

Days of Praise

December 2019 • January • February 2020

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

December 2019 • January • February 2020

*“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”
(1 John 4:4)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” (Psalm 138:2)

Dear Christian friend,

Every one of these short devotional studies has come from hours of personal study by each writer in their own time with the Lord. Of all the precious time that we are enabled to spend with our Lord Jesus, it is most intimate when we are searching “the mind of the Spirit” (Romans 8:27) through the written text of Scripture.

Often, as the writer cites a particular phrase from a passage of Scripture, it is merely to use the inspired words of the Bible to more precisely convey the dear thought that has been stimulated in their thinking by the portion of text being studied. Sometimes, however, a parallel reference is brought to mind that is in some way a clarification or a contextual story that might help the reader to gain a deeper understanding.

As you have time, mine these nuggets as well. They will bring much encouragement.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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Sunday, December 1

White as Snow

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.” (Daniel 7:9)

In this amazing vision of the everlasting God on His fiery judgment throne, we find one of the six occurrences in the Bible of the fascinating phrase “white as snow.” As the symbol of holiness, pure white finds its clearest natural expression in the beautiful snow when it has freshly covered the ground.

Twice the phrase is used to describe the cleansing of a guilty sinner by the grace of God. David, after confessing his own sin, prayed: “Have mercy upon me, O God. . . . Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. . . . wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:1-2, 7). Then, God promises through His prophet: “Come now, and let us reason together, . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). The cleansing blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, is the only substance that can turn blood-red scarlet into snowy white.

When Christ ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, “his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow” (Mark 9:3), which confirmed to the three disciples that He was the Son of God, even as the voice from heaven had said (Matthew 17:5). At the empty tomb following His resurrection, “the angel of the Lord” also had “raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3). Finally, when John saw Christ in His glorified body, he testified that “his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow” (Revelation 1:14).

It is marvelous that the raiment of the angel of God, the transfigured Christ, and the Ancient of days, as well as the head of Christ in His glory, are all described with the same phrase as the soul of one whose sins are forgiven! HMM

Monday, December 2

Giving and Receiving

“Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.” (Philippians 4:15)

As Paul went on his missionary journeys, he never asked for money for himself from the people to whom he preached. He later wrote to the Thessalonians, “Because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:9). He did stress the teaching of Christ that “the labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7) and that “even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). But he himself said: “I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me” (1 Corinthians 9:15).

Thus, he was especially moved when the impoverished Christians at Philippi, without being asked, “sent once and again unto my necessity” (Philippians 4:16), and they were the only ones who did! This act of generous concern came about, Paul recognized, because they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). As a result, Paul could assure them: “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Not only their material need, but every need.

They had learned a wonderful truth that every Christian needs to learn. As Paul told the Ephesian elders: “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Therefore, let each of us give in His name, “not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:7-8). HMM

Tuesday, December 3

Can It Be?

“Christ also suffered for us. . . . Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2:21-24)

Those who love good church music have come to love Charles Wesley’s commitment to and knowledge of his Savior and the Scriptures, for he wove into his music and poetry deep insights that challenge and thrill us even today. One of his hymns, “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?,” has unfortunately been abridged in modern hymnals. The first verse is expressed:

*And can it be that I should gain,
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him, to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That thou, my God, should’st die for me?*

Even the Old Testament saints wondered why God loves man so. “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?” (Job 7:17). The New Testament contains many similar expressions of wonder. “Behold, what manner of love [literally ‘what a different kind of love’] the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . . And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:8-11).

The point is we were desperate sinners deserving His wrath. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love [i.e., ‘amazing love’] wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5). JDM

Wednesday, December 4

The Immortal Dies

“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17)

The second verse of “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” poses and solves a great mystery:

*T’is mystery all! the immortal dies!
Who can explain this strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries,
To sound the depths of love divine;
T’is mercy all! Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

Our text reminds us that God is immortal. And yet, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3) to bring us salvation. If this astounds us (and it should), we can take solace in that we are not alone. “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things . . . which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Think of it! The Creator, the Author of life, has died to offer eternal life to His creation, for “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23), and the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). He died so that we don’t have to die! This grand plan remains beyond our full grasp, as it always was to the prophets and the angels.

The motive behind His plan is God’s mercy. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us; . . . Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5-6). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33). JDM

Thursday, December 5

His Mercy Found Me

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

The third verse of the hymn “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” sets the stage for the implementation of His majestic plan.

*He left His father’s throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race;
T’is mercy all! Immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!*

The plan involved the death of God the Son. The Creator dying for the creation. The righteous Judge taking on Himself the penalty of the condemned. The rejected Holy One becoming sin on behalf of the true sinner. The convicted ones, powerless to alter the situation, simply receiving the offered grace through faith (see our text).

First, God had to take on Himself the nature of the condemned, live a guiltless life so that He could die as a substitutionary sacrifice. To do so, God the Son had to leave His Father’s throne. And, although “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God [i.e., was willing to give up his kingly status]: But made himself of no reputation [literally, ‘emptied himself’], and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Adam had rebelled against his Creator’s authority, and all of mankind suffered. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12), yet Christ’s work on the cross changed all that. “For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (v. 15). Amazing love! JDM

Friday, December 6

My Chains Fell Off

“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 marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

The fourth verse of Charles Wesley’s great hymn “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” compares Peter’s miraculous deliverance from prison with a sinner’s deliverance from bondage to sin. “Peter was sleeping, . . . bound with two chains. . . . And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: . . . And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him . . . follow me” (Acts 12:6-8).

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.*

The Bible teaches that before being delivered, “ye were the servants of sin [i.e., in bondage to sin], but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). We were powerless to gain freedom on our own.

But “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6), bringing freedom and life. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). “And you, being dead in your sins . . . hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). If He has done all this for us, how can we do less than follow Him? JDM

Saturday, December 7

Alive in Him

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

The final verse of Charles Wesley’s “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” provides a fitting climax to what’s gone before:

*No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus, with all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th’eternal throne,
And claim the crown, thru Christ, my own.*

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). “Who is he that condemneth?” Not Christ! “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (v. 34).

We’re now alive through Christ’s work on the cross, with a standing beyond our comprehension. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him” (Colossians 2:9-10). The song calls Him our “living Head.” Peter calls Him a “living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. . . . The same is made the head of the corner” (1 Peter 2:4-7).

In response to His love, we “put off concerning the former conversation [way of living] of the old man . . . [and] put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24). Dressed in His righteousness, “let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). JDM

Hastening His Coming

“Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” (2 Peter 3:12)

Exactly how can we “hasten unto the coming of the day of God”? The answer is by bringing its coming closer. In fact, the phrase can just as well be understood as “hastening the coming.”

Although the Scriptures give us many signs to know when Christ’s return is near, Jesus said that no one could determine the exact time—not even He Himself! “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). In His self-limited human nature, He did not know because, apparently, it depended in some way on what His disciples would do to “hasten his coming” after He went back to heaven.

When He left them, He said: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This was a command, but it was also a prophecy: “Ye *shall* be witnesses” to the very last tribe on earth. In His Olivet discourse, He had said: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14). Sometime, somehow, every tribe will be reached, because John, in his vision, saw a great multitude “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” in heaven (Revelation 7:9).

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise” to return, but He does desire “that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), and we should “account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15). No one but the Father knows just when the last convert from the last tribe will be won, but if we “love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8), we can “hasten his coming” by doing all we can to get the gospel to the ends of the earth. HMM

Monday, December 9

The Good Fight

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:12)

Scripture frequently refers to the Christian life and work in athletic or combative terms. When all things are considered, reason compels the Christian to enter into the race and fight.

First, our Commander is worth following. He leads us into battle and stands with us on the front lines receiving the fiercest fire: “Let us run with patience the race. . . . Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Second, we are well-armed and protected. The “whole armour of God” includes the girdle of “truth,” the “breastplate of righteousness,” shoes of “the preparation of the gospel of peace,” “the shield of faith,” “the helmet of salvation,” and “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:13-17). The warrior’s mouth is filled with prayers and bold speech (vv.18-20); his sword has no scabbard, and his back has no armor, for retreat is unthinkable.

The goal of our fight urges us on. We strive to undermine the kingdom of darkness and to fill it with light. Each must battle on to exalt our Leader and to champion His Word. “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

To the victor belong the spoils. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne” (Revelation 3:21). We no longer will be soldiers, but kings; we will trade our battle armor for robes, washed and made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). Our helmet will be replaced by an “incorruptible” crown (1 Corinthians 9:25)—“a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give [us] at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). JDM

Tuesday, December 10

Jewels

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (Malachi 3:16-17)

This precious promise occurs at the end of the Old Testament, a time of wholesale apostasy on the part of the people of Israel. But there was a believing remnant. Today, Christians again are in a minority (as always), and it does us well to study the former situations, paying attention to the nature of the remnant as well as God’s response to them.

Notice first the attitude of these believers toward God. We see that they “feared” God when they “thought upon his name.” Who could help but do the same as the work and character of God are pondered? Further, a proper attitude and walk with God lead to true fellowship. They “spake often one to another.” Too often it seems that mere friendship replaces true Christian fellowship as entertainment of guests replaces true hospitality. Human relationships can never attain the fullness possible unless they center around the Lord.

Next, note God’s response to the dear saints in our text. He hearkens and hears, evidently paying special attention to the attitudes (“feared the LORD”) and the words (“spake”) of the saints. Then He registers their history in a special “book of remembrance.” We will all give an account one day, but we may be assured that the good will be remembered, for it is in God’s special book of remembrance.

Likewise, we are assured of salvation: “They shall be mine,” He says. We will be spared while others are being judged. The mighty Lord of hosts holds us as dear to Him as “jewels.” JDM

Wednesday, December 11

Ministry of the Holy Spirit

“God . . . hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 4:8)

Every believer has some awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if there is no such awareness, then there is absolutely no relationship with God (Romans 8:9). Just what, then, is the ministry of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives?

All who have come to God by faith have felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit prior to salvation. From the world’s perspective, that constitutes His ministry. The Holy Spirit is commissioned by Jesus Christ to “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). Acting as God the Father’s operative Agent, the Holy Spirit draws us into a personal consciousness of our sin, Christ’s righteousness, and the absolute certainty of judgment to come.

This reproof has but one goal: to bring about regeneration (Titus 3:5) and give us witness that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16). What is born from above (John 3:3) is nothing less than a “new creature” by the triune Godhead (2 Corinthians 5:17), created like God in “righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). The Holy Spirit energizes our “dead” spirit and causes us to “live” (1 Peter 4:6).

And that is just the beginning! Once regenerated, the Holy Spirit sees to it, as the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13), that we are led (Romans 8:14) into truth—because the Holy Spirit will not invent information but will take truth directly from the mind and heart of God.

With that leading, we are sanctified (both positionally and progressively), having been chosen to salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13). With the Holy Spirit’s power (Acts 1:8), we can exhibit His fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) and come under His filling (Ephesians 5:18). May the glorious ministry of the Holy Spirit be yours both as promised and in practice. HMM III

Thursday, December 12

Zechariah's Visions: Under the Myrtle Trees

"I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white." (Zechariah 1:8)

The Lord divulges 10 visions to Zechariah in one night. All of them are among myrtle trees in the "bottom" of a dark, mysterious, and somewhat eerie ravine near Jerusalem. The first vision reveals a man on a red horse responding to questions from the "angel of the LORD" and "the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 1:8-17).

It is likely that the angel of the Lord is a pre-incarnate form of Christ speaking to the First Person of the Godhead. Two other horsemen are cited, which ties these heavenly envoys to the four horsemen of Revelation and to the horsemen driving the four chariots revealed in Zechariah 6.

When Zechariah asks, "What are these?" (8:9), he is told that they are responsible to "walk to and fro" on Earth and inform the Godhead of their findings. On this specific occasion, they report that "the earth is at rest." Immediately, the "angel of the LORD" asks the Lord of hosts how long He would wait to bring judgment on the nations that have abused Judah now that the 70 years have passed and the punishment of Israel and Judah has been accomplished.

The Lord gives "good and comfortable words," noting that He was displeased with the nations who had carried out His judgment because they had done more damage than necessary. However, the Lord promises that He will return and build His house, restore Jerusalem to prominence, and "comfort Zion" (Zechariah 1:17).

