the brethren a priority—the children came with us. Although we had natural family, the brethren both near and far were their family too. 2) We read to the children every night and prayed with them individually and together at different times in the day: meals, going off to school each day, bedtime. 3) By conscious decision we did not have a TV in our home for 19 years (including 15 with children), then with very limited use. (Jordan had reasoned that other notable brethren owned one.) 4) Bible camps and seminars were a priority. 5) We supported them in their youthful sports activities, but not if it interfered with meetings. But when they wanted to be Boy Scouts at age 12-15, I became a hiker and backpacker and took them (with other Bible Student boys) mountain climbing, sleeping in tents overnight. 6) We never discussed Bible student problems in front of them. 7) We encouraged them to spend time with certain mentors (like Br. Paul Lagno and Br. Allen Springer). 8) We shall always be eternally

grateful to the Lord's overrulings of our mistakes and his tender mercies to our family.

Aurel Cap: Behold, dear brethren, that the target of Satan's temptations is to sow confusion and to make our fight on another level through: 1) not observing the order determined by God in the family; 2) practicing other methods of educating our children; 3) losing sight of the 'lesson' on the special prescriptions for a woman and of the 'sign of her submission' which 'she must wear on her head' in certain circumstances, to keep alive in our mind our duties toward the order established by God within the family and ecclesia.

And consider, dear brethren, the practical answer to brother Piotr's question—living examples, as many others, of harmonious, educated families, with consecrated children, who gave and give the same fruits God expects, as we read in Genesis 18:19, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.' The golden counsels with all their details from the 'letter' of the Laodicean 'angel' from volume 6, chapter 13 ('Parental Obligations of the New Creation') make many of us eternally grateful to the Lord for similar results.

Answer 2c (temptations in the class):

Piotr Krajcer: Treating your participation in the meetings as a formality, to attend just Sunday's meeting. Lack of zeal. Sometimes it is very difficult to convince the friends to attend a meeting when a majority of those attending leave after the first part, and do not stay to the end.

Henri Peau: To maintain discipline in the classes, Brother Russell's advice in volume 6 is valuable. Having several non-consecrated persons in an ecclesia, one might feel obligated to have them participate in the studies or to use them for certain services according to their competence. Granting them privileges reserved for the consecrated does not stir them toward consecration. On the other hand, because they are not consecrated, they do not have Christ's mind, they are not begotten. In fact it endangers everyone's spiritual future as it would lower the level of the ideal to be attained. This was the error of the nominal system which, at the opening of the Christian era, thought it good to incorporate worldly principles to attract people from the world.

Robert Gray: As long as we are meeting with our brethren, we should be reverent and do nothing which will offend. Likewise there is no reason for us to come into the meeting place immodestly or improperly clothed, much less stand before our brethren in singing groups where we represent the congregation, or even in personal testimony. Regarding the election of class servants, we must examine qualifications for any ecclesia service honestly and impartially, keeping our flesh out of the decision-making. Are we often tempted to be too lenient and liberal, or the opposite, tempted to be too strict and severe? How can we have the right balance? We must base our decisions on knowing and loving the truth. That requires us to expect the same of our teachers and those who represent the ecclesia. To know and love the truth must be fundamental. Remember the words of Paul in Tit 1:9. One who would be an elder must hold firmly 'the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.'

Aurel Cap: Behold some problem-temptations of the arsenal of fight of the three foes against the new creation which the Father permits to try us to see if we love him with all our heart, strength, and mind. In a desire to increase the number of members of our ecclesia, or out of the fear of losing them, we have temptations of 'selling indulgences' and to have another organization, order, and discipline than that settled in God's Word. Let us not forget that no one is more loving and wiser than the Father and his word, and our love toward him is shown in everything. {*Joh 14:21,24*} Brother Russell in volume 3, page 189, shows us what categories of truths are making the cleansing, how, and who are the unclean: 'The varied truths now made manifest reveal So clearly (1) the perfect will of God, (2) the import of full consecration to his service, and (3) the narrowness of the way which must be traveled by those who walk in the Master's footprints, that those who have joined themselves to this class from any unclean motives are continually scourged by the truth, until constrained to separate themselves from the sanctuary class.'

But let us pay heed! In the lack of 'such a clear and continual revelation' of these 'cleansing' truths, we may become a comfortable 'place' for 'every unclean and hateful bird.' 'Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person'. {*Hebrews 12:16*} Babylon is a state and a place of uncleanness and of formalism. {*Re 18:2*}

Answer 3 (methods of defense):

Piotr Krajcer: How to deal with all this? By studying in families and classes the things that are temptations for us; even though they are not completely evil, they make our dedication weaker. To fight evil, first we must know the temptation. The temptation to which our Lord was exposed had a shape of good as well: turn stones into bread. Is this wrong? Lack of activity causes lack of zeal.

Henri Peau: To avoid being a prey to the adversary, let us also be active in the service of the truth. Let us do all that is profitable for the development of the New Creation. Let us free ourselves from the daily cares not worrying for the morrow as the Lord advises us in Matthew 6:25. Let us redeem the time as the apostle Paul counsels in Colossians 4:5 to offer it in God's service. Being thus engaged we will feed spiritually and this will strengthen us; we will be better armed to resist Satan's influences. Within our families let us speak together, let us spend our time together in the service of the truth. In the ecclesias it is desirable that all should have consideration for everyone, that nobody should be ignored.

Robert Gray: The best defense is a strong offensive against temptation. 1. Regarding evil-surmising, I must immediately examine why I am thinking that way. In my mind, I must look for ways to promote the virtues of my brethren and make excuses for their words or actions which reflect the flesh they also struggle against. 2. Let us pray in advance—anticipate crisis times—act first to strengthen the resolve to resist. (See the September 28 <M>*manna*.) 3. Let us be wary of rationalizing our way into sin by saying, 'It may be wrong for someone else but my circumstances are different and So this is really OK!' 4. Let us watch out for peer pressure—or poor examples among brethren—'If Br. A or Sr. B does it, it must be OK.' 5. Let us be careful when stressed or weary and facing a trial—low resistance may cause careless thoughts, words, and actions. When temptation says: 'You are weary... you need time for pleasure reading!' our new creature can answer by saying, 'I need to feed instead on the Words of Life.'

If tempted to take a long walk or run for exercise, why not bring along some truth literature to give out? When talking to worldly friends or neighbors, do we use the opportunity to 'drop seeds for the kingdom'? Let us be careful not to rationalize recreation beyond what is needed for good health and find we have no time for the spiritual. Let's turn our temptations into opportunities for spiritual growth. Let us learn from the past—don't waste past failures. Use them to win future victories!

Aurel Cap: Thank you for these examples and advice. Out of experience and observation I have noted too that the continual nourishment of 'every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' and on the 'meat in due season' instructs us, warns us, and gives us the necessary strength to vanquish every temptation of our time, along with 'watch and pray.' Also 'A Vow unto the Lord' and 'The Morning Resolve' repeated each morning prepare us for the battle of each day. The immediate perception of all the problems which appear, their analyses in the light of the pertaining scriptures and the strict application of the remedies of the holy word have always been to us salvation and blessing! *{Ps 119:105}*

III. God's purpose in sending the Laodicean Angel

Mt 24:45 makes us understand that the letter given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the church of Laodicea through her angel is larger than that which we find in Revelation 3:14-22, namely the 'meat in due season'—seasonal nourishment.

Questions: 1. What do you think about this and where do you think we could get this 'meat in due season'? 2. What does this letter or message sent to us by God imply? What should be our attitude toward this letter?

Piotr Krajcer: I think that we should notice that the verse in Matthew 24:45 speaks about the food given in due time, or, as some of the Scriptures say, on time. *{see Luke 12:42, Psalms 107:27}* This food was to be distributed systematically during our Lord's absence, and not just during his return. The fact that the servant was found working means that he was distributing the food all the time during our Lord's absence. I think that the servant is experiencing a certain kind of 'trial of faithfulness' in the time of the church of Laodiceans. Revelation 3:17 speaks about those who became rich and do not need anything. The servant could have possibly thought that if someone from the household is rich, it means he does not need food, and it may lead him to discouragement. It is also a temptation for the members of the household: 'We are So rich and we have everything, So we do not need food from the Lord's table.' Can't we see that there are some of us who do not wish to use the food found in the volumes or periodicals being printed, who claim they see enough without eyesalve? *{Re 3:18}* The present wealth of the time of the end cover the poverty and nakedness of spiritual life.

Robert Gray: 1. I agree that we must link Matthew 24:45 with Revelation 3:14-22 as suggested in your question. One sign of the

Lord's return is that he would provide an abundance of timely truth, 'meat in due season.' That truth was given to us by a servant who was made 'ruler over all his goods.' As a part of the cleansed sanctuary class, 'that servant' was found serving truths when the Lord returned. What truths? Ransom, restitution, resurrection—as well as the truth about the soul, hell, and trinity. When Brother Russell understood the truth about the Lord's invisible presence, he began to put forth this truth as well with even greater zeal. I believe that besides being 'the seventh messenger' and 'that Servant,' he is also the 'man with the writer's inkhorn'. { *Ezekiel 9* } The purpose of giving 'meat in due season' is twofold: 1) to separate the true wheat from the anti-Christ system—Babylon; 2) to provide sufficient truth for full sanctification and sealing of those separated.

Henri Peau: Thus we admit that Brother Russell has been this channel chosen by the Lord to give spiritual nourishment proper for the time of harvest. His zeal, his energy, his work in general, show us his ability to be that faithful and wise steward. It is then in the volumes, in the Watch Towers, and his other writings that we will find the messages the Lord wants us to know to help us stand fast in this evil day. Would we refuse to eat what the Lord lays on our table? Would we dare offend him by So doing? Does not the apostle Paul warn us in Hebrews 12:25, 'See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.'

Aurel Cap: We can conclude that the purpose of sending the Laodicean angel is to give the church 'meat in due season.' While all the periods of the church had some common truths, each of them received a seasonal message, given as a rule through a special messenger (see Revelation 1:20 and chapters 2 and 3). Which of the 'servants' who serve the 'household of faith' with present truth have not received it through 'the wise and faithful servant'—the steward made ruler by the Master over 'the class of his servants'? To be unable to recognize this messenger means not opening the door to him, not receiving all the messages intended by God, and suffering a heavy loss. We will be 'damaged' also if we will not accept the 'meat'—the volumes, the periodicals—and if we will not make them ours as a personal message of love. { *Re 3:19* }

IV. Reflections upon the experience and message of the Laodicean Angel with respect to:

A) Different methods with different results in studying the truth;

B) The most edifying meetings

A) Different methods with different results in the study of the truth.

The way of studying on subjects recommended by the apostle Peter in his second letter, first chapter, verses 20 and 21, is the method used and recommended persistently by Pastor C. T. Russell, was the way of the revealing of the present truth. In his first volume, first chapter, he says: 'If for the knowledge and appreciation of any science a thorough and systematical study is necessary, for the highest science—the Divine Truth—this way of studying is so much more important.' Today, among Bible Students two methods of study are in use: one on books, the other on subjects.

Questions: 1. Do you think that the method of study on books can replace the study on subjects without loss? 2. What does a thorough and systematical study mean?

Piotr Krajcer: In my opinion studying the Bible verse by verse cannot be replaced with any other method of studying. A topical study may only complete this main type of study. In my class we have three studies a week: the book of Psalms, Matthew, and the epistles. Once a month we have topical studies. Systematical study is a daily study, or at least, once a week. Longer intervals between the studies do not have a good influence on its effectiveness.

Robert Gray: Studying the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, and verse by verse is a beautiful way to gain a knowledge of what is in the Bible. However, topical study has been the secret to understanding what the Bible means. Brother Russell's choice of this approach to Bible study in the six volumes and *tabernacle Shadows* made it possible to understand the Plan of the Ages hidden in the Bible. The method set forth in the six volumes and *tabernacle Shadows* of topical Bible study reveals the harmony of the Bible as no separate study of books can do. That is because the Bible is its own interpreter. So then we need to study the Bible topically to unlock full understanding. One method of study might be suggested here: follow what is already prepared in the volumes. The volumes are practically the Bible itself in an arranged, systematic form. They go through Scriptures on various subjects with care and in an orderly fashion.

Henri Peau: A study by books consists in taking, for instance, an epistle and in studying its various chapters, everyone having the opportunity to present his point of view on each verse. There will be as many little comments as there are verses and ecclesia

members. The class may be oriented in a wrong direction if the chairman is clever enough to make the class accept his view on the topic. The most appropriate method to assimilate the truth and to first retain the main lines of it, and then to grasp the details, is definitely topical study. The volumes have been made up according to this principle.

Aurel Cap: From the infallible statement of the apostle in 2 Peter 1:20,21, I see resulting four aspects: 1) 'no prophecy is of any private interpretation'—verse 20; 2) every prophecy must be 'interpreted' in the context of all the prophecies of the other prophets of God—which means a study of topics—verse 21; 3) To do a thematic study, we need to be acquainted with and to refresh our minds of 'all the words that proceed out of the mouth of God' through a previous personal study on books—book by book, verse by verse; {*Lu 4:4*} 4) A study of 'interpretation' on separate books, which does not follow the rule mentioned by the apostle Peter and followed by all the apostles {*Ac 15:13-15*} may lead to the situation stated by the Laodicean 'angel,' Pastor Russell, in a Watch Tower, that 'those who abandoned the thematic study and replaced it with the study on books, in a greater or smaller measure, earlier or later, moved off the truth.'

B. The most edifying meetings

Speaking out of conviction and experience, Pastor Russell in volume 6, page 322, recommends with strong arguments that the most useful meetings for our spiritual growth is weekly testimony meetings.

Questions: 1. Why do you think weekly testimony meetings are considered the most important? 2. How do you see the lack of interest of some for this type of meeting, and what advice might you give on it?

Piotr Krajcer: We have testimony meetings every three months and I would gladly listen to any advice about what to do to have them more frequently.

Robert Gray: I believe that the weekly testimony meeting allows brethren to express themselves personally more than at other meetings and it therefore becomes very meaningful to each saint who speaks and who actively listens. Each one present should be encouraged to give a testimony about a current experience. In the same way our pastor encouraged participation in the volume studies. He says in volume 6, page 326, that the elder should try to

get 'each member of the class to give an expression of his thought respecting the particular matter under consideration.' If brethren are not currently having testimony meetings, I would urge them to consider the reasons Brother Russell said it was a most important meeting. Perhaps it just takes the practice of trying them. Then it will become easier. While circumstances and cultural differences may cause hesitation, I believe that with the sensitive leadership of an elder, the friends would learn to look forward to sharing their recent struggles, their victories, and their failures as well as their current opportunities to witness.

Henri Peau: At this kind of meeting each one has the opportunity to speak about his experiences as a Christian. Recent testimonies are of use to those who hear them. A testimony meeting properly done allows each one to analyze himself and to learn useful lessons for Christian development. This kind of meeting favors the best spiritual growth.

Aurel Cap: I see, too, the greatest spiritual progress in the weekly testimony meetings, because here: 1) we measure the fruitage of the meetings of teaching and study; 2) we benefit at a low cost from the hard experiences of other brethren; 3) we immediately realize if we are going on wrong ways and we can quickly retrieve the wasted time; 4) we are comforted when we see that other brethren are also going through similar experiences; 5) these meetings hasten the appearance, the development, and the maturation of the fruits of the spirit, without which no one will see God.

'Every beginning is hard.' 'The blossom may be bitter, but the fruit will be sweet.' 'After 3-6 months of meetings (well conducted), the fruits begin to be sweet.' The procedure is to be found in Volume 6 at 'The Character of the Meetings' and in the Reprint 4886. So, I wish you courage! *{Heb 4:16}*

V. A type of the status of the Church available during the Gospel age

It is known that the prescriptions for women are at the same time a type of the church throughout the Gospel age. *{Eph 5:24,30-32}* Let us analyze these aspects: a) 'covering her head' *{1 Corinthians 11:10 14:34-37}* b) 'I suffer no woman to teach; c) or to usurp authority over man' *{1 Timothy 2:12}*

Questions: 1. What do these expressions mean for the woman and for the church? 2. Are these prescriptions optional or obligatory?

Piotr Krajcer: The difficulties with understanding the point of a teaching about head covering by women and her submission to the man come from a false understanding of these ideas by people today. These problems touch the consecrated too. The devil has for many centuries promoted the idea of the humiliation of women and limiting her position in society. Today, when the light of truth does not allow this, he promotes emancipation and a false liberation of women. When we look at Christ and his church, we will surely understand what kind of relationship should exist between a man and a woman. Would anyone like to go above Christ and teach him? No one could replace him in his suffering and his sacrifice.

Robert Gray: In the apostle Paul's discourse on headship in 1 Corinthians 11, he strongly admonishes that in the church the sisters are to have their heads covered if they pray or speak. He teaches that a covered head acknowledges headship of the brothers representing the Lord's headship. While a woman is not to teach in the church, she is certainly at liberty to speak and pray. She is certainly free to witness publicly as were the four daughters of Phillip who prophesied {Ac 21:8,9} and in the home to children. In Tit 2:3, it says the older women are to 'teach good things' (to other women). But to fulfill the type, a sister is not to be a teacher in the church. Some have suggested that hair is the covering. If that is so, then all brothers must shave their heads since Paul said for them to have their heads covered when they pray or speak dishonors their head—Christ. Is wearing a head covering optional or obligatory? It is a privilege. We have the admonition of Brother Russell (the seventh messenger) and the admonition of Paul (an apostle).

Henri Peau: The 'head covering' is a sign of submission. In the tabernacle arrangement the priest wore a 'cap' while the High Priest was bare headed. The church is obedient to the Lord. In the meetings the Lord is represented by brethren and the church by sisters. Therefore the sisters have to wear a sign showing this obedience.

Aurel Cap: 1Co 11:10,16 (14:35-38) tells us that it is a 'sign'—a symbol—which 'she must wear on her head,' and that what the apostle said is not negotiable in all 'the churches of God.' What are we to always see and feel in this living type? The conditions to enter and remain in Christ! a) 'to cover her head'—The church should have visible signs and proofs of her obedience and submission to her Head; b) 'is not allowed to teach'—The church is not allowed to invent and learn and teach a new doctrine from

itself—the word makes us ‘perfect’; { 2 Timothy 3:16,17 } c) ‘not to usurp authority over man’ — ‘not to disregard what is written.’

The destiny of all those who want to become the antitypical ‘obeying woman,’ the bride of Christ, will depend on the acknowledgement and observing of the ‘lessons’ of these typical prescriptions (and literal, at the same time). Are we ready for this? Will we speak for him through our lives and with our lips in the night of Gideon’s fight? Do we speak today when we have such favorable opportunities? If we don’t speak today, how will we speak tomorrow? We are perhaps discouraged because ‘the day is at its end’ and ‘there are enough workers.’ Let us not forget the call at the eleventh hour, and that all of us in our day have been ‘sown’ in this general harvest.

We often ask ourselves whether the decreasing number of brethren is not due to our attitude, be it by having changed the method used by the Laodicean ‘angel’ or because of the lack of an organized activity and sustained as his activity was? Ecclesiastes 11:6 tells us, ‘in the evening withhold not thine hand for thou knowest not whether shall prosper.’

‘Work while it is still day’ in your garden and in the great work of harvest, in the field of God, So that during the ‘night’ of testing you can stand up, and after having overcome everything you can receive the reward. Every problem and experience is a test of our love and obedience toward God, his word, and his cause! Let us strive to have Christ’s spirit of obedience and submission So that we could be told as well: ‘Well done, faithful servant!’

We thank the Lord and the brethren who participated for the refreshment of our common treasure, The Truth!

The Three Great Covenants-Adolphe Debski, France

Dear brethren, may the Peace of God be with you! Our subject will be on the covenants. It is titled, ‘The Three Great Covenants.’ These covenants are the Abrahamic Covenant, the Law Covenant, and the New Covenant.

The first one, the Abrahamic Covenant, is the fundamental covenant including the entire plan of God with respect to the world of mankind. It was unconditional, was ratified by an oath, and is summed up in one short phrase: ‘And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’ .{ Genesis 22:18,16 }

Notice the two parts of this promise: the one pertaining to the coming of a 'seed,' and the other promising the blessing of all the families of earth by this seed. The blessing of the world of mankind will be accomplished under the New Covenant.

Also concerning this promise or covenant, we will consider primarily the development of the promised seed. This development is accomplished by means of sacrifice. This is why a particular covenant, the Covenant of Sacrifice, is associated with the Abrahamic Covenant. *{Ps 50:5}*

We wish to state clearly that this Covenant of Sacrifice has nothing whatsoever to do with individual or collective suicide, such as we see in our day by members of various sects, and which is condemned by human conscience. No, the matter is simply the sacrifice of earthly interests and ambitions in order to gain eternal life offered by the gospel.

As for the Law Covenant, *{Ex 24:6-8}* it was sealed by the blood of typical animals. It had a priesthood, after the order of Aaron, and a mediator, Moses. It was conditional. The underlying principle in this arrangement is summed up in Matthew 22:37-39, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'

The New Covenant, on the other hand, will be sealed by the blood of Christ. *{Jer 31:31-34 Luke 22:20}* It will also have a priesthood, but after the order of Melchisedek, and a mediator, Christ. It will also be conditional. Its law will be the same as that of the Law Covenant: love supreme for God and love for one's neighbor as for oneself.

According to the apostle Paul, Sarah represents the Abrahamic Covenant, what we also call 'the Grace Covenant' or 'Sarah Covenant,' and Hagar represents the Law Covenant. *{Ga 4:24-28}* By analogy, we can say that Keturah, Abraham's last wife, represents the New Covenant. *{Ge 25:1,2}*

Abraham, himself, represents God. Each one of these covenants develops his seed. In the Abrahamic Covenant, the seed is The Christ complete, Head and Body, as New Creatures. *{Ga 3:16}* This seed was typified by Isaac. Under the Law Covenant, the seed is the nation of Israel, represented by Ishmael. As concerns the New Covenant, the seed will be all those who will be restored to human perfection and who will enter into the ages to come. They are represented by the six sons of Keturah.

Abraham's Family Typify

the Covenants

The operation of these Covenants is superbly illustrated by Abraham's family. Upon entering Canaan, Abraham was 75 years old. The promise, or Abrahamic Covenant, became fixed; from that moment on it was binding upon God because Abraham had met the requirement which was to leave Ur and to go to a country that he knew not.

He was waiting for a seed that would bless the world. But Sarah was barren, the seed did not come. Likewise the Abrahamic Covenant was barren for a long time. The seed, foreseen by the Lord, did not come. Sarah resorted to one of the customs of her day, thinking she was doing right. She gave Hagar, her servant, as a concubine to Abraham, with the understanding that the seed which would be born from this union would be considered as her own. A son was born, Ishmael. Abraham was 86 years old {*Ge 16:16*} and for him and for Sarah, Ishmael was the promised seed. But in the eyes of God, such was not the case.

