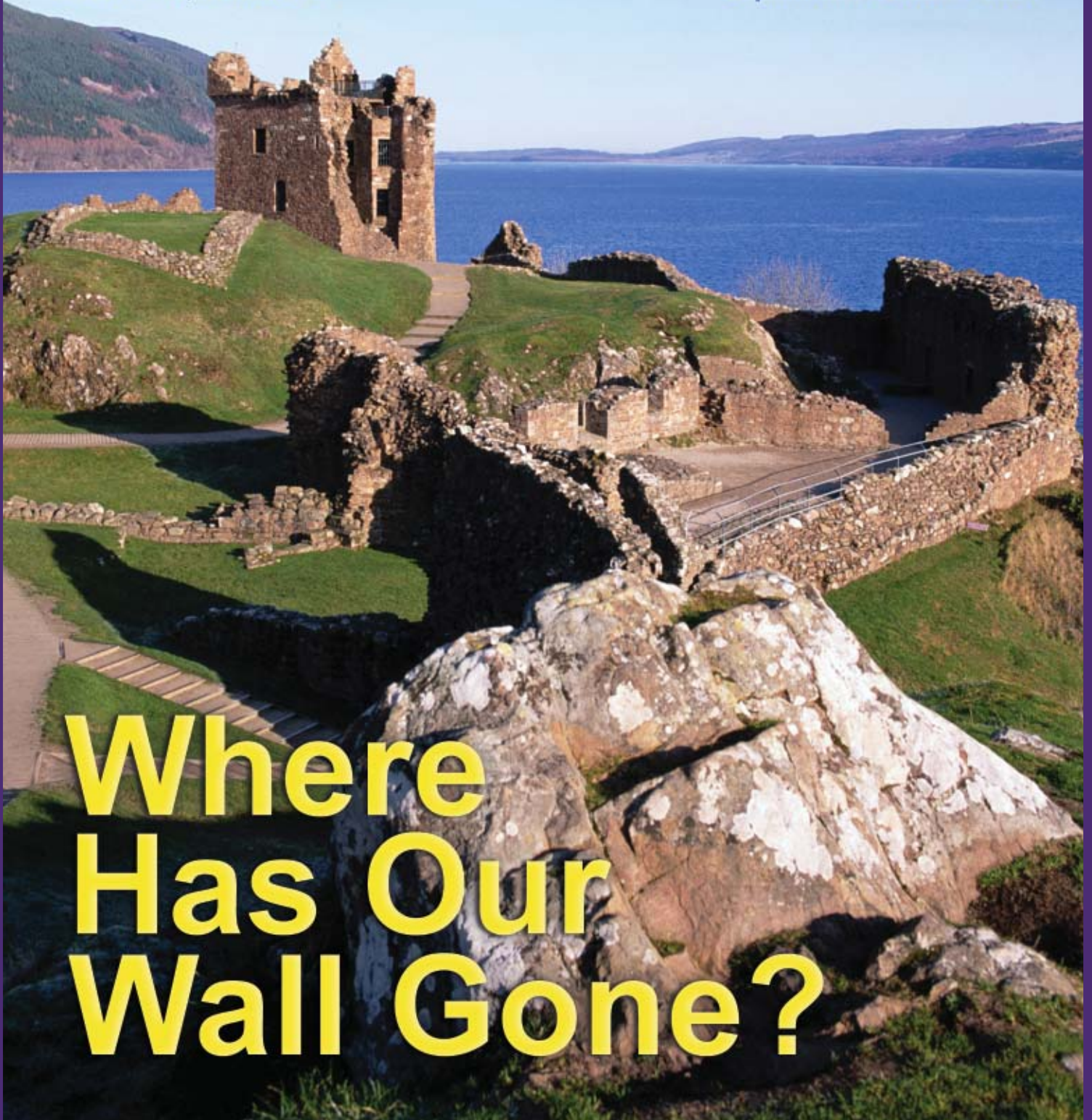


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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**Where
Has Our
Wall Gone?**

EATING: *How Good It Is!*

Part Seven

If a person believes that it does not matter at all what or how much he eats or whether he ever exercises or gets proper amounts of sleep, will he not be subject to the consequences of such a lifestyle? Similarly, if a person believes he should carefully monitor his body's reactions to certain foods, how much he eats, his exercise and sleep patterns—and he carefully stays within what he has discovered works for him—will he not produce constructive results?

If a person does not care at all what he ingests into his mind and so involves himself in seeking out, witnessing and experiencing extreme forms of human behavior, will that not affect his conduct and how he thinks about and judges such activity? On the other hand, if a person diligently seeks out good things for his mind, will it not tend to produce positive thinking patterns?