The following visions outline the inexorable promises of God that will be fulfilled in the years to come. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1:20). HMM III

Friday, December 13

Zechariah's Visions: Horns and Carpenters

“Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 1:18-19)

Immediately after seeing the horsemen that were sent to determine the state of the earth, Zechariah observes four “horns” amid the myrtle trees. Zechariah is told they represent the authorities responsible for scattering the people of the two nations of Judah and Israel, destroying Jerusalem in the process as well.

The image of horns usually refers to empires in other passages of Scripture. The horns of the goats in Daniel 7 and 8 and the horns of the seven-headed dragon used in Revelation 13 and 17 are good examples. Zechariah may have understood this specific vision as a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image recorded in Daniel 2. We would identify those horns as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. It is possible that the previous empires of Egypt and Assyria would have been included, but the context does not specify.

The purpose of this vision seems to lie in the task of the four carpenters that appear following the horns (Zechariah 1:20). The Hebrew could be better understood by our words “craftsmen” or “artisans” since they were assigned the task to “fray [terrify] them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it” (Zechariah 1:21).

Even though human history seems to creep by, God will execute His plans for all nations. God’s sovereignty has “determined the times before appointed” (Acts 17:26), and He has often assured us that His Word “shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). HMM III

Saturday, December 14

Zechariah's Visions: Man's Attempt to Measure

"I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof." (Zechariah 2:1-2)

Seeing a human in the vision is a departure from the earlier visions of Zechariah. Each of the prior three visions included only angelic beings interacting with the Lord of hosts. Suddenly a man emerges holding a measuring rod, attempting to measure Jerusalem.

Immediately, a second angel is sent to the angel who has been explaining the visions to Zechariah, instructing him to "run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein" (Zechariah 2:4). Obviously, whatever time is anticipated by the vision, it is not the time of the present Jerusalem. God sees a vast Jerusalem that cannot be measured (Zechariah 14:8-11).

Not only will the city grow beyond historical memory, but the Lord "will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (Zechariah 2:5). No longer will Jerusalem be the pawn of other nations, no longer will she be subject to the whims of rival nations and competing religions. The Lord Himself will become a wall around her similar to the way God protected them as they fled from Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22).

Yet beyond even that wonderful promise, the Lord insists that "many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (Zechariah 2:11). Not only will God restore the city to prominence, but the nation itself will become the center of His global government. "Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation" (Zechariah 2:13). HMM III

Sunday, December 15

Zechariah's Visions: Joshua and the Branch

“And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.” (Zechariah 3:1)

Joshua is pictured standing before the face of the angel of the Lord, who (as before) is the Second Person of the Godhead. Satan is there to “resist” (the same word) the angel of the Lord. “Satan” is a title—a noun to describe the character of an adversary. The Hebrew term *satan* appears 30 times in Scripture, sometimes applying to human adversaries as well as that chief angelic being.

In this vision, Joshua appears in “filthy” clothing unfit to come before the presence of the Lord—a picture of the human sinful condition (Psalm 14:2-3; Isaiah 64:6). But, since Joshua is a “brand plucked from the fire” by the Lord Himself (Zechariah 3:2), Joshua has the filthy garments taken away and a change of clothing given.

Suddenly, the scene shifts as the angel of the Lord announces the promise of the Lord of hosts: “I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (Zechariah 3:8-9).

Many previous prophetic promises must have passed through Zechariah’s mind as he heard these words. Jeremiah spoke of a “Branch of righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15-16). Isaiah promised the son who would rule the world (Isaiah 9:6-7). Even Hanani the seer spoke of “the eyes of the LORD” that would “shew himself strong” (2 Chronicles 16:9). These visions were given to encourage the returning remnant (and us) to reset their focus on the timeless promises of the everlasting God. HMM III

Monday, December 16

Zechariah's Visions: The Eyes of the Lord

“For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes. . . .his seven lamps those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” (Zechariah 3:9; 4:2, 10)

All of the visions among the myrtle trees promise a future in which the Lord rules the world from Jerusalem. Each of the visions also speaks of angelic and God-ordained agencies that are used throughout history to accomplish His will. Those insights bring serious questions about the nature of God’s sovereignty.

What is the need for horsemen that walk “to and fro”? What about the “eyes of the LORD”? Assuming the lamps, candlestick, and olive trees are pictures of God-ordained human involvement (as other Bible passages would confirm), what roles would they play?

There is obviously much we don’t know about the heavenly sphere of operations. It does appear, however, that the omniscient Lord and Creator has allowed others (including angelic beings) to participate in His creation and development of the eternal state to which everything is inexorably moving. We know that “the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psalm 76:10).

We, God’s twice-born, are given the privilege to preach the gospel by which others are saved through the power of the gospel. We are to be witnesses, speakers, testifiers, workers of the ministry, about which even the angels themselves are curious (1 Peter 1:12).

Apparently, the sovereign Lord is developing an on-the-job knowledge that He will put to use in the eternal state. Meanwhile the Adversary (Satan) is constantly opposing and attempting to confuse both the message and the messengers. But the “great and precious promises” of God will not be thwarted (2 Peter 1:4). HMM III

Tuesday, December 17

Zechariah's Visions: One Candlestick, Seven Lamps, Two Olive Trees

"I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof."
(Zechariah 4:2-3)

This vision has three main messages. It represents "the word of the LORD" given to Zerubbabel, which is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). It also foretells the finishing of the temple by Zerubbabel wherein the "mountain" will become a "plain" and the "small things" will become the "plummet" in the hand of Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:7-10). Finally, the vision presents "the two anointed ones that stand by the LORD of the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:14).

The golden candlestick symbol was used in the tabernacle with seven lamps on each branch (Exodus 25). Ten duplicate candlesticks were in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 7:49). Seven individual candlesticks are revealed in Revelation 1 that represent "the seven churches." The similarities and differences suggest something about the "mystery" that God kept from the Old Testament saints (Ephesians 3:9).

The two olive trees are unique to Zechariah. God called Judah a "green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit" (Jeremiah 11:16). God called the New Testament church "the olive tree which is wild by nature" (Romans 11:24). Some have suggested that Revelation 11:3-4 speaks of these "two witnesses" as the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. HMM III

Zechariah's Visions: The Flying Roll

"Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll . . . the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits." (Zechariah 5:1-2)

The large "flying roll" pictured for Zechariah is 30 feet long and 15 feet wide, signifying the enormity of its purpose. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah all speak of a roll in terms of judgment that is coming on Israel and Babylon (Jeremiah 36:2; Ezekiel 2:9-10).

This roll contains the curse that goes forth over the "face of the whole earth" (Zechariah 5:13)—a phrase that is only used five other times in all of Scripture: God warns Noah of the coming Flood (Genesis 6:7), the population under the leadership of Nimrod rebels at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4), God sends the plague of locusts on Egypt (Exodus 10:15), the vast empire of Greece destroys and overcomes Persia (Daniel 8:5), and a day will come "on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:35).

The parallel to the scroll with the seven seals in Revelation is striking. Revelation 6:1-8 tells of the four horsemen who carry out the judgment of the first four seals that parallel the ninth vision of Zechariah (6:1-8). Revelation 6:12-17 describes the "great earthquake" that is parallel to the earthquake foretold by Haggai (2:6-7, 21-23). Revelation chapters 6–10 describe the judgments that impact both the planet itself and the population.

Zechariah's roll judges those who steal and swear and will be "cut off." The implication is that those unfit for the people of God will be "cleansed" from the final kingdom. Since the obvious purpose of these visions is to give assurance of the ultimate victory of God, we can be confident that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). HMM III

Thursday, December 19

Zechariah's Visions: The Ephah and the Women

“Then the angel that talked with me . . . said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah.” (Zechariah 5:5-7)s

The ephah is a volume measure, similar to a bushel basket (Leviticus 19:36). The woman inside is defined as “wickedness” (Zechariah 5:8). The ephah is lead-sealed (contained) by God Himself and is taken (while contained) to Shinar by two women with wings like a stork (Zechariah 5:9-11).

These two women are difficult to identify. It is possible that they are Aholah and Aholibah described in Ezekiel 23, with Aholah representing Samaria as an adulteress with Assyria and Aholibah substituting for Jerusalem as the adulterous wife of Jehovah. It is also possible that these two women could represent Israel and later the church involvement with the worldly system of Babylon. In either case, these two women enable “wickedness” to be brought to Shinar and allow Babylon to be “established” (Zechariah 5:11). The New Testament counterpart of these events is probably the decadent woman pictured in Revelation 17.

This segment of Zechariah's visions seems to set the stage for God's harvest. There is the vision of the scroll of judgment impacting the entire earth; then this basket of “wickedness” that resembles conditions “through all the earth.” And lastly the house in the land of Shinar that is “established” before the four chariots (Zechariah 6) begin their final work. While these prophecies are not pleasant to anticipate, God “hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). HMM III

Friday, December 20

Zechariah's Visions: The Four Chariots

“And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass.” (Zechariah 6:1)

These four great angelic creatures appear in several roles in Scripture. They are specifically identified as “four spirits” and are positioned “before the LORD of all the earth” (Zechariah 6:5). They come out from between two mountains of brass to walk “to and fro through the earth” (Zechariah 6:7). The horses are the same color as the horses in Revelation 6, indicating that these horsemen are age-long angelic authorities that execute and implement God’s will in the earth.

The four living creatures seen by Ezekiel may be the chariots that the horsemen are riding in Ezekiel 1:5. Those living creatures have four faces and four wings (Ezekiel 1:6), and a “wheel was on the earth beside each living creature” (Ezekiel 1:15).

The similar descriptions and connection with the book of world judgment in Zechariah and Revelation argue for a close relationship with four special creatures that are directly positioned with, and to, the throne of the Second Person of the Godhead—the Lamb of God. The differences are tantalizing but can easily be understood as eyewitness testimony by different people at different times in history.

Zechariah was told of their work in the “north country” (Babylon, Gog, and Magog) and in the “south country” (Egypt, Libya). Given Daniel’s previous prophecy of the north and south (Daniel 11), Zechariah would understand the future focus of the horsemen as history moved forward. “They are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). HMM III

Saturday, December 21

Zechariah's Visions: Transition to the Branch

“Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest; And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.” (Zechariah 6:11-12)

The instructions to Zechariah focus on setting up model leaders for Judah. Joshua is crowned high priest, and crowns of authority are issued to others who had returned with Ezra and Zerubbabel (Zechariah 6:14). These were all to be a memorial toward the future coming of the Branch who would come and complete the work of God (Zechariah 6:12-15).

The role of the Branch is told to Zechariah earlier in the fourth vision among the myrtle trees. He would be the servant who would do the Lord's will as the Branch of righteousness who was the “stone” with “seven eyes” (Zechariah 3:8-9).

The promise of ultimate rule is clear in Scripture (Isaiah 9:7 and Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16). The impact of this prophecy in Zechariah extends to the millennium and even into eternity. “And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you” (Zechariah 6:15).

The little band of remnants needed assurance from their Lord. They, like us, needed to shift their eyes beyond the moment to the end-game. “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). HMM III

Sunday, December 22

Going and Returning

“I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.” (Genesis 46:4)

Imagine the turmoil Jacob must have felt when he heard the news that Joseph was alive and wanted him to move to Egypt. His son, whom he had thought dead for many years, was not only alive but governor of Egypt! As difficult as this was for him to believe, Jacob no doubt had myriad other emotions crowding in on him. God had directed him to Canaan, as with his fathers Abraham and Isaac. This was the land of promise, and yet circumstances seemed to indicate that God was leading him away. In the past, God had always spoken to him directly before each important move, and Jacob must have had that in mind as they traveled.

The company stopped at Beersheba, the southern boundary of the promised land. Here Jacob had lived with his parents (Genesis 28:10). Here God had repeated His covenant to Isaac (Genesis 26:24), and here Jacob decided to build an altar to ask God for clear leading before leaving the land (Genesis 46:1), and God graciously answered: “I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation” (Genesis 46:3). Furthermore, God assured Jacob, in our text, that when His purposes in Egypt were accomplished, He would “bring thee up again” into the land of promise. Many details were as yet unknown to Jacob, but he gladly obeyed.

This pattern is applicable to us. As we endeavor to follow God’s leading, we should proceed as best we can discern the situation (assuming there is no scriptural teaching to the contrary), all the while praying for wisdom and clarification. He may shut the door and redirect, or He may confirm our decision. We can proceed in the confidence that He will go with us, and when the time is right, He will lead us on. JDM

Monday, December 23

Praise from the Creation

“Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein.” (Psalm 69:34)

We may not yet understand the full purpose of God in creation, but at least one aspect of that purpose is that all things created should somehow praise their Creator. This theme occurs often in Scripture, especially in the psalms. For example, in addition to the exhortation in our text:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalm 19:1).

“Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for he cometh” (Psalm 96:11-13).

“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee” (Psalm 145:10).

“Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. . . . Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl” (Psalm 148:3-4, 7-10).

The Lord Jesus said that if men should refuse to praise Him and “should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). Yet even though the whole creation—in its beauty, complexity, and providential orderliness—gives continual praise to its Creator, men perversely have “worshipped and served the creature [or more aptly stated, the creation] more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever” (Romans 1:25).

How poignant, therefore, is the final verse of the book of Psalms: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6). HMM

Interpreting the Bible

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

One basic reason why so many people seem to have trouble understanding the Bible is that they try to “interpret” it to fit their private opinions. The Greek word for “private” (*idios*) is related to such English words as “idiom” and “idiosyncrasy,” and this key passage warns us against any exposition of Scripture that is based on the teacher’s pet doctrinal or behavioral prejudices. A reader or hearer of the Word of God whose “heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing” will be unable to “understand” (Matthew 13:15) because he comes with his mind and heart already bound to his own opinions.

The Bible does not need to be “interpreted” at all. In every other New Testament reference to “interpretation,” except the one in our text (which means “explanation” or “exposition”), the meaning is simply “translation.” The Bible does, of course, need to be correctly *translated* from Greek and Hebrew into English and other national languages, but that is all. God is able to say what He means, and He wants to communicate His authoritative Word to men and women of obedient hearts, who are willing to devote diligent study to all the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 5:12-14), to obey them (James 1:22), and then teach them to others (2 Timothy 2:2, 24-26) carefully, and clearly, and graciously.

To such students of the Word, the promise is: “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-5). HMM

Wednesday, December 25

Signs of Christmas

“Moreover the LORD spoke again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.” (Isaiah 7:10-11)

Although “the Jews require a sign” (1 Corinthians 1:22), and this attitude was rebuked by Christ when He said that “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39), God has given three specific signs with respect to the incarnation of Christ. There were other signs too, no doubt, such as the star of Bethlehem, but three events were specifically called signs.

First, to the unwilling King Ahaz, He said: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Immanuel means “God with us,” and the sign of the virgin birth, biologically impossible without a mighty miracle of divine creation, assures us that the omnipotent God has entered the human family once for all.

That entrance was not made in an emperor’s palace as a great conqueror, however, but in the very humblest of human circumstances, and this also was a sign. “And this shall be a sign unto you,” said the leader of the angelic host; “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

And there was a third sign. When the infant Jesus was brought to the temple, the aged prophet Simeon said: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35).

That is, the God/man would Himself be God’s great sign to Israel and the whole world. The attitude of men and women to God, in Christ, would reveal the state of their hearts and seal their eternal destiny, whether rising again to everlasting life or falling forever away from God. HMM

Thursday, December 26

God in the Garden

“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (Genesis 2:8)

This was the world’s first garden, and it must have been a beautiful garden, for God had planted it Himself. Every tree was “pleasant to the sight”; there was a lovely river “to water the garden” (Genesis 2:9-10), and God was there.

Then one day God was “walking in the garden” only to find that “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). Sin had entered, and Adam and Eve had to be cast out, leaving God alone in the garden (Genesis 3:23).

Many years later, God entered another garden with His loved ones. “He went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples” (John 18:1). There in the garden of Gethsemane, the disciples soon fell asleep, once again leaving Him alone in the garden, “withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast” (Luke 22:41). There He “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” (Hebrews 5:7) as He faced the death He had pronounced on His very first loved ones long before in that first garden.

There was yet another garden where He must be alone. “In the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus” (John 19:41-42). God had walked alone in the first garden, seeking His own. He knelt alone in the second garden, praying for His own. He was buried alone in the third garden, having died for His own. Therefore, in the new “paradise of God” where the pure river flows and the tree of life grows eternally, “his servants shall serve him” and reign with Him “for ever and ever” (Revelation 2:7; 22:1-3, 5). HMM

Friday, December 27

Walk before Me

“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.”
(Genesis 17:1)

Abraham had been “walking” in the land of Canaan nearly 25 years when God gave this command to him. He had experienced the shameful rebuke in Egypt by Pharaoh and a marvelous victory against Chedorlaomer—and then had demonstrated both humility and obedience before Melchizedek.

God had been explicit in His promises to Abraham, but the promised heir had not yet come. Now, in spite of the awful lapse of faith with Hagar and the nagging burden of Ishmael, God insisted that Abraham “walk before” Him and “be perfect.”

The Hebrew language here is unusual. The word translated “before me” is *panyim*, basically meaning “the face.” This is the term used in the first commandment where we are told to “have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

In Genesis 17:1, the phrase could well be translated “walk, looking at my face.” The first commandment could also be translated “don’t let any other god get between your face and my face.”

The implication is obvious. God expects us to live in such a way that His “face” (person, character, presence) is always “before” us so that our “walk” (lifestyle, behavior) is “perfect” (complete, whole, healthy), with nothing inhibiting the relationship “of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13).

“Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations” (Genesis 6:9). After warning Israel of the dangers of the pagan nations surrounding them, Moses still insisted that they should “be perfect with the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 18:13). No matter what the circumstances may be, if we are looking at God’s “face,” we will walk perfectly. HMM III

Spiritual Hygiene

“But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

We are bombarded these days with diet plans, exercise programs, health foods, beauty aids, etc.—all aimed at improving our lives or lifestyles. These may profit a “little” and should not be ignored, but we must never allow a preoccupation with physical things to negate our true priorities.

Spiritual hygiene is much more important than physical hygiene. As infants, we should “desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). For adults, “strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Hebrews 5:14)—those who are no longer “unskillful in the word of righteousness” (v. 13).

We are to be “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6), and admonished to profess “sound [literally ‘healthy’] doctrine” (Titus 1:9; 2:1) and healthy “faith” (1:13; 2:2), as well as healthy “charity” and “patience” (2:2), and use healthy “speech” (2:8).

Exercise must not be ignored, but it should be “exercise . . . unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7), enabling us to “discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). It may take the form of chastisement, which “yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (12:11).

And, of course, cleanliness is important. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). Christ gave Himself “that he might sanctify and cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26-27). JDM

Sunday, December 29

Why?

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Romans 9:20)

In this scientific age, it is essential for us to remember that “science” can never answer any question beginning with “why.” Scientific research seeks to answer questions of “what” and “how,” and sometimes “where” and “when,” but it can never deal with “why” questions. Such questions require a moral or theological answer.

Probably the most vexing of all such questions is: “Why do the righteous suffer?” Or, put another way: “Why is there evil in a world created by a God who is good?” The question becomes especially poignant when personal calamity comes and we ask, “Why did this happen to me?”

Many think the book of Job was written to answer such questions, for Job was one of the most godly men who ever lived, yet he suffered more than anyone. But God answered Job’s searching questions only by pointing to the wonders of His creation. God has made us for Himself, and He is “forming” us for His own holy purpose; that is all we need to know right now. “What I do thou knowest not now,” said Jesus, “but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7).

Yet even Jesus in His human suffering cried out on the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). We do know, at least in part, the answer to this question. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

For answers to the other “why” questions, we may well have to await God’s own time. Until then, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28), and we can say with Job: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). HMM

Monday, December 30

Prepared for You

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34)

In context, this wonderful promise may apply specifically to those living believers recognized as “sheep” by Christ when He returns to judge the nations (or “Gentiles”) at the end of the age. For them He has *prepared* a wonderful kingdom in which they can fully serve their great King here on Earth. The “goats,” on the other hand, will be sent away into “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

But we remember also that the Lord Jesus Christ has also *prepared* a mansion in heaven for His faithful disciples. “In my Father’s house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

He is, even now, preparing for us that glorious *place*. One day, it will be fully prepared, and we shall see it when He brings it down from heaven, as John did in his great vision. “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

It will, indeed, be a wonderful place of “*many mansions*,” and John describes some of its beauties in the Bible’s last two chapters. But that is not all. “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). Therefore, we can say with Paul: “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” (Romans 8:18). He has indeed prepared a great eternal future for His redeemed children. HMM

Tuesday, December 31

Times and Seasons

“And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”
(Acts 1:7)

Just before Christ ascended into heaven, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). Christ refrained from answering their question as they had hoped, but in His wisdom He used the occasion to teach them that some information is for God alone, including the “times and the seasons.” In our finiteness, we are unable to handle too much information, and should we know even a small part of the “knowledge [which] is too wonderful for me” (Psalm 139:6), we would use it improperly.

Isaiah taught the same lesson many years before: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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” (Isaiah 55:8-9). God has graciously revealed enough that we know He has a wonderful plan, but the details are known by Him alone. They are under His “own power,” or authority. Certainly He knows the future, but more than that, He controls it.

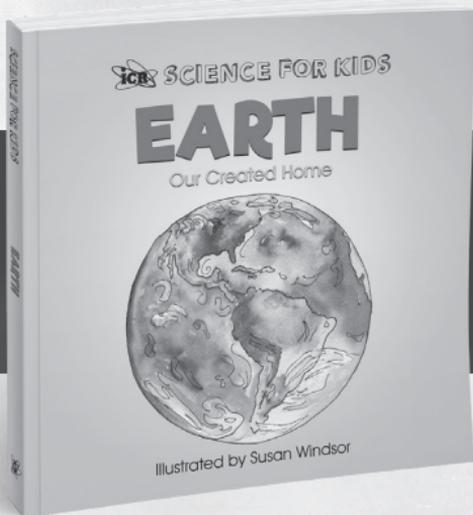
And why not? He created time (Genesis 1:1); surely He can exercise authority over it. Surely the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Revelation 22:13) can control the destinies of individuals and nations. “Power” to work out His good pleasure rests solely with “the only wise God our Saviour . . . now and ever” (Jude 1:25).

Even though this “power” is His alone, His promise to the disciples that “ye shall receive power [a different word than that in verse 7, here meaning strength]” (Acts 1:8) has been fulfilled in the person of the Holy Spirit. We have what we need to be “witnesses” of that which we know of Him to “the uttermost part of the earth.” JDM

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Wednesday, January 1

Creation and the New Year

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”
(Genesis 1:1)*

It is appropriate for Christians to begin the New Year by referring back to the beginning of the very first year. The first verse of God’s Word is also its most important verse, since it is the foundation on which everything else is built. Even God’s great work of salvation is irrelevant and futile without His prior work of creation, for only the Creator of all things could ever become the Savior of all things.

If a person really believes Genesis 1:1, he or she should have no difficulty believing anything else in the Bible. The very first object of saving faith (Hebrews 10:39) is the fact of special creation by the word of God (Hebrews 11:3).

The verse is comprehensive and scientific, viewing space (“the heaven”) and matter (“the earth”) as functioning in a framework of time (“in the beginning”). This space/matter/time “continuum” (as scientists call it) has not existed eternally, nor is it still being created, both of which heresies are standard beliefs of all forms of evolutionary pantheism (including most of the world’s religions and philosophies, ancient or modern). It was created—and even completed in the past.

This foundation of all foundations is, clearly, the only sure foundation upon which one should build a life, or an organization, or anything. A firm renewal of one’s commitment to special creation, as literally recorded by divine revelation in the inerrant Word of God, is thus the proper way to begin a new year, or a new home, or a new career, or a new family, or any phase of a Christian life. This is the time to confess and forsake all doubts and trust God’s Word! In the beginning of the first year, God created all things. At the beginning of this year, we should resolve to believe and obey all things in His Word. HMM

Thursday, January 2

Hardness of Heart

“Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.” (Mark 16:14)

Apparently many people—even Christians—are afflicted with “spiritual atherosclerosis” (hardening of the heart), for there are some 40 references in the Bible to this malady. The first was in reference to Egypt’s unbelieving Pharaoh. Concerning him, God told Moses: “I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go” (Exodus 4:21).

But when the children of Israel did escape Pharaoh’s persecutions, they also contracted this debilitating attitude: “Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work” (Psalm 95:8-9).

Even the very disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ were rebuked by Him for their hardness of heart. In spite of the Old Testament prophecies, and in spite of His own repeated promise that He would rise from the dead, the disciples forsook Him and fled into hiding when He was arrested. Some were even skeptical about the first reports of His resurrection until they saw Him for themselves. His rebuke (see our text) essentially equated their unbelief with “hardness of heart” (Greek *sklerokardia*).