This union between Abraham and Hagar corresponds to the inauguration of the Law Covenant between God and the nation of Israel at Sinai. This covenant was immediately fruitful. It produced its seed, the nation of Israel. Down through the ages the Israelites under the Law Covenant were considered as the promised seed of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed under the direction of the long-awaited Messiah. But God had in mind for this work of blessing not a fleshly seed, but a spiritual one, which would be Christ and his church. The nation of Israel, as the fleshly seed of Abraham, will nevertheless have a role to play in this future work of blessing.

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, three angels appeared to Abraham. One of them declared that the following year, at that same time, Sarah would bring a son into the world. One year later Isaac was born. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. This was an event, and what an event! Sarah, the barren one, had given birth.

This birth, preceded by the begetting, reminds us of the time when the Abrahamic Covenant began to be fruitful after more than twenty centuries of barrenness; we can place this moment at the baptism of our Lord at Jordan, when the holy spirit descended

upon him and he was begotten to the divine nature. It was there that our Lord became a New Creature, the condition of begetting; later, at his resurrection, this new creature was born, endowed with his divine body. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, the fruitfulness of the Abrahamic Covenant was manifested by the sending of the holy spirit, and the begetting to the spirit nature of the apostles and all the disciples consecrated to God.

It has been the same ever since right down to our day, of all those who have presented their bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God. By the Covenant of Sacrifice—and we repeat that this is not at all a question of suicide, but of a reasonable worship rendered unto God—and by the begetting of the holy spirit which results, these consecrated ones enter into the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant and are developed there as new creatures.

Let us return now to the birth of Isaac. Isaac's birth indicated that Ishmael was not the promised seed. This fact was made very clear in a marked way at the feast that was made when Isaac was weaned. {*Ge 21:8-13*} Isaac was about five years old and Ishmael 19. Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac. She arranged for him to be driven out with his mother because, as she said, 'the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.'

These words greatly displeased Abraham, but God told him to go along with Sarah's wish, assuring him that his eye would be upon Ishmael. Abraham obeyed. He dismissed Hagar and her son. The two seeds, Isaac and Ishmael, were separated one from the other, as were the two mothers.

What an eloquent type! The mocking of Isaac by Ishmael represents the trials during the harvest of the Jewish Age, that the first Christians coming from the Jewish nation were subjected to, beginning with the Lord Jesus himself. He was mistreated, hated, rejected and, finally crucified. And it was his own nation who did this to him, the Israelites.

As they rejected him, they likewise were rejected, and this rejection was made known by the pronouncement that the Lord made against them just prior to his crucifixion: 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.' The double of favor of 1845 years was coming to an end. The double of disfavor of the same duration was beginning. National favor was ending even though it was being prolonged for individual Israelites for 3-1/2 years until the end of the 70 weeks of special favor as prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27.

After being dismissed Hagar wandered in the desert of Beersheba where she ran out of water. Thirst seized her as well as Ishmael, who began to cry out. Death seemed certain. Hagar separated herself a little way off to not witness her son's death. Then the Lord intervened by an angel who said to her: 'Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink'. { *Genesis 21:18,19* }

After the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Israelites were likewise driven from their land and dispersed throughout the world where they wandered from country to country. With the passing of the years their faith weakened in the divine promises concerning them, and with the concept of assimilation which caused them to be the citizens of the countries in which they resided, the people of Israel would have ceased to exist. They would have died as a people. But such was not the intent of the Almighty. God intervened at the opportune time and today we see the result: the State of Israel exists anew, and it is in the Holy Land.

The history of the last 120 years shows the chain of events leading up to the re-establishment of this state. We know that the last link in this chain is still to come—the establishment of Messiah's government. Among other things it was the vision of the State of Israel which gripped Theodore Herzl in 1895-96. In 1897 he established the Zionist Movement which brought together the faith and the hope of the Jews as a people in the re-establishment of and return to the Land of Promise. This movement thereby saved the Israelites from death as a people. But there can be no doubt that the main actor in this work of resuscitation was the Angel of Jehovah, the returned Lord, who by the wise and faithful servant drew attention to the Word of God as well as to the prophecies concerning the return to the Holy Land, and who created the necessary conditions for such a return.

Let us visualize the scene: Hagar and Ishmael are wandering in the desert while Isaac is growing stronger in his father's house under the proud and watchful eye of Sarah. This is exactly the situation that has existed throughout the Gospel Age. On one hand we have the Jews wandering in the desert of the nations while clinging to the Law Covenant. On the other hand we have the disciples of the Lord, objects of divine grace, being developed at the same time but 'in the Father's house,' in the bosom or heart of the Abrahamic

Covenant. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus furnishes us another view of the situation.

This situation is still going on. But the day is coming when it will cease. This will be at the inauguration of the New Covenant. Then, Jesus and the church will constitute the heavenly phase, rulers of the kingdom who will with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other Ancient Worthies make up the earthly phase. They will bless first the nation of Israel and, through them, the whole world. At that time under Christ, harmony will be realized and will extend to all people.

As Hagar was a servant of Sarah, likewise the Law Covenant has played the role, in various ways, of servant toward the Abrahamic Covenant. It brought sin to light, the imperfection of man and his inability to attain human perfection by his own means, and his inability therefore to attain eternal life by his own means. In the same way, the Law points out the necessity of the sacrifice of a perfect man for the sin of Adam and for the sins of the world, and was thus a schoolmaster to lead to Christ. *{Ga 3:24}*

The instructions, the types and figures of the Law, shadows of good things to come, hold an important teaching pertaining to the Gospel age as well as the Millennial age. In addition, the Law demonstrated the perfection of the man Christ Jesus because the Lord fulfilled it in a perfect way without failing in anything. The Law showed that his sacrifice was that of a perfect man, that he could be accepted as the ransom price of the world.

To prove Abraham's faith, the Lord told him to sacrifice Isaac. This request demonstrates that the special seed mentioned in the Abrahamic Covenant would have to die a sacrificial death. This was the case of the Lord Jesus, primarily, and was and is secondarily the case of the members of the church.

The next significant event in Abraham's family was the death of Sarah recorded in Genesis 23. Sarah was 127 years old, Abraham 137, and Isaac 37. This death represents the end of the high calling which will occur when the last members of the church will have finished their course and will have been changed (like the other members of the church) into glorious heavenly beings, recipients of the divine nature by the power of the first resurrection currently in progress.

Three years later the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca occurred. This is recorded in Genesis 24:67. Isaac was 40 years old. He brought

Rebecca into Sarah's tent. This wedding corresponds to the marriage ceremony of the Lamb, pointed out in Revelation 19:7, during which the presentation of the bride to the heavenly Father will take place. According to Psalms 45 it appears that this will be a most solemn, heavenly event without precedent. After the nuptial feast the promised seed will be ready to accomplish its task under the New Covenant typified by Keturah.

As we can see here the taking of Keturah to wife by Abraham is pointed out as being immediately after the marriage of Isaac. {*Ge 25:1*} This corresponds to the inauguration of the New Covenant between God and the nation of Israel. We note that Keturah is described in 1 Chronicles 1:32 as Abraham's concubine. In this instance, it would be understood that Abraham officially took her to wife immediately after the marriage of Isaac.

We can see how beautifully the plan of divine salvation is illustrated in the family of Abraham. Details are here furnished us on particular points and notably on the call and development of the church. This development comes about by way of sacrifice, as we have already said.

As we have already seen, sacrifice was well demonstrated in Abraham's family in Isaac. Isaac, being the son of Sarah, shows us that the complete Christ, Jesus and the church, are developed under the covenant represented by Sarah (namely the Abrahamic Covenant) and not under the New Covenant represented by Keturah. Note well the fact that sacrifice is not shown with respect to any of the sons of Keturah, but only with Isaac. Note further that Keturah had six sons, a relatively important number with respect to the other two wives who each had only one son. This shows that the covenant represented by Keturah is the one that will develop the most numerous seed.

Without dispute this will be the New Covenant which will generate offspring (all the families of the earth) with the exception of those who go into Second Death. Here again we see very well the fact that the church, limited in number, is not developed under the New Covenant.

Christ the 'End' of the Law

In Romans 10:4 we read: 'Christ is the end of the law, for righteousness to all who believe.' The matter here is not the end of the law as summed up in the ten commandments engraved upon stone and given to Moses. These commandments are eternal. The

point concerns the covenant made with the Israelites on the basis of these Commandments. Let us note well the thought presented in this verse. The apostle did not say that since the death of Christ on the cross the Law Covenant no longer existed and, as a consequence, was no longer obligatory upon any Israelite. But the apostle did say that the Lord IS the end of the law [of the Law Covenant] and that he has become the end for a very special purpose: for the righteousness of all those who would accept him from among the Israelites.

In dying on the cross and fulfilling the law completely in all its requirements, the Lord did what he had to do to free the Israelites from their transgressions with respect to the Law Covenant, as well as the curse of the Law, and from the Law Covenant itself. {*Heb 9:15 Galatians 3:13 2:19*} Those among the Israelites who became his disciples benefited from these advantages, and for them the Law Covenant came to an end. They were justified by faith and passed from the Law Covenant to the Abrahamic Covenant, from Moses to Christ. But for the other Israelites who have not accepted Christ, they are still under the Law Covenant. It is true that the Law has aged considerably. It has been quite curtailed and emptied of its promises which were won by Jesus. Nevertheless, it is still obligatory upon the Israelites.

This was well illustrated in the type. When Hagar and Ishmael were driven from the tent of Abraham, Hagar did not die, but she left with Ishmael and continued to take care of him. Likewise, at the death of Christ when the nation of Israel was rejected from divine favor for a time, the Law Covenant did not cease. This was indicated by the apostle Paul when he wrote a little more than twenty years after the death of Christ: 'And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, as under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law'. {*1 Corinthians 9:20*}

Note the present tense used by the apostle Paul in the expression 'them that are under the Law' in a letter written around AD 56, some 23 years after the death of Christ, after the time when Christ became the 'end of the Law.' In addition, that the Law Covenant remained in force during the entire Christian era is demonstrated in the trials that the Israelites had to endure which were included in the terms of the covenant as punishment for unfaithfulness. {*Le 26:14-39*} The time will come, however, when the Law Covenant will die. This will be when the Israelites will look upon him whom they have pierced and mourn for him as one mourns for his only son.

Ministers of the New Covenant

'I will give thee for a covenant of the people'. { *Isaiah 42:6* } The Covenant here referred to is the New Covenant, and the people are the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ was given, was sent, to accomplish all the work necessary to the New Covenant. He has already accomplished the most important task. He furnished the blood that was called for by this New Covenant. Without this blood the New Covenant could never be established and the world as well as the church would be lost.

During the Gospel Age Jesus has been preparing the ministers of this New Covenant so that they can have all the necessary qualifications for conducting, under his direction, the great work of leading mankind to God. { *2Co 3:6* } Once these ministers have been developed, referring to the Little Flock, and as soon as the last members of the Great Company have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, the Lord will take the necessary step to put in motion the New Covenant. In his role as High Priest he will appear a second time before God to apply, on behalf of the world, the merit of his blood or, figuratively speaking, to sprinkle his blood on the mercy seat of divine justice.

What will be the result? Adamic sin, the sin of the world, will be taken away. Mankind will be freed from their individual sins committed during this life. The sentence of death upon Adam and his posterity will be removed. The blood of Christ, the price of redemption, { *1Pe 1:18,19* } having been poured out to divine justice for the world, will effectively and legally ransom them. So then, during this second appearing before God, the Lord will redeem mankind just as he redeemed the members of the church during his first appearing, at the beginning of the Christian era, by the imputation of the merit of his blood on their behalf. { *Heb 9:24* }

'These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb'. { *Revelation 14:4* } If the members of the church have been redeemed from among men, this signifies, therefore, that mankind has not yet been redeemed. And if these members have been redeemed as the firstfruits, this means that mankind will also be redeemed, but afterward, as afterfruits. Once the world of mankind is transferred into the hands of the Lord, he will be able to start his work of mediation. Then the New Covenant will be sealed and put in motion.

Let us note in passing that the Bible confirms the last thoughts of the wise and faithful servant on the Ransom. Even though awakened from death and freed from their present sins, mankind will still be imperfect. To return to human perfection the Lord will give them his flesh, the bread from Heaven. And whoever will eat of it, whoever will appropriate the rights of perfect human life from the Lord represented by his flesh, and who will conform to the righteous, divine laws, will gradually progress toward human perfection, being able to perfectly obey the Law of God and, thereby, live everlastingly.

‘And the bread that I will give, is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world’.{ *John 6:51*} Only the Lord Jesus will be capable of carrying out all that is required by the New Covenant, and he will do this for the great blessing of Israel and the World. Once his work has been accomplished, the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 will be realized. His seed will become like the stars of heaven (referring to the heavenly seed, the church, but also to the Great Company) and as the sand upon the seashore (referring to the earthly seed, to the world of mankind led back to God and rejoicing in everlasting life). Let us not forget that Abraham represents God himself.

The Names of the Three Wives

‘Sarah’ signifies princess or noble woman. This name illustrates the preeminence of the Abrahamic Covenant, its noble, princely and royal character. Noble, because of the work of sacrifice involved. Princely and royal because of the honor and glory inherited by the seed which it develops.

‘Hagar’ gives the thought of fleeing, of wandering, and illustrates well the behavior of the Israelites under the Law Covenant. They strayed often. They separated themselves often from God. Finally they were ‘thrust out’ but only temporarily, according to the Scriptures. The word ‘Hagar’ can also signify ‘rocky.’ Hagar pictures equally the rocky mount of Sinai at the foot of which the Law Covenant was inaugurated, which agrees with the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote, ‘For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia’.{ *Galatians 4:25*}

‘Keturah’ signifies incense or perfume. This meaning applied to the New Covenant shows the blessed result of the work that will unfold under the New Covenant. The emphasis is on the thoughts of gratitude and the praises that mankind will render to God, as

incense, as a sweet-smelling perfume, which will rise continually from earth toward the Throne of Grace.

On this point we will close, hoping that this subject has contributed to our common, spiritual edification, and to the glory of the holy name of our heavenly Father.

Amen.

Deliverance-Ernest Kuezli, USA

Sr. Janice and I and our family are very happy to be with you in convention. This is the third international convention we have had the privilege of attending. It has been and continues to be a great blessing and encouragement for us to meet with you in convention. We also bring you much love from the brethren in our home ecclesia in Orlando, Florida. With that love, our class sends Colossians 3:16 as their greeting to you: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.'

God's Deliverance is a Process

What comes to your mind when you think of the term deliverance?

Typically, we think of the day when we were freed from a very long and difficult trial. We think of deliverance as an event—the day our trial came to an end—because it is natural for our flesh to focus on the removal of the physical hardship or experience.

God's deliverance is a process, not an event. To God, deliverance is a series of events, which accomplish our release by shaping us into a copy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 1:9,10 Paul writes:

'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; Who delivered us from So great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust he will yet deliver us.'

Paul mentions deliverance three times in this passage: (1) God has delivered us from the sentence of death in ourselves, (2) God doth deliver us now and (3) we trust that God will yet deliver us. Paul is describing deliverance as a multi-step process, which includes our entire spiritual life.

1. Paul tells us about the deliverance from Adamic condemnation into a relationship with God because of our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. Paul is speaking about our justification, and how we have been delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. *{Ro 8:21
1 John 3:1}*

2. Paul speaks about the deliverance taking place now—from serving the flesh to living after the Spirit. Paul is speaking about sanctification; how we put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and we ‘put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.’ *{Eph 4:22-24}*

3. Paul speaks of the deliverance to come—to glory, honor and immortality, eternal life in the first resurrection. *{Ro 2:7}* This deliverance is to the divine nature, which is promised to the church, those who are faithful unto death. *{Re 2:10}*

Our deliverance into God’s spiritual family is a journey. It begins with consecration and ends with the First Resurrection. During this journey, there are many difficulties but these difficulties are the catalyst of our spiritual deliverance. While our flesh cries out to be freed from these hardships, we have these experiences because (1) we have ‘taken the cup of salvation and called upon the name of the Lord,’ (Psalm 116:13) and (2) God is answering our prayer for spiritual deliverance from death to life. God uses these experiences to accelerate our transformation and preparation as sons of God.

The apostle Peter’s deliverance from prison was a process, not just an event. Often, we compare difficult trials in our life to Peter’s deliverance and we call our trials ‘iron gate’ experiences. But Peter’s deliverance did not begin at the ‘prison gate’ but when the angel of the Lord woke Peter up and told him to arise. Peter’s deliverance is recorded in Acts 12:6-11:

‘But when Herod was about to bring him forward, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the guards before the door were watching the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the building; and striking Peter on the side, he awoke him, saying, ‘Arise quickly.’ And his chains fell from his hands. And the angel said to him, ‘Gird thyself, and tie on thy sandals.’ And he did so. And he says to him, ‘Throw thy mantle around thee, and follow me.’

‘And going out he followed him; and knew not that what was done by the angel, was real, but thought he saw a vision. And having passed through the first and second guard, they came to that iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them of itself; and going out they went forward one street; and immediately the angel withdrew from him. And Peter becoming selfpossessed, said, ‘Now I know truly, that the Lord sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod, and all the expectation of the Jewish people.’ ‘(*Diaglott*)

Peter’s deliverance illustrates how God delivers the church from Adamic condemnation into God’s spiritual family in heaven. In this experience, Peter pictures the entire Gospel age church.

Before we received the truth, we were (like Peter) in the prison house of death, sleeping or unaware of the divine promises and chained to our fellowmen as members of a fallen race. *{Ro 13:11 1 Thessalonians 5:6,7}* Satan, represented by Herod, seeks to keep us in the prison house.

Peter’s deliverance begins with light coming from an angel of the Lord. That angel pictures our Lord Jesus at his first and second advents when the light of the Gospel shined in the prison to enlighten all mankind in the proper heart condition. *{Isa 9:2 Revelation 18:1 2 Corinthians 4:6}* Just as the angel struck Peter to direct his attention to the light, *{Ac 12:7}* the Lord through our experiences directs our attention to the light of truth that we might see and appreciate it.

Only Peter awoke to the angel and the light. None of the guards heard or saw the angel. The same thing is true with us. While we see our Lord Jesus and the light of the truth, our fellowmen remain blinded by the Adversary to the glorious Gospel of Christ. *{2Co 4:4}*

Deliverance Depends on Faith

The angel told Peter to rise and when he did, the chains fell off (verse 7). If Peter had never gotten up, the chains would have never fallen off. Peter demonstrated his faith by standing up and when he did so, he was freed from the chains. This pictures how we are released from Adamic condemnation—by making a consecration and ‘standing up’ in God’s sight through our faith in the blood of Jesus.

Justification by faith is pictured in the Scriptures by standing or standing up. In Romans 5:2 Paul describes justification as the

grace wherein we stand. In Romans 11:20 and 2 Corinthians 1:24, Paul mentions that we stand, or have a relationship with God, by faith. Peter's standing up is a picture of our justification, which leads to our standing before God as probationary members of his spiritual family because we have made an acceptable consecration to him. Like Peter, our deliverance depends on our faith in, and obedience to, the Lord's instructions.

After standing up, Peter girded himself and wrapped his mantle around him before beginning his journey out of prison. This pictures our putting on the character of Christ, the fruits and graces of the Spirit, which we must have for our journey out of the prison. Girding ourselves and following the angel corresponds to the process of sanctification, which occurs during our Christian walk. Paul describes sanctification as being clothed in Colossians 3:10,12-14 : 'And having put on that new one [New Creature], being renewed by knowledge, according to a likeness of him who created him ... Be clothed, therefore, as chosen ones of God, beloved saints, with bowels of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patient endurance; bearing with each other, and freely forgiving each other, ... And besides all these things, put on love; it is the bond of the completeness.' (*Diaglott*)

If we clothe ourselves with the fruits of the Holy Spirit as the apostle Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1, then we will become a vessel of honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use and prepared for every good work. {*2Pe 1:5-7 2 Timothy 2:21*}

Peter's walk through the prison corresponds to our Christian walk. During our walk, we have a relationship with God even though the New Creature is still in our earthen vessel, and hence we are still within prison until we are changed in the First Resurrection. {*1Co 15:53*} Like Peter who walked through the prison, {*Ac 12:9,10*} further and further from his cell and closer and closer to complete deliverance, we do the same day by day as we follow the angel of the Lord. The angel is the only one who knows the way to the 'Iron Gate' and complete freedom.

Future Deliverance, Through the Iron Gate

Just like Peter, the angel leads us to the Iron Gate and deliverance from death (verse 10). We have no power to open that gate. Only our Lord Jesus through God's power can open the gate to the prison house of death. {*Isa 61:1 42:7*} Because of our Lord's faithfulness unto death, he was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God. {*Ac 2:24 Ephesians 1:19,20*} If we are faithful in

following the Lord, he will open the gates of death and release us completely.

Israel's Deliverance Was a Process

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was also a process. It began with a new king ruling over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. Under his direction, the Egyptians made the Israelites bitter with hard bondage. *{Ex 1:8,11,14 2:23,24}* God was preparing the nation through bitter experiences to desire their freedom. He was whetting their appetite for deliverance.

In parallel with the suffering of Israel, God spent 80 years preparing a man to be his representative in the deliverance: Moses. During this time, God overruled Moses' experiences to develop his faith, meekness and submission to divine will. *{Ex 2 Hebrews 11:24-29}* These qualities would be essential for Moses to lead the entire nation to deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

The same principle is true with us. We must develop faith, meekness and submission to divine will before we will be ready as a member of the church, to help deliver the world of mankind in Christ's kingdom.

When Moses returned to Egypt from the land of Midian, Israel's deliverance continued as a process. Through the confrontations with Pharaoh and the ten plagues, God taught the nation about himself, and their need for faith and obedience to be released. This process really accomplished three things:

1. It introduced the nation to their God. They learned his name: the great I AM. *{Ex 3:14}* They learned about his character; his power through the plagues (vs. 20), his love in releasing the nation (vs. 17), his wisdom and his justice.
2. It united the Israelites as a nation. It reminded them about their common heritage as descendants of Jacob and established a relationship between them and their God. *{Ex 4:31}*
3. It gave the nation focus—of doing the Lord's will and not their own.: *{Ex 12:28}* 'And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, So did they.'

The process of deliverance completely changed the Israelites' relationship with God. Their focus, their attitude, their character

and way of life all changed. The result was their release from servitude to freedom.

Deliverance transforms our lives in the same way. First, it introduces us to, and then teaches us about, our God and his character: his wisdom, justice, love and power. Second, it defines and unites us as a people, the sons of God, the church of the first-born. {*Heb 12:22,23* | *John 3:1*} Third, it gives us focus—to serve the living God, to follow in Jesus' footsteps and to do his will. Finally, it eliminates any desire within us for this present evil world and sets our hearts and affections on things above. {*Col 3:1-3*}

God's plan of salvation provides two opportunities for deliverance—one for the church and one for the world of mankind. In both cases, the deliverance process leads the affected individuals from the condemnation of sin and death back into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, from serving the flesh to doing the will of God. {*Ro 6:17,18*} The Prophet Joel refers to both in Joel 2:32:

'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.'