These questions loosely illustrate major principles given and expounded upon in the Word of God. Paul writes in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” He adds in Romans 2:6, “[God] will render to every man according to his deeds.” Because deeds provide strong evidence of what is in the heart, we could consider this the controlling principle of God's judgment. What more positive proof for judgment exists than the evidence one produces by his conduct? A person can act only according to the quality of what he has fed his mind. Even though a carnally well-fed mind will not eliminate human nature of itself, it still tends to produce better conduct.

Where Has Our Wall Gone?

The basis of the biblical way of life is that obedience to laws, especially God's, produces the good in life. Laws, as used here, are those forces whose actions or reactions occur consistently by nature.

Because laws are consistent, those who exercise their powers can depend upon them to produce exactly what they were intended to produce for good or ill. God has given us free moral agency so that we can choose to produce good in our lives. In Deuteronomy 30:19, God commands us to choose life. Yet, we have no need of the knowledge of laws if we are carelessly going to ignore them, even when such knowledge is readily available to us.

Is not the church's present condition like so many sheep scattered upon a thousand hills? Some wander aimlessly, and others gather in small groups, perhaps with no leadership of a shepherd. Others drift more or less aimlessly from group to group. Others seem intent on shouldering other sheep along a path they have determined is right for them. Others meet in large groups restlessly milling about but making little movement in any direction.

Virtually all of them suffer from some degree of weakness, and some of them may be seriously diseased from a lack of proper attention. Scattering of the sort that grips the church is not the result of strength but of weakness; scattering is a fruit of spiritual disease (Deuteronomy 28:64). Disease stalks and attacks the weak.

Considering the history of the church over the past twenty or thirty years, is God giving us a message of the church's continuing internal state as He sees it through this metaphor? Disease occurs in a person's body when foreign substances invade it and overwhelm its immune system.

Ezra 9:9, which appears in the midst of Ezra's prayer, points to the importance of a wall compared to other gifts of God. “For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.” In ancient times, a wall encircled a city to protect it from invasion. In biblical imagery, it serves as a symbol of a spiritual and moral defensive structure. The physical body's “wall” is its immune system.

While intended to be impenetrable, city walls were of course never completely exempt from penetration and

destruction. Thus, depending upon the context “wall” appears in, it can also be a biblical image of vulnerability as well as security. Enemies sought every means to penetrate walled cities. Some scaled the walls, while others tunneled under them. Some battered through them, and others burned them with fire. Because of this vulnerability, walls can also be an image of misplaced trust. Youths tend to put their trust in their “walls” of physical strength and good health and older people, in their wisdom (Proverbs 20:29). Through the ages, people have risked putting confidence in themselves, money, armies, weapons, cultures and structures rather than God. We need to consider seriously whether our trust is misplaced.

Disease and Malnourishment

It should take little meditation for all to agree with the profound truth of David’s admiring exclamation to God in Psalm 139:14: “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.” We are utterly fantastic creations fashioned from a combination of minerals, water and spirit, and kept alive by chemical and electrical processes that work according to predetermined laws upheld by the word of God’s power (Hebrews 1:3).

We may name a disease like polio, cancer, or pneumonia and feel as though we are its helpless victims, but in reality, because the immune system has become compromised or weakened by a series of stresses, it is unable to defend the body. This is a great simplification of the process, but it is fundamentally correct. For example, at any given time, cancer cells are present in the body, but the immune system produces antibodies to defend it, not allowing the cancer to gain an upper hand.

Even if a brand new invader enters it, the body will work—on its own because God has designed it thus—to produce an entirely new antibody to fight the new invader. This happens even when a person receives a transplanted organ from another. Though the transplanted organ may be healthy, the recipient’s body recognizes it as an unwelcome invader and begins attacking it to destroy and purge it from the body. Doctors thus have to give the recipient anti-rejection medication. This illustrates that, even though we are all generally the same as humans, we are all specifically different because each person’s genetic makeup is unique.

Even under normal circumstances, as with having cancer cells present within us, the immune system can be overwhelmed because it is too weak to fight the invader back sufficiently. The body then becomes diseased, and symptoms of sickness begin to appear. Our basic responsibility in this is to balance our life so that, as much as possible, we protect the body from the stresses that will overwhelm the system.

The stress that frequently does the most damage to the majority of people is *malnourishment*. We feel full because we get plenty of food, but quantity is hardly an issue in Israelitish countries because God has blessed us so

abundantly in fulfilling His promises to Abraham. Often, the generally ignored cause of health problems is the *quality* of what we are supposedly consuming to keep our systems fit. Rarely do very many question the nutritional value of what they are eating.