If this heart of hardness and unbelief could attack the 11 disciples, it could surely happen to us, if we allow it. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. . . . But exhort one another daily . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. . . . To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:12-13, 15). Instead, we should heed Christ’s first great commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Matthew 22:37). HMM

Friday, January 3

Christ: Our Redeemer

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” (Job 19:25)

This famous testimony of Job has encouraged many. He knew, as we can know, the reality of his living Redeemer and that the Redeemer would one day reign over His creation as intended.

A redeemer is one who buys back something that has fallen into the hands of the enemy. Originally, the creation was in the proper hands, but Adam sinned, and to a great extent the rebellious world and all its inhabitants fell into bondage at the hands of Satan. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). We became the slaves or “servants of sin” (Romans 6:20).

In order to be freed, a slave must be redeemed. Could we as slaves have bought ourselves back? No, we had nothing of worth. Silver and gold would not do it. In fact, nothing short of the blood of a completely innocent sacrifice would suffice to pay the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). Only God the Son, by laying aside aspects of His deity and taking on human flesh, could be that perfect sacrifice. “And he saw that there was no man [capable of redeeming mankind], and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation” (Isaiah 59:16). “In his love and in his pity he redeemed them” (Isaiah 63:9) by His own blood, buying us out of bondage to sin and Satan.

Notice also that this redemption is not just something we hope for; it is a fact! He has done it, and it will never be undone! “Thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob” (Isaiah 60:16). “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). JDM

Declaring the Unknown God

“As I . . . beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” (Acts 17:23)

The people of Athens were known to be quite religious, worshipping a host of nature gods. They even had set up an altar “to the unknown god.” Paul pounced on this point of contact to declare unto them the God they didn’t know.

He starts by laying the foundation: This God, he claims, is the Creator. He not only “made the world and all things therein” (v. 24), but also is “Lord of heaven and earth.” To cause to exist and then to rule over all of creation, one must be omnipotent. He is much too great to dwell in “temples made with hands.” How ludicrous to think He might need anything, including the worship of men, “seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (v. 25).

This God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” and “hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (v. 26). To know all men, their race, futures, and details of their lives, God must be omniscient, eternal, boundless. He has done this so “that they should seek the Lord” (v. 27). He is not hard to find, for He is “not far from every one of us.” He is the sustainer and source of all life. “In him we live, and move, and have our being; . . . we are also his offspring” (v. 28), totally unlike gods of “gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (v. 29).

But mankind has not known this God. He has been patient, but hates sin and “commandeth all men every where to repent” (v. 30), to gain forgiveness based on the work of “that man whom he hath ordained” (v. 31) as a final sacrifice, or as righteous judge. We can be sure of this because, when the sacrifice was slain, God “raised him from the dead” (v. 31).

Some mocked at the declaration of this mighty God (v. 32); some refused to act; but others believed (v. 34). JDM

Sunday, January 5

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Identifying the Children of God

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (Romans 8:16)

Paul presents a magnificent section in Romans 8 on the resources of the believer. He begins with an affirmation that the Holy Spirit has been tasked to bear witness with our spirit that we are the actual children of God.

No less than 13 times does the phrase “children of God” appear in the New Testament, all written in one way or another to confirm that we “are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

Obviously, this does not apply to all humanity, as some would assert. None other than Jesus Himself stated that the wicked Pharisees and Sadducees were “of your father the devil” (John 8:44). The apostle John made the difference crystal clear: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10).

The children of God are peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and according to the Lord Jesus are “equal unto the angels” because they are “the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). Furthermore, none other than the Creator Himself promises to “gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).

Finally, this is how each of us can know that we are, indeed, the children of God—“that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). HMM III

Monday, January 6

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Verifying Our Relationship with Christ

“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.” (Romans 8:17)

Since it is obvious that we are children of God by the internal ministry of the Holy Spirit to our spirit, then it follows that we are “heirs of God.” Paul states it should be equally obvious that we must be “joint-heirs” with God’s only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus (today’s text).

It is noteworthy that Paul recognizes that one of the sure signs of our relationship with Christ is that “we suffer with him.” Paul warned: “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). That was promised by our Brother Himself when He said, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

But—and here is the great promise—we will “be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17). All our present sufferings pale in comparison to “the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). When our Lord Jesus was delivering the simple Beatitudes as He introduced His magnificent Sermon on the Mount, He ended them with the note that we would be persecuted (Matthew 5:11). However, we were to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:12). HMM III

Tuesday, January 7

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Stimulating Patience for Us

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. . . . Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 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. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” (Romans 8:19, 21-25)

The Holy Spirit has insured us with a witness with our own spirit that, as the children of God, we have certain affirmations about our relationship with the Creator. Clearly, we are to know that our eternity is “reserved in heaven” for us, since the power of none other than the Creator Himself keeps us (1 Peter 1:4-5).

The current “fellowship of his sufferings” that we are privileged to now endure (Philippians 3:10) has absolutely no comparative value to the glory we will share with our Redeemer for eternity. It is a fact that the creature (read “creation”) is an unwilling participant, “groaning” in those sufferings. Yet, because of the Holy Spirit’s witness, we have an “earnest expectation” that assures us “that in nothing [we] shall be ashamed, but that . . . Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

We “are saved by hope,” but we have not seen that hope. Hope seen is not hope. Hope expected is patiently waited for. HMM III

Wednesday, January 8

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Helping Us in Our Weakness

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26)

When the Holy Spirit said He “helpeth our infirmities,” He caused Paul to coin the Greek word *sunantilambanomai* (translated “helpeth”). This very unusual and complicated term is only used twice in Scripture, once in our text and the other when Martha requested that Jesus tell Mary to “help” her wait on guests during a dinner at their home (Luke 10:40). This strong term insists on working together in the same task with the same enthusiasm.

We have *astheneia* (infirmities) and are unable to articulate the correct request. But the Holy Spirit makes *huperentugchano* (intercession) for us; again, a completely unusual word, adding the Greek preposition *huper* (above) to the basic word for “intercession” (used in Romans 8:27, 34; 11:2; Hebrews 7:25).

Then, the Holy Spirit uses *stenagmos* (groaning) that cannot be *alaletos* (stated), using two words unique to this very specific application. What seems to be in view by Paul is that the Holy Spirit makes a “sigh” in a way that only God Himself can understand, because the thought is “too deep” for words.

Whenever we find these words used in other Greek literature, they usually describe a sound that is emitted under either pain or ecstasy. How marvelous! HMM III

Thursday, January 9

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Searching Our Hearts

“And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:27)

One of the great axioms of Scripture is that the triune Godhead is *not* three gods, but rather “the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Having just given the wonderful insight in the previous verse that the Holy Spirit helps our “infirmities” by transmitting our inexpressible prayers directly to God, the Creator now responds that the inseparable and omniscient triune Godhead already knows that the indwelling Holy Spirit communicates for the “saints according to the will of God.”

This is no *new* truth. “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). The Bible abounds with this fact. “The LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9). “Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psalm 44:21). “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20).

It is no wonder that God knows the “mind of the Spirit.” The core ministry of He who is “the Spirit of truth” is that He will “guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).
HMM III

Friday, January 10

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Confirming God's Purpose to Us

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

This power-packed promise is sometimes misquoted, failing to complete the qualifiers that secure the good for which all things work together. Frequently overlooked is the context upon which “all things” are based.

- “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22).
- “All things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22).
- “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21).
- “Every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:12-13).

The “all things” are promised to those who “love God.” That is defined by obedience to His commandments (1 John 5:3). Further, those who love God are “the called.” That definite article demands all that follows in Romans 8:29-30.

And finally, those who love God and who are “the” called are absolutely and consciously aware that God has “made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself. . . . In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Ephesians 1:9, 11-12). HMM III

Saturday, January 11

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God's Fail-Safe Plan—Foreknowledge

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29)

God “foreknew” everyone who would become His children. The Greek term is *proginosko* and is used only four other times in the New Testament. It means precisely as conveyed: “to know ahead of time.”

Paul used it in Acts 26:5 when he told Agrippa that the Jews “knew [him] from the beginning.” In Romans 11:2, Paul spoke of Israel whom God “foreknew,” and Peter insisted that the Lord Jesus was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20).

The common use, however, is illustrated in 2 Peter 3:17, where the twice-born are told: “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.”

The foreknowledge of God is very specific of every living creature. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29).

“(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth), it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger” (Romans 9:11-12).

Is it not affirming to know that “he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4)? HMM III

Sunday, January 12

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God's Fail-Safe Plan—Predestination

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29)

God “predestinates” all whom He has foreknown. The Greek term is *proorizo*. It is similar to *proginosko* (the word used for “foreknowledge”). The basic meaning is “to predetermine, decide beforehand” as opposed to having had knowledge about beforehand.

It is used in five other Scriptures in the New Testament. Acts 4:28 indicates that the crucifixion happened as “thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Paul told the Corinthian church that “the wisdom of God” was “ordained before the world” (1 Corinthians 2:7).

Although God’s omniscience would indicate that He is aware of all “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12), His predestination seems to be more specifically focused. Our text insists that the predestination (decision made ahead of time) is “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Paul also confirms this in his letter to the Ephesian church, where we are told we are predestinated to adoption as children (Ephesians 1:5) and that this adoption is “according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11).

God surely knows the details of our lives (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7), but the “liberty” God has granted to His children on Earth is not predestined (Galatians 5:1, 11). God grants us choice in much (Exodus 17:9; 1 Chronicles 21:10; Proverbs 1:29; Philippians 1:22)—at least as it seems to be so to us.

HMM III

Monday, January 13

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God's Fail-Safe Plan—Calling

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

God has “called” those whom He has predestined. The Greek term is *kaleo*, widely used to convey a specific invitation. Note how the Scriptures use *kaleo* with the formal identification of the name Jesus: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt *call* his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. . . . Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall *call* his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:21, 23).

Just so, Jesus is “called” a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23). The lord in the parable of the vineyard “calls” the laborers (Matthew 20:8), and the king in the parable of the marriage feast “bids” those in the “highways, and as many as you find” to the feast (Matthew 22:9).

This same invitation (a specific and identifiable calling) is issued to believers when we “were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). It should come as no unusual matter, therefore, that because God foreknew how we would respond to His invitation, He could then “pre-order” the end product of that calling, having “saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

May we never tire of the precious knowledge that God’s “calling” was an invitation that had an eternity behind and ahead of it—merely executed in time and space. HMM III

Tuesday, January 14

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God's Fail-Safe Plan—Justification

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

This summary phrase has the “list” of what God does when He causes one of the sinful sons or daughters of Adam to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). We will not ever grasp the fullness of the omnipotent and omniscient Father in heaven who draws us to Him (John 6:44).

We do need reminding from time to time that our justification is based on our calling, which came about because we were “predestinated” to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Those heavenly decisions were made since God had foreknowledge of our “members . . . which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16).

Yes! I am saved to “the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25). I was “rendered righteous” when the great Creator God the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, “being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” the triune Godhead remains “just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:24, 26). HMM III

Wednesday, January 15

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God's Fail-Safe Plan—Glorification

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

God “glorifies” those whom He has justified. The Greek term is *doxazo*, with the core meaning “to make glorious, adorn with luster, clothe with splendor.” It is the same word the Lord Jesus uses of what the heavenly Father will do for His beloved Son. “It is my Father that *honoureth* me; of whom ye say, that he is your God” (John 8:54). It is also the same word the heavenly Father speaks about Himself. Jesus prayed: “Father, *glorify* thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both *glorified* it, and will *glorify* it again” (John 12:28).

Paul addressed the awful sentence that would be executed on those who reject the substitutionary work our Lord accomplished on Calvary. All who reject it are doomed “because that, when they knew God, they *glorified* him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the *glory* of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23).

As for us, we are to share in the glory that our Lord will receive, so that “God in all things may be *glorified* through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11). When all the redeemed stand before the throne in heaven, we will all sing the Song of Moses: “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and *glorify* thy name? for thou only art holy” (Revelation 15:4). HMM III

Thursday, January 16

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: God Himself Is For Us

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

This stunning statement is founded on the unalterable attributes of the triune God (Romans 8:31-35). God Himself secures our salvation; who then can possibly undo His work?

- “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1).
- “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).
- “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me” (Psalm 56:11).

God Himself is the giver and the protector of our salvation.