Deliverance for the church, or the spiritual phase of the kingdom, shall be in mount Zion. Deliverance for natural Israel and the world of mankind shall be in Jerusalem, through the earthly phase of Christ's kingdom.

The deliverance of Israel and all mankind in Christ's kingdom will be a process. Their deliverance will be accomplished as they walk up the way of holiness to the goal of human perfection and sonship with God. {*Isa 35:8-10*} God will put his law in the inward parts of man and write it in their hearts and they shall be his people. {*Jer 31:33*} Natural Israel and the world must be transformed. They must receive a heart of flesh and the character of God must be written in that heart if they would obtain perfection, sonship, everlasting life and deliverance. {*Eze 11:19,20*}

First or Past Deliverance

In our theme text, 2 Corinthians 1:9,10, the apostle Paul mentions three deliverances: The first is from the condemnation of sin into the liberty of the sons of God. The psalmist described this deliverance in Psalms 69:13,14:

‘But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters.’

The mire describes man’s present position as a fallen and condemned race. This Scripture reminds us of Psalms 40:2: ‘He (Lord) brought me up also out of a pit of noise, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.’ (*Margin*) The rock is Christ. Our faith in his sacrifice is the foundation for our relationship with God and we cannot follow in Jesus’ footsteps until we receive this deliverance.

The apostle Paul explains this deliverance in Colossians 1:12,14:

‘Giving thanks at the same time to that Father who called and qualified us for the portion of the saints’ inheritance in the light; who delivered us from the dominion of darkness, and changed us for the kingdom of the son of his love; by whom we have the redemption, the forgiveness of sins.’ (*Diaglott*)

God called us and through our faith in Jesus’ blood, qualified or justified us for a portion in that future inheritance. Because of our faith, we have been delivered from Satan’s dominion and God changed us into New Creatures. ‘Even when we were dead in sins, [he] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved;) And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ {*Eph 2:5,6*}

This deliverance is based on our faith in God and the sacrifice of his son, and our acceptance of the invitation to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. {*Mt 16:24*} We cannot receive this deliverance unless we take this step.

Second or Current Deliverance

The second deliverance mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:9,10 is the process God uses to lead us up the narrow way of sacrifice. It includes God’s overruling providences and the process of sanctification by which we are changed into the likeness of his dear son. The psalmist describes this deliverance in Psalms 91:3,4 (NIV): ‘Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.’

The fowler, Satan, is seeking to devour us. {1Pe 5:8} Brother Russell suggests the deadly pestilence is the sinful tendencies of our fallen nature. (*Reprints*, page 3331) The Lord through his armor and his faithfulness protects us from both of these enemies.

In Psalms 33:18,19, David identifies both of the deliverances we have mentioned So far: 'Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.' The Lord has not only delivered us from Adamic death but he keeps us alive 'in famine' or a wilderness condition. While there is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord in this present evil world, God provides the spiritual food for our growth and development as a New Creature.

Delivering the Three Hebrews

The apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 2:9: 'The Lord knows how to rescue the pious out of trial.' (*Diaglott*) The deliverance of the three Hebrews: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, was just such a rescue. Nebuchadnezzar had a huge statue of gold constructed and gathered together all of the officials of his realm to its dedication. During the dedication, the assembly was to bow down and worship the statue. If they did not, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. {*Da 3:1-8*}

Similarly, Satan has tried to unite the world in the worship of a false god. That great papal system was erected to preempt our Lord's kingdom and all nations were assembled to bow down to it. Like the three Hebrews, the church of the Gospel age has refused to worship this false god.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow before the great image. The enraged Nebuchadnezzar confronted the three with the ultimatum: worship the image or be thrown into the furnace and 'who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?' {*Da 3:15*}

This has been Satan's approach to thwarting the church of the Gospel age. He has threatened to destroy them if they do not worship the great false system he has set up. {1Pe 5:8 *Revelation 13:7*} Many who refused to bow down lost their earthly lives to 'Babylon the Great.' {*Re 17:5,6*}

The three Hebrews responded with great faith in, and loyalty to, the Heavenly Father. They did not know if Jehovah would actually

deliver them but they would not abandon their worship of God to save their physical lives. They had faith in God's promise of a better resurrection. *{Heb 11:35}* Satan offered them deliverance from the trial but God offered them a greater deliverance to life and relationship with God. And So the three Hebrews refused to bow down before the golden image Nebuchadnezzar had erected. *{Da 3:16-18, Moffatt}*

Their response enraged the king. Nebuchadnezzar had the furnace heated seven times hotter and his mighty men bound the Hebrews and threw them in the fire. *{Da 3:19-22}* But the fire had no effect on the Hebrews except to release them from their bonds. An angel of the Lord appeared and together the four walked without harm in the midst of the furnace. When the Hebrews came out of the furnace, there was no trace of the fire on them or their clothes. They were delivered from bondage by the experience.

This story reveals one of the keys to obtaining spiritual deliverance from God. David mentions this key in Psalms 91:14,15:

'Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.'

The three Hebrews demonstrated their love by doing the Lord's will and not worshipping the image. *{Ex 20:3 John 15:10}* Similarly, we demonstrate our love by doing God's will. Because we love him, the Lord delivers us. While the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was literal and physical, it pictures the deliverance of the church, through trial, to serve the Lord. *{Joh 8:32}* While the fire (trouble) destroyed Nebuchadnezzar's mighty men (agents of Satan), it sets the child of God (1) free—to worship and serve him in this life and (2) free—to be delivered via the First Resurrection.

The Apostle Paul's Deliverance

The apostle Paul was delivered many times during his Christian walk and he listed some of these experiences for us in 2 Corinthians 11:22-28 . As a minister of Christ, Paul was beaten with stripes, beaten with rods, stoned and shipwrecked. He endured perils of robbers, his Jewish brethren, heathen and false brethren. Yet, when Paul wrote about his deliverance in Philippians 3:10,11, he was referring to being delivered from death, not his difficult experiences:

‘That I [Paul] may know him [Jesus], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I [Paul] might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.’

Paul wanted to be delivered from death and be raised back into harmony with God. Paul was not delivered Fromhis difficult earthly experiences but was delivered BY them.

One of Paul’s burdens was his ‘thorn in the flesh.’ This problem hindered Paul’s service to the Lord and three times Paul asked the Lord to remove it. {2Co 12:7-10} The Lord responded by not lifting the affliction but giving Paul the strength and grace to endure it. Paul recognized the value of difficult experiences. In such an experience, the power of Christ was operating on his behalf. This power did not eliminate the suffering but it did assure Paul that his spiritual deliverance was guaranteed, as long as he leaned upon that power.

We Face Similar Experiences

We face experiences like the apostle Paul and the three Hebrews endured. They might involve persecution or opposition directly related to our service in the Truth. Or they may be more normal experiences of life. Whatever the source, these experiences are painful to the flesh and our flesh cries out for the trial to end. However, many times the trial goes on and on with no end in sight. We have these experiences because we have asked the Heavenly Father for spiritual deliverance and this is his best method for making our future deliverance possible.

A Real Life Example of Deliverance

The life of a recently consecrated sister illustrates this principle. Years ago, before she even knew the truth, she was the victim of an alcoholic and abusive husband. With a three year-old son, she was desperate to escape an intolerable situation. Though she was not religious at the time, one evening she prayed and prayed to God to make things right. Later that evening, her husband returned drunk and gave her the worst beating of her life. This young mother was So mad at God for not answering her prayer. But the final beating brought the police into the situation, forced her to leave her husband and ultimately, led her to meet brethren who introduced her to the Truth.

For years, this individual thought that God never answered her prayer that night. Only recently, now that she has made a consecration, can she see that God actually did answer her prayer. The answer was not what the young mother expected at the time nor was it along physical or temporal lines. Instead, God read her heart and knew with the proper experiences and teaching, he could lead her into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And God delivered her in just that way.

Third or Future Deliverance

A third deliverance mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:9,10 is promised to those who are faithful even unto death. This deliverance occurs when: 'this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality' in the First Resurrection. When this occurs, 'then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.' {1Co 15:53,54} When the First Resurrection takes place, the iron gates of the prison house of death swing open, just as they did in the case of the apostle Peter and we walk free as an eternal member of God's spiritual family.

'Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him'. {Psalms 91:14,15}

Being 'set on high' means we will be set together with our Lord Jesus in his throne. {Re 3:21} We will abide in God's tabernacle, dwell in his holy hill and stand in his holy place. {Ps 15:1,2 24:3} We will be 'priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years.' {Re 20:6} But to be set on high, there are three requirements we must meet according to the Psalm.

First, we must set our love upon the Lord. That is the only attitude of heart and mind that is pleasing to God and will enable us to cheerfully endure the difficult trials we must face as a part of our Christian walk. All of the individuals who have been faithful—Peter, Moses, the three Hebrews and Paul—exhibited this great love for God. It was their love and loyalty to God that enabled them to triumph in the experience.

Second, we must know the Lord. We must know our Heavenly Father's and Lord's character, plans and principles and then seek to apply their character and principles in our life. As the apostle Paul expressed it, we must know Christ, and the fellowship of his

sufferings, being conformed to his death; if we expect to attain to the resurrection from the dead. *{Php 3:10,11}*

Third, we must call upon the name of the Lord, for grace to help in every time of need. *{Heb 4:15,16}* We need the Lord's help; we cannot deliver ourselves. If we try to depend on our own strength and wisdom, we will fail. Paul did not make this mistake. He fully trusted in the Lord and leaned upon him even when all others deserted him. He wrote:

'In my first defence no one came to me, but all forsook me; ... but the Lord was present, and strengthened me, So that through me the proclamation might be fully established, and all the nations might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me for his heavenly kingdom.'—2 Timothy 4:16-18, *Diaglott*

If we call upon him, the Lord will deliver us out of the lion's (Satan's) mouth just as he delivered the apostle Paul, Daniel, the three Hebrews and all of the Lord's faithful servants.

Conclusion

The Lord is delivering us each and every day of our lives—from condemnation to sonship.

1. He has already delivered us from Adamic condemnation into probationary sonship. *{1Jo 3:1 Ephesians 2:6}*
2. He is now delivering us from doing the will of the flesh to becoming the servants of righteousness. *{Ro 6:17,18}*
3. He promises to deliver us beyond the veil—to glory, honor and immortality, eternal life—if we remain faithful. *{Ro 2:7}*

How thankful we should be for God's process of deliverance. It does not release us from individual experiences but does So much more—bringing us back into harmony, sonship and eternal fellowship with our heavenly Father. The best way for us to show our appreciation for So great a salvation, is to embrace it with all our heart, mind, strength and soul. To do less, would be unthinkable.

The Laodicean Period-Wolodymir Krajeckij, Ukraine

Beloved brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ! We welcome you with the words of Jesus: Peace be unto you. We are grateful to God for the brotherly fellowship, joy, spiritual rest, and for what you brethren have done So we could be together here.

Let us direct our attention now to the Laodicean period *{Re 3:14-22}* . The seventh epistle of Christ addressed to the church of Laodicea started during the second presence of our Lord in 1874. The Lord introduces himself to this ecclesia as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

Amen means true. In the mouth of our Lord, this word has the role of a vow, a confirmation of what would be written and said to the church of Laodicea. These words are bitter, severe, and able to move the conscience of people who hesitate, who are proud and self-content. The Lord speaks of himself as the faithful and true witness. All truths given to the church during the time of harvest deserve the highest appreciation because they are strictly under the control of the one who died and proved himself faithful to the promise given: 'I go and prepare a place for you and I will come again'.*{ John 14:3}*

The last expression, 'the beginning of the creation of God,' has a particular meaning because it has been said to the Laodicean church at the time of general skepticism, lack of faith, and evolutionism. We live at an admirable time when many ideas have been developed. Nevertheless, we notice a complete disregard of ideas in the form of spiritism, hypnotism, and various delusions by demons, etc.

Generally speaking the Lord reveals himself and his character to this church and presents its shortcomings to the Laodicean church. Whoever is familiar with the volumes knows that the fifth volume concentrates on our Savior. It explains and proves on the basis of the Word of God, his pre-human existence, his attitude towards God the Father, his work of the ransom given when he became a man So that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man. *{Heb 2:9}* It also presents our savior's present state when God highly exalted him and gave him a name which is above every name. *{Php 2:9}*

This Lord is known only by his faithful followers who rejoice in present truth. All the rest who call themselves Christians do not know the Lord. The presence of our Lord gives to the Lord's people during the Laodicean period all the possibilities of gaining

many blessings and the Lord's appreciation. Still, the message to the church states something completely different.

The name Laodicea consists of two Greek words: *lah-os* meaning people and *dee-kay* meaning law, judgment, justice, punishment, and repayment. Therefore Laodicea means law for the people, judgment of the nations, and people's tradition as well as their punishment. This is a period when people gain for themselves justice, judgment, and execute punishment but they are also being justly judged and punished. Besides, it is a time of judgment prophesized by our Lord in his epistle to the church of Philadelphia: 'I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which will come upon all the world'. { *Revelation 3:10* }

So we have a prophecy that this hour will come upon the entire world including the church. A conclusion can be drawn that on the earth and in the air there will be something (the so-called demonic powers) which will reach everyone. We can see that gradually more temptations are coming from various directions; everyone wants to get more for himself, to fight for honor, privileges, and positions, etc. Christianity which gradually comes under trial, is shown by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. The apostle describes some details of this hour of trial as referred to on a different occasion as a time of great trouble coming upon the whole world. From the prophetic descriptions we learn that the essence of this trial is self-love.

The holy Scripture speaks of a coming hour of trial for everyone. We are conscious that this hour has already begun. For worldly people it means discontent, grief, evil judgment, hatred, quarrels, robbery, murders, etc. It is this spirit which threatens the destruction of the whole society.

Let us leave aside the world and draw our attention to the condition in which the Lord's people are. Let us not forget that this hour of trial, in a certain sense, is to start from us the church; it is God who permits this. The Creator will give us a clear understanding of the possibility of self-renewal of one's character, the understanding of his glorious plan, and present truth; he will give us the possibility of learning about the high calling to a divine nature.

We have received his invitation and have been begotten of his holy spirit. We have entered into the school of Christ and we are learning about our character which must be shaped within us if we are to be received among the members of the 'bride of Christ' class. We are undergoing an examination now, a particular trial.

Those who will come through it successfully will be praised and will prove that despite weaknesses, imperfections of the flesh, and inherited vices, they are able to achieve, in their thoughts and hearts, a character resembling our Lord.

Although the Lord will not preserve his faithful of the Laodicean period from trouble, we may be sure that those who will keep his word of patient endurance will be given the power to defend themselves, as it was promised: 'I stand at the door, and knock, if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and I will sup with him, and he with me'. { *Revelation 3:20* }

This is a special reward for those who run their race at the proper time. Even though it is not our privilege to avoid the hour of trial, it is our privilege to have greater blessings connected with the presence of our Lord. We can find great joy in fellowship with him, in lessons and spiritual food in due season provided to a greater degree than in any of the previous periods. We should be aware that these great blessings are countered by severe trials and temptations coming to the whole world.

Patience and endurance were always needed; they are needed now more than ever. Those who run the race have patience because they are able to endure in this evil world. Others could not do it because, according to the words of the apostle Paul, 'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is'. { *1 Corinthians 3:13* }

We are led to the Laodicean period by one more thought: 'Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted'. { *Matthew 5:4* } Our hearts grieve over those who go through severe trials not realizing they are enslaved by ambition, business interests, worldly riches, and the cares of life, instead of being drawn to the truth. Year after year they become colder and more distant. These fiery trials should exercise us to prove who are his faithful.

Let us recall certain thoughts of the 'angel' of the Laodicean church, Brother Russell, a faithful instrument of God, who presented old teachings and admonitions which the Lord has given to his people after the second presence. Despite this help from the holy Scriptures, the church of Laodicea found itself in a pitiful state.

The Admonitions that Apply to Us

Let us return to the important words given to the churches and particularly the church of Laodicea given in verses 15, 16, and 17. These words do not apply to nominal Christianity but to the consecrated class who make their covenant of sacrifice with the Lord. At present, let us consider which of the Lord's admonitions may apply to us and how they are explained by the Faithful Servant. Let us enumerate them:

1. Often, we do not make use of the advice, grace, and teachings of our present Lord.
2. Often, we become lukewarm instead of hot in the Lord's service and cold in the earthly things. Lukewarmness causes us to be spit out of the Lord's mouth.
3. Often, we neglect self-sacrifice, seek after selfish things, which we have already sacrificed.
4. Often, in our surroundings during our trials we show lack of patience and faith.
5. Often, we take pride in the truth we haven't grown to know yet, and to which we are not obedient.
6. Often we are poor, lacking knowledge, and its spirit.
7. Often we are lukewarm, shortsighted, we don't see in what time we live. *{1Th 5:4,8}*
8. Often we are naked and lack spiritual armor; we are exposed to the fiery arrows of our enemy Satan.

For those who strive to learn about and to conquer their own weaknesses and negligence, the Lord says: 'be zealous and repent.' Zeal, inner fire, inspires the preaching of the truth, serving others, complete sacrifice for the Lord, the truth and the brethren. Opposition causes greater zeal; repentance is the return to a lost grace.

If we repent at the proper time before we are sealed, our stumbling will be forgiven. We will be brought back to God's grace and we can again run with diligence and persistence until the end (see June 23 *Manna*). If our effort is not delayed, the Lord will not reject us but support us in our struggle. Let us work while it is still day, let us gain knowledge because thanks to it, we are built up in faith. We acquire God's armor to withstand the approaching night. *{Ps 119:8 Ephesians 6:11,12 Hosea 6:6 Romans 15:14 1 Corinthians 1:4-8}*

'I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire So that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes So that you may see.'

If we desire to buy gold (for the price of self-sacrifice), heavenly treasures, the divine nature, and the proper character resembling our Lord, we should first go through fiery trials. Our imperfections, our sins, must be covered with the white robe of Christ's righteousness because each deviation from purity of the heart leaves spots on the robe. We can have fellowship with our heavenly Father only through justification.

It is also important that we anoint our eyes with the eyesalve of meekness, sacrifice, and submission to the will of God. In the third volume we read: 'Only those who have oil in their lamps (in themselves a complete sacrifice) can have light and recognize that: I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and I will sup with him and he with me.'

The Lord has been standing at the door of Laodicea since 1874. One of the proofs confirming these biblical words is the understanding of the teaching contained in Revelation: 'If any man hear my voice.' Is this voice unclear and difficult to hear, the voice in which these important words were spoken? On the radio we also hear different voices on different frequencies. It depends on how we tune our radio. It is similar with the truth. One hears and understands the truth only if one has a mind and heart which have been tuned to wait for the word of God. The voice of the Lord does not impose itself; it is quiet and unpopular.

The time will come when the Lord will roar like a lion, when everyone will hear him and will tremble before the Lord's wrath. Let us try to have tender hearts and consciences to hear the quietest whisper of our heavenly bridegroom.

The Supper

Why is the feast prepared by our Lord called a 'supper'? The truth sent since the dawn of the Lord's presence is the food for the evening of the day of the Gospel age. The present teachings about times received here before the completion of the church when the night is approaching is a supper in relationship to the entire period of Laodicea. The same thought can be found in the apostle James'

words (5:7) where he speaks about early and later rains which the Lord will send at the beginning of his presence and the end of the church's way.

The Lord says, 'I will sup with him and he with me.' What supper can we serve to the Lord? He draws closer to us through his mercy and truth without imposing and we see his providence and care in our lives. He feeds us in green pastures. If we appreciate his message and sacrifice to him our hospitality and earthly belongings, in this way we return gratitude for our received mercies. We can receive our Lord with the fruits of our character. According to Song of Solomon 4:16 they are like pleasant fragrances (our obedience to the truth which we have known). Then the Lord will allow us to taste his truth regarding the time and circumstances which lead to the completion of the church and the establishment of his kingdom.

Verse 21 encourages us to fight against this state of lukewarmness, against pride, boasting, and thinking highly of ourselves, that we are spiritually rich and need nothing more. Brother Russell writes: 'We should overcome self love, popularity, and success in the world, human theories and systems'—to which we can add fear of loneliness, rejection, and disdain in the eyes of the world.

The Lord stresses that this victory should be similar to his victory: 'The overcomers will sit with me, just as I overcame and sit together with the Father.' These words suggest that the last members of the body of Christ may expect the same experiences that our Lord had. One ought to expect, just as in the case of the Lord, a Gethsemane rejection, and a dishonorable end. In the eyes of men the church will suffer a dishonorable, humiliating end. Are we ready for it? There are still possibilities of putting forth efforts to remain in this narrow way, to overcome the world and Satan. {*Joh 16:13 1 John 2:13 4:4 5:4,5*}

The Lord never worked out a compromise. He could share with crowds his zeal and then with humility he gave up his life in the most humiliating way. The Laodicean period will come to an end together with the end of the church. Then the overcomers will be given thrones, and they will sit there together with their Lord. This is the reward promised to the overcomers of this most difficult period.

One needs a strong will in this time of temptation and freedom to remember one's consecration. Let us rejoice then, that there will be those who will complete the number of the church. Let anyone who has an ear, hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. For

the seventh and last time the spirit of God calls everyone who has an ear to hear and be obedient to present truth and understand what is going to happen later. {Re 4:1}

Amen.

Silently God Will Plan Your Life-Waldemar Szymanski, Poland

Dear brethren, I would like to share with you some of my observations about problems which we all must overcome in our lives. When we look at the years gone by, we notice there were ups and downs. It is true for everybody. There are times when we reach peaks, we enjoy good health, we grow, we are happy, and everything falls into place. After a period of growth, there comes a depression; we lack our usual smile, things keep falling out of our hands, we cannot cope with the simplest tasks, we make the worst possible decisions, we are dissatisfied with the surrounding world and ourselves. People then say, 'I am down.' But after some time, there comes a change of the cycle. Everything starts to improve and the whole process begins again.

When we look at the lives of people who are rich and famous, we have the impression that they are always at their peak. It is not true. They too have their 'downs' and just like the poor and the simple; they too have to climb their peaks. The life of everyone is a repeating cycle of these ups and downs. This cycle repeats in everyone's lives.

When I was a teenager, I recited a poem in our ecclesia. I don't remember its author but I remember the beginning: 'Silently God will plan your life.' Today I would like to make these words a foundation for my remarks.

It was shortly before a meeting organized for a couple who were getting married. This poem was a form of my wishes to them as they were entering a new way in their lives. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

For many years I had been wondering why God did not plan our lives so we could always be at the highest point of the cycle of life. Then we would always be glad, smiling, and joyful. Why isn't it that way? The apostle Paul gives us an answer to this question. He says very strange words in 2 Corinthians 12:10, 'Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in

persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.'

Life's 'downs' bring man closer to God. Mainly these moments shape our characters. 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' When I am down, when I feel poor physically, then I am drawn closer to God spiritually. Falls and stumbling on the road of life are helpful in reaching these peaks of life. What strange forces rule human conduct. Let us turn to the Scriptures in search of other examples of God's peculiar dealings with his people. Silently God will plan your life, my life, our lives quietly.