Let us consider these thoughts in light of the church. The Bible symbolically depicts the church as a body—specifically a female body—in which each member is a cell functioning to support the whole. Even the church body has cancer cells in it at any given time, called “tares,” “heretics,” “false prophets” or the like in various places. They bear some similarities to the real cells, most noteworthy perhaps is that, though unconverted and not truly of the body, they are deceptively religious folk and sometimes quite moral, at least in following most of the commandments. However, they tenaciously hold to their own opinions in defiance of biblical truth and make no effort to change their minds when confronted with these errors. The world contains many of such people, and sometimes they lurk within the fellowship of the church.

As long as the individual “cells” in the body strive to keep themselves well-nourished on the food intended to strengthen them spiritually, the spiritual cancer contained in the tares, heretics and false ministers pose little danger to the well being of the whole body. This does not negate the potential danger they pose. They occasionally manage to influence some—even convince a few to leave the fellowship of the church or put them into such a suspicious, distrusting, cynical or angry attitude that real spiritual growth virtually stops. It is similar to weeds crowding out the fruitful plants in an untended garden or like a cancer sapping the body’s strength by using the body’s nourishment for its own growth.

Come and Freely Eat!

With this preface in mind, it is vital to refresh our understanding of Isaiah 55:1-3:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.

Remember who is saying this and to whom. Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament and our Savior is speaking, not to the world in general as some may think, but to all those who have made the covenant with God.

Under the Old Covenant, this includes Israel and Judah, and under the New Covenant, the church. Verse 1 essentially invites us to come and eat freely, that is, without restriction, because all that He offers is good to eat.

However, the English translation hides a tone of pity. In Hebrew, it pleads for us to take advantage of what God has made readily available. It bears a pleading tone because suffering and discouraged people seem to be doing all but the right things to help them overcome their difficulties. These people are “spinning their wheels” in their preoccupation with Babylon, a type of the world.

By contrast, the tone of verse 2 is mildly chiding as well as urgently warning. It admonishes against spiritual foods that indeed may make one feel “full” but really do not nourish the spiritual life’s genuine needs. Eventually, one feels that something is missing. Our Savior does not argue but asks, “Does all this really satisfy you? Is this the end to which you are called? Is this what life is all about?” He implies that those He has invited will have to choose to change their spiritual diet. Then He urges us to listen carefully. It is almost as if He says, “Listen! Listen!”

He then exhorts us to eat what is good, that is, what He has specifically made for this purpose. In verse 3, His admonishment becomes abundantly clear when He says, “Come to Me [and] hear.” What comes from Christ truly nourishes, satisfies and produces spiritual strength and richness, fortifying the spiritual wall that protects us from falling away.

Previously, we considered John 6:48, 53-58 in detail. Its immediate context concerns the Passover symbolism of flesh and blood, unleavened bread and wine. However, Passover is only the most obvious allusion. We can apply the “eating” principle Jesus uses to a much broader context including “eating” the words of His teaching about His entire way of life.

Let us notice three passages in this regard:

- ◆ Romans 10:17: So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
- ◆ Romans 1:16-17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”
- ◆ Zephaniah 3:1-2: Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD; she has not drawn near to her God.

First, in the spiritual sense, “eating” occurs primarily when one hears and reads. A person ingests messages and concepts into the mind through words, which establish and nourish his pattern of life. Those words, if one permits it, create a faith upon which one bases the way he lives. This faith is almost entirely dependent upon the quality of what is heard and whether a person believes it enough to follow it. These verses reveal only the words of God or Christ, His gospel, His truths, will form the faith that leads to salvation because they will form the correct beliefs and thus the correct way of life. This is the faith of Christ; the

person who has it believes what Christ believes. This is a simple, understandable, true formula.

The verses in Zephaniah show what happens when a person rejects or disbelieves His words. That person comes to great dismay. This does not mean we cannot have words other than God’s in our mind, but the children of God must filter everything through God’s words to test their validity before they allow themselves to believe them firmly enough to make them part of their belief system.

Put another way, there is faith and then there is *the* faith, the faith that brings salvation. This faith arises from believing God’s words. What we believe will determine our conduct and attitudes whether or not we stop to think about those beliefs because what is contained in the heart *will* come out (Matthew 12:34-35). Only God’s words truly produce spiritual strength. In our recent past, “eating” and believing the wrong words set the church up for the scattering that has occurred. For quite a while, worldly things gradually corrupted the spiritual health of God’s children, weakening them through spiritual malnourishment and changing their faith.

Life’s Central Issue

Corinthians 1:10 provides a first-century account of a congregation suffering from this process of ingesting the wrong words: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Division troubled this congregation because the members held dissimilar views on beliefs that are basic to spiritual unity. I Corinthians shows disorder, confusion, argument and offense as symptoms of spiritual weakness.