- “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).
- “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).
- “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

What can possibly undo the work of the omnipotent and omniscient triune Godhead and Creator of all things? It is utter foolishness to yield our eternity to the Savior and then conclude that our feeble efforts could somehow thwart a work of eternity. HMM III

Friday, January 17

The Holy Spirit's Ministry: Absolute Assurance

*“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”
(Romans 8:33-34)*

This is an amazing proof of God’s limitless love for us. God Himself did not hesitate to deliver His own Son as payment for us. God gave the dearest, the most precious, the most excellent Gift He could possibly give—His one and only Son—for you and me!

God will, therefore, “freely give us all things” (Romans 8:32). The Word of God contains much Scripture written on these “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). Not only has the omniscient Creator acted in love toward us, but He did so knowing “our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).

Surely you will remember the gentle record that “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God’s love was given unilaterally toward us. We must be drawn to our Lord’s love by the heavenly Father Himself (John 6:44).

Since the entire process is God’s process from beginning to end, “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” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM III

A Created People

“This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.” (Psalm 102:18)

Only God can create, and whenever this verb (Hebrew *bara*) is used in the Bible, the subject of the verb, either explicitly or implicitly, is *God!* However, certain “progressive creationists” contend that “creation” does not have to be instantaneous but can be a protracted process—some form of evolution. The verse above is used as a proof text for this position, the idea being that the Jewish “people” are being gradually created (“molded”) into a nation that will eventually bring praise to God.

This type of scriptural distortion illustrates the extremes to which theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists will go in order to force long evolutionary ages into Scripture. In the context, the psalmist is not speaking of a long process but a future event. He is speaking of a future time to “have mercy upon Zion,” when “the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come” (v. 13). At that future time, “the LORD . . . shall appear in his glory” (v. 16). Then will come the glorious day “when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD” (v. 22).

It is only then that “the people shall be created” who “shall praise the LORD.” When a person receives the Lord Jesus Christ by faith as his Creator and Savior, he does indeed become “a new [creation]” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the miracle of regeneration is always recognized in Scripture as an instantaneous event accomplished by the Creator in the mind and heart of the believer at the time of conversion. As for the Jews who are alive when the Lord returns, “in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David” (Zechariah 13:1). Multitudes will believe and become, at that time, “new creature[s] in Christ Jesus.” HMM

Sunday, January 19

Thoughts of the Heart

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”
(Genesis 6:5-6)

These two verses, describing the incurable wickedness of the antediluvian world that finally brought on the global Flood, contain the first two of over a thousand occurrences of the word “heart” in the Bible. Note the contrast: man’s heart was evil; God’s heart was grieved.

Both the Hebrew and Greek languages treated the heart as the center of a person’s being, the seat of all feelings and thoughts, and we do the same in English. The writers knew that the heart was a physical organ, with its function of circulating the blood as basic to physical life. Leviticus 17:11, among other Scriptures, notes that “the life of the flesh is in the blood,” but only rarely was the word used thus in Scripture. Nearly always the word is used symbolically in reference to the deep essence of a person’s being. It is also used occasionally to refer to the innermost part of physical objects (e.g., “the heart of the earth,” as in Matthew 12:40).

In this first occurrence, it refers to the “thoughts” of the heart. Somehow, before one thinks with his mind, he thinks with his heart, and these deep, unspoken thoughts will determine the way he reasons with his brain. Jesus confirmed this in Mark 7:21: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts.”

How important it is, then, to maintain a heart that is pure. In fact, in sharp contrast to the first occurrence of “heart” in the Old Testament referring to man’s evil thoughts, the first occurrence in the New Testament is in the gracious promise of Christ: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). HMM

Monday, January 20

God's Work of Providence

“Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.” (Psalm 65:9)

The 65th Psalm speaks especially of God's great work of “providence” as supplementing His primeval work of creation. The latter was completed in the six days of the creation week (Genesis 2:1-3). The work of providence, however, still goes on, perpetually reminding us of God's care for His creatures. “He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

God's providential concern, however, extends not only to men and women. “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle” (Psalm 104:14). “So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. . . . These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season” (vv. 25, 27). “Behold the fowls of the air: . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them” (Matthew 6:26).

Note that He is not *their* heavenly Father, He is *your* heavenly Father—yet He feeds *them*! He is merely their maker and provider; yet a single sparrow “shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29).

He even provides for the inanimate creation, “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). The omnipotent God of creation is thus the ever-sustaining and ever-caring God of providence.

Still, some choose not to believe, even though “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen . . . so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20). HMM

Tuesday, January 21

Joy Is Better than Fun

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16)

People today seem always to be looking for fun or entertainment. “Fun” is never mentioned in the Bible, so it is evidently not considered to be a very significant part of the Christian life. The word “entertain” is used to speak of hospitality, and such activities as “play” and “reveling” only receive condemnation. (Playing is appropriate for children and animals, of course.)

Christians, however, have something far better than worldly fun—they have heavenly joy! This is the unique privilege of the redeemed, and there are many channels through which this joy can be experienced.

First of all, Christian joy comes through the Word. As even Jeremiah (“the weeping prophet!”) could say: “Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart,” as in our text. Then we rejoice in God’s great salvation: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10).

There is great joy also in the privilege of prayer and having our prayers answered: “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). Christian service and witnessing are a source of tremendous joy when their fruits are finally seen. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5-6).

And there is much, much more! “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). After all, we know personally the very Creator of all that is good, “in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). HMM

Wednesday, January 22

We, Being Many

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5)

All too frequently in today’s Christian circles, we place certain individuals and certain gifts on a pedestal, and all too often the resulting pride is devastating. Pride may be the favorite tool of Satan. Pride was the reason Satan rebelled and lost his exalted position (Isaiah 14:13-14). He appealed to Eve’s pride in the garden (Genesis 3:6), similarly tempted Christ in the wilderness (Luke 4:6), and uses it on us today. Be warned! “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6): “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Paul, through the Holy Spirit, chose to introduce his teaching on the use of spiritual gifts and unity of the entire body with a warning against pride, admonishing “every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). His discussion on the many-membered body that follows leaves no room for pride. Nor does the parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

The apostle points out that each Christian forms an equally essential part of the whole. Since we are all equal in God’s eyes, and all mutually dependent upon one another, what room is there for pride? Likewise, Paul points out that each Christian possesses an equally vital connection with Christ. Who are we to tell Christ a part of His body is less valuable than the rest? He is concerned for each one equally. “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). JDM

Thursday, January 23

The Communion of the Saints

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)

The words “fellowship” and “communion” in the King James Version are both translations of the same word (*koinonia*) in the Greek New Testament. The fellowship of which the New Testament speaks is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian life. In the early days, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . 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 2:42, 46).

It wasn’t long before heresies, schisms, and non-Christian practices began to fragment the churches; nevertheless, fellowship is still a vital biblical doctrine toward which all Christians should strive.

Today, with our multiplicity of sects and denominations, the concept of the communion of the saints seems almost an anomaly. Yet there is still a very real and blessed fellowship among Bible-believing Christians of all denominations, and this is one of the great blessings of the Christian life.

True fellowship, of course, must be based on truth in doctrine and practice. As our text indicates, real spiritual fellowship with fellow Christians must be based, first of all, on fellowship with the Father and the Son. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7). Christian fellowship is not, as many seem to think, built on food and fun, but on truth and light. HMM

Friday, January 24

Paul's Growth

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3)

Many times today we look at Paul and wish to be greatly used of God as he was. But Scripture teaches us that use of Paul as a role model requires a proper view of Paul—his humility and his submission to Christ.

Paul didn't start out as a humble servant. In fact, before his conversion, he was quite proud of his pedigree (Philippians 3:4-6). He was the overseer at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). He was fanatical, the haughty persecutor of the early church (8:3). In grace, he was informed of his error by “Jesus whom thou persecutest” (9:5), and soon Paul recognized the worthlessness of his background and human achievement, and counted all these things “but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

Once his view of Christ was proper, Paul's view of himself began to decrease. In AD 56 or so, Paul, who had been set apart for a ministry to the Gentiles “from my mother's womb” (Galatians 1:15), called himself “the least of the apostles, that am not meet [fit] to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

While in prison several years later, Paul wrote to the Gentile churches he had founded, marveling that this ministry was given “unto me, who am less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8). Shortly before he was beheaded in prison for his faith, he testified “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

As Paul grew older, his evaluation of his own worth decreased. As one draws closer and closer to the light, he is able to see more clearly his own unworthiness. JDM

Saturday, January 25

The Indwelling Christ

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

The fact that Jesus Christ is actually in each believer is both a great mystery and rich in glory. In fact, it is our very hope and assurance of glory in the age to come.

How Christ may be both seated at “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3) and yet living in us is surely a mystery, yet it is fully true. He Himself told His disciples: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. . . . He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 14:23; 15:4-5).

The apostle Paul also confirmed this great truth: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). One of his prayers for the Ephesians was “that Christ [might] dwell in [their] hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17).

The mystery as to how this can be is resolved in yet another mystery—that of the triunity of the Godhead. Christ, the Second Person, is present in His people through the Holy Spirit, the Third Person. Christ said: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter. . . . Even the Spirit of truth; . . . for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

In fact, as our text says, His indwelling presence is our very hope of glory, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9).

Thus, where we go, He goes; whatever we say, He hears; even what we think, He knows. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, is our ever-present comforter and guide and counselor. This is, indeed, a glorious mystery! HMM

Sunday, January 26

What Is His Name?

“They shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:13-14)

Moses had been specially trained by God for the task ahead. He had been raised in Pharaoh’s household and had no doubt learned the wisdom of Egypt. Moses was well acquainted with authority, both exercising it and submitting to it. It comes somewhat as a surprise, then, that when told by God that he would be the one to lead his people out of bondage, he both objected to assuming such a leadership role and even questioned God’s authority over the situation.

But when he first realized that he couldn’t talk God out of using him, Moses expressed doubt as to God’s ability to bring this about. He asked God for more proof of His authority over mankind, evidently feeling that merely being “the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3:6) was insufficient authority. He couched his question in a roundabout way, claiming that the unbelief of the people of Israel was such that “they” would want to know, but this was not the case at all. When Moses first explained God’s plan to the “elders of the children of Israel” (4:29), “they bowed their heads and worshipped” (4:31).

God graciously answered Moses with the wonder-filled declaration “I AM THAT I AM.” He is the self-existent One. He is, simply because He is. No one made Him. He made all else that is, including Moses and the Egyptians. This assurance empowered Moses for 40 years and should be enough to empower us. “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:5-6). JDM

Monday, January 27

Haste Makes Waste

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”
(Isaiah 28:16)

This is one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, promising a Savior who would be the sure foundation of the eternal temple of God; yet it was 700 years before the promise was fulfilled. God did not “make haste,” but His promise, nevertheless, was sure. No doubt many believing Jews wondered why it was taking so long, but in the “fulness of the time” (Galatians 4:4), Christ came.

It is so easy to rush ahead of God instead of waiting for His leading. With good intentions and admirable zeal, Christians plan great programs, establish new organizations, promote legislation, and become involved in a thousand-and-one good activities, all in the name of Christ and His kingdom. Such activism is urgent, they believe, because the time is short. Nuclear war is coming; maybe even Christ is coming; and we must hurry.

But the Scripture says: “Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

We must not fail to follow when He really leads through His Word, but all too often undue haste results in confusion and collapse. When our text is quoted by Peter (1 Peter 2:6), the phrase “make haste” is rendered by “be confounded,” or “be ashamed.” It is not honoring to God for Christian projects and activities to “be confounded,” so Christian believers must be careful not to “make haste.” “Wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). HMM

The New Birth

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18)

The term “born again” has come into wide use—too wide and popular, in fact, for many who use it have little comprehension of its meaning. First of all, there can be no real Christian who is not a “born-again Christian.” Jesus said: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Ye must be born again” (John 3:3, 7).