Old Testament Examples

I will begin with a story from the Old Testament. Surely we all know who Solomon was. I will read two verses, which are the introduction to this story: 'And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead'.{ *1 Kings 11:42,43*}

Rehoboam became a king of Israel after Solomon's death. The representatives of the ten tribes came to the new ruler and said: 'Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee'.{ *1 Kings 12:4*} Rehoboam did not answer his people immediately. First, he summoned the elders who had stood before his father and asked them for help in making a decision. This is the answer of that council of the elders: 'If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever'.{ *1 Kings 12:7*} King Rehoboam ignored these words and asked for advice from the young men who were serving in his court. After three days, according to prior arrangement, the representatives of the ten tribes came to the king for an answer: 'And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions'.{ *1 Kings 12:13,14*}

Notice the difference of opinion between the two councils. I won't analyze the reasons why these opinions were so different. In reaction to the king's words, Israel rebelled against Rehoboam, who had to flee to Jerusalem. The Israelites elected a new king, Jeroboam, who had lived in Egypt since Solomon's reign. In the

meantime, rejected king Rehoboam swiftly gathers an army from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (180,000 soldiers). He intends to bring the ten rebelling tribes into submission. However, the Lord opposes his intentions saying: 'Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me'. { *1 Kings 12:24* }

Rehoboam, the rightful ruler of Israel, loses the fight for his kingdom, the fight for his rights, and in the end he hears the words, 'for this thing is from me.' This story and especially its ending perfectly illustrates the peculiar ways God deals with his people. The rightful king comes for his ownership, it seems, but the Lord says: 'Ye shall not go up, nor fight, for this thing is from me.' We would say today, 'God has planned your life differently.' How many times has God planned our lives this way!

Let me give an example. A certain brother has been a servant in his class for many years, which makes him feel he is the best candidate for elder in the upcoming elections. It seems that the upcoming election is only a formality. His feeling, based on the history of his many years of service, is that this position is owed to him. Then the elections occur. The Lord's message, expressed through the vote of the brethren, is different. For the next term the class puts him in charge of a [as Brother Russell calls it in the sixth volume] 'less honorable service.' True, he was a class elder for so many years. But the Lord planned his life differently. Now he has to work more on those qualities of his character which he had been neglecting lately.

King Rehoboam wanted to regain his kingdom by force. He wasn't allowed to fight because the Lord, for the king's own good, had planned his life in another way. How often we are not able to understand God's ways or, I should say, God's guidance. The Lord planned our lives in such a way that we could attain a wonderful prize in the future. Indeed, we ask our Lord in prayer for something every day. God doesn't always answer these prayers and we can't understand that this is for our own good. In many cases these unanswered prayers are God's answers to our petitions, because we ask amiss.

Unknowingly, we often impose our will on the Lord. From our point of view there are two solutions to a problem which we bring before God. When we kneel down, we ask God to show us a better solution. Answering our prayer, the Lord points to the best or third solution. I will repeat these words again: 'Silently God will plan

your life.’ He will give you a solution that you haven’t thought about. That is also how God’s guidance manifests itself.

We all find ourselves in situations which require making a choice or a decision. We often hesitate and ponder because we don’t know what is best. When we are at the peak of this cycle of life, we make our decisions faster and easier. Not always are they well thought out or the best ones, but almost always we make them by ourselves, without God’s help or the help of others.

I will use an example from the Old Testament when Abraham and his family were traveling south from Egypt to the city of Bethel: ‘And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south’.*{ Genesis 13:1}* Both Abraham and Lot had separate possessions and herds; there were frequent contentions between their servants. Abraham decided that he could not continue to travel with Lot and that they must go separate ways: ‘And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left’.*{ Genesis 13:8,9}*

Thus Lot faced a test of choice. He settled in a valley on the plane of Jordan, in the land resembling Egypt because of its richness. It seems that ‘he took his fate in his own hands,’ as a Polish saying has it, and made a choice all by himself, without prayer. From the human standpoint, Lot made an excellent choice—he chose a rich and fertile land. On the other hand it was a very bad decision because Lot did not consider the character of the people among whom he would live.

Today we have to face similar trials. More and more often we must choose between material prosperity and spiritual growth. Then we say, ‘It’s much better here, I have a job, a house, we are doing better financially, but there is no class around here; we would be isolated from the brethren.’ What should we do? Should we ‘accommodate a wife and daughters’ as Lot did? Or should we look at these things from God’s point of view?

Despite Lot’s obvious mistake, God did not forsake him; he is even called a ‘righteous man.’ ‘And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)’.*{ 2 Peter 2:7,8}*

‘Silently God will plan your life.’ Despite our many shortcomings and mistakes, he will bless us. One can say that God acts in a very strange way. Man often falls and yet God blesses him. This is God’s way. Despite our many mistakes, unlike people, God still blesses us.

As it was with Lot, God did not leave the three men whom Nebuchadnezzar made governors in his kingdom. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced a test. They had two choices: to worship the image or die in the burning furnace. They chose the second. From a human standpoint they acted unwisely. All they had to do was to bow before the image and then carry on with their lives. They were the king’s governors after all. They chose a less advantageous solution. ‘Silently God will plan your life.’

The Lord did not leave them during this severe trial: ‘Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, Come forth, and come hither. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them’.*{ Daniel 3:26,27}*

From God’s standpoint they made the right decision, they chose well. They were at the top and they led peaceful lives, but suddenly they found themselves down and faced death. God blessed them and again they began to rise: ‘Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon’.*{ Daniel 3:30}*

The Importance of Attitude

Let us notice that they never changed their attitude toward God. Despite difficulties and problems, regardless of their situation, whether they were up or down, they always plainly expressed their viewpoint: ‘If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up’.*{ Daniel 3:17,18}*

Recent Examples of Faithfulness

Some of the Polish brethren went through similar trials during and shortly after World War II. It was the generation of my parents. Brethren often had to choose between life and death. They were forced to deny the truth, destroy their Bibles and cut their ties with other brethren. If they didn't do these things, their families would face poverty, prison, physical oppression and death by firing squad. Many brethren gave up their lives for the truth in that way. Perhaps some of you read letters written by brethren from the concentration camps shortly before the executions. These letters are very uplifting.

I would like to mention a convention that took place 51 years ago in June of 1949 in Zemborzyce. About 400 brethren gathered to listen to the Word of God. As a result of an attack by so-called 'unknown perpetrators' three persons were killed: Brother Mikolaj Grudzien (then chairman of the board of Polish Bible Students) and two sisters. Ten people were injured, some of whom are still among us. Zemborzyce is a little town near Lublin, my hometown. Today it is a district of Lublin.

In the mid-1970s when we were at the funeral of a husband of one of the sisters killed at that convention, I recalled the stories about the funerals of 1949 told by brethren. In front of me a picture of people throwing stones and shouting names stood before my eyes. I was standing in the same place. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

It is very difficult to explain that incident. Nobody was able to predict the consequences of those events. We still don't know what influence they had for spreading of the Word of God in our country. One thing is certain, unless God permits it, 'there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you'. { *Acts 27:34* } I know from others that these difficulties and trials happened to the brethren in other countries of Eastern Europe. Perhaps there are brethren who are on a life and death trial right now.

Let me ask you a question: Does anyone who has ever faced such a test, regret choosing God, the truth, and the brethren? 'Silently God will plan your life.'

Job had to make a very difficult decision in his life. As we know, he was a very wealthy man, he had ten children, big herds of cattle, sheep and camels. 'He was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil'. { *Job 1:1* } Today we would say that he was at the peak of his life. Suddenly he started falling down. All the misfortunes caught up with him. At one moment he lost his children, servants and all possessions; he was alone.

Under the burden of these misfortunes his health deteriorated, sore boils covered his body. He was brought down very quickly. His friends wanted to convince him that God had forsaken him. The closest person in his life, his wife, shared the same view. She said: 'Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die'.{ *Job 2:9*} Job chose an entirely different solution. He answered his wife with these words: 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?'.{ *Job 2:10*}

Once again we read very strange words. I think that we all expect only good things from God. We credit Satan with all the bad. The problem is we don't always know what is good for us. Only God can foresee the immediate advantages of our temporary experiences. 'Silently God will plan your life.' Take this heavy burden on your shoulders now and God will put a wonderful crown on you head in the future.

Shortly after this event, God gave back to Job everything that Job had lost. He had ten children again, he received twice as much wealth as a reward for his faithfulness because 'in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly'.{ *Job 1:22*} Job's story is an excellent illustration of a man's life. He was at the peak, then found himself down, and again he was at an even higher peak. He received more than he had possessed previously.

Now I will present another kind of test and a result of making a wrong decision. This is a very short story. It is about Esau and Jacob: 'And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright'.{ *Genesis 25:32-34*}

Spiritual vs. Earthly Values

Esau chooses a temporary comfort and a tasty meal instead of his father's blessings. He satisfies his body and doesn't realize that thus he loses much greater things. The pottage of lentils is worthless to Jacob; he chooses spiritual values. This is a great lesson for us. Spiritual values are always more precious for us.

Making Choices Today

Dear brethren, as we go through life we are very often in situations similar to those mentioned above when we are faced with a choice and we have to make a decision. We have been facing these choices since our childhood. When a child is born, its parents want to name it with the best, the most beautiful name. Someone may say that it is very important; one's character, future, and accomplishments could depend on a name. We quickly go through names of famous people and try to see if they fit our child. It is similar with the selection of Bible names. We are looking for the name of a positive character, someone faithful and devoted to God. It seems to us that thus we will guarantee our child a glorious future. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

Our child, having a beautiful name, is ready to go to school. We need to choose a school for our child. It has to be the best school in the city. Only the best teachers should teach my son or my daughter. They should do everything so that my child would be the brightest of all. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

Then comes the time when we need to find a profession for our child, and what comes with it? The child's further education. We face another problem often at the time our child shows the first signs of independence. He or she wants to decide about his or her profession and education. And again, from a parent's point of view, it has to be the best job and the most respected school. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

After graduation, our child as an adult almost immediately faces a few new tests. The first test is a job. A young man starts to look for his first job; he reads ads, asks his friends, makes his résumé and goes to job interviews. As he has learned from his parents, he looks for the best, the easiest, and financially most attractive job. These searches are sometimes very long. 'Silently God will plan your life.'

With the search for a job there comes a decision to move. Sometimes one has to leave the family. It appears that there is a good job and financial prospects at the other end of the country. Is it worth it? Sometimes in search of a good job we have to leave the country. Is it worth it? 'Silently God will plan your life.'

Around the same time we face a choice of our future spouse. It is a very important decision. According to the Scriptures, it is an irreversible decision. We cannot change our spouse as we change jobs, places of employment, or places of living. Then another problem arises. A man looks for the best wife, a woman expects to

find the best partner. How to choose the best one out of So many?
'Silently God will plan your life.'

After establishing a family at the time our child is born, we face the test of selecting a name. As you can see, the whole process starts all over again, but this time we are the parents. This is what the life of an average man looks like.

In some cases there are additional situations requiring the making of very important decisions. We all made this most important decision. We decided to sacrifice our lives to Jesus Christ. Let us remember that we cannot turn back. There is no other test for us who are consecrated. For us there is only a wonderful prize in the heavenly kingdom, or the second death.

The entire world of mankind will face a similar test of choice in the future. People will have to declare whether they are with or against the Lord. Choosing the Lord will allow them to live in the kingdom established on earth; otherwise death will destroy them. Our decision of choosing the narrow way gives us the ability of reigning with the Lord in heaven. Does anyone regret giving his or her life to God? Does anyone think that it was a bad choice? I think that regardless of our difficulties, experiences, and persecutions, it is safe to repeat after Job, 'blessed be the name of the Lord.'

'It Was Pleasant to Suffer'

I would like to quote the words of a Polish Hymn (318) to all those who hesitate and are facing a choice of following Christ: 'Our waiting was worthwhile, our effort is rewarded, because today the Lord's people attained the first resurrection. We are still waiting for this moment. Although many sufferings have passed, it was pleasant to suffer.' And again we hear strange words: 'It was pleasant to suffer.' Who can say these words today? Who can understand them? 'Silently God will plan your life.'

Sometimes a member of the family becomes ill, I mean long, severe, and seriously ill. How can one explain such an event in the light of the words, 'Silently God will plan your life'? Are all experiences, illnesses, and tragedies which we go through in our lives planned by the Lord to torment us? Perhaps God made a mistake and planned our lives in a wrong way? That's not true! The Lord is using natural ways to carry out his plan. Both illness and death are a natural heritage of man's fall: 'cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt

eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' {*Ge 3:17-19*}

We never know what blessings, especially spiritual ones, the illness of a family member can bring us. The apostle Paul said, 'For when I am weak, then am I strong.' Do we understand these words now? Can we appreciate the spiritual benefits resulting from such a condition? That's how God shapes our characters and gives us the ability to develop the wonderful fruits of the Spirit. {*Ga 5:22,23*}

Dear brethren, in our lives we go through sufferings and trials similar to the ones that the above-mentioned Bible characters went through: Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Esau, the three Hebrews, and Job. Regardless of how difficult these experiences and decisions are, let us remember that silently God will always plan our lives under one condition: that we ask him to do so. We should recognize the Lord as the 'author and perfecter of [our] faith,' in all our matters, earthly and spiritual. Looking for wisdom from above, we should do everything in our human power to cooperate with God.

We usually see two extreme approaches in this matter. There are people who do not believe in God at all and Christians who lack faith. They feel so strong, wise, and clever that they take care of everything by themselves. They look for their jobs and spouses, they choose professions and make decisions for their children, all by themselves. It happens somehow that they spend a lot of time searching for these things and they still do not have jobs, cannot support their families, and still they search for something. After many years they would often admit that at some point they made a mistake leaving their hometown or choosing their spouse. By having this attitude, such people forget about God completely. They think that they should take credit for all they have. They do not turn to God for his guidance when they make important decisions.

The Common Sense Approach

Let me present another approach of people who use very little common sense and who leave all their matters in the hands of the Lord. They put God in charge of all their problems and concerns but they do not do anything to change the status quo. They look for a job, but they do not answer any offers. Waiting for their prayers to be answered, they expect God to perform a miracle.

Let me give an example. In the morning of the day of high school final exams many students go to church to pray. I once closely analyzed this situation. Students, who have never been there before and students who have not shown much academic progress, are going to church! What is the sense in that? A person who has not believed in God now expects a miracle from him? Someone who has not studied for the last few years now expects to pass exams in a miraculous way? I think that one can tempt God this way.

I presented two extreme approaches. A Christian should choose a third solution. He or she should ask God for guidance before making a choice and then should do everything to make the best decision and the best choice. Being thus prepared, and if this is God's will, we will receive wonderful guidance. The Lord will create such circumstances that in making decisions regarding our earthly matters, we will find solutions which we wouldn't see otherwise. 'Silently God will plan your life' but only on one condition: that you ask him to do it.

In choosing this third solution, a Christian must keep a proper balance. On the one hand there is God and his guidance, on the other hand there are our actions. To illustrate this attitude we can use a story of the choosing of a wife for Isaac. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, prays to God before making a decision: 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.' {*Ge 24:12-14*}

This story beautifully illustrates the topic of our consideration. 'Silently God will plan your life' on one condition: you ask him to do it.

Amen.

One God, One Mediator Between God and Men- Edward Pietrzyk, Poland

Beloved brethren in Christ, dear friends _ all 'that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein. Grace be unto you, and peace, from him

which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth'. { *Revelation 1:3-5* }

The words of the apostle Paul, a man of wisdom and a theologian of the New Testament, will be the basis of our discourse. In 1 Timothy 2:5,6 we read this testimony: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.'

In these words the apostle Paul brings to our attention three things which, often and in many places, are the credo of his gospel: 1) there is one God; 2) there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ who gave himself a ransom for all; 3) God foresaw a due time in his plan for the above aspects to be proclaimed.

Following the apostle's thought we ask these three basic questions:

1. Why does the apostle Paul emphasize and admonish that there is one God? Can anyone think that there are more gods?
2. Why did the apostle Paul think it was appropriate to teach and remind us that there is one mediator between God and men with his mediation based on the merit of a life given on Calvary? Could this cause any difficulties for the faithful ones of the Gospel age, period of time during which the good tidings have been proclaimed?
3. Why does the apostle Paul connect the significance of the work of the ransom paid on Golgotha with this 'due time'? Could the understanding, or even more, could the advantage of the ransom be distributed in time and be different for different groups of people?

Let us turn to Scripture which 'is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction' { *2Ti 3:16* } to find answers to these questions.

One God

The apostle says: 'There is one God.' In 1 Timothy 4:10 he adds that 'we trust in the living God.' Let us expand our previous question: Can God be dead?

To understand the apostle's thought better, let's turn our Bibles to Exodus 20:1-6 where we read about ten commandments given by

God to his chosen people at Mount Sinai. 'And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.'

So there is one God, the Everlasting, 'the beginning and the end,' whose 'hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens'.{ *Isaiah 48:13*} This is the same God who led the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

God asks: Is there a God beside me? He answers: 'Yea, there is no God; I know not any.' {*Isa 44:8*} And he warns: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.'

What an irony: many Christians, quoting this commandment of God, omit the Lord's warning more or less consciously. We are not to judge, but let us notice how severe the words of our Lord are, expressed in the vision of John the Revelator: 'If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life'.{ *Revelation 22:19*} 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'.{ *Hebrews 10:31*}

Let us repeat after the apostle: 'There is one God,' a living God in whom we laid our hope, not in any carved or painted image made with human hands. The prophet Jeremiah wrote these words when he glorified the only living God: 'Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine

of vanities. Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men. But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king.' {*Jer 10:1-10*}

There is something else: the apostle Paul, witnessing about one God and one mediator between God and men, settles one more issue. He teaches that there are two: God and the mediator (the Father and the Son), two distinctly different beings. They are not two or three in one person, as it is being taught by so many churches of the contemporary world. Although both are immortal, they are not equal.

In 1 Corinthians 15:27,28 the apostle Paul speaks about the glory of the future kingdom for which we all pray 'Thy kingdom come.' He shows these differences in a very logical and indisputable way: 'For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.'

One Mediator

The apostle Paul says 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.' Let us ask this question again: Why did the apostle Paul think it was necessary and proper to teach and remind us that there is one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ alone? Why was his mediation based on the merit of his life offered at Calvary? Could this cause any difficulties to the faithful ones of the Gospel age?

To look for an answer to this question let us go back six thousand years ago when God's power created life here on earth. Let's read Genesis 1:26,27: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.'

The Scriptural evidence is that God created man 'in his own image and likeness' and not according to his nature or kind of life. The apostle Paul teaches: 'There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the

terrestrial is another. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'.{ *1 Corinthians 15:40*} He created man in his own image So that man, like God, could reason and have free will, So that the harmony of God's attributes (wisdom, power, justice, and love) would be reflected in him, and So that he, just like God who is the King and the Lord of the universe, would reign over the world.

Man and God have similarities, but also differences. Their bodies: one is earthly, of the earth's dust, and the other is divine, spiritual. Also the difference of life: the Scriptures say that God, the creator of the universe, is immortal. This means that it is impossible for God to die. Scriptural testimony in this regard is indisputable: 'King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, whom no man hath seen, nor can see'.{ *1 Timothy 6:15,16*}

What about man? In Genesis 2:8,16,17 we read: 'And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

Death was possible for man, death of a soul, of a living being, not of the body itself because the Scriptures teach us that man is a soul and not that he has a soul. To confirm this statement we read in Genesis 2:7, 'And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.'

Furthermore, the same Scriptures tell us that the soul is mortal which means that death is possible for man. The first man, created in likeness of God, trespassed God's law. 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat'.{ *Genesis 3:6*}

Adam was 930 years old when he died. The words of God's judgment were fulfilled: 'for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' Adam, the living soul died as the prophet Ezekiel would later say: 'Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, So also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die'.{ *Ezekiel 18:4*}

Six thousand years have passed since these events took place. When Adam reached for the forbidden fruit, he brought the curse

of death upon himself, but not just himself. The words of God's judgment reached also his descendents, on all of mankind.

The apostle's statement is very clear in this regard: 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men'. { *Romans 5:12* } Indeed, 'the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge' as the prophet adds. { *Jer 31:29* } What's more, because of his fall, man not only found himself under the death penalty, but he also lost his likeness to God in some degree. He defiled and depraved himself. He became a child of wrath, often 'having no hope, and without God in the world'. { *Ephesians 2:12* }

Is there any hope for mankind? Or are there only pain, sin, and death left? By no means! The apostle John reveals this great mystery of God's plan designed 'before the foundation of the world.' He writes: 'In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.' { *1Jo 4:9,10* }

The apostle Paul in *Romans 3:25* confirms the same thought: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Jesus himself said: 'It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true'. { *John 8:17* }

Adam, a perfect man, trespassed God's law and therefore he died. In him died all of mankind. 'Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne' says the psalmist. { *Ps 89:15* } The perfect law of God does not know any exceptions: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a man for a man, a life for a life. { *Le 24:17-20* }

Because a perfect man sinned, a perfect man had to sacrifice his life so mankind could be freed from the punishment imposed on it by God's justice. For this cause Jesus came into the world! 'But when the fullness of the time was come'—according to God's plan drawn before creation of the world—'God sent forth his son, made of a woman'. { *Galatians 4:4* } It was a man, Jesus Christ—not a materialized angel. It was the son of God who 'in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren... was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'. { *Hebrews 2:17 4:15* }

This Jesus, this man Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God willingly gave his own life as a ransom for all: 'he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'. { *Hebrews 10:12* } It means no repetition

of the sacrifice is required under any circumstances. It is the very center, the pivot point of God's plan towards men, hope for the world lost in sin and death. *Antilutron*—equivalent price—'the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood'.{*Ro 3:24,25*}

The apostle Peter says: 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved'.{ *Acts 4:12*} And the apostle Paul emphasizes: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'

There is no other mediator, there is no other advocate, neither here on earth, nor in the heavens, because 'no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven'.{ *John 3:13*} Therefore Jesus, when he was on earth, was admonishing his disciples: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name'—not in any other name—he (the Father) will give it you'.{ *John 16:23*}

Summing up, let us then remember that Jesus, 'the Lamb of God who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world,' died for Adam, and in him for all mankind, for all people, because that was God's plan for man.

Due Time

The apostle says: 'Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.'

Let us ask again: Why does the apostle Paul connect the significance of the work of the ransom paid on Golgotha with this 'due time'? Could the understanding, or even more, could the advantage of the ransom be distributed in time and be different for different groups of people?

To understand the apostle's thought when he speaks about Jesus as the only way of atonement between God and man, we should notice one important fact. The great majority of the world's population is in their graves and many of those who have lived during the Gospel age have never had any opportunity to hear about Jesus, to believe in him, or to attain salvation. The Scriptures teach very emphatically that God does not have any intention to save anyone on the basis of their ignorance, but 'he wants all men—all men with no exceptions—to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth'.{ *1 Timothy 2:4*} Because 'there is

no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave' we should expect that the Almighty, the just and loving God, foresaw all this in his plan.