When the Tkach group began to teach their package of doctrinal changes, many in the church’s fellowship were sitting ducks. In some cases, the spiritual “walls” had been compromised, and confusion, discouragement, accusation and scattering resulted. This fruit was produced because the church—the whole body—had not maintained good spiritual health. Practically, this spiritual disorder within the church occurred primarily because the minds of its individual parts were not being fed the spiritual food that will nourish a person’s relationship with God. Long before we saw the evidence of division with our eyes, a spiritual famine had struck, setting the stage for scattering through malnourishment.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, then-candidate Bill Clinton uttered one of his more memorable lines. He said, in scorn and sarcasm to then-President George Bush, whose campaign was failing because he apparently failed to grasp the central issue in the voter’s mind, “It’s the economy, stupid!” Do we understand that for us now the central issue in life is dressing and keeping our relationship with God established through His revealing of Himself and His purpose? This, combined with the work of Jesus Christ, is our salvation. Please understand this simple picture. When Adam and Eve sinned, they cut

themselves off from God and were put out of the Garden of Eden. They cut themselves off from access to the Holy Spirit, which God intended to be the source of nourishment for an abundant life and fulfilling His purpose.

Hebrews 2:1-3 contains the apostle Paul's earnest appeal to make every effort to hold on to what we have learned:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

It is necessary for us to seek recurrent nourishment from the Word of God, and it is available only through an enduring relationship with the Creator. This spiritual relationship, like any human relationship, is multifaceted. Yet, quite simply, we as individuals and as a body neglected our relationship with God, and the result was division and scattering.

The world's spiritual junk food gradually became the source of our spiritual nourishment. It invaded our attitudes and behaviors, systematically weakening us as it produced the spiritual disease we call Laodiceanism. It deceived us because we outwardly appeared to be in good health. We judged that we were spiritually rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. However, the reality was that a spiritual cancer was eroding our spiritual health. He who looks on the heart saw that we were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. When the test came in the form of false doctrine, He found us lacking in spiritual strength and scattered us.

We can reduce this process to simple principles. Matthew 6:24 reminds us that it is impossible to serve two masters equally well. As time has shown, we were serving the self and the world rather than God. He revealed our spiritual weaknesses, and they have greatly diminished us.

Signs Along the Way

We can learn a great deal from the prophets' descriptions of conditions in Israel in the years just before God scattered them. Jeremiah 7 contains an especially vivid description, describing attitudes and conduct just before Babylon's invasion of Judah. Anybody who cares and diligently searches for the causes of our present scattered condition can easily find many of them.

Verse 4 reveals a casual, self-righteous and presumptuous self-confidence that, since they were fellowshiping with the "church," everything would be fine! Nevertheless, the enemy conquered Judah and took the people into captivity, so membership in the church is no guarantee that judgment will not come on us individually or collectively. Jeremiah expresses the Jews prideful *assumption* of being above

correction, an attitude that has its basis in a confused understanding of God's love and the purity of His holiness.

We must be prepared for God's Kingdom. The attitudes and conduct of these people, expressed here but applied to us now, show that we were not living up to God's expectations. We can learn, though, that fellowshiping with the church without the right attitudes and conduct can easily foster a delusion that all is well, while by God's judgment all clearly is not well! Verses 5-6 illustrate that their judgment of how to apply God's Word in their lives was severely compromised. They definitely did not love their neighbor as themselves; they were unmistakably self-centered. Is there more evidence here that we may have been the same?

Verse 10 expresses the extent this delusion had permeated their lives. By ignoring God's moral and ethical demands, they were in effect telling God that attending services released them from the guilt accrued during the rest of their lives. It was as if God's judgments did not apply to them. They were after all "in the church," right? It reads almost as if they felt they were doing God a favor by showing up! What is more, while there, they heard insipid messages telling them, "Peace, peace. Everything is okay. God's grace covers all."

Though ceremonially going through the motions, they lacked thorough dedication and devotion to God's way in every aspect of life. Beginning in verse 12, God reminds them that they should remember the history of former generations and take warning because they are on track to experience the same calamities. Have we in our time repeated their assumptions that everything is fine when it is not? It seems so, since the Laodicean assumes he is rich and increased with goods and needs nothing. The reality is that he is blind to his true condition and not clothed with God's righteousness.

God has called us into a courtship relationship leading to marriage with Jesus Christ. He makes clear what He expects from us as our part in this relationship. Jesus says to His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). A love relationship requires each to sacrifice thoughtfully for the other. Keeping of the commandments does not "save" us, but it prepares us to live eternally with Him and shows our attitude of submission to Him.

Jeremiah 7:5-9 plainly portrays precious little concern for fellow man. In fact, most of the sins Jeremiah directly mentions are transgressions of the last five commandments. Only one sin, idolatry, focuses directly on the first four commandments. This suggests that a breakdown in human relationships quickly followed the disintegration of the relationship between God and Israel. Similarly, I John 4:20-21 calls upon those who say they love God and claim to be Christians to love the brethren. John goes so far as to say that, if we do not love the brethren, our claim to love God is a lie! This is another area in which many fell short, and it led to division, which continues to the present.