The Creator of the new birth is the Creator of the universe, as the text declares. He begat us as a kind of first fruits of His creatures. The new birth is not a new leaf, or a new morality, but a new creation! “Except a man be born of . . . the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

The miracle is accomplished through faith in Christ, believing the record of His saving work, as revealed by the Scriptures. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

Those who are truly born again will inevitably exhibit the characteristics of a spiritual birth, just as those who are born physically exhibit signs of physical life. As one characteristic of the new birth, “whosoever is born of God doth not commit [i.e., ‘practice’] sin” (1 John 3:9). Another sign is that of true Christian love, for “every one that loveth is born of God” (1 John 4:7). Furthermore, “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

The new birth is not a religious cliché but a miracle generating everlasting life. “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). HMM

Wednesday, January 29

The Names of God

“And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.”
(Genesis 7:16)

Many stirring books have been written on the general subject of the names of God. Most of the names make use of one or two of the three primary names. The first is *Elohim*, meaning “mighty one.” It is a uni-plural name—plural in form but singular in meaning and verb usage, suggesting the uni-plural nature of the triune Godhead, appearing in most English translations as “God.” It most often is used when worldwide events or attributes are discussed, including creation, judgment, sovereignty, transcendence, and salvation. The second is *Jehovah*, meaning “the self-existent one,” which appears as “LORD” in English translations. It stresses God’s holiness, nearness, concern for man (especially Israel), hatred of sin, love of sinners, and His revelatory nature and communication. The third is *Adonai*, a more general term meaning master and used of both men and God. It appears as “Lord” in English Bibles.

For example, the name *Elohim*, the transcendent, uni-plural Creator God, is appropriately used exclusively in Genesis 1:1–2:4, the account of creation from God’s perspective. Throughout the rest of Genesis 2, the account of creation from man’s perspective, the combination name *Jehovah-Elohim* is used. Man was at this point without sin, in full accord with his Creator, and experiencing the fullness of His love and communication. The curse, as related in chapter 3, changed things forever, and in chapter 4, Adam and his offspring, painfully aware that their sin has broken God-established relationships, relate better to *Jehovah*, the Savior. In our text for the day, we see Noah obeying the orders of *Elohim*, the sovereign judge, to enter the Ark, but *Jehovah*, the loving Savior, making them secure. JDM

Thursday, January 30

You All

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.”
(Philippians 1:3-4)

One would suspect from his frequent use of the phrase “you all” that the apostle Paul had come from Alabama or Georgia! But in his writings, “you all” is not a southern idiom but a warm expression of Christian fellowship. His heart was burdened, not just for a few close friends and loved ones (as in most of our own prayers), but for “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

He assured the Philippian church that he was, in every one of his prayers, praying for “you all.” He told them of his confidence in their continued growth in Christ, that it was altogether fitting for him to believe this of “you all,” thankful that “in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace” (Philippians 1:7).

He wrote in a similar vein to the Thessalonians at the start of his (chronologically) first epistle: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (1 Thessalonians 1:2). Paul had a long prayer list.

To the Roman Christians he wrote: “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8). Then he wrote his benediction: “Now the God of peace be with you all” (Romans 15:33). He concluded his message to the Christians at Corinth: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Peter and John used the same expression in their writings, for they also were large of heart and concern. Finally, these are the very last words of the Bible: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21). HMM

Friday, January 31

Written for Our Learning

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

Let no modern Christian ever think that he can ignore the Old Testament and base all his faith and practice on just the 27 books of the New Testament, as vital as they are. Even the apostle Paul, who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else, depended heavily on the Old Testament Scriptures for his exposition of the New Testament doctrines he had received “by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12).

For example, in the longest and most doctrinal of all his epistles—that is, Romans—he actually quoted from the Old Testament no less than 60 times, even though the epistle had been specifically addressed to Gentiles (Romans 11:13).

In his letter to the Gentiles at Corinth, after an extensive discussion of the Old Testament account of the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, he said: “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

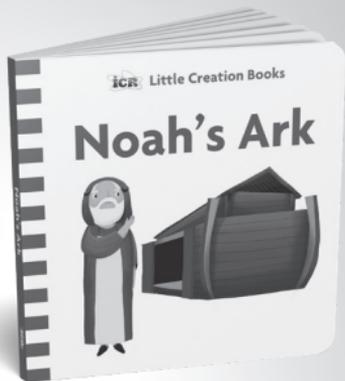
In this passage, the word translated “examples” is the Greek *tipos*, from which we derive our word “types.” Thus, the experiences of the Israelites were actually revealed by God to be “types” of Christ and our relation to Him. Therefore, in addition to the many explicit prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament, many other Scriptures can be profitably expounded as “types” of Christ. Indeed, in all the Old Testament Scriptures, as Christ Himself taught, are “things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). HMM

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Saturday, February 1

The Bright and Morning Star

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” (Revelation 22:16)

The epilogue of Revelation contains many words of comfort to the believer. Our Lord promises, among other things, that “behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me” (v. 12), and “blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (v. 14). Likewise, there are many names for God given, such as “the Lord God of the holy prophets” (v. 6), “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (v. 13), and “the root and the offspring of David” (text). This rehearsal of names and deeds provides comfort, but why is Christ called the “bright and morning star”?

The analogy is to the planet Venus, so often seen shining brightly in the early morning. The sight provides a pledge of the coming day during which the light is brighter and the sight clearer.

Likewise, however beautiful and awe-inspiring our perception is now by the light of our Bright and Morning Star, Jesus Christ, we are promised a more complete view. Although He has “shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6), and although Christ appeared as “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3), soon we shall see Him “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12) and even “be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Our view now constitutes only the beginning of a clearer sight — a guarantee of the glorious day that has no night, when we shall see the King in all His beauty. There will even be no need of the sun, “for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23). JDM

Sunday, February 2

Great Reward

“Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.” (Luke 6:23)

Sometimes great rewards are promised to those who help locate dangerous criminals, or to those who win a lottery, but such pecuniary rewards are trivial compared to those awaiting all the faithful servants of Christ. The “great reward” promised by Christ in our text is specifically for those believers who willingly have endured hatred and ostracism, reproach and slander “for the Son of man’s sake” (v. 22).

Such rewards are distinct from salvation, of course, for *that* reward is given only “to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5-6).

That is, salvation is a free gift, received only through personal faith in Christ and His sacrificial death for our sins. Rewards, on the other hand, are earned by faithful witness and work for Christ. In that day when “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10), many will learn to their dismay that, although they have indeed received everlasting life, they will have very little reward. For “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13)—not the quantity, but its quality and fidelity to God’s Word. Then, “if any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved” (v. 15).

We need to remember that one of the last and thus most significant promises of Christ was: “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). HMM

Monday, February 3

Behold, He Cometh

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” (Revelation 1:7)

This striking verse, which deals with the return of Christ, contains several aspects well worth our study.

First: “Behold, he cometh.” This event is still future, but it is as sure as if it had already taken place. Christ will return.

Second: “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). His coming “with clouds” was also prophesied in Daniel 7:13; Matthew 26:64; Acts 1:11; and elsewhere.

Third: “Every eye shall see him.” Who is included here? Certainly everyone living at the time, both Christian and non-Christian. But also the saved dead and raptured saints will be present (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Can it be that the unsaved dead will likewise “see” Him come? Those who died without Christ should be vitally interested. Either the coming rebellion will defeat Christ and free their spirits from Hades, or they will soon face certain, final judgment.

Fourth, notice the different reactions. His tormentors will be in horrible distress; those who “pierced him” will be in inexpressible anguish as they realize the awful consequences of their actions. Who pierced Him? Certainly Israel, but the collective sins of all men of all ages pierced Him. Some have gained forgiveness and will gladly see Him come; others have refused and will “wail” at His return.

Saints in heaven and on Earth will delight in His coming. To them, it means release from persecution, justice on their persecutors, and a righteous kingdom established. It will mean questions answered, imperfections removed, the curse repealed. Any distress felt for friends and loved ones still living in rejection will be swallowed up in the rightness of the action. JDM

Tuesday, February 4

King of All the Earth

“For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.” (Psalm 47:7)

This stirring psalm of praise, which celebrates the reign of Christ over all the earth, finds its primary fulfillment in Christ’s second coming and full reign over His kingdom. The reader is exhorted to “sing praises unto our King” (v. 6). The reign of Christ certainly gives cause for celebration. His arrival forces the psalmist to proclaim, “O clap your hands, all ye people” (v. 1).

What has happened to make this Kingship such cause for celebration? After all, “by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Colossians 1:16). He belongs on the throne. We should expect to find Him there. However, even though there is a sense in which He reigns today, the sad fact remains that another has usurped rule.

This usurper can be none other than Satan, who not only claims rule of the creation for himself, but who spoiled the original perfection of the creation which now “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). He has encouraged men to accept the mindless concept of evolution, and even denies Christ recognition as Redeemer, as the humanist’s creed “We will save ourselves!” boasts.

But all is not lost! Our text assures us that Christ will reclaim His kingdom: “He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. . . . God reigneth over the heathen” (vv. 3, 8). Christ the Creator, the Redeemer, the Heir, has conquered the enemy and soon will assume His rightful throne—“the throne of his holiness” (v. 8), “greatly exalted” (v. 9). Then we shall join the redeemed of the ages, and “shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (v. 1). JDM

Wednesday, February 5

The Holy City

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” (Revelation 21:2-3)

On the night of the last supper, Jesus made a wonderful promise to His disciples: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). Eventually, at His second coming, those who belong to Him shall be with Him.

That this promise applies to all His disciples (not just the 11 in the upper room) is evident in His prayer right after this conversation: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. . . . Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (John 17:20, 24). When the Lord returns, or when we die as believers, “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

That place where we shall be with Him, which He is still preparing for us, is the Holy City, new Jerusalem; for our text says that “he will dwell with them” there and be their God. The last two chapters of the Bible describe in some detail that beautiful “tabernacle of God” in which we who believe in Christ will all have our Christ-prepared mansions some day.

This magnificent city is not heaven, for John saw it “coming down from God out of heaven.” Right now, therefore, it is in heaven, where the Lord Jesus is, along with the souls of those believers who already have gone “to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). There in the Holy City, “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” with eternal joy (Revelation 22:3). HMM

Thursday, February 6

Made Manifest by the Scriptures

“But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”
(Romans 16:26)

This revelation was written by Paul the apostle as a conclusion to his great doctrinal epistle to the Romans. That which “now is made manifest . . . to all nations” had been “kept secret since the world began” and was essentially the simple truth revealed in “my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Romans 16:25) offering to people from every nation (not just Israel!) the wonderful gift of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

And note that this was being made manifest not just by the preachers and Scriptures of the New Testament, but “by the scriptures of the prophets”—that is, by the *Old Testament Scriptures*. There are some today who think the Old Testament is no longer of significance to Christians. But they are wrong! Remember that Jesus, after His resurrection, speaking to two of His disciples, rebuked them by saying: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: . . . And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25, 27).

Furthermore, the Old Testament abounds with wonderful promises and precepts and examples that are supremely practical and profitable for the Christian life. As Paul said, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). In fact, every Old Testament Scripture is “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). HMM

Friday, February 7

Live Honestly

“Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.” (Hebrews 13:18)

It ought to go without saying that a Christian should live honestly in all things. Apparently it does need saying, however, because the Scriptures contain many such references. For example: “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17). For the sake of one’s Christian testimony before other men, it is vital that utter honesty must characterize his life. Even if men cannot see our little acts of dishonesty, God can, and so even our secret actions must be “providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21). “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest . . . think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

We live in a corrupt and cynical society where genuine honesty is rare. Petty pilfering at the office, cheating on taxes, plagiarizing, loafing at the job, padding expense accounts, cheating on tests, cutting corners on obligations, breaking promises, exaggerating—the list of petty dishonesties is endless, not even to mention the crime and major corruption so prevalent today almost everywhere. In such an environment dominated and conditioned by a humanistic educational system, unsaved persons easily adapt to such questionable practices, for “unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15).

But when Christians do such things (and, unfortunately, they do!), those same people find it scandalous and blaspheme the gospel because of it. How vital it is for Christians to become scrupulously sensitive about even the smallest matters. This should, in fact, be a major item of daily prayer, as in our text for the day. HMM

Saturday, February 8

By Faith

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

This great verse, evidently a definition of faith, appears to be somewhat obtuse, but it can be properly understood. The word “substance” carries the sense of reality, or assurance. The same author uses the word to explain that the Son of God took on human “substance,” consisting of “the express image of his person [or ‘substance’]” (Hebrews 1:3). The word “evidence” is more properly translated “proof.” The passage teaches, then, that faith provides the reality and proof of things that we can’t see directly. They are as sure to us, through faith, as are things we can see directly.

Faith enters into the picture whenever we attempt to understand something outside the realm of empirical observation. This surely includes creation. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3). Creationist faith is certainly reasonable faith, in stark contrast to evolutionist faith, which believes in ordered complexity from disorder without any ordering mechanism or outside intelligence.