Let us read the apostle Paul's words once again: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.' Have we grasped the key that the apostle Paul is putting into our hands? God has a due time for everything. Indeed, he could have given this testimony to those who lived in the past, before Jesus was born; the fact that he did not do that proves that there will be a due time for them in the future.

God in his plan foresaw a due time for mankind that, according to the Scriptures, is to last one thousand years. It will be 'times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets'.{ *Acts 3:21*} Then the entire world of mankind, those who lived before Christ and those who were born after Christ but lived 'without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world',{ *Ephesians 2:12*} will have the opportunity of taking advantage of the Lord's sacrifice. They will have the opportunity to attain atonement with their creator, God Almighty.

Before that time, however, during the present Gospel age, God gave the opportunity of a conditional covenant of sacrifice to a special class of people: the Church of the firstborn, joint-partakers of the heavenly calling, the saints of the present age. The apostle Paul writes about them in *Romans 12:1*, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' According to God's plan this class—144,000 members together with Jesus—will constitute the royal priesthood of the future age. Through them all others will be led to the knowledge of the truth.

These thoughts are confirmed also by the apostle John in his epistle: 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world'.{ *1 John 2:1,2*}

Let us sum up our considerations. Analyzing the apostle Paul's words from *1 Timothy 2:5,6* where we read: 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,' we come to the following conclusions:

1. There is one living God, whose 'hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens.' We should trust in him, not in any image made with human hands.
2. Man was created in the image and likeness of God, not according to God's nature or kind of life. Man was and is a mortal soul. By trespassing God's law he brought upon himself a curse of death; he defiled and depraved himself.
3. A perfect man—not a materialized spirit being—had to sacrifice his life So that mankind could be freed from the punishment of death. The man Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, gave himself a ransom for all.
4. God foresaw a due time for mankind to gain this knowledge and accept salvation. This due time for the church of the firstborn is different from the due time for the rest of the world of mankind.

May all of us that 'readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein' be able to utilize this 'due time,' now or in the future. Thus the words of the apostle Paul who writes in 1 Timothy 4:10 are fulfilled: 'For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.'

Amen.

The Fall, Ransom, and Restitution in the Plan of God- Bertoldo Fonsaca, Brazil

My beloved friends, sisters, and brothers: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

I find myself among you at this International Convention of Bible Students, and I am very happy that, by God's grace at this moment, I have the opportunity to convey to you something of the Christian good wishes that we've learned in the gospel, as well as some words of Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the prophets.

According to his revealed plan the purpose of God respecting the human race is its restitution or restoration to the glory that it

formerly had. To accomplish this important task, first it was necessary for God to plan or outline what was best to do. Before God created the world he already had a plan which contemplated man's creation, his possible fall, and his ransom and restoration: 'Says the Lord, who has made these things known from old'. { *Acts 15:18* } This meant that God foresaw what was going to happen.

Isaiah said: 'Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure'. { *Isaiah 46:9-11* } 'Jehovah of hosts has sworn: As I have planned, So shall it be, and as I have purposed, So shall it stand. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out and who will turn it back?'. { *Isaiah 14:24,27* }

Man's thoughts and plans are often in direct opposition to God's. Therefore, man's plans will utterly fail if they are contrary to God's designs. Through the same prophet, the Lord said: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. So shall my word be that goes from my mouth; it shall not return empty, but shall accomplish which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.'—Isaiah 55:8,9,11

God also said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him'. { *Genesis 1:26,27* } The plural 'us' is interesting due to what is written in John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word.' And Proverbs 8:22, 'Jehovah possessed me from the beginning.' These texts tell us that Christ existed from the beginning with God as personified Wisdom.

Today when we talk about man being made 'in the image of God,' we understand it as referring to those divine powers of reasoning and memory, or those capacities to express and exercise justice and love, that were given to man. We read, 'And God created man in his image' (an earthly image of himself)—with reasoning capabilities and moral consciousness. From this we can see how contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures the doctrine of the trinity really is.

Jesus said: 'Even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I have come and whither I am going. In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true; I bear

witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me.’—John 8:14, 17,18.

To the Corinthians, the apostle Paul wrote: ‘Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’.{ *1 Corinthians 8:6*} On the other hand, those who teach evolution believe that man is not the result of God’s creation, but the natural descendant of an ape. We ask then, where did the ape come from? They are left without an answer because they do not know.

In Genesis 2:7 we read: ‘Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.’ The first man, from whom all mankind came into being was earthly in nature. The second Adam, through whom life will come to the world was heavenly because he came from heaven.

According to the Scriptures ‘man became a living being.’ He was not immortal as many wrongly believe. God said to him, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’.{ *Genesis 2:16,17*} When man transgressed this command, he died the same day. But how can this be if Adam lived until he reached 930 years of age?

For an answer, let’s go to the words of the apostle in 2 Peter 3:8. ‘But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’ In Psalms 90:4 we read: ‘For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.’ From this we can conclude, and also be certain, that this was the kind of day during which Adam died. And this has also been true of Adam’s descendants. Not one of them has lived as long as one thousand years. After Adam’s transgression God’s sentence was heard in the garden. ‘Surely you will die and return to the dust from where you were taken.’ God’s intention was not to punish man with eternal torment, denying the possibility of a recovery from that condition of punishment, neither did he punish him with eternal destruction which would have meant the end of human life upon the earth. God cursed man with the following words: ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground from which you were taken’.{ *Genesis 3:19*}

Adam was human and hence earthly. He was not a spiritual being. Nothing was said of an eternal punishment with torment. Nevertheless Satan through the serpent said to the woman: 'You will certainly not die. She took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate'. { *Genesis 3:4,6* } By his disobedience Adam died. That is true. But there was something else, and that was God's promise that the descendant of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. That gave our first parents a hope. As we know, Christ became that descendant who also would give himself as a ransom not only for the believers, but for all mankind.

During the existence of the nation of Israel, the sacrifices offered at the tabernacle were of such nature that they could never take away the sins from the people. The sacrifices were imperfect and So were the ones who offered them. But Jesus our high priest is perfect and So is his sacrifice. In Hebrews 9:11,12 we read: 'But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, he entered once for all into the holy place, taking not the blood of bulls and goats thus securing eternal redemption,' which means eternal—present and future—deliverance from the bondage of death.

The ransom for all, provided by the sacrifice of the 'man Christ Jesus' does not secure eternal life or blessings to anyone, but it guarantees to all men a full opportunity or trial to obtain eternal life. The ransom given does not condone sin; its purpose is not to consider the wicked and sinful as saints, opening freely the doors of eternal life for them. It goes as far as setting free from the Adamic death all those that are in their captivity, giving them a full opportunity to obey and live; or disobey and be destroyed.

Adam failed under the test. He willfully sinned, no question about it. But his descendants took no part in that disobedience, yet nevertheless were condemned in Adam's loins. But during the Millennium things will be different. The obedient ones will receive eternal life and the willful sinners will be eternally destroyed in the second death. { *Re 20:6* } The ransom for all designed by God will take place in due time, bringing to the faithful believers the blessed liberation from the Adamic condemnation and the opportunity to enjoy happiness, the happiness that only belongs to the sons of God, the happiness enjoyed before the fall in Eden.

At the present time not everyone enjoys the freedom that Christ brings, but only the few who accept and obey him. These very few compose the Church. These are called and tested with the special purpose of participating with God in the task of blessing the world.

Today they are the ones who are giving a witness to the world about this future period. At the same time they are the only ones who currently enjoy the blessings of the ransom. They are under test now. To these few all the blessings of restitution are imputed (through their faith). These are treated in a special way due to their faith in Christ now.

Times of Restitution

When God said to Abraham, 'In thee all the families of the earth shall be blessed,' a resurrection from the dead was implied because at the time that these words were uttered many people had already died without receiving any blessing from God. This is a true promise from God. When the times of refreshing shall come, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. {Ac 3:19} They will slowly progress to perfection. Death will disappear, contrary to what takes place today in the world. There is no doubt that the Scriptures teach a future restitution of all things. In Acts 3:19-21, we find the important words of the apostle in relation to the 'times of restitution that were spoken by the mouth of the prophets of old.' The kingdom of God was the main theme of these prophets. From Genesis to Revelation that is the central message of the Bible, and the prophets without exception called attention to that future event.

Tears have been a symbol of pain and suffering during the reign of sin and death, but in one of his prophecies of the restitution that God will bring, Isaiah wrote: 'He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth'. {Isaiah 25:8} What a marvelous hope this is!

In Isaiah 35:5-10 we read: 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand, shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

The principal lion free over all the earth during the dark night of sin and death has been the Devil himself. The apostle Peter referred to this one as a 'lion trying to devour'. { *1 Peter 5:8* } During the Millenium Satan will be bound for one thousand years { *Re 20:2* } . Thus this old enemy of God will not be able to interfere and separate those who are walking through that highway on their way back to perfection and life eternal.

It is written symbolically about that way that 'no ravenous beast shall come up on it.' This means that huge corporations organized for selfish purposes will no longer be tolerated. 'They shall not hurt or 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 62:10* } Stones (errors etc.) will be gathered out and the standard of truth will be lifted up for the people. Isaiah wrote, 'And the redeemed of the Lord shall return.'

Paul said Jesus gave himself as a ransom price for all. { *1Ti 2:3-6* } This means that all mankind shall come back from death and will walk on that highway of holiness toward perfection. They will come back with joy and happiness because here will be no more sorrow nor mourning. { *Re 21:4* } All the causes of despair and mourning shall be wiped away, especially death.

Concerning the times of restitution Isaiah wrote: 'They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain'. { *Isaiah 65:21,25* } Nevertheless the restoration shall begin with the Jew. { *Ro 2:9* } 'And the Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first'. { *Zechariah 12:7* }

In 70 AD Jerusalem and the nation of Israel were destroyed; the Jews were scattered among all the nations. The Bible contains many prophecies respecting the return of the Jews to Palestine, mentioned also in *Studies in the Scriptures*. In May 1948 the nation of Israel was formed. That was a special date for Jews the world over. What took place then anticipates the blessings soon to come during the Millenium to the nation of Israel. The illustration of the fig tree { *Mt 24:32* } in relation to Israel was a proper one. Israel has ambassadors in many countries and vice versa. No more is Israel an oppressed nation. It is a free and respected nation.

In the 37th chapter of Ezekiel we find a prophecy about the restoration of Israel to its promised land. In it, all the nation of Israel is compared to a valley of dry bones. Those bones were seen

prophetically as coming together, to be covered with flesh and skin, receiving the spirit of life of God. In this prophecy the different nations where Israel has been dwelling for the past 2000 years are compared to opened sepulchers. Today more than two million Jews have left those sepulchers and have gone back to their land. But very few recognize the significance of this today. Eventually they will know the Lord. The prophecy declares; 'And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, saith the Lord'.*{ Ezekiel 37:13,14}*

But before Israel can receive the spirit of the Lord again, they will have to pass through a period of great anguish and trouble. Chapter 38 of Ezekiel deals with this event during which Israel will be attacked by armies commanded by Gog from the land of Magog. In Jeremiah 30:7 we read: 'Alas! that day is So great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.'

From the prophecies quoted we are sure that the Middle East will witness a great conflagration. Brother Russell wrote in volume 4, page 554, that this event will take place in the land of Palestine. In the middle of the trouble, God will intervene and release Israel as he did in times past. When he will fight for Israel and use pestilence and calamities against its enemies, God's power shall be marvelously displayed. 'So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives. And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord'.*{ Isaiah 59:19,20 Romans 11:25-32}* Then Israel, as well as all the other nations, will learn to appreciate the kingdom of God.

This destruction of the enemies of Israel (which will end the time of tribulation and anguish and begin the kingdom) is clearly portrayed in Ezekiel 38:18 to 39:20. This old social order of things will be destroyed, *{Isa 24:19,20}* in order to clean up the earth in preparation for the new heaven and new earth. The earth (present social structure) 'shall be removed like a cottage' *{Isa 24:19,20}* to clear the way for a 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'.*{ 2 Peter 3:13 Isaiah 65:17}*

Before the deluge the earth was surrounded with water. God used it to destroy that world. Today something similar is taking place. The

earth's atmosphere is witnessing the presence of flying and atmospheric strategic weapons with which man can destroy the entire planet. After two cities were destroyed in Japan, it became a terrifying possibility; in 1945 we entered the atomic era and in 1957 the space age.

However, these inventions have been applied to the benefit of mankind only to a small degree; they are rather used to prepare weapons to destroy the world. Will there be a nuclear conflagration? In Zechariah 14:12 we read, 'And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh shall rot while they are still on their feet, their eyes shall rot in their sockets, and their tongues shall rot in their mouths.'

In the book of Joel (2:30) we read: 'And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke'—just as the atomic explosion in Japan in 1945 caused a pillar of smoke. The only ones today who really know what is going on in the world are those who through faith have accepted the prophetic Bible testimony. For these the Bible's prophecies are a ray of light. They know from the Scriptures that no human government will be capable of solving the world's problems. They recognize that only Christ will solve them when the earth shall know the Lord.

Salvation Is for All

If someone says that salvation can be obtained through a religious group or sect, do not believe it, because Christ died for all and it is a truly great hope. Salvation is given by the Lord to the whole world 'from sea even to sea,' from mountain to mountain, from valley to valley. Such are the teachings of the Holy Scriptures which we cannot alter nor dismiss.

This prophetic day is at hand. We have to study the Bible, cultivate the fruits of the spirit, our perseverance and brotherly love. 'Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity'.{ *Psalms 133:1*} The apostle Peter said: 'Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall'.{ *2 Peter 1:10*}

Let us love the brethren, love the Lord and remain in the power of the holy spirit.

It has been a pleasure to see you again in this part of the world and certainly it has been for me a wonderful privilege to present to you these thoughts. I hope that we will meet again to participate in the Lord's cause. May God bless you. Amen.

The Glory of the Lord-Alain Boulier, France

The Bible clearly states that God is at the highest possible level, above every creature. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork'. { *Psalms 19:1* } The study of God's word permits one—among other things—to better know God, the Omnipotent, the Eternal One, and to become aware of his glory.

From the very beginning of the first book of the Bible, we learn that God created the man Adam in his own image. Unfortunately Adam and his companion Eve disobeyed God and even though he had warned them of the consequences of that disobedience, they sinned and lost the communion they had with God. In this tragic experience where everything was lost, God allowed his justice to be accomplished: the man who had been created to live was condemned to die. { *Ge 3:19* } But the disobedience of man did not just lead to his condemnation. It also brought about the revelation of the divine plan which was not as yet known by the angels, { *see Revelation 5:1-5* } a plan in which we see the joint interaction of the Almighty's wisdom, justice, love, and power.

Indeed, in his foreknowledge, God had foreseen the possibility of the fall of man because he had given him free will. Even though God did not withdraw this liberty from those who descended from the man he had created, he maintained control over the events that happened to them. ('God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness,' as we read in *Psalms 47:8*) He even intervened to end the evil that had filled the earth, according to *Psalms 29:10*, 'The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.' 'For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them'. { *1 Samuel 2:8* }

Subject Outline

For our oration, we shall begin by reading some excerpts of the vision of the glory of God on his throne as found in *Ezekiel chapter 1*. We will follow with some general remarks, and will examine the details in this chapter that could symbolize God's four attributes following this order: Power, Wisdom, Justice, and Love. We will then review the main ideas before concluding.

‘And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. [verse 26] And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even

downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, So was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.’—Ezekiel 1:4-22,26-28

This description is very impressive. Try to imagine the feelings of Ezekiel. In verse 4 he gives us this precise information: ‘I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it.’ Would there not be fear before such a vision? ‘God is clothed with terrible majesty’.{ *Job 37:22, RSV*}

In fact, the source of this whirlwind, of this great cloud and fire infolding upon itself, is the north, the throne of the Lord. {*see Job 26:7, ‘He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing’*} We also read in Job 37:22 [RSV], ‘Out of the north comes golden splendor.’ We remember how the jealousy of Satan led to his fall according to Isaiah 14:13. All these verses confirm that, according to the Bible, God remains in the north. That’s why the prophet fell on his face. Thus we realize the solemnity of the divine revelation that was granted to him.

To help the reader better picture this vision, Ezekiel uses the same technique as a writer describing a scene: first, he describes the background; then he progressively fills in the details that attract his attention. In the course of this description, Ezekiel uses the number four twelve times. We think this is not a coincidence. The repetition of the number four is done to emphasize its symbolism. On the one hand, part of what Ezekiel sees is unreal; on the other hand, the number four reappears here and there to give us a constancy, a sort of balance with regard to this vision of extraordinary creatures that do not exist on earth.

Apart from this, Ezekiel uses simple but precise words, understandable to our human perceptions, that allow us to imagine with extraordinary realism what he saw. But, as we have already mentioned, he describes to us something that does not exist on earth.

Can we imagine an animal that had ‘the likeness of a man’, resembling ‘burning coals of fire’ with ‘four faces...four wings...joined one to the other,’ with ‘straight feet, with the sole of their feet like the sole of a calf’s foot,’ with the ‘hands of a man under their wings on their four sides’?

This is difficult; we could not conceive that such beings could exist and move about. Why? Because humans and most animals move forward within the field of vision of their face. A lion, an ox, and an eagle cannot move backward facing forward; if they want to go backward, they must make a 180-degree turn, then go forward in reverse to their previous direction. As for us, humans, we would have to constantly turn our head to see where we are going, but in doing this, we can no longer see what is happening behind us! On the other hand, the joints of our legs were designed to walk forward and not to walk equally forward and backward.

However, these creatures are said to have four faces, which permit them to see in all directions simultaneously; they don't have to turn their head to see where they are going. Ezekiel writes that 'each [walked] every one straight forward.' They don't divert their attention, whatever happens; they maintain their objective while continuing to see everything around them. That is why he adds: 'They turned not when they went.' In the same way, they have four wings, which seems to signify that in principle they can also fly in any direction.

This ability has not been given to any living bird on the earth. Furthermore, Ezekiel adds that these animals 'went back and forth like lightning.' This, in part, is terrifying, but at the same time it means they are endowed with both exceptional ability and speed, like no other creature on earth. This pictures the superiority of spiritual beings in the service of God as compared to fleshly beings: angels act and intervene in the universe created by God without having the constraints we humans have when we move about from one point to another. For God and his angels, distance is no barrier! He contemplates his creation—all the universe—as if he held it in his hand.

Four, The Number of God's Attributes

Ezekiel distinguishes:

- four living creatures (v. 5)
- who had four faces (v. 6)
- four wings (v. 6)
- four sides (v. 8)
- all four had faces and wings. (v. 8)

—as for the likeness of their faces, all had the face of a man (v. 10)

—all four had the face of a lion on the right side, (v. 10)

—all four had the face of an ox on the left side, (v. 10)

—and all four had the face of an eagle. (v. 10)

—there was one wheel upon the earth, near the living creatures, before their four faces. (v. 15)

—and all four [wheels] had the same likeness (v. 16)

—the rims of the wheels were of a frightening height, and were full of eyes round about (v. 18).

We suppose that the number four may represent the activity of God, in the form of his four attributes because it is written in verse 20 that these four animals came and went ‘where the spirit directed them to go.’ We note that in Revelation 4:7 a similar vision of the throne is described by John. According to a biblical commentary the four creatures described by the apostle John, in a different order, can each represent one of the attributes of God.

Power: The Ox

Generally, believers agree that the power of God is manifested in his creation. In fact, the Bible begins by stating, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’.*{ Genesis 1:1}* The concept of the ‘Big Bang’ or the theory of the expansion of the universe set forth in 1929 by Edwin Hubble is perhaps an explanation of THE beginning. According to this astrophysicist, it essentially would be caused by an immense force of incredible power that produced an extraordinary explosion, much like a ball of gas in which the temperature was extremely high.

The ‘fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it’ (v. 4) seems to be a harmonious picture of this gas ball which, if the hypothesis of Hubble proves to be correct, blew up to cause the ‘Big Bang’ (‘in the beginning’). This explosion would have produced by the change of gas into matter, a source of inexhaustible energy, and caused the expansion of space, within which the galaxies, stars, and planets would be progressively developed as they cooled.

We see that the first sentence of the Bible contains an explanation of what some call the mystery of creation. If Hubble's hypothesis is correct, we can say that this 'ball' was created by God. It is interesting to note that the discoveries of certain scientists during the course of this century come into harmony with the teaching of the Bible.

The sun is another manifestation of power. We see also a manifestation of God's considerable power in the sun. The Larousse dictionary says it is positioned 150 million kilometers from our planet, and that its mass is about 333,000 times that of the earth. Its diameter is 1,392,000 kilometers. The temperature in the center of the sun is on the order of 15 million degrees Celsius.

We are dazzled by these numbers which say a lot about the extraordinary energy contained within the sun. Yet the dictionary adds that within the galaxy, the sun 'is a small star' (!), 'quite ordinary.' Its sole singularity is that it is 'the nearest star to the earth.' Knowing that there are billions and billions of stars that were created by God, we realize the scope of divine power.

We can also see a demonstration of God's power in the infinite number of the host of heaven who serve him. *{see 1 Kings 22:19}* That's why 'He ruleth by his power for ever'. *{Psalms 66:7}* In Ezekiel, even though the creatures are not numerous, their goings and comings are not disturbed by anything ('they went every one straight forward'—verse 12). A strong impression of power emanates from this vision.

On earth, from antiquity even to our day in certain countries, oxen are used by man for domestic chores that require strength, such as plowing, extracting water from wells, and pulling carts. That's why this animal is a symbol of might in Ezekiel's vision.

Let us move on to another attribute of God described in this vision.

Wisdom: Face of an Eagle

In the first place, we might be surprised that the eagle, an unclean animal *{Le 11:13}* that drinks blood, *{Job 39:27,30}* represents one of God's attributes. Yet the Lord used the symbolic eagle to accomplish his works. *{see Exodus 19:4, 'Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself'}* In the same way we read in Jeremiah 48:40, 'Thus saith the LORD; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab.'

Another characteristic of the eagle is its keen vision which allows it to fly facing the sun. Hence the expression 'having the eyes of an eagle' in the sense of having perceptive insight. By extension and in a figurative manner, one might say 'to have the look of an eagle' in the sense of having a great understanding spirit. Such qualities are adequate to represent divine wisdom which understands everything. ('The LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts'—1 Chronicles 28:9. We read Jeremiah 20:12, 'O LORD of hosts [that] seest the reins and the heart.')

We might add that an eagle can reach a speed of 120 kilometers per hour and that it knows how to effortlessly use the ascending currents of hot air to hover very high. Just as an eagle surpasses us with the ease of its flight, So are we largely surpassed by the knowledge and wisdom of God.

Returning to our comments regarding the manifestation of the power of God in the sun and the universe, let us also consider the wisdom of God in his creation. Life on earth is possible because the sun is situated at a very precise distance: neither too close to nor too far from the earth. It takes around seven and a half minutes for the light of the sun to reach earth; the sun is about 30,000 light-years from the center of the galaxy, which means it is around two billion times further away.