This indicates that self-absorbed people indulged themselves at others' expense. Self-absorption produces strained marital relationships and ultimately divorce, and alienated children as they and their parents go in wildly

different directions. Within congregations, it yields shallow and casual relationships that show little true concern. Its fruit are intolerance, impatience, strong opinions about trivial things, offense, judging and division.

It produces busy people who feel as if they are accomplishing a great deal because they seem to get many things done. The church member may even prosper more than at any other time in his life. However, the busy-ness is spent on things of minor spiritual importance. Meanwhile, the relationship with God, while existent, is allowed to be neglected. That is what Laodiceanism is. People bring it in from the world where God is a figurehead but with whom there is no relationship. It is a deceitful fruit of too much time, attention and energy focused on the wrong things. Laodiceanism is deceitful because the Bible reveals that the person afflicted with it is unaware that he has it. He is blind to it, but God certainly is not because He is being neglected in this relationship. How can He possibly marry someone who will not draw close to Him because of involvement in so many other things?

The Major Key to Good Health

The only way we can truly “eat” Jesus Christ is through a dynamic, growing relationship with Him. We do this by seeking Him through His Word, communicating with Him through prayer and wholeheartedly conforming to *His* way of life, not the world’s. We must partake of the whole process, and what we take in we must chew over, digest, assimilate and use.

A previous article described the American diet as an imbalanced “too much and too little.” We get plenty in terms of quantity, but too frequently, much of what we eat the body never assimilates and uses. It goes in and passes out, often because we do not eat enough truly nourishing foods, like live fruits and vegetables that contain many of the enzymes our bodies need to assimilate food. Perhaps in the course of life we have failed to keep our digestive tracts clean and well supplied with the beneficial bacterial organisms necessary for breaking down the food passing through. If so, we might eat enough food but receive little nourishment from it.

Ignoring the proper functions of the body’s processes is risky business over the course of time. Americans and Canadians are paying the price in poor health. According to the World Health Organization, the United States now ranks *seventeenth* among the nations of the world in terms of mortality rate! In other words, the people of sixteen nations live healthier, longer lives than the richest, most God-blessed nation that has ever existed in mankind’s history!

Frequently, there exists a grave imbalance in our spiritual and physical diets. The spiritual is, of course, far more important. We most certainly cannot afford to neglect our relationship with God in the same careless or ignorant manner we often neglect our bodies. This relationship is not only the major key for good spiritual

health, but it is also the major key to good mental and physical health.

Notice the wonderful promises God gives in Isaiah 58:6-12, to those who are keeping His commands within loving relationships with Him and fellowman:

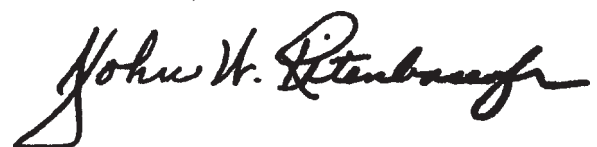
Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, “Here I am.” If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

This is just one example of how important this relationship is to our physical well-being.

It is our responsibility to dress and keep those things given into our care. God admonishes us that whatever our hand finds to do we should do it with all our might (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Death is an enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed in God’s plan (I Corinthians 15:26), and it needs to be fought tooth and toenail. Far too often, a long and painful period of very poor health precedes death because too many of us are giving in by neglecting those things that bring good health and a long abundant life— forfeiting it inch-by-inch, spoonful-by-spoonful. Is our Creator and Judge pleased with the way we are caring for the precious life He has given us?

James 1:17-18 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” Life itself is a great gift because it opens the potential for the ultimate gift of eternal life. Show God you care! Nurture what He has freely given. And neglect the relationship with God at your own risk.

In Christian love,



A Ready Answer

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”
—Mark 9:24

Faith to Face the Fire

It is not a lack of faith when a person does not believe or expect that God will do something. On the surface, this sounds startling and—to be frank—faithless. It seems to contradict everything we have ever learned about faith. However, this misunderstanding of faith may be making some of us feel less faithful than we may really be.

The example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3 will help us see it more clearly. These faithful men believed and knew that God *could* do something even as mi-

raculous as saving them from the fiery furnace. Nothing is impossible with God (Mark 10:27). This is why they say, “Our God whom we serve *is able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:17). They knew God’s power and abilities. However, they were not so bold as to think or believe He would deliver them “at their request,” or according to their personal desires and timing.

While they do say, “He *will* deliver us from your hand, O king” (verse 17), this statement refers primarily to their ultimate spiritual deliverance,

not their physical deliverance from their present distress. How do we know this?