Faith is extremely important in God’s economy: “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6) in any area of life. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Likewise, we live by faith: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). Furthermore, “by faith ye stand” (2 Corinthians 1:24) steadfast as a Christian, and “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are to “follow after . . . faith” and “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

Since this list comprises only a sampling of things that must be done in, by, or through faith, it is no wonder that it “is the victory that overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4). JDM

Sunday, February 9

Wages or a Gift

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

This wonderful verse has been used by the Holy Spirit countless times to bring a person to the point of salvation, and rightly so. Seldom did the author of Scripture pack so much into so few words, and seldom is the gospel of salvation more clearly and succinctly presented.

Perhaps the key to this verse and its teaching is the little word *but*, for marvelous contrasts hinge on it. In fact, pointing out the parallel but contrasting statements has proven to be an effective witnessing tool. Let us consider these individual contrasts.

First, *wages versus gift*: Wages are something that must be earned, while a gift cannot be earned; it is free. The wages of employment follow directly from having done the work, just as the wages of sin follow directly from having done the sin. Similarly, the gift of God follows directly from God’s own character. He is a loving, gracious God who freely showers His gifts on those who will accept them.

Second, *sin versus God*, or *sin versus the sinless one*: We might even define sin as the opposite of godliness. Sin is the deed that merits the wages, while God is the being who gives the gift. Sin is a wrong action, attitude, or thought, while God is a person, active and loving. Sin takes; God gives.

Third, *death eternal versus life eternal*: Conscious existence in separation from God versus conscious existence in communion with God. Sin brings death, surely and permanently; God gives eternal life.

This gift of eternal life is not given capriciously, however; it is based on the work of Jesus Christ, the one who Himself collected the wages of our sin. The sinner who accepts God’s gift, through Jesus Christ, can hardly fail to recognize Him as Lord. JDM

Monday, February 10

The Spirits in Prison

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.” (1 Peter 3:18-19)

Just who were these imprisoned spirits to whom Christ preached when He had been “put to death in the flesh”? This has been a controversial verse, so one should not be dogmatic in discussing it. However, the idea that these were souls in purgatory to whom Christ was offering a second chance is clearly wrong, for Hebrews 9:27 declares plainly that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

One point often overlooked is that the word “spirits” can apply to angels as well as human beings. In fact, when it occurs in the plural, as it does here, it refers specifically to angels in at least 26 of its 30 occurrences.

This strongly suggests that these were evil spirits to whom Christ was (literally) “proclaiming” the victory He had won over Satan when He had “once suffered for sins” on the cross (the same word is translated “proclaimed” in Luke 12:3—“proclaimed upon the housetops”). These fallen angels had tried to corrupt all flesh “in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20; see Genesis 6:1-4, 12), and therefore had been cast “down to hell” and “delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

But as Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost: “His soul was not left in hell, . . . This Jesus hath God raised up” and “hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:31-32, 36). Thus, He is now our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom some day soon “every knee should bow, . . . in heaven, and . . . in earth, and . . . under the earth” (Philippians 2:10). HMM

Tuesday, February 11

For Our Justification

“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Romans 4:25)

We rejoice greatly in Christ’s resurrection, knowing that He has promised that “because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). But it is also very important to realize and remember that if He had not been raised from the dead, we would still be lost sinners, separated eternally from God. He was raised, Paul reminds us, “for our justification.”

The immensity of the load of sin that Christ bore with Him on the cross is beyond comprehension. He had to “taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9), for He was the offering “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), were it not for the infinite power, as well as the infinite love, of both the Father and the Son, such an infinite weight of sin would seem impossible to overcome, so Christ would die forever, and we would be lost forever. How could we ever know that we had been forgiven and that He had paid the awful price that would suffice for our salvation? How could we ever be acquitted and declared righteous before God?

That is exactly what the resurrection of Christ assures! “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Romans 5:18). His infinite righteousness has more than balanced the terrible weight of “the sin of the world,” and He was able to take it away (John 1:29). Although the wages of sin must be death, “the free gift is of many offences unto justification” (Romans 5:16).

This gift of total and eternal justification is free because of His love, but even a free gift must be accepted before it can be possessed. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). HMM

Wednesday, February 12

Lessons from the Rich Fool

“But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20)

This sobering verse gives, in a nutshell, God’s evaluation of people whose dominating concern is the accumulation of material possessions. Such a person is, by the Lord’s own testimony, a fool.

But before the man in this parable became a covetous fool, he first became a self-centered clod, interested only in his own desires. In the verses comprising his monologue (Luke 12:17-19), he used the personal pronouns “I” and “my” no less than 11 times, and then even addressed himself using the pronoun “thou” or “thine” twice more.

“My” is the devil’s pronoun. It was Satan who first said “I.” “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . . I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:13-14). Lucifer’s primeval, self-seeking covetousness brought rebellion and sin into the angelic host, and then into the human family. Ever since his fall, he has used this deadly sin of self-centeredness to keep men away from God and to lead them into all kinds of other overpowering sins.

In the case of the rich man, his pampering of self had led him into a life of such greed and covetousness that he was still concerned only with his own personal comfort (“eating and drinking”) right up to the day of his death. He “thought within himself” (Luke 12:17), giving no thought whatever to God’s will or the fact that all his possessions really belonged to God. Multitudes over the ages have been overtaken by this same sin of self-centered covetousness, perhaps never more pervasively than in modern America, even among American Christians. To anyone of such covetous spirit, the day may soon come when the Lord will say: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” HMM

Thursday, February 13

Lifelong Love

“Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.”
(Ecclesiastes 9:9)

The above wise advice was written by King Solomon in his later years after many years of searching for happiness through intellectualism, worldly pleasures, riches, and power, and finding that all of it was mere “vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Solomon had 700 wives, all of whom were “princesses” and thus at least partially for purposes of prestige and politics, but various references in his book of Proverbs suggest that these were more a problem than a help. It is interesting that he had only one son, Rehoboam, plus two daughters, as far as the record goes.

That one son was born a year before he became king, while he was still very young, and Naamah (Rehoboam’s mother) was thus very likely the only wife he really loved (compare 1 Kings 11:42; 14:21), as described so beautifully in his Song of Solomon, which Solomon himself called his “Song of Songs.”

So, it seems poignant and significant that, near the end of his life, Solomon is counseling young men to cultivate that special love “with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity.” (Note also Proverbs 5:18-19.) The Bible very seldom refers to romantic love or marital love (nearly always biblical love is *agape* love), so this rare reference to romantic love (as between a young bride and bridegroom) is especially noteworthy. The admonition to “live joyfully” is from a word usually translated “alive,” so his advice was to keep that young marital love alive and fresh all through life! HMM

Valentine's Day

“Who so findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.” (Proverbs 18:22)

Embedded in many of our customs and holidays are a mixture of pagan and biblical principles. Saint Valentine's Day is no exception. Mystery surrounds who Valentine really was. He was probably a priest martyred in 269 AD at Rome. Among Roman Catholics, he is called the patron saint of affianced couples, beekeepers, epilepsy, fainting, greetings, happy marriages, love, lovers, plague, travelers, and young people. He is one busy (and confused) man!

In the Western world, the emphasis is on human expressions of love and friendship. That is certainly important and, when guided by the biblical principles, a godly ardor worth commemorating.

Here are a few guidelines to remember this season:

- “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9).
- “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).
- “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).
- “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25).
- “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

The objective of every kind of biblical “love” is stated in Paul's prayer for the Philippian church: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9). HMM III

Saturday, February 15

Nests in the Ark

“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.”
(Genesis 6:14)

Details surrounding the story of Noah and the Flood have long caused laymen and theologians alike to stumble and compromise.

None could argue that the wording was not clear. God had commanded Noah to build a wooden boat of huge dimensions and to take on board representatives of land-dwelling, air-breathing animals. The Flood, Scripture reveals, devastated the entire world. But 19th-century theologians, pressed on by Hutton, Lyell, and others proposing the new uniformitarian interpretation of Earth history, became convinced that the scriptural account must be understood in a figurative sense. Their later counterparts repeat this error, promulgating the non-biblical idea that the Flood was only local.

Some have wondered how Noah could gather all the animals, but the Bible simply says they “went in two and two unto Noah into the ark” (7:9), evidently migrating to the location on God’s command.

Their care while on the Ark has also been raised as a problem. But, in all likelihood, the animals entered a state of semi-dormancy, as nearly all of their descendants do today when faced with danger over which they have no control and from which they cannot flee.

Scripture supports this idea in our text: The word “rooms,” which is more properly translated “nests” everywhere else in Scripture, implies a small place to sleep or nestle rather than a large cage. The job of caring for the animals may have been difficult, but our gracious God would have seen to it that it was possible. Questions like these are no cause for compromise. JDM

Scripture Songs

“Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.” (Deuteronomy 31:19)

The book of Psalms was essentially a song book for Old and New Testament Jews, while other songs are scattered throughout Scripture written by a variety of prophets and leaders. Our text tells us that the Lord commanded Moses and Joshua to write aspects of the Law and details of God’s dealings with the nation, as well as His promise of judgment should they disobey—in a song.

This song would serve several functions. First, it would be a memory device. “It shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed” (v. 21). Those who have been around good church music probably know many portions of Scripture set to music, including the grand old hymns of the faith that are frequently conglomerates of many verses around a doctrinal theme. Many of us probably have memorized without trying, and maybe without realizing, many, many Scripture verses. In fact, this may be the very best way to build biblical principles into the lives of our children.

The second function of Moses’ song would be to convict those in disobedience (32:7, 47, etc.). As with the people of Israel, our hearts should be receptive to the teachings contained within the songs that we know.

Unfortunately, Israel seldom listened, even to those songs they had memorized. Thus, the third and evidently primary function of this song was to “testify against them as a witness” (31:21). Much of this song carefully explains their coming apostasy and inevitable judgment. No doubt many remembered this song and its message with tears as they marched into captivity, unable to charge God with unfaithfulness. JDM

Monday, February 17

Daniel the President

“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.” (Daniel 6:1-2)

Not many people realize that the godly prophet Daniel was the first president of the great Medo-Persian-Babylonian empire!

Of course, Daniel’s office did not correlate directly with that of an American president, being appointive rather than elective, and being subject to the emperor, but he nevertheless had great authority. Many translations use the word “governor” instead of “president”—the original language was Aramaic in this case rather than Hebrew.

In any case, Daniel was a God-fearing Hebrew rather than a Persian or Babylonian, and so soon drew the envy and resentment of the other “presidents” and “princes” of the empire. But the only charge they could make against him (there was no hint of scandal or corruption in his character or activities, unlike certain nominally Christian presidents in our own country) was that he was too “religious,” worshipping openly the true God of creation instead of the nature gods of the pagans. “They could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him” (Daniel 6:4).

It is sadly true that such a testimony could never have been given concerning any American president, not even Washington or Lincoln, as great and praiseworthy as they were. Nevertheless, God would remind us “that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). HMM

Lively Hope

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

This verse contains several enlightening words:

Blessed: The word in Greek means to be well spoken of, or praised. *According to*: This does not say that we are blessed according to the extent of His mercy, but rather that He was impelled by His “abundant mercy” to save us.

Begotten: A child is begotten of parents and is of the same nature as its parents. We are begotten into God’s family by the work of Christ. *Again*: There are two possible concepts that are attached to the term “born again”—born “the second time,” or born “from above.” In our text, the term used is literally born “the second time,” but the Father mentioned is God. We are indeed born “the second time,” and that “from above.”

Lively: The word is in the form of a verbal adjective, having all the descriptive power of an adjective and all the active power of a verb. A “lively” hope is more than a hope that is living; it is actively alive. *Hope*: We hope, not in the sense of desiring something to come to pass, but in the confident assurance of something that certainly *shall* come to pass. We may “lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:18-19). We *shall* follow Christ in life everlasting.

Resurrection: It may seem strange to think we are born again “by the resurrection,” but this was the instrument God used to bring about His purpose. In a real sense, Christ was “born again” with a glorified body when He arose from the dead. Since He is “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18), many will follow, “that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). JDM

Wednesday, February 19

The Futile Wrath of Man

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” (Psalm 76:10)

One of the most amazing anomalies in human life is the oft-repeated testimony to God’s grace and power unwittingly rendered by men who would dethrone Him if they could. Biblical examples are numerous.