According to some studies, it appears that if the distance between the earth and the sun were changed by only a few percent, life on earth would no longer be possible (it would be either too hot or too cold). We have as an example of this the other planets in our solar system where there is no life. Is this chance, as some might claim, or is it the extreme wisdom of God who initiated the course of creation only after taking into consideration all these things?

Before the famous Big Bang, God had established the laws which are the foundation of astrophysics, thermodynamics, nuclear energy, the principles governing chemistry, etc. The earth is therefore positioned in the universe with a precision greater than that of a watchmaker, being protected from solar radiation by different layers of air. That is why we can enjoy a relatively temperate climate, one very conducive to pleasant living conditions over much of the surface of the globe, as we see it every day.

Let us praise the Lord for his wisdom, for having created such a marvelous universe in which it is So good to live! Contrary to the

claims of some, we have no fear that the earth will be impacted by an asteroid or another planet because God created it according to his preestablished laws So that it may be inhabited and not destroyed.

All this is not astonishing if one considers the powerful reservoirs of energy (apparently random) found within the universe. The intense activity that Ezekiel saw (verse 13) seems to describe this inexhaustible resource of active energy radiating in all directions: this 'fire' that circulates up and down among the living creatures, this brilliant light from which burst forth the lightnings and tumult which does not disturb the creatures. So it is with God who artfully masters his creation, the power and energy of which, as we have said, are frightening to human beings. Nothing can diminish the overwhelming might of God.

We have mentioned the keen eye-sight of the eagle. This penetrating eye-sight, which could perhaps be a picture of limitless knowledge (wisdom) of God, is emphasized by the details given in verses 17 and 18. Ezekiel sees wheels full of eyes; they went 'upon their four sides' and were 'so high they were dreadful.' Why were there eyes within these wheels? We suppose this large number of eyes in the wheels which could go in all the directions—and even 'lifted up from the earth' (verse 19)—illustrates the fact that nothing can be hidden from God, whose eyes behold the nations and run to and fro through the earth. *{Ps 66:7 Zechariah 4:10}*

Justice: The Lion

Let us read about Solomon:

'The king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. The throne had six steps... and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom.'—1 Kings 10:18-20

In the dedication of the temple, Solomon pictures the Church glorified who, according to 2 Timothy 4:1, 'shall judge the quick and the dead.' This description of the throne of Solomon decorated with lions appears to us to be especially in harmony with another text in Psalms 89:14 where it is said that 'justice and judgment are the habitation' of God's throne.

We recall that the wisdom of Solomon was known throughout the entire world, particularly because he knew how to make fair judgments. The king held supreme power in his kingdom, and it was while sitting on his majestic throne flanked with lions that he rendered justice. We think, therefore, that the decoration of the throne with these animals symbolizes the execution of justice.

An example of this kind of justice executed by a lion is given in 1 Kings 13:24 where we find the account of a man of God who, after having prophesied to evil king Jeroboam, was swayed to rebel against God and did not obey the commandment he had been given to return home immediately. This prophet met a lion who killed him on the way back. His corpse was cast in the way... and the lion stood next to it.

In Isaiah and Hosea the Lord is compared to a lion:

‘For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: So shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.’—
Isaiah 31:4

‘They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.’—Hosea 11:10

In Jeremiah chapter 4, we see that God announces to Israel the coming of his judgment. In verse 7 it is written: ‘The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant.’ God sends forth his judgment from the north by a destructive lion.

We believe these verses illustrate the harmony between the vision of Ezekiel chapter 1 and the lion, a symbol of justice and one of the attributes of God. We might add that even today the lion continues to be considered the king of other beasts and feared by them.

Love: The Man

Why does man symbolize love, one of the four attributes of God? Is it because man has demonstrated a special love toward God? Unfortunately not. To the contrary, it is because ‘the love of God is

manifested toward us in that God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him.’

‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ *{1Jo 4:9,10}* And verse 19, God ‘first loved us,’ that is to say, before we even loved him. In this we see how much we are indebted to him. These verses sum up the marvelous plan of restoration of all things for man.

The most extraordinary thing in this plan—and for some, the most difficult to understand—is that God allowed his very own dearly beloved son to be the propitiatory sacrifice. *{see Hebrews 10:5-10}* According to Philippians 2:7,8, this only begotten son, Jesus Christ, ‘made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and... humbled himself, and became obedient unto death... of the cross.’

In this we see that the love of God has been particularly manifested toward mankind. That’s why this attribute finds its most harmonious symbol in the form of a (perfect) man, in the form of Jesus who came to carry out the plan of God (see the preceding verse).

Main Ideas in This Vision

Before concluding, let us review the main ideas in this vision:

1. The description of what Ezekiel saw projects pictures to our eyes of something unreal. This is normal because it concerns the nature of God, something that is infinite and extremely complex, a source of inexhaustible energy, even having life within itself. To our limited human understanding, the divine nature is in fact incomprehensible (unreal).

2. We see the unity in the harmonious operation of God’s attributes. In studying these attributes we have seen that not only do they interact with each other, they also complement one another in perfect balance. Likewise, even though a dominant characteristic of these attributes can be pictured in the four faces of the creatures, not one of the attributes has its own specific and isolated domain, nor does it appear that one attribute has more importance than another (or the others). Power and wisdom (knowledge) were necessary for God to create a universe as perfect as it is. Similarly, God reveals to us in his plan that his justice is not exercised apart from love. We read in Romans 5:20,21, ‘Moreover the law entered,

that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even So might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.' And So justice and love (grace) act together, and this principle demonstrates the great wisdom of God (combining three attributes together).

3. Texts which speak of the justice of God (such as Psalms 45:6,89:14 and 97:2) add an important idea: equity. God established perfect laws for mankind. *{see Psalms 19:8}* Every transgression of the law produces a condemnation that God applies with equity because he did not establish his laws according to a dictatorial principle. He conceived principles So man might live eternally in a state of happiness, even bliss.

4. Verse 15: Near the four creatures, upon the earth there were four wheels which seemed to be [the color of] beryl, a precious, translucent, olive-green stone. During our study of this vision in our ecclesia, we supposed that these wheels might represent the Plan of God which is being accomplished unrelentingly. These wheels which appear each 'to be in the middle of another wheel' (v. 16) advance and stop to the same rhythm as the creatures, 'and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up' (v. 19) 'because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels' (v. 21). Likewise the Plan of God proceeds according to the ticking of God's timeclock.

5. In verses 22, 26, 27 and 28, Ezekiel sees 'a firmament as the colour of the terrible crystal,' and 'above the firmament... the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone,' and 'the likeness of a man' and 'as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire... round about within it,' and 'it had brightness round about' and 'the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain.' This detailed description suggests the Holiness of God, and we think we can here establish a parallel with the 'pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb' in Revelation 22:1. The transparency of crystal and the brilliance of sapphire suggest the clarity and purity of the truth which are part of the foundation of God's throne. *{See Exodus 24:10}*

6. Polished copper is as precious as gold according to Ezra 8:27; gold is a symbol of the divine nature.

7. The rainbow symbolizes peace which returns after the tumult of a storm; so, after a tumultuous period of sin, it announces the establishment of the Peace of God when his kingdom begins.

Conclusion

Let us be inspired by God's attributes So we might act in unity of faith with moderated good sense and without excess toward one thing or another:

1. Let us not be strong (like an ox) only.
2. Let us not be exactors of justice (like a lion), and let us not condemn others when we think we are the target of injustice.
3. Let us not pretend to have 'the' best knowledge of the Scriptures because we know how to read them 'in context' or because we have scrutinized them (like an eagle).
4. Let us not accept ideas contrary to the truth, nor act out of partiality (as does man): may we always associate love, justice, and wisdom as God does in order to accomplish his will.
5. Let us aspire to purity and be sanctified by our study of the holy Scriptures.
6. Let us try always to be the best imitators of the one who utterly put into practice in his life here on earth these four attributes: Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
7. Like the four creatures, let us walk straight, letting the holy spirit act in us (v. 12), and let us remain faithful to our consecration, 'forgetting those things that are behind' *{Php 3:13,14}*. Then we can hope to participate in the marriage of the lamb, to prostrate ourselves and adore God, seated on his throne, by saying: Amen! Hallelujah! And to hear 'a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great'.*{ Revelation 19:5}*

May the Lord bless you! May he be praised from eternity to eternity! Amen.

The Balm of Gilead-Adam Kopczyk, Australia

Dear friends, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to share a few words with you. My accent comes from Australia and I bring the love and greetings from the brethren of the Melbourne Berean Bible Class.

Today people are turning their attention to the good old natural and herbal remedies for many of their illnesses. I would like to take you back in time and examine the Balm of Gilead mentioned in the Old Testament.

The historic old word balm of Gilead, or Mecca balsam, is a small evergreen tree once called Opobalsamum of the incense-tree family. The word balm appears six times in the Old Testament; Gilead occurs 99 times. Together the phrase 'balm of Gilead' occurs only twice. Gilead was famous for its balsam or balm. Today I propose to examine the name Gilead and look at this rather intriguing balm that came from there.

First let us do a little archaeology and forestry work to see why the balm of Gilead was so important in the ancient world. Then we will examine some of the Scriptures that mention the balm of Gilead. All English quotations are from the American Standard Version Bible.

Gilead's Location

Gilead is a 'mountain region east of the Jordan River 915 meters [3000 feet] above sea level; extending about 97 kilometers [60 miles] from near the south end of the Sea of Galilee to the north end of the Dead Sea. Gilead is about 32 kilometers [20 miles] wide; it is bounded by the Jordan river, on the south by the land of Moab, on the north by the Yarmuk river, on the east by the desert. The Jabbok river divides Gilead into two parts: northern Gilead between the Jabbok and the Yarmuk, and southern Gilead between the Jabbok and the Arnon. {*Jos 12:2*} The term Gilead, however, came to be applied to the entire region of Israelite Transjordan. {*De 34:1*} '—*Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

The major trade route in Transjordan, the King's Highway, went from the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus and passed through the area of Gilead which was noted for its spices and myrrh as well as balm.

The source of the genuine balm of Gilead is a tree that stands 10 to 14 feet high with wand-like spreading branches. The outer bark is of a rich brown color, the inner bark is green and very aromatic, the leaves are small and white. The flowers are small and reddish in color. The seeds are solitary, yellow and grooved down one side. The fruit is reddish gray and the size of a small pea with an agreeable and aromatic taste. The tree grows from seeds. It is both rare and difficult to rear. It is mentioned in the Bible as well as in the works of Galen and Dioscorides.

Josephus states that the Queen of Sheba took trees from Arabia to Judea as a present to King Solomon. They were believed to have been planted in Judea and Jericho originally by King Solomon who received the trees among gifts from the Queen of Sheba. {*1Ki 10:10*} There, being cultivated for its juice, it acquired its popular name Balm of Gilead. Other historians also inform us that the tree was first planted in Judea and that it grew only in the king's garden. This actually comprised two gardens and the balsam tree was allowed to be grown in both.

The juice exudes during the heat of summer, in resinous drops, the process being helped by incisions in the bark. The amount of liquid balm obtained from a tree is about three drops a day. The resin hardens into small nodules. When the oil was separated, it was prepared with great secrecy and taken to the stores of the ruler, where it was carefully guarded. The quantity of oil obtained is roughly one-tenth the amount of juice.

'Balm of Gilead' had long been famous in antiquity for its nearly miraculous properties for healing wounds. It was used to cleanse sores, to heal deep wounds, as an eye salve, as an antidote for the bites of poisonous serpents and for the breaking down of calcium deposits in the body. In fact it was commonly held by Israel to be beneficial in the healing of all manner of disease. The resin or gum of the balsam tree was also used as a scent for oils and perfumes. The product is named *balasan* in Arabic, hence probably Hebrew *baal shemen*, meaning 'lord' or 'chief of oils,' and our word balsam.

Recent excavation of an ancient city within the Gilead area has unearthed the remains of a fortress-like building used for the manufacture of balsam oil. Balm is described from antiquity as being a 'rare, fragrant, and intoxicating lubricant.' Its ability to heal wounds bordered on the miraculous, and its fragrance was like an aphrodisiac in its effects. In fact, the balsam oil of Gilead was so famous that the conquering Roman emperor Titus (70 AD), after conquering the area of Gilead, displayed branches from Gilead's balsam trees in his triumphal march through Rome.

It was extremely valuable and often used for barter. The value of the balsam oil in the community and ancient world became obvious during a recent excavation. So precious was this oil to the commerce of Gilead that the extract manufacturing and distilling process was kept a closely guarded trade secret. The tower where it had been distilled was so well fortified that the archaeologist

directly digging remarked: 'This place was built like Fort Knox.' The villagers were sworn to secrecy. Archaeologists uncovered an inscription carved into the mosaic floor of a local village synagogue that reads: 'Whoever reveals the secret of the village to the Gentiles, the one whose eyes roam over the entire earth and sees what is concealed will uproot this person and his seed from under the sun' (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sept./Oct. 1996).

It should be noted that when Joseph's brothers tried to sell him to a caravan of Ishmaelites, their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, purchased in Gilead, on their way to Egypt. {*Ge 37:25*} And so the use of extracted plant oils was an established industry thousands of years before our Lord Jesus Christ walked on earth. Today a related strain of the balsam tree is cultivated in the southern Arabian peninsula and Somalia, and the oil is processed for use. Its application remains the same now as in biblical days, mainly used for healing. The balm is used as an antidote for snakebites and scorpion stings.

Jeremiah's Three Questions

Let us now concentrate on Jeremiah's reference to the balm of Gilead. We note that in Jeremiah 8:22 he asked three questions: 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?'

Jeremiah was a prophet who cried out to God on behalf of the people of Israel. Theirs was a proud history, and the people were quick to assume that God's blessings of the past were a guarantee of his future blessing regardless of their own actions and devotions. We know Jeremiah's three questions did not refer to the physical condition of Israel nor did he refer to the natural balm that was contained in the balsam tree of Gilead. He was not referring to the physicians of that time but to *themoral condition of Israel*.

When the people turned away from God and when trouble came, they seemed surprised. When sickness and oppression came, they discovered they were looking in all the wrong places for relief, all the wrong places for healing. They trusted in their own methods instead of God. The result was a coming destruction, sickness and oppression. In the face of this coming devastation, Jeremiah is overwhelmed with sorrow and depression. He sees the sickness to come, the terrible days ahead, and cries out to God.

'Is there a balm to heal this sickness?' Jeremiah asks. In his day, balms and balsams, along with ointments, were medicines. Balms

and balsams were aromatic. They were made from resins and substances from plants in the area. They had several applications. In that day, one can imagine the terrible odors from diseased parts of the flesh, sick bodies, as well as odors from work and perspiration. These balms and balsams were made to help in masking the odors, to cover them up. So sores and diseased parts of the flesh were treated with balms and a recovery occurred. Many of these applications helped in the healing process. Many of them even soothed the pain, perhaps numbing the nerves somewhat. They had medicinal value and became a natural way of speeding the healing process. When one was sick or diseased, balms were applied to cover up the odors, to soothe the pain, and to aid healing.

The balm of Gilead was still there. The balm, dear friends, was the word of God. There were still capable physicians of the Lord's word in Israel. There were still prophets of God in Israel who would have skillfully applied the healing balm. These prophets would have attended to the sickness of the nation.

Then why was Israel not recovered? Israel was not recovered because it did not listen to those true physicians who had the necessary healing balm. The nation as a whole was spiritually diseased. Its moral health was deteriorating and God was most displeased. Jeremiah was not asking the questions as if he did not know the answer. He knew the answer only too well.

Jeremiah was earnestly asking the nation to turn back to God. The nation of Israel would have no difficulty in understanding the question. They knew the prophet was using figurative language. They knew he was referring to the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation's personal Physician.

It is written of Israel in Jeremiah 2:13, 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.' Israel had not repaired itself according to those true prophets or physicians who held the balm of Gilead or the word of God. Instead Israel appointed and hearkened to a false priesthood who were no longer spreading the true word of God, but who had become 'broken cisterns that could hold no water.' This was why Israel was not recovered.

In Ezekiel 22:28 we read, 'And her prophets have daubed for them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah when Jehovah hath not

spoken.’ How meaningful is this verse! Instead of the rightly-tempered, perfectly balanced balm, these false prophets daubed with untempered mortar. They applied no longer a soothing, healing balm. God’s law in their hands had lost its temper. It had become watered down. Instead of having the true balm with which to heal, these false prophets daubed with untempered mortar which rendered the recovery of Israel impossible.

As a judgment upon Israel for neglect of the physicians there, Gilead, together with mount Zion, the holy sanctuary, was given to the Romans. The fruitful land was turned into barrenness and many of Israel were killed. Jehovah who had once said ‘Gilead is mine’ {*Ps 60:7*} now had a different story to tell her. Through the prophet Hosea he says in chapter 6 verse 8: ‘Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, it is stained with blood.’ Even Gilead, city of the priests is polluted. Today we hear of false doctrines of purgatory, eternal torment, immortality of the soul taught by many churches. All of these false doctrines destroy the doctrine of the resurrection and the ransom. They are teaching the opposite to what the Scriptures state.

The Balsam Tree

But let us go back and examine the balsam tree in a little more detail. The balsam tree of Gilead had great medicinal value in the old days. In the seed of the tree, the sap of the tree, in the wood, or the tree itself, we have a most beautiful picture of the Word of God. The balsam tree was a saving or healing tree. Its many medicines and creams at that time would miraculously heal wounds. And, dear friends, the Word of God as expressed by Jesus and as presented in the Scriptures is the only means of salvation, for the church and for the world of mankind. There is no other way.

The balsam tree produces a seed and a new tree grows from it. This could picture the seed of our new nature, a seed that through the operation of the holy spirit is generated within us. This is similar to the seed of the balsam tree which when planted in the ground, germinates and brings forth a new plant. What a beautiful picture it presents of our begetting by the holy spirit as new creatures. The seed requires a life-giving fluid, water. Watching the tree grow, it will be found putting forth leaves until a certain age, when it will begin to blossom—a further stage of growth.

With the breaking out in blossom it is pleasing to the eye, gives off a pleasant smell, and we see that a future result will be to bring

forth some fruit. So with the Christian, when he or she begins to blossom out, we note the progress. It is pleasing to behold and it is a sweet-smelling savour to the householder who anticipates some fruitage.

If the tree is well watered, it will show healthy-looking growth, as well as rapid growth, it will become sturdy and able to produce more. The lack of the life-giving fluid will result in sickly, shriveling foliage and the tree will gradually wither away or put on a stunted growth. It is similar with the Christian. The Christian needs to be irrigated with the water of life—the truth. The tree may lose much of its irrigation if the roots do not come in proper contact and absorb it. If the truth is not absorbed by the Christian, all the irrigation may be lost. However, where it is taken in we notice the refreshing results. The prophet says, ‘Blessed is the man that trusteth in Jehovah and whose trust Jehovah is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.’—Jeremiah 17:7,8.

It is necessary that Christians plant themselves near the stream of life where the food is so satisfying—near to that river where the fruits of the spirit grow. They must grow from the leaf stage, develop to the blossom condition, and produce fruit. They are to progress in the development of the image and likeness of the great Creator. Time and processes of growth are most important factors in the production of a Christian character.

We are told to be ‘transformed by the renewing of our minds.’ The apostle writes further in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ‘Therefore if any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature, the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.’ The term new creature or new creation is in itself a suggestive one. The apostle says in Ephesians 2:10, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.’ And in Philippians 2:13, ‘For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.’ If we are co-workers together with him, we are therefore to have revealed in us the power of him by whom all our creative work has been accomplished. We cannot fail to be appreciative of the great privilege of being thus transformed by the renewing of our minds in harmony with the Divine will. The intention is our complete conformity in character and nature to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The sap of the balsam tree could picture the holy spirit circulating through God's Word. As the sap of the Balsam tree of Gilead circulates through that tree to impart life and vitality to it, similarly the holy spirit circulates through the Word of God. It imparts life and vitality and is an energizing power to the Christian. As the sap of the balsam tree generates or causes the seed of that tree to form, So does the holy spirit operating within our minds and hearts, generating the seeds of the new nature by fertilizing, assisting, nourishing and promoting its welfare.

We are told that the leaves of the balsam tree of Gilead were white and were thickly distributed over its branches, literally covering the tree and giving it a very white appearance. This might possibly picture the covering robe of Christ's righteousness and the purity and spotlessness of the Word of God. In Psalms 12:6 we read: 'The words of Jehovah are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified seven times.' And in Proverbs 30:5, 'Every word of God is tried: he is a shield unto them that take refuge in him.'

The Scriptures give us to understand that at the very beginning of our Christian experience we figuratively are clothed in white raiment. This white raiment represents justification—we are justified freely from all things. It is a robe without a spot. It is sometimes spoken of as Christ's robe of righteousness because it comes to us through Christ. It is only to be had through Jesus. He is able to impute his righteousness to us, to grant to us this temporary robe.

The Lord has arranged that at the conclusion of our trial, at the end of our present life, all the overcomers shall receive a new body. This new body will be a body of actual purity. The apostle says, 'For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven.'—2 Corinthians 5:2

The Balm of Gilead had rather a sharp, biting taste, but was most beneficial to the digestion. Similarly the Word of God is indeed sharp and not agreeable to the normal appetite. The Word of God was folly to the Jews and a stumbling block to the Gentiles but to the chosen ones of both Jew and Gentiles, it was the power of God unto salvation. Often the truth is initially sour to the taste, but afterward it becomes ever So sweet like the sweetest honey.

There is a class who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, who in days gone by have experienced the healing power of the balm of God's Word, but who for various reasons have again become sick, yet refused to apply that precious balm for their

recovery. They have become deaf to the warnings of the holy spirit; they are in danger of crucifying the Lord afresh and of putting him to open shame. To such a class a solemn warning had come through the prophet Isaiah in these words: 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; and that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!' {*Isa 5:20*} Such a course, if persisted in, can have only one final ending.

The balsam tree of Gilead exudes or weeps a kind of gum very much in the form of tears. It could possibly picture the tears of grief and sympathy shed by Jesus. We see him as he grieved and wept over Jerusalem, and we hear those sweet words recorded in Matthew 23:37, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' And behold him at the grave of Lazarus, when with a heart full of sympathy for those sorrowing sisters, the emotion of grief gripped him and he wept tears of sympathy. The shortest text in the Bible, John 11:35, graphically illustrates this where it states, 'Jesus wept.'

The balsam tree of Gilead was first granted to but one land, the land of Judea. From there it was introduced to others, but the merchants of Judea took it to Israel first. And so it was with the balm of the Word of God: it was first given to Israel. We read in Psalms 147:19,20, 'He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his ordinances, they have not known them, Praise ye Jehovah.' This distinguishes them above all other nations of the earth and gives them special occasion for gratitude.

Our Lord Jesus expressly commanded his disciples not to go unto the Gentiles nor any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The first opportunity for membership in the kingdom, the first chance for the high and holy calling, was granted to the Jewish People. *ro 2:10* illustrates this well: 'But glory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' As a nation they neglected to take this special, once in a lifetime opportunity.