It becomes clear when we read their next words: “*But if not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (verse 18). They did not know that God would save their physical lives from the fires of the furnace. What they believed is that their spiritual, eternal deliverance was assured, thus they could make this courageous and resolute declaration.

Their faith and belief had developed over time because of their experiences with interventions God had performed in their lives. Whether they were healed or blessed or saved from harm, God had demonstrated to them His willingness, power and mercy to intervene in their lives, and had built strong faith in them. Whatever their situation, they absolutely trusted God and His judgment according to His wisdom. Such life experiences—beyond merely reading of God’s past interventions in His Word—are a vivid and compelling means of developing faith.

Thus, when they stood before Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the world at the time, they boldly announced, “Our God can and will deliver us.” They knew that, even if Nebuchadnezzar burned them to ashes, God would ultimately deliver them spiritually. Like other Old Testament saints, they knew of and believed in the God of salvation (Genesis 49:Job 13:16; Psalm 18:2, 46; Isaiah 12:2; Jeremiah 3:23; Micah 7:7; etc.).

Nevertheless, they did not know whether God would actually allow Nebuchadnezzar to throw them into the fiery furnace. They did not know if He would allow them to die the horrible death of burning alive. They did not know at all what God would choose to do. They just absolutely believed that they were in God’s capable, loving and merciful hands.

No Lack of Faith

This not knowing what God will choose to do is not in any way demonstrating a lack

of faith. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar's "mighty men of valor" threw them bound into the midst of the fire, and God chose to save them out of it by an awesome miracle (Daniel 3:19-26). The officials in Nebuchadnezzar's court "saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them" (verse 27).

This kind of physical deliverance is highly unusual. Like these three men, we cannot trust that God will save us from death according to our will or desire. In some cases, God does not intervene and allows His people to die. This should not surprise us, for Hebrews 9:27 states clearly, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." If God decides that it is time for us to die—whatever the means—it is His right as Creator to allow it.

Sometimes suffering and pain and even death has a greater purpose, like the example of the man in John 9:1 who had been born blind. When the disciples ask Jesus who had sinned, the blind man or his parents, Jesus says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (verses 2-3). This man had been born blind, and he and his parents had to suffer for all of those years until Christ came, so that Jesus could heal him to give glory to God. Lazarus had to endure even death to make a witness for God to the people (John 11, particularly verses 4, 11-15, 42).

Usual Deliverance

God does not usually deliver us miraculously out of the situations of life or from the natural consequences of our own choices. He allows us to reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). He does this for good reasons.

Recall the great numbers of people who have had to suffer over the centuries for being Christians. Some were thrown to the lions, beheaded, burned or crucified, yet God did not deliver them. Did they lack faith? Not necessarily. God's "failure" to deliver them

occurred not because they lacked faith. We certainly cannot conclude that God could not deliver them. He chose not to deliver them out of their trial at that time for a reason perhaps only He knew. Maybe they had proven their faithfulness to God by holding fast and not giving in, and He judged that they had grown sufficiently in His image.

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were brought before the king, they acknowledged that they did not know what God would do for them. They just trusted that, since they had done all they could do to affect the situation, whatever happened did so according to God's will and plan for them. They were also sure that, no matter where matters appeared to be heading, they would not compromise their beliefs and faith in God's wisdom, judgment and determination on how their situation would finally turn out. They were living by faith (II Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:20), but their faith was not necessarily the means of their deliverance. Ultimately, God decided that in this situation at that particular time that He would save them to His glory.

Being Disappointed

When we are going through a severe trial, we redouble our efforts to get close to God and seek His will on what we should do. It seems that quite often circumstances turn out far differently than we desire, and we react with disappointment, discouragement or dejection. Being disappointed when things do not go our way has little or nothing to do with a lack of faith, although it may show spiritual immaturity.

Our thoughts are not God's thoughts, and our way is not God's way (Isaiah 55:8). So the fact that God answers prayers only according to His own purpose, in His own time and manner, tells us that things will rarely happen the way we ask for them to happen. His way of looking at what needs to occur is light-years different from what we might perceive needs to happen.

What, then, is faithful, fervent

prayer supposed to avail (James 5:16)? The apostle James says it "avails [profits, benefits] much," but what does it produce? In our human blindness, we often cannot see the fruit of fervent prayer. We want to see our prayers produce what we desire to happen, but this is carnal, shortsighted thinking. What our fervent prayers do is something that God knows will prepare us spiritually for His Kingdom, or otherwise, He would not expect them of us.

In many cases, there is usually no apparent movement or result from our prayers. Sometimes, God suddenly intervenes, helps or alters some aspect of a situation, but for the most part, it seems, God stands back and lets us reap exactly what we have sown. Does He not say in Numbers 32:23, "Be sure your sin will find you out"? Jesus modifies this only slightly in the New Testament: "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops" (Luke 12:2-3).