Joseph’s brothers hated him and sold him into slavery, but “God meant it unto good . . . to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:20). Haman tried to destroy the Jews in the days of Queen Esther; but instead their leader, Mordecai, was elevated to prime minister, and Haman was hanged upon his own gallows. Daniel’s enemies maneuvered him into the lions’ den, but these enemies themselves were later devoured by the animals, and King Darius decreed “that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever” (Daniel 6:26).

In the awful hour of Satan and the powers of darkness, Jesus died on the cross, but “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). “Why did the heathen rage? . . . the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.” Their plans turned to frustration and rage because all they could do was “whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:25-26, 28).

Let men be ever so bitter against God and hateful to His people. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and the more His enemies rage, the more will God be glorified. The wrath of man can never prevail against the Lord. It will either be restrained in due season or will be turned into praise, for “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). HMM

Thursday, February 20

The Title “Christian”

“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1 Peter 4:16)

The word “Christian” occurs only three times in Scripture and seems to have changed in its meaning from first to last. In the first instance, “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). The name merely identified them as followers of Christ with no reproach intended.

The second usage was some years later, by which time the term was evidently well known, even among unbelievers. After Paul had witnessed to him, “Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). A more literal translation that renders the sentence “Do you try in such a short time to make a Christian of me?” indicates an air of superiority or incredulity in Agrippa’s voice. It would take more than a short testimony to make a Christian of him.

As the years went by, the church began to be plagued by persecution. Our text indicates that even the name “Christian” was by then regarded with contempt and reproach. But Peter tells us that there is no shame involved in the name “Christian” or in following Christ. Peter, no doubt, recalled the shame he felt for denying the name of Christ, but he also recalled with thankfulness how that even though the Jewish council had “beaten them” and “commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus” (Acts 5:40), he and the other apostles departed “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (v. 41).

Furthermore, we can “glorify God on this behalf” or “in this name.” This implies more than just praising the name. We can glorify God in what we do—in how we live in that name. We can certainly also bring dishonor to the title “Christian” by our actions. A solemn responsibility is then ours to bring honor and glory to God through our lives. JDM

Friday, February 21

The Rough Places Plain

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.” (Isaiah 40:4)

This is an amazing promise. In the primeval “very good” creation (Genesis 1:31), there was nothing “crooked” or “rough.” Even the hills and mountains were apparently gentle in slope and relatively low; the rugged mountain ranges and volcanic peaks of the present world date from the upheavals and residual catastrophism of the great Flood (see especially Psalm 104:5-9). God had instructed men and women to literally “fill” the earth (Genesis 1:28), which would indicate that no part of the lands was uninhabitable.

That is not the way it is now. Vast inaccessible mountain ranges, deserts, glaciers, swamplands, etc., abound, all basically as a result of sin and God’s curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17).

But in the coming period of God’s judgments on the rebellious world of mankind, there also will be extensive renovational physical changes accompanying them. For example, there will be such “a great earthquake” that “every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (Revelation 6:12, 14). Then a few years later will follow an even greater global earthquake—“so mighty an earthquake, and so great” that “every island fled away, and the mountains were not found” (Revelation 16:18, 20).

“For thus saith the LORD of hosts; . . . I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come” (Haggai 2:6-7). Finally, indeed, “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:4-5). HMM

Saturday, February 22

The Ways and Works of God

“He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.” (Psalm 103:7)

We have a distinct privilege, as believers, to know something of the “acts” of God. Scripture records many instances where He performed even miraculous deeds on behalf of His children.

There is perhaps a greater privilege—that of reflecting on His “ways,” as well. “Ways,” in this context, may be understood as God’s actions and behaviors that reflect His underlying character, resulting in His “acts.” Understanding His “ways” may not always be possible, “for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9), but nevertheless we are admonished to try and even pattern our own ways after His.

The people of Israel who had special knowledge of the “acts” of God were told to “walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you” (Deuteronomy 5:33). But, “oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!” (Psalm 81:13). “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

The New Testament echoes this same teaching: “Your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest” (Hebrews 3:9-11).

Moses, an eyewitness to the many magnificent works of God on behalf of Israel, went beyond and discerned the “ways” of God, as our text teaches. Surely, he chose the better way. JDM

Sunday, February 23

World Without End

“For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” (Isaiah 64:4)

This beautiful Old Testament promise has been appropriated by Paul (1 Corinthians 2:9) and applied to the New Testament believer guided by the indwelling Spirit of God. It looks forward to the ages to come when all those “things which God hath prepared for them that love him” will be given in their fullness.

It is noteworthy that both “the beginning of the world” in our text (Isaiah 64:4) and “world without end” (45:17) are translations of the same Hebrew word, *olam*, which means essentially “indefinitely long ago” or even “eternity.” Thus, the wonderful plan God has prepared for His people, to be implemented and enjoyed in *eternity future*, was formulated by Him in *eternity past*.

We were then chosen “in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4). He had even planned our redemption from sin through His Son, “with the precious blood of Christ, . . . Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:19-20).

We may not, in this life, really comprehend with our minds such marvelous things, but we who “wait for him” can believe them with rejoicing in our hearts, for “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). Thus, we can unite with thankful and understanding hearts in Paul’s great doxology: “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21). HMM

Monday, February 24

We Will Serve the Lord

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

As Joshua’s death approached, he gathered the people around him for a final address and challenge. “Fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served” (v. 14), he exhorted as he reviewed the history of God’s provision for Israel. Indeed, God was worthy of their service in light of all He had done for them. Speaking on behalf of the Lord, Joshua used the divine pronoun “I” no less than 17 times in the previous 11 verses, in a majestic listing of His work on their behalf.

There seems to be a twist of irony in Joshua’s words. Even though the people adamantly maintained, “Therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God” (v. 18), Joshua evidently knew they had already decided not to follow God. He did not offer them a choice between the true God and false gods, he offered them a choice between sets of false gods—those “on the other side of the flood” (i.e., the Euphrates River), or those “in Egypt” (v. 14), or “the gods of the Amorites.” None can compare, obviously, to the Lord.

Joshua’s point is still applicable today. Man must worship; he must have a god. One may recognize his god as an actual “god”—an idol to be openly worshipped. Many times today, however, the god is that of human reason, science, evolution, or humanism, and worship is performed unwittingly. Our duty in witnessing includes helping the unsaved to make a knowledgeable choice, pointing out the consequences of their choice of gods. Such a comparison should drive one to the same decision as Joshua’s: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” JDM

Tuesday, February 25

Lessons from Amos: Walking with God

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3)

Amos was a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (son of Joash), who ruled the northern 10 tribes of Israel from 825 to 784 BC (2 Kings 14:23). Some 100 years earlier, Jeroboam I (son of Nebat) had led a rebellion against the son of Solomon and started the northern nation of Israel (1 Kings 12). In order to keep his people from returning to Jerusalem, Jeroboam I “made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 12:30; 16:26; etc) by developing a “new” religion centered on an image of a golden calf, with idol temples in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28-29).

Those northern tribes never returned to the worship of Jehovah but “sinned against the LORD,” and Israel “feared other gods” (2 Kings 17:7). The list of their sins is long and grievous in God’s sight.

- They “did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD” (2 Kings 17:9).
- Israel set up “images and groves in every high hill” (2 Kings 17:10).
- They “wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger” (2 Kings 17:11).
- They “worshipped all the host of heaven” (2 Kings 17:16).
- They “used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger” (2 Kings 17:17).
- They “feared the LORD, and served their own gods” (2 Kings 17:33).

Amos was commissioned in those dark years to openly confront the nation to “walk” in “agreement” with the God they professed to worship. Hypocrisy is at the core of the judgment and warnings that God recorded for us in the little book of Amos. We must learn the lessons or suffer the same judgment. HMM III

Wednesday, February 26

Lessons from Amos: Seek the Lord

“But seek not Bethel. . . . Seek the LORD, and ye shall live.”
(Amos 5:5-6)

Bethel had a long history with Israel. Abraham camped near Bethel when he first entered the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:8) and “called on the name of the LORD” at Bethel when he returned from Egypt (Genesis 13:3-4). Jacob’s dream of the ladder took place at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-12, 19), and later it was there his name was changed to Israel (Genesis 35:9-15).

Later, however, Bethel became Bethaven, the “House of Idols” (Hosea 4:15), after Jeroboam I established a temple to the golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-33). And much later, Assyria, after the destruction of Israel, left false priests at Bethel to corrupt the land (2 Kings 17:27-34). The *place* became a substitute for the *person* of God.

The danger comes when God becomes fixed to a place or an event where there is more concern for *property* than *people*. The kind of place (one’s denomination) substitutes *theology* for *truth*, or the experience gives more credence to *intuition* than *inspiration*. Worship of place or event supersedes the worship of God. Both substitutes will produce error.

The admonition of Amos is to “seek the LORD” (Amos 5:6). The promise is that if we seek the LORD, we “shall live.” We will not find God in a place but in a person (Acts 4:12). We cannot find God in a campaign but in a commitment (Matthew 6:33). We surely will not find God in promises from men but in power from God (2 Peter 1:4). HMM III

Thursday, February 27

Lessons from Amos: Don't Enter Gilgal

“But [do not] . . . enter into Gilgal . . . for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity.” (Amos 5:5)

Gilgal was the place of new beginnings. Twelve memorial stones from the Jordan were set up at Gilgal after the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 4:3). The nation was circumcised there in preparation for their possession of the land (Joshua 5:5). The Passover was celebrated (Joshua 5:10), and the miraculous manna ceased (Joshua 5:12). The victorious campaign in the hill country of Judea extending to Kadesh-barnea and Gaza was conducted from Gilgal (Joshua 10:15). The great battle at the waters of Merom was conducted from Gilgal (Joshua 10:43; 11:5). Saul was crowned Israel's first king at Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:15).

Yet, the activity at Gilgal began to obscure the Word of God. Saul compromised and sacrificed at Gilgal to try to gain God's blessing. His desire for political favor resulted in direct disobedience to God.

A zeal for “righteous action” without obedience can result in evil. Jephthah's foolish vow and subsequent bad leadership led to a horrible slaughter (Judges 11–12). Micah's selfish desire for a personal priest led to terrible apostasy (Judges 17–18). A Levite's false zeal for revenge led Israel into civil war (Judges 19–21).

When activity substitutes for holiness, the cause starts to justify the activity. Activity then becomes necessary to preserve the cause, and dedication to the activity is equated with loyalty and holiness. In many cases, preservation of a memorable event overrides biblical truth. We don't need “activity” at Gilgal as much as we need “abiding” in Christ. The “branches” need the “vine” (John 15). HMM III

Lessons from Amos: Don't Pass Through Beersheba

“But . . . pass not to Beersheba.” (Amos 5:5)

Beersheba (well of the “sevens”) became a location of some importance in Israel’s early history. Hagar, the Egyptian bond-woman who bore Ishmael, was rescued by God at Beersheba (Genesis 21:14-19). Abraham improved the well at Beersheba and settled there, built a grove, and “called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33). It was at Beersheba that Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-4).

Beersheba figured prominently in the life of Israel. Isaac made a covenant with the Philistines there, repaired the well, and lived at Beersheba for many years (Genesis 26:17-33). Historically, Beersheba is best known for the political oaths ceremoniously confirmed there with the secular nations around Israel.

At Beersheba, truth later became equated with tradition. Substituting the wisdom and traditions of man (Mark 7:3-13) or the world’s logic (Colossians 2:8) for truth can be very dangerous.

- God looks forward not backward. Historical places and events are lessons not laws.
- God wants obedience not activity. Past victories are to be praises not patterns.
- God demands truth not compromise. Successful negotiations are directives not doctrines.

“Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:14-15). HMM III

Saturday, February 29

When He Shall Appear

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” (1 John 2:28)

There are many glorious promises associated with the great promise that Christ Himself shall once again appear in person here on planet Earth. For example, Paul says: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Similarly, the apostle Peter promises: “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4). The writer of Hebrews first reminds us of His former appearance on Earth: “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Then the promise is: “Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (v. 28).

Perhaps the most wonderful promise associated with His second appearing is given through John: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

Therefore, when He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory; we shall receive an unfading crown of glory; we shall be like Him, and without sin unto salvation. These promises even now constitute an incentive for each believer to purify himself even as He is pure.

But there is also the sobering warning in our text associated with the soon-coming time when He shall appear. We should abide in Him (that is, continue in Him, hour after hour), careful that whatever we do, wherever we go, we are in no danger of being ashamed before Him when He shall appear! HMM

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