But when the time came for the spiritual balm of Gilead to go to other nations and to other peoples, it was the Jewish 'spiritual' merchants—the apostles—who gave it to them. Acts 13:46 reads: 'And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to

you: seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.'

Historians inform us that when first the balsam tree grew in Judea, it was permitted to grow in the king's garden only. Subjects of the king had full access to the balm for their needs and sicknesses, but they were not permitted to control the output of the balsam tree. The same can be said of the spiritual balm, the Word of God. It did not originate from man; it came from heaven itself. It was first given to man by God through the prophets, then through our Lord Jesus, and later by the apostles.

As already noted the balsam tree was permitted to grow only in the king's garden which consisted of two parts or two orchards. One of these orchards was much larger, much grander and finer than the other. What a beautiful picture this presents of that day to come shortly when there will be two phases of God's kingdom in operation.

The resurrection day is the time when the long planned for completion of the Church, the Body of Christ, will take place. The resurrection has a spiritual component for the Church as well as a natural component for the rest of mankind. These are referred to by John as: 1) a resurrection of life for Gospel Age overcomers; and 2) a resurrection of judgment for the remainder of mankind. The final judgement for life for mankind in general will await the end of their trial time, but for those blessed in the resurrection of life—described as 'the first resurrection'—the assurance is: 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.' *{Re 20:6}* Theirs is the reward of immortality, of the divine nature. How the apostle Paul longed 'that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death.' *{Php 3:10}*

The spiritual resurrection is the doorway to a face-to-face relationship with the Father and the Bridegroom. If our hearts yearn for that experience, then we must burn off the impurities of the heart as John says: 'Beloved now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be, we know that, if he shall be made manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' *{1Jo 3:2,3}*

The heavenly phase of the kingdom will be grand and most spectacular, beyond the dimensions of our minds. It will be the larger or greater phase of the kingdom. The lesser or earthly phase of that kingdom will also be glorious. From both phases the healing balm of the even-balanced, even-tempered Word of God shall flow. Speaking of that time, Isaiah says: 'They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall receive instruction'. { *Isaiah 29:24* } Here we see a day is coming when the spirit of love and the truths of the Bible will go hand in hand. It will be a rightly tempered, perfectly balanced gospel, not 'untempered mortar.'

It has been written of the balm of Gilead that it was recommended for the breaking up or dissolving of stones or calcium formations in the body. This could picture the spiritual balm of God's word and its power to break up and dissolve the hardest formation of all, a stony Heart. *Jer 23:29* says: 'Is not my word like fire? saith Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' Again we read in *Ezekiel 36:21-30* addressed to the nation of Israel, that God will sanctify his name among the heathen. Paraphrasing the verses: They shall know that I am Jehovah, for I will take you from among the Gentiles and bring you to your own land. Then I will wash you with the truth about Messiah and the way to eternal life and joy forevermore.

In *Ezekiel 36:26*, 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.'

How comforting are the words to the nation of Israel: 'a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit that will cause you to walk in my statutes. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers, my people indeed and I will be your God.' What a beautiful promise is given to the nation of Israel!

The World Needs This Balm

Today a distressed world is searching about for healing balm. Each one of her concoctions fails to bring peace to this world of ours, each fails to bring healing to the sickness of the people on earth. So many of earth's leaders seek for balm but refuse to seek it in Gilead. They seek for a physician, but refuse to seek him in Gilead. The leaders of the nations refuse the only physician who can heal all their problems and diseases.

On our globe over the years we have had fascism, communism, and other '-isms.' The United Nations and NATO are being tried by a despairing, dying world, but they fail to bring about healing. Their solutions are only temporary and they create more problems for this world by their so-called attempts at making peace. The recent Kosovo crisis is an example of this. Mankind cannot and will not bring peace into this world of ours. With all our modern medicines, with all our modern medical equipment, some may reach 100 years, but eventually all must die. This world will finally gaze on a discarded mound of broken 'cisterns,' for even as Israel after the flesh did, So will the nations of this present evil world heap to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Soon, dear friends, the Great Physician will be seen pointing the way to the healing balm, to those who shall have been delivered from the besieged city. To those who shall have been delivered from the power of Satan, he will be seen pointing towards literal Gilead, the Gilead of old, for from the nation of Israel shall the word of the Lord go forth, the healing balm for every ill.

Jer 30:17 speaks of the promise that God will restore the nation of Israel: 'For I will restore health unto thee and I will heal thee of thy wounds saith Jehovah: because they have called thee an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.' Hosea 6:1 promises the healing for Israel: 'Come, let us return unto Jehovah: for he has torn and he will heal us: he has smitten, and he will bind us up.'

Isa 2:2,3 reads: 'And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob. And he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, For out of Zion [the heavenly phase of the kingdom] shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem [the earthly phase of the kingdom],' where the resurrected 'ancient worthies' will be 'princes in all the earth.' The spiritual seed will instruct and support the earthly seed. What a strong and irresistible government will be established!

The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, for which the Master taught us to pray has not yet come. The divine promise assures us that it will come. The hope for humanity is the Messianic kingdom described in these verses. The 'mountain of the Lord's house' signifies the kingdom of God's house, his church. It will be

established in the top of or above the kingdoms of the world. It will be exalted among the nations and all will flow to it. There will be an attraction in it for all people. It will lead them to climb upward. The attraction which will thus draw mankind will be the blessings of health and restitution. The kingdom will be prepared to greet all people as they shall come into harmony with its requirements. {Ac 3:19-23}

In the last days of this Gospel age the time will come in the Divine Plan of the Ages to set up the kingdom of Messiah under which all families of the earth are to be blessed by the promised seed of Abraham. This seed will consist of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and his bride, the Church, who will be spirit beings in the resurrection nature and glory, though invisible to mankind. Through this seed all the people will be blessed. All nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues shall be bought gradually to an appreciation of the Divine Plan. They shall all be blessed with restitution privileges, opportunities, and enlightenment.

‘At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.’—Jer 3:17

From another standpoint, we may sometimes wonder if there are those who, coming among the Lord’s people, ever have occasion to ask Jeremiah’s question: ‘Is there no balm in Gilead?’ Possibly this question may come from some lonely heart or from some seeker of truth and righteousness. Has someone ever come to us in search of the true balm of Gilead and gone away without receiving it? This is a question to which each one of us should give serious thought.

Further, in those moments of self-examination, does that question come to each one of us? Let us examine our hearts and minds. Is the balm of Gilead to be found there? Is the true and great physician reigning within our hearts?

Let us hold fast those spiritual blessings that have been given to us, ever remembering that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, for our great Adversary is watching spiritual Israel at this time as never before. If we let down our guard, he will be sure to reach some vulnerable spot.

I wish for each and every one of you as well as for myself, that we may hear those most beautiful words at the end of our earthly journey: ‘Well done thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’

May the Lord bless us all in this mission.

Amen.

A Man with a Message-Albert Hudson, England

Introduction by Michael Nekora

Albert Hudson was born on May 20, 1899. He died on February 10 this year at the age of 100. I don't know how he learned the truth, but he remembered hearing Brother Russell speak in London in 1914 when he was 15 years old. In the *Watchtower* dated July 15, 1914, Bro. Russell said he attended a three-day convention in the London Opera House a few weeks before and that there were 2000 at the largest session of that convention. At the time this videotape was recorded, Brother Hudson believed he was the only one still alive in England who heard Brother Russell speak. Now there are none.

Brother Hudson was very active in the promulgation of the truth. He wrote books and tracts and for many years he was the editor of the *Bible Study Monthly*, one of the most scholarly publications in the truth movement.

In February, 1998, Brother Donald Holliday used his video camera to record some thoughts from Brother Hudson. Our dear brother talks about what has happened in the past after the death of a person God used to do great things. Fervor among those favored often dies with the leader. He sees a similar diminishing of fervor since the days of Brother Russell. He told Brother Holliday he remembers the huge crowds that met together on Sunday in London in a building that seated 1200. Today that building is gone and there is not a single Bible Student who lives in the city of London.

The singing voice you will hear before Brother Hudson speaks comes from a recording used in the Photodrama which was first presented in 1914. The faces in the photographs are elders of the old London Tabernacle. There is also a picture of Royal Albert Hall where Brother Russell spoke in 1910 on several occasions to audiences numbering 4,000 to 7,000 for each lecture.

Brother Hudson on Videotape

In all history there have been critical times in the history of the church. Since earliest times, men have arisen that have brought a message that have inspired those who heard it and led them to make progress in the understanding of the divine plan and to take their place in their own time and age in that plan and its outworking. And always a time has come when the enthusiasm dies, when generation succeeds generation. The influence of the man who once brought the message is no longer felt.

I think the gist of this is in the words of Habakkuk the prophet in the days just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the desolation of the land, and the carrying away of the men of Judah to Babylon. Habakkuk was a prophet of the Lord. He knew something of what we call the divine plan. And he said this at the end of his book: ‘Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, and the flocks shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation’.*{ Habakkuk 3:17,18}*

Those words were uttered just at the time when the threat of the desolation was hanging over Israel. And it came. Many a time as we’ve looked at those words, we’ve interpreted them in a sort of symbolic fashion and applied them to ourselves. ‘The fig tree shall not blossom.’ The fig tree surely is Israel. We’ve waited to see it blossom and it blossoms now. ‘The labor of the vine fails to give its fruit.’ The vine—the symbol of the church—and all the labor expended on encouraging those who would be the Lord’s, seems to be wasted and dissipated as so many of them fall away again. ‘The labor of the olive shall fail, the fields shall yield no food.’ The staple food in those days was wheat and barley. All these symbols should be plain to us. The labor of the olive—the work of the holy spirit—seems to be ineffective. And that which is the food of those who would be the Lord’s becomes nonexistent. And then perhaps the most vivid of all, ‘the flock shall be cut off [separated] from the fold, there shall be no herd in the stall.’ So often we’ve said the time is at hand for the last of the flock to be gathered home, and then those who are destined for earthly life to find their place.

Habakkuk saw these things happening in Israel. He foresaw the desolation. And in a very literal fashion all those expressions came true. He saw Israel and Judah carried into captivity and the Lord’s land desolated and given over to the enemy. And yet he found cause to rejoice. He was sure—certain—that one day, as the Lord had said, all would be well.

But in the meantime Israel was unrepentant. And you have to remember this, that he lived in a day when many had fallen away from the true faith of Israel. The days of Josiah the good king were a couple of generations in the past. The man who had instituted that wonderful passover which as someone declared, 'There was no such passover seen in all the days of Israel'. { *2 Chronicles 35:18* } It was the fourth generation from Hezekiah, and Hezekiah with his people had tested the power of the Most High God when Sennacherib surrounded the land—one of the very few occasions when Israel did not trust in the forces of Egypt to defend them from the enemy. They trusted in the Lord. And they went to their night's rest confident that the Lord could deal with the enemy which surrounded the city. And even the Assyrian King Sennacherib, in his own account of that particular incident, declared triumphantly, 'Hezekiah, their king, I shut up in his royal city of Jerusalem like a bird in a cage.' And then, most unaccountably for Sennacherib, he failed to say what happened next. He was never slow in his records, boasting about his achievements, but all he said about that was, 'And the king took the long road to Nineveh.' Reading the Bible account we know that it was a lonely road because all his forces had been slain in the night by the angel of the Lord. { *2Ki 19:35* }

But those days were all in the past. Israel in the days of Habakkuk looks on those things largely as fairy tales of the past which perhaps were embellished by their forefathers, not to be taken very seriously.

And then again Jeremiah the prophet at much the same time had much the same experience. Jeremiah had a long ministry of 60 or 70 years. He got almost to the end of his ministry and he is so discouraged he said, 'Then said I, I will no more make mention of his name.' But then, in a reversal of thought almost immediately, he goes on to say, 'But his words were in my bones as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay'. { *Jeremiah 20:9* } And Jeremiah was faithful to his calling. He told the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) that he would surely perish at the hands of the Babylonians unless he obeyed the Lord's word to go quietly. He told the men of Judah that if they should go quietly to Babylon, because that was the Lord's edict for them, they'd be safe. Otherwise not.

The rest of the story I think we know. They chose still to rely upon Egypt, and Egypt failed them. It was a long, long time before a day came when by virtue of the decree of Cyrus, they came back full of enthusiasm to rebuild their country and rebuild their temple and

restore the true worship of God as it had been in the days of old. And when the fourth generation had passed, they had forgotten all about that. So something like 30 years later Zechariah the prophet came with his message, calling them back to their mission of finishing that temple that they had hardly begun to build. The generation to whom he preached was so enthusiastic within four years the work was completed and the temple dedicated. With great enthusiasm the men of Israel started a new life. Then in a couple of generations they had forgotten all about it again. Always a few remained faithful, always the many had absconded.

You don't have to think of that time when these things were true. It happened back in the days of Joshua. I remember the record that Joshua died and all the elders who outlived Joshua, and all that generation, and a new generation arose which knew not the Lord nor the wonders he had done in the desert. Once again, you see, the Lord had brought them at last, after that 40 years in the wilderness, into the land of promise. And with great enthusiasm under their leader Joshua they set about settling in the land, entering into the spirit of the covenant they'd made at Sinai, and becoming in very truth the people of the land. Their generation passed away. And the next generation? They followed because that's the way they'd been taught. The next generation? Well perhaps it was something like the people in the days of Ezekiel of whom the Lord said, 'Thou art [that is, Ezekiel] thou art unto them as a very lovely song, one that has a pleasant voice, and that can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, and they do them not'. { *Ezekiel 33:32* }

We can remember quite plainly there how truly the word of God is fulfilled. Remember at that time there is the story in the Scriptures. The man Elimelech of Judah, because the country had suffered a severe famine, took himself and his family off to Moab to dwell. And he died in Moab. When you come to think of it, if that country had fallen into famine—and Moab is only just across the river not so many miles away, there was plenty so that he could settle there—there can only be one explanation: at that time they had renounced the covenant, and the penalty of the broken covenant had come upon them. That's because the covenant promised that if they maintained its provisions, their enemies would never get into the land, the crops would never fail, their cattle would live, the sun and the rain would do its work, and all would be well. And here was the land in famine about three generations after Joshua. Then the king of a far country with a long name—Cushan Rishathaim—came and held them in bondage for eight years.

The next we hear in the story is that Naomi the wife heard that the Lord had blessed Israel and given them bread, So she went back and lived there with her daughter-in-law Ruth. That could only mean one thing: if the Lord had blessed Israel by giving them bread, it could only mean they had come back to the covenant. Otherwise the famine would have continued. So there again we get a time of adversity resulting in the broken covenant and then the defamation. Othniel the first of the judges of Israel had arisen. He had expelled the alien king from the land and when Naomi and Ruth entered the land, they find Boaz a prosperous farmer, a plenteous harvest—he's got workers in his field with men over them. And then, not long after that, a gap, which could only mean that Israel had left [the covenant] once again.

So all history from Joshua onward is characterized by men rising up to point the way forward, to an increasing understanding of divine truth and of the place of men in that truth in their own day and age only to be eclipsed by rising unbelief in their followers.

Today you find the same thing. A man has arisen with a message that carries us farther than ever before, along the pathway of divine truth. The man goes. And before long what he had to say, what he left behind—instead of being taken and worked upon and carried forward perhaps even higher on the levels of understanding—is relegated to that which Israel relegated the same things in Ezekiel's day: 'A very lovely song, one that has a pleasant voice, that can play well upon an instrument, but they hear thy words but they do them not.'

This is our position this day. We have enjoyed a wonderful vision, the outworking of the divine purposes in our day and age. We need to hold that and to see it in clearer guise as the days go by, as events come and pass us by. We have to realize, as the psalmist says, or rather the words of the proverbs: 'The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day'. {*Proverbs 4:18*}

That's our mission today. We've seen wonderful things in the past—wonderful revelations of divine truth—and we look for even greater things in the future. The longer that we have seen these things, the more certain we can be that we have been rightly guided. The day will come when all for which we hope and long will come to pass.

The Word of God-David Rice, USA

Dear brethren, we come to the close of another delightful convention. We have heard So many good lessons, So well prepared. We have dined at the Lord's table, and received the waters of life. All this bounty is from the Word of God. We stand at the close of one century, and the opening of another... at the close of one millennium, and the opening of another. Tonight we will look back, and look forward. We will see where the Word of God has led us, and where it will lead us.

But first we will look at how the Scriptures themselves speak of the Word of God. We will consider the manna in the wilderness, the showbread and lampstand in the tabernacle, a psalm dedicated to the Word of God, and the two witnesses of Revelation.

Manna in the Wilderness

The 'Word of God' has two meanings: the literal word, the Scriptures, and the living word, Jesus. The first is mentioned in Matthew 4:4, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,' and the second in Revelation 19:13, 'His name is called The Word of God.'

The daily manna which nourished Israel in the wilderness represents the Word of God in both senses. First, it represents the Scriptures from which we receive daily nourishment (Numbers 11:8 Matthew 24:41; Volume 4, page 609). When the Israelites first ate the manna from heaven, 'the taste of it was like wafers made with honey'. { *Exodus 16:31* } These symbols, wafers and honey, picture the wonderful call to glory contained in the Scriptures.

A wafer was one of three items placed on the wave offering when the priesthood was consecrated to God. { *Le 8:26* } In *Tabernacle Shadows*, page 46, Brother Russell interprets two of them as justification and sanctification, and the wafer as glorification—'our hope and faith in the exceeding precious promises of glory, honor and immortality.' A wafer was also used at the end of the Nazarite vow, which represents our consecration to God, which leads to glorification. { *Nu 6:19* }

Honey represents the sweetness of our hope in Christ. Remember the riddle which Samson posed: 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness'? { *Judges 14:14* } The riddle was about a slain lion, which bees had used to store honey. The lion represents Jesus, the 'lion of the tribe of Judah' whose death provides us the sweetness of the heavenly call. Because

honey represents our divine call, it was one of two things God commanded never to be sacrificed on the altar. *{Le 2:11}* One was leaven because we cannot offer anything sinful to God, the other was honey because we never sacrifice the promise of glory, honor, and immortality.

The manna also represented Jesus the living Word. In John 6:48-51 Jesus applied it to himself personally: 'Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness... I am the living bread which came down from heaven... the bread that I will give is my flesh.' Without this bread from heaven, we would have no life.

Showbread in the Tabernacle

In the holy of the Tabernacle was a table with two stacks of bread, called 'showbread' because it was 'shown' or displayed openly. But a better translation is 'bread of the presence,' bread that was displayed in the 'presence' of Jehovah who was represented just beyond the veil. *{Ex 25:23-30, NASB}* It was probably baked in large round loaves, not too thick, 12 loaves arranged in two stacks of six, each topped with frankincense. To the Israelites it represented spiritual nourishment for the 12 tribes, but it has a greater meaning to us. It is the nourishment for spiritual Israel—the Word of God, the Scriptures.

The Scriptures come in two parts, the Old and New Testaments, illustrated by the two stacks. There are many symbols for the Word of God which appear two in number:

Silver trumpets *{Nu 10:2}*

Olive trees *{Zec 4:3}*

Witnesses *{Re 11:3}*

Wings of a great eagle *{Re 12:14}*

Swords. *{Lu 22:38}*

So the two stacks of bread in the holy are a consistent way of showing the two parts of the Bible. Even the table itself shows this, measuring one cubit wide, but two cubits in length.

That the two stacks contain six loaves each is necessary for a total of 12, for the 12 tribes. But, coincidentally, it reminds us what they represent, for the two numbers 6 and 6 form the number 66, which

is the number of books in the Bible. We all know there are more books in the Old than in the New, not simply 33 in each. However, if we begin with that number and add one 6, we get the number of books in the Old Testament, 39. If from 33 we subtract the other 6, we get the number of books in the New Testament, 27. It is a little trick, easy to remember.

Those who actually ate this bread (after it was changed weekly) were the priests. This shows again that the nourishment is for the church because the priests represent the church. *{Re 20:4-6}* Each loaf was baked with 'two tenth deals' of fine flour, making 24 tenth deals in all, just as the priesthood was later divided into 24 courses of service. *{Le 24:5, 1Ch 24:18}*

As the bread of presence relates to Jesus, the living Word, we note the height of the table displaying this bread was 1-1/2 cubits—the *{Ex 25:23}* same height as the ark in the most holy, *{Ex 25:10}* and the grate of the altar in the court. *{Ex 27:1,5}* Thus Jesus is represented at the same 'level' in all three cases—as the sacrifice in the court, the bread in the holy, and the blood in the most holy—all 1-1/2 cubits high.

The Lampstand

Also in the holy, on the left side as one entered the chamber, was a golden lampstand. It had three branches on each side and a central stem in the middle, seven spires in all, on which were placed seven lamps to burn oil and produce light. In John 15:5 Jesus said 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.' In a similar way the lampstand represents Christ and the seven spires represent the church. Revelation views the matter only a little differently, as seven candlesticks, the seven stages of the church through the Gospel age.

The weight of the golden candlestick was one talent just as the silver sockets of the Tabernacle weighed one talent each. Those silver sockets came from the ransom money paid to redeem each adult male in Israel. They picture the ransom given by Christ, the foundation of God's plan of atonement. *{Ex 30:12-16 38:25-27 1 Kings 20:39}* So, as Christ is shown at the same height in the court, holy and most holy, he is shown in the same weight also—one talent of silver in the sockets, and one talent of gold in the lampstand.

The oil which burned in the seven lamps represents the holy Spirit of God. When we use it, when we 'burn' it, we are enlightened.

But what is the source of this holy Spirit? A vision of Zechariah, chapter four, gives the answer. In that vision also was a lampstand with seven lamps. Nearby were two olive trees, one on each side, which drained their oil through two golden pipes into a bowl which fed the lamps. The two olive trees represent the Old and New Testaments—the Word of God—which are a reservoir of God's holy Spirit. From these two sources we receive inspired light, instruction, and guidance for our Christian journey.

The lampstand of the Tabernacle is described in Exodus 25:31-40. Verse 33 says the branches contained bowls like almonds, with a knob and a flower. Probably the knob was a flower bud, with its petals rising to form the shape of a cup or bowl. These flowers represent the lovely graces of the spirit developed by the saints. The almond flowers remind us of an episode in Numbers 17, when the authority of Moses and Aaron had been challenged. Jehovah instructed each tribe to lay a rod before the Lord, and in the morning Aaron's rod had grown almond buds, blossoms and fruit. By this means everyone knew that Levi, and in particular Aaron, was God's choice for the priesthood. Similarly, Christ and the church will be recognized as God's choice for the priesthood when their character is 'displayed' in the kingdom.

The word 'almond' in Hebrew means 'hasten,'(1) because almond trees 'hasten' before other trees. They flower early, while other trees are still dormant, just as the church blossoms before the world revives in the kingdom. Also, almond flowers have five petals, and five is the Scriptural number of God's New Creation—for example, in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins each class is 'five' in number.(2)

Each of the six branches had three flowers, but the middle stem had four, making 22 flowers total. At the end of each spire was a place for a lamp, seven lamps total. This coupling of numbers—22 and 7—is an interesting one. Some of you will remember that $22/7$ is a standard approximation for the number 'pi' which relates circles to straight lines. Some believe this number is a picture of things divine, or of God himself.(3)

Now consider the number 22. It is twice 11, a number used in the tabernacle to represent the church in the flesh.(4) Perhaps the 22 flowers represent the fruitage of God's Spirit acting upon the church (eleven), from its two reservoirs, the two olive trees, the Old and New Testaments.