At first, that God would let us face the consequences of our mistakes may sound cruel and unmerciful, but from an eternal point of view, it has a significant upside. The experiences of this physical life are preparation for our position in the God Family in the next (John 14:1-3). If we see what wrong behavior produces—suffering, pain, destruction, death—we become determined never to do it again, and this determination not to do evil becomes part of our character. We have added a layer or two of godliness to the image of His Son that God is creating in us.

In addition, our prayers in such situations, combined with the results we see from God's answers, should teach us something about God Himself. If we are truly seeking to be more like Him, we will

Continued on page 18

GLOBALISM

Part Four: Israel P

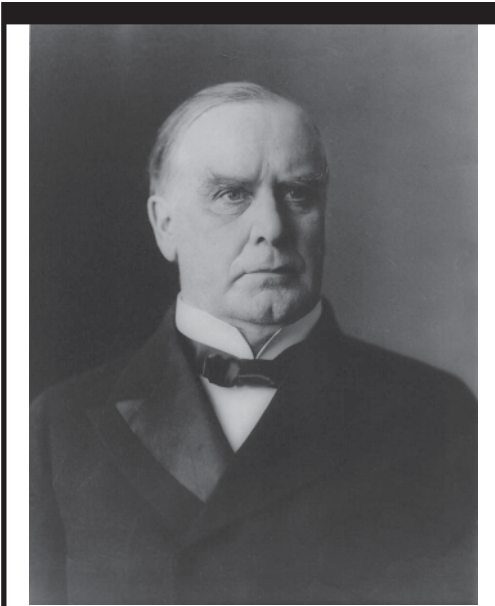
As we saw last month, America's foreign policy in the 19th century was generally isolationist, one of "masterly inactivity," toward foreign powers. And, for good reason! America was in the thick of working out her "Manifest Destiny," busy building a nation. She generally shunned temptations to become involved in international matters, that is, to "overclimb the wall" (Genesis 49:22) by becoming entangled with other nations' affairs. With the coming of the 20th century, a number of powerful forces converged to change America's isolationist stance. Two are noteworthy here.

The Globalist Bandwagon

America, by the last quarter of the 19th century, was becoming nothing short of a stunning industrial powerhouse. Indeed, by about 1890, just one American steel company, the Carnegie group, "produced more steel than Britain, France, and Germany combined."¹ The American powerhouse needed raw materials and laborers, as well as markets. Recognizing this, America found common cause with Britain in promoting a policy of international economic integration, which, we saw earlier, became "the first age of globalization."² After all, Americans could see a good thing when it came their way, and globalization, as led by Britain, seemed a successful strategic tool for producing national

wealth. America, then, jumped on the British "bandwagon" of globalism.

American forays into economic integration just before and after 1900 were essentially complementary to, rather than competitive with, the British drive toward globalization. America's first real global engagement came during the presidency of William McKinley (1897-1901), who



William McKinley (1897-1901)

America's first president to pursue an imperialist foreign policy—to conquer foreign lands and stay there.

conquered the Spanish colony of Cuba, and then rode out this wave of imperialism to seize Puerto Rico, Wake Island, the Philippines and

Hawaii.³ For the first time, an American president led his people into Gentile lands, outside the nation's God-ordained boundaries, with the obvious intent of *staying* there.

It is instructive to compare the leadership of McKinley with that of James K. Polk (1845-1849), arguably the greatest American president. The indefatigable Polk led America into war with Mexico over Texas. American troops occupied the Mexican capital until the proper treaties had been signed, and then withdrew. McKinley, serving about 50 years later, took a completely different course of action. He too invaded Gentile lands, but with the obvious intent of building colonies. McKinley, an out-and-out imperialist, did not just occupy these lands for a short time to stabilize them or to build a regime amicable to American interests. He moved in to stay. (The U.S. is still in some of them.) Working hand-in-glove with the British-led globalism and imperialism of his day, he articulated an open-door policy with China and secured the passage of the Gold Standard Act in 1900.