This psalm is all about the Word of God. It is unique in several ways, and I owe much of the following information to Brother I. A. Joseph, the humble, well-studied brother from India who finished his course last year. It is the longest of all the psalms; in fact it is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. These verses are not the divisions of an editor—they are inherent in the original. There are precisely 22 parts to this psalm, each containing 8 verses. Each verse in part one begins with the Hebrew letter Aleph, each verse in part two begins with Beth, each verse in part three begins with Gimel, and so on through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Every verse in the psalm (except 122 and 132) specifically mentions the Word of God by one of the following words: law, testimony, way, precept, statute, commandment, judgment, word. The psalm extols the merits of reading, studying, meditating, and applying the words of Jehovah into our hearts, our lives, our beings.

From this psalm come these familiar praises.

‘O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day’ (verse 97).

‘Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them’ (verse 165).

‘Thy testimonies... are my delight and my counsellors’ (verse 24).

‘I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart’ (verse 34).

How well these expressions fit the mind and attitude of our dear redeemer. How wonderful if these would express our sentiments also.

As the 22 sections of this psalm promoted the Word of God to the Jewish people, it is interesting that an early record says the holy books of the Hebrews were 22 in number. The comment is by Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the first century AD. Here is the passage.

‘We have... only 22 books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine... five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death... from the death of Moses till the reign of

Artaxerxes king of Persia... the prophets... wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life' (Against Apion, I, 8).

All 39 books we have were included in the 22 books Josephus mentions, by combining some books which we now distinguish.(5)

There is a connection between the 22 parts of Psalms 119, which extols the Word of God, and the original 22 books of the Old Testament. Yet as Christians, we recognize in the 22 sections of Psalms 119 refrains of praise for the entire Word of God, including the New Testament. Thus the 22 blossoms on the golden lampstand picture the fruitage of the Spirit through both Old and New Testaments.

A Lamp Unto Our Feet

One of the familiar texts of this psalm is verse 105: 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' Probably this text was in Peter's mind when he said the 'word of prophecy' is 'a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts'. { 2 Peter 1:19} Peter seems to mean that the lamp of prophecy guides the church to the end of the age when the morning star appears—Christ at his second advent. A morning star is seen only by the watchers who are awake before the breaking of the new day. In the past Christians studied prophecy to mark the progress of events toward the end of the age. But now we are here. The lamp which guided us here now shows we have arrived.

Our Lord's Great Prophecy in Matthew 24 and 25 is about the second advent. It contains two meanings, one for the end of the Jewish Age and another for the end of the Gospel Age. God's judgments on Israel then picture God's judgments on Christendom now. The first application forms a pattern which helps us understand the second.

There are three parts to our Lord's discourse: 1) his answer to the disciples' questions; 2) some lessons about those answers; and 3) some parables illustrating his lessons. Each of these parts are divided into three other parts.(6)

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins there are two elements which relate directly to Psalms 119:1 Matthew 25:6 says 'at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom' —then the virgins rose, and went out to meet him. Psalms 119 says 'At

midnight I will rise... because of thy righteous judgments' (verses 62, 63).

2. The parable is all about the lamps the virgins took with them, the wise taking sufficient oil, the foolish being less careful. These lamps represent the Word of God, and Psalms 119:105 identifies this symbol: 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'

Therefore Psalms 119 has special meaning to us today. It encourages us to study the Word of God, to see by its light the unfolding truth—to anoint our eyes with eyesalve. In the light of this lamp, we have been richly blessed. The meat in due season has greatly strengthened us.

Our Lord's Prophecy

Part one of our Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24 is in verses 4-31. He first explained what will happen before the end of the age in verses 4-14. He closed this section by saying 'and then shall the end come,' and the verses which follow, 15-28, describe that end.

Those verses describe the *parousia* of the Son of Man, the time of trouble on the religious systems, the gathering of the saints out of those systems, their flight to the 'mountains', { *which Psalms 125:2 says represent the Lord* } and their feasting on the rich spiritual food where the eagles are gathered together. During this time there is great tribulation, and flight is difficult. All this happens before the climax. That climax, described in verses 29 and 30, is the *apokalupsis*. Then 'the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance'. { *2 Thessalonians 1:8,9* } Then 'every eye shall see him' { *Re 1:7* } and 'all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'. { *Matthew 24:30* }

Mankind will perceive Christ through the distresses incident to Armageddon. They will 'see' Christ the same way they will 'see' God—the { *Re 22:4* } same way as Job who said 'now my eye sees thee'. { *Job 42:5* } They will see Christ through the experiences around them, revealing the mighty power of the new King. But what they will see later, in the *apokalupsis*, we see now, in the *parousia*.

The Two Witnesses

In Revelation, chapter 11, 'two witnesses' appear who 'prophesy 1260 days clothed in sackcloth' (verse 3). Most brethren apply these two witnesses to the Old and New Testaments, and we agree. Verse 4 says the two witnesses are the same as the 'two olive trees' of Zechariah's vision.

For 1260 years—a day for a year in prophecy—the Word of God was suppressed while Papacy ruled, about 539 to 1799. At times during this period even the private reading of the Bible by the laity was considered a crime. William Tyndale was burned alive for daring to translate it.

Verse 6 describes these two witnesses like Elijah and Moses—they have power to 'shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy' (like Elijah did), and turn water into blood, and 'smite the earth with all plagues' (like Moses did). Moses represents the Old Testament and Elijah the New Testament.

Verses 7-13 explain what happened to the Scriptures at the end of those 1260 years. Though we might suppose their circumstances would improve immediately, actually it was the opposite. They were 'killed' and lay dead 'in the street of the great city,' Christendom, for 3-1/2 'days' while their enemies celebrated. But then the two witnesses were raised to life and ascended to heaven in a cloud.

All of this was fulfilled in the three years about and following 1799. Christianity was formally abolished for a brief time and the Scriptures, figuratively, were dead. But then they revived, and through many Bible Societies they were published in the common languages and distributed by the millions. Thus the Bible 'ascended to heaven' with great prominence.

Notice how these experiences parallel those of Jesus. He also had a ministry of 1260 days, about 3-1/2 years. He also suffered, being 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'. { *Isaiah 53:3* } He also was killed, was dead for three days, and rose again. He also 'ascended up to heaven in a cloud' as it says of the two witnesses. The parallel between the written Word and the living Word is clear, just as with the manna, the showbread, and the lampstand. The Scriptures are God's 'two witnesses,' and Jesus is 'the faithful and true witness'. (7) { *Re 1:5* }

Years Past

As we stand at the entrance to a new millennium, we are much better off than a thousand years ago. Then 'Jezebel' was still reaching for the pinnacle of her power and the dark ages were fixing their grip upon the Christian world. The Word of God was greatly suppressed.

In the century and a half from about 880 to 1030, 35 popes ruled for an average of about four years each. Many 'were in their early twenties, several were teenagers. Some lasted twenty days, or a month, or three months. Six of them were dethroned, a number were murdered.'⁽⁸⁾ Depravity was rampant in the highest places, and church leaders were sometimes only thinly veiled pagans. Church offices, even the Papacy, were purchased by rich families for their children. Eleven year old Benedict IX became pope in 1032. Before his voice changed he was wearing the tiara, celebrating high mass, appointing bishops and excommunicating heretics. Before he was 14 he had surpassed the excesses of his predecessors. He was later described, by a Catholic writer as 'a demon from hell in the disguise of a priest' who 'feasted on immorality.'⁽⁹⁾

Later that century the supremacy of emperors over popes would be reversed, bringing papal power, and papal atrocities, to their height. Judicial torture, banned by Imperial Rome, would be reinstated, and not simply upon the accused. Now witnesses could be tortured to extract testimony against the accused. The inquisition would flourish, and millions would perish. The darkest of the dark ages was at hand.

Years Ahead

A thousand years forward, all the saints will have long been in glory, and all the trials of this age past. Right, truth and honesty will prevail. An equitable distribution of earth's bounties will bring wealth to each and every person. Happiness will be the rule, and sorrow will be past. The resurrection will be complete, and all the bereaved long since comforted.

The mind of man, then perfected, will have progressed for centuries. Technology will bring wonders we can only dream of, and some we cannot imagine. Man's creative intellects will have free exercise for advancement in every field. The exploration of space will have leaped forward. The arts will have produced beauties of form, color and grace, and music of such loveliness, as will bring peace and pleasure to everyone.

Earth will yield its increase, all needs will be satisfied, and beauty will be everywhere. Goodness will flourish. Whether the little season will have finished its work we cannot say. But it will be a marvelous time. And this will be only the beginning of an eternity of everything wholesome and wonderful.

The Century Past

A hundred years ago the harvest had passed its earliest years and was building momentum. Brethren observing the memorial that year were about 4000 (*Reprints*, page 2623), and would multiply more than four times by 1915 (*Reprints*, page 5675). Those dear brethren rejoiced to see the first crimson beams of dawn. But as Isaiah predicted, 'the morning comes, and also a night'. { *Isaiah 21:12* } The past century has been the deadliest since the flood. Wars, revolutions, and purges have claimed the lives of more than 100 million persons. The 'time of trouble' has been severe and the climax is still before us.

At the opening of the harvest, Revelation pictures three angels, each heralding a message. The first had 'the everlasting gospel,' the second declared 'the hour of his judgment,' and the third said 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen'. { *Revelation 14:6-8* } We have heard the everlasting gospel, God's Plan of the Ages. We have observed God's judgments. We have seen Babylon rejected as spokesman for the Lord. Thus he chose a devoted businessman for his messenger rather than a minister of Christendom.

The Progress of Events

In 1872 the doctrine of the Ransom and its implications opened up to Brother Russell. About 1874 he was immersed, though he had been consecrated for some years.(10) By 1876 he recognized both the manner and object of the Lord's return. In that year Nelson Barbour showed him that the time prophecies, which William Miller had studied so earnestly, actually indicated Christ had returned in 1874.

Thus he recognized that the harvest was here and the harvest work was due. This filled him with resolve, that if the Lord would prosper the matter, he would devote his life to the harvest work. This he did until his death 40 years later. Thus began a wonderful blessing for the church, but a period of decline for Christendom, which may be summarized in seven steps.

1. Though a boon to us, the harvest message was an irritation to the churches. It should have roused Christendom to a fresh and lively examination of the Scriptures. Instead, many responded with indifference, others with opposition.

2. Next came a severe judgment in 1914, when Christendom was rent by a great World War.

3. This war had a greater impact than just the obvious devastation. The whole hope of Christendom was shattered, for the general expectation that they would promote Christianity throughout the world lay broken in the ruins of battle. It has never been the same since.

4. As a result the latent modernist theories of some churchmen spread rapidly through the clergy and laity. So that most members of large denominations discard the essence of the Gospel, denying the blood atonement from a fall many believe never occurred.

5. Papacy, strict and formal, seemed to weather the turmoil and disputes; in 1929 the Lateran Treaty even restored some of their losses of the 1870s. But following World War II their inveterate foe, communism, occupied Papacy's strongholds in central and eastern Europe. In the 1960s, with dissent within and foes without, Pope John XXIII said 'the church seems fated to die.' However, with the fall of communism in the 1980s, their circumstances have improved a little.

6. Today the western world is like a shell, apparently stable, but without the moral stability to stand another blow. Yet more blows will come. Some suppose that a major financial crisis could devastate western economies and rend the very fabric of society. Perhaps the drying of the River Euphrates, the commercial life blood of great Babylon, represents such an episode. Then the governments will seek the moral stability of the churches, each in weakness leaning on the other, for a united effort of churches and governments to steady society. Revelation 16:13 seems to predict this, listing the participants as the dragon (civil power), the beast (Papacy), and the false prophet (protestant systems).

7. About this time another crisis will surface, gathering the nations to 'the battle of that great day of God Almighty... into a place called... Armageddon.' Joel chapter three implies the crisis will be in the middle east, probably the invasion by Gog of the north. The battle will begin, and 'all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be

thrown down... and every wall [of national defense] shall fall to the ground'.{ *Ezekiel 38:20*}

8. Then part two of Armageddon will strike. 'There was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, So mighty an earthquake, and So great. And the great city was divided into three parts [civil, papal, protestant], and the city of the nations(11) fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her... the fierceness of his wrath... every island fled away, and the mountains were not found' {*Re 16:18-20*} .

Thus this order closes. At Israel the 'still small voice' of the Lord will call to the nations through the risen prophets. The Lord will rebuke the raging tumults, 'peace, be still,' and gradually men will see that their extremity has led to God's solution—the peaceable kingdom of Christ.

Probably with reserve at first, many still stubborn with wounded pride, the nations will be slow to recognize the opportunity. Some will resist, and upon these no blessings will come until they relent. Some will even need the inducement of special difficulties. But as time passes, the voices of praise and thanks will swell to a world wide chorus: 'Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation'.{ *Isaiah 25:9*}

For God will 'destroy... the covering cast over all people... the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces... for the LORD hath spoken it'.{ *Isaiah 25:7,8*}

The Century Ahead

Certainly very few of the brethren alive 100 years ago, if any, supposed the saints would still be waiting for their consummation 100 years later. Of course, for us, the extended time has been a blessing. It has allowed us to be included in the heavenly call. Probably most of us believe now, as they did then, that another century will not pass before the saints are completed. That is my view. But have we much greater evidence now than they had then? I believe we do.

Revelation speaks of seven particular judgments of God which close this age. We know them as the 'seven last plagues, for in them is filled up the wrath of God'.{ *Revelation 15:1*} These plagues are referred to in Jeremiah 50:35-40 as five swords, a drought, and

desolation, and in Exodus as the last seven of the 10 plagues on Egypt.

There are a variety of views respecting these plagues, and the time of these plagues, and sometimes very good and studious brethren differ in their conclusions. Our view is that these plagues began with the judgment of Babylon about 1878, and the first of these was the message of present truth itself, which was a plague to nominal Christians.⁽¹²⁾ According to this view the temple filling with 'smoke from the glory of God'—which just precedes the plagues—refers to the raising of the sleeping saints into their reward. (Compare Revelation 15:8 with 1 Kings 8:6-11)

If this view is correct—if the seven plagues appear sequentially through the harvest—then notice the implications. Most brethren who share this view believe five plagues are past. Plague five was on the 'seat of the beast'—Papacy—and this passed with the fall of communism in the late 1980s. Of course the plagues do not all take equal time, just as the seven churches and the seven trumpets do not all take equal time. But as an approximation, if five plagues took about 110 years, then the two remaining plagues would not take 100 years more.

Actually we are concerned with just one more plague, the sixth plague, because the saints will not pass through the seventh, which is Armageddon. Surely, then, the saints will not continue in the flesh for another century.

Our Continuing Privilege

Dear friends, we have some years left. We can still acquire a few more jewels of divine character. We can still show our love for the Lord, the Truth, and the Brethren. We show our love for the Lord by obedience, and service in his cause. We show our love for the Truth by honest, prayerful study of the Word of God. We show our love for the brethren by our kindness, and meeting with them regularly.

Let us be fully consecrated. Let us not slack our zeal, or dull our fervor, or dim our spirit. Let us look past the temporal things of clay, 'draw back the parting veil, and see, the glories of eternity!' Amen.

1. That 'almond' means 'hasten' explains the surface meaning of Jeremiah 1:11,12. On a deeper level, Jeremiah's reference to the almond rod represents the glorification of the saints, following our

Lord's return. It is they who bring to pass the other things represented in Jeremiah 1 2 . Here are some examples of five as a picture of the new creation.

5 virgins, Matthew 25 5 stones David gathered to fight the giant (compare to the stone of Daniel 2).

5 posts at the holy, the dwelling of spirit-begotten new creatures.

5 cubits, a frequent measure in Ezekiel's temple, the church in glory.

1/5 of Egypt's grain gathered by Joseph—the church who nourishes mankind in the kingdom.

1/5 deal of flour in each of the cakes of showbread. {*Le 24:5*}

1/50 is the Lord's share, Numbers 31:30.

1/500 is the Lord's share, Numbers 31:28

(see note 4).

3. Adam Rutherford suggests the transcendental number pi represents God (*Pyramidology*, Book II (1962), page 370). Julian Gray gives the same thought in *The Authorship and Message of the Great Pyramid*, page 1 (1953), and I believe others before him as well. Pi also bears an interesting relationship to the lunar, solar, and prophetic years designed by the Creator, as explained below.

If one searches for the closest approximations of pi, using a ratio of two whole numbers up to the number 1000, a number of approximations closer than 22/7 can be found. The closest three ratios which are not less than pi are 355/113, 732/233, 377/120. E688/219 is very close, but slightly less than pi. 333/106 is also very close, but not quite as close as the others.) These three ratios have something in common—they are related to the number of days in the three cycles used in Scripture—the lunar year, the solar year, and the prophetic year. 355 is the number of days in a lunar year (rounded up to the nearest whole number); 732 is twice the number of days in a solar year if rounded up to the nearest whole number; 120 is one third the number of days in a prophetic year.

Another independent feature: if the moon (2160-mile diameter) and earth (7920-mile diameter) are placed adjacent to each other, the moon atop the earth, and a triangle formed from the center of

the moon to each end of the horizontal diameter of the earth, that triangle's two base angles will match the famed 'pi angle' of the Great Pyramid.

4. The number 11 appears as follows. The first covering of the Tabernacle, the white linen embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet, was made of two segments of five strips each. This represents the New Creation which is of two parts: Christ himself, and the church. Five strips are used because five is a symbol of the new creation (see note 2).

The second covering was of goat hair. It also was made of two segments, one of five strips and the other of six strips, making 11 total. The goat hair covering represents the imperfect flesh of the church. The five shows the new creature, and the six shows our flesh. We are dual creatures, we have this treasure (the new creature) in an earthen vessel (the flesh). The number 11 represents this.

The third covering was of ram skins dyed red, picturing the redemption of our Lord's sacrifice to cover our imperfections. The fourth covering was of seal skins, an uncolorful outer covering for weathering, with no particular attraction—as the world sees us, unattractive, and nothing noteworthy.

Eleven appears conspicuously in two sequential narratives in Judges. The lords of the Philistines each offered 1100 pieces of silver for the betrayal of Samson, *{Jud 16:5}* and Micah of Ephraim took 1100 pieces of silver from his mother. *{Jud 17:2}* The two episodes refer to two spirit-begotten classes during the Gospel age and are therefore consistent with the use of 11 in the second tabernacle covering. (The first narrative is about Samson, the church. The second is about the tribe of Dan who went into perpetual idolatry, representing the second death class. The last episode in Judges is about the tribe of Benjamin, representing the spirit begotten who become the Great Company.)

5. Though modern Jewish translations list 39 books, they are still referred as 'The 24 books of the Holy Bible' as in Isaac Leeser's translation. This is done by combining some of the 39 together to reduce the count to 24—the 12 minor prophets into one book, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles into one book each, and Ezra-Nehemiah into one book.

How this was further reduced to yield Josephus' 22 books is uncertain, but some authorities suppose Lamentations was

combined with Jeremiah (Hebrews wrote both), and Judges with Ruth, though rather than the latter perhaps Samuel was combined with Kings.

What we refer to as the Old Testament, the Jewish people call the Tanakh. It is composed of three parts: the Torah (five books of Moses), Nevi'im (prophets), and Kethuvim (writings). The Nevi'im include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 prophets. The Kethuvim include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, So, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.

Today these three divisions have 5, 8 and 11 books respectively, unlike in Josephus' day. It is supposed that the 'writings' originally may have been called 'the other writings'—those additional to the Law and the Prophets—in the course of time abbreviated simply to 'writings.' The word Tanakh is actually an acronym using the first letter of each part, T_N_K. These were referred to by Jesus as 'the law of Moses... the prophets, and... the psalms'. { *Luke 24:44* }

Josephus' claim that the original division was into 22 books is verified by two early Christian writers who cite a portion from the Apocryphal 'Book of Jubilees' about this. That portion of the Book of Jubilees is not in the versions available to us today but evidently it was in the versions cited by these two writers. Here are their quotes:

'God, as it says, created 22 works in the six days, wherefore also there are 22 letters among the Hebrews and 22 books, and 22 founding fathers from Adam to Jacob' (John of Constantinople, sixth century AD).

'All the work together 22, equal in number with the 22 Hebrew letters and the 22 Hebrew books and the 22 founding fathers from Adam to Jacob' (Georgius Syncellus, eighth to ninth century). (Both references are from *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* by Beckwith. These citations are thought to be from a middle portion of chapter 2 of the Book of Jubilees as it read in their day.)

With 22 books of the Old Testament, and 27 of the New, the total is 49, exactly 7 times 7, which is an appropriate number. The square of a number emphasizes its meaning. Psalms 12:6 says, 'The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.'

Incidentally, in the Hebrew canon the last book listed is 2 Chronicles, which helps explain Jesus' reference to 'the blood of Zacharias... whom ye slew between the temple and the altar' as the last Old Testament martyr. Apparently he intended the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. (Note that 'Barachias' in Matthew 23:35 does not appear in the Sinaitic manuscript and is absent also in the parallel text Luke 11:51)

6. An Outline of Matthew 24 and 25

Jesus' answers

—Before the end (24:4-14)

—During the end (24:15-28)

—The climax (24:29-31)

Lessons about his answers

—What I have told you will certainly happen (24:32-35)

—The time will not be known in advance, So you must watch (24:36-44)

—Those watching will be rewarded (24:45-51)

Parables about his prophecy

—Wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13)

—Talents (25:14-30)

—Sheep and Goats (25:31-46)

7. It is no coincidence that Moses and Elijah were the ones who appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, witnessing that Jesus was to die at Jerusalem, as though to say the written Word identifies Jesus as our Redeemer. These three have some other things in common—each fasted for forty days, and in each case their bodies were not found. Probably there is some deep meaning to this also.

8. Peter Deuteronomy Rosa, *Vicars of Christ, The Dark Side of Papacy*, 1988, page 47.

9. *ibid*, page 54.

10. 'Convention Report Sermons' records a testimony by Sr. Margaret Russell Land, Brother Russell's natural sister, at a convention in 1907, in which she is reported as saying 'About 1874 the true mode of baptism and its import was discerned by him [Brother Russell], and he and father, together with a number of others, including myself, symbolized our baptism into Christ by water immersion' (page 12 of the edition reprinted by the Chicago ecclesia).

11. The Sinaitic Manuscript has 'city' singular, referring to Babylon.

12. The plagues of Revelation 18:8, which 'come in one day' or 'one hour' (verse 10), are different. Those are future, and brief. Those plagues are three in number rather than seven. They are specifically called 'death, mourning and famine,' and are a subdivision of Armageddon. Similarly the French Revolution, a picture of Armageddon, was subdivided into 'three plagues... the fire and the smoke and the brimstone'. { *Revelation 9:18, NASB* }