His successor, Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), implemented an even more assertive internationalist policy, militarily and economically.⁴ Roosevelt came to see Americans as "effete" because they had become "isolated from the struggles of the rest of the world, and so immersed in [their] material prosperity."⁵ How enticing was his argument to a nation now no longer young, but in late adoles-

ushes the Nations

cence, strong enough to carry a big stick, ready to flex its muscles. Roosevelt wrote,

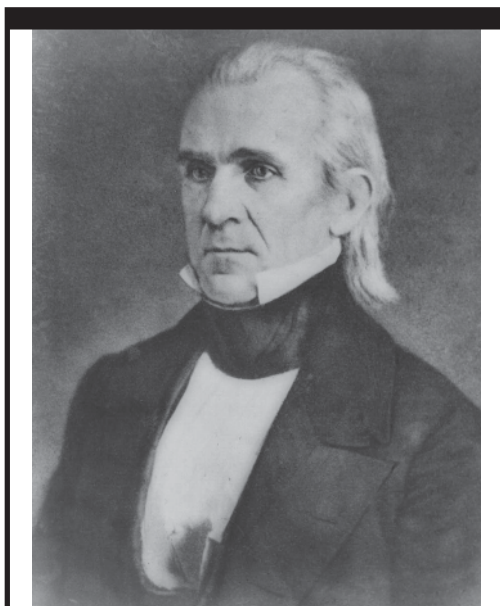
A nation's first duty is within its borders, but it is not thereby absolved from facing its duties in the world as a whole; and if it refuses to do so, it merely forfeits its right to struggle for a place among the people that shape the destiny of mankind.⁶

He believed that it was the moral responsibility of every American citizen to better civilization worldwide. This belief conveniently coincided with his ideas of gunboat diplomacy, "the fact that the gunboat, however puny, symbolized national might and the readiness to use it."⁷ A committed internationalist who easily acceded to the Ephraimite globalism of his day, he worked diligently to build a global economy. By hook—and a whole lot of crook involving France and Colombia—America acquired Panama. In that narrow isthmus, Roosevelt built an ocean-connecting canal, thereby facilitating trade between Orient and Occident. America, in her presumption, did not merely come to "possess the gates of those who hate" her (Genesis 24:60)—she created the gate.

It was a golden age.

The existence of empires and the gold standard had made the world's economies more 'globalized' than they are today. . . .

[T]he interests of the great powers—above all, their economic interests—were so closely linked that war no longer made sense.⁸



James K. Polk (1845-1849)

Fifty years previous to McKinley, Polk conquered Mexico, made a binding treaty and withdrew.

The world looked forward to a continuation of prosperity and peace, the *Pax Britannica*—with America not far behind. The Panama Canal, touted as the towering achievement of the first age of globalization, opened in 1914. It was to make the world one, joining east and west. America was in the middle, primed to enrich herself.

But something else happened in 1914 to change all that.

Vast and Senseless Dying

If the truth be told, it was not America's industrialization—her search for markets, laborers and resources—which led her to forsake isolationism and overclimb her walls. No, it was the dominant event of the 20th century, the First World War, the Great War, that ended the first age of globalism. As with the force of a cannonball, that war propelled America onto the world scene, eventually driving her to abandon whatever isolationist leanings she still possessed.

The gunfire of Sarajevo resounded for four years in Europe. The vast dying shook the continent. To be a French boy anywhere in his teens in 1910 "meant a one in four chance of dying in battle."⁹ More than fifty percent of late-teenaged German boys would die in the hideous war. The German war effort, which seemed to grow each day more vigorous and vicious, unrelentingly inflicted huge losses on French and British forces. When Germany escalated her submarine activity in the Atlantic, seriously undercutting America's commitment to supply the Allied forces, Wilson came to believe "that the business of neutrality is over. The nature of modern war leaves no state untouched."

Thus, an isolationist-minded professor-president led America into the fray in 1917. At its conclusion, this same isolationist appeared mu-

prophecy watch

tated into a thoroughgoing internationalist, the chief proponent of the League of Nations (see sidebar). Through Wilson, America turned thoroughly internationalist. Today, she even considers herself a *European* power.

Europe has flourished [in recent decades] because the United States has essentially become a European power—and Europe did not flourish, as in the first half of this century, when American power was not part of the balance.¹⁰

See how America has overclimbed the wall!

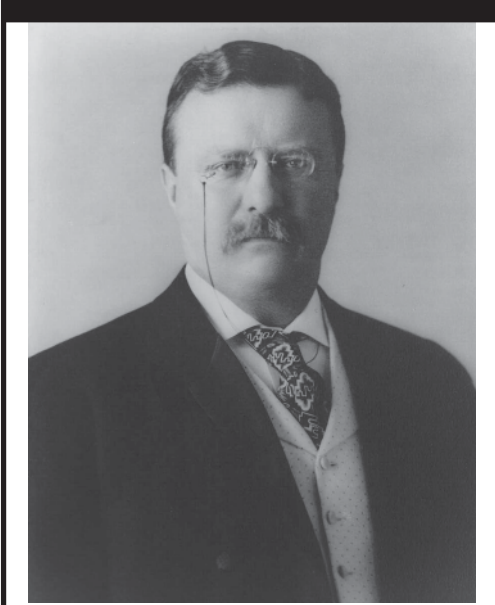
America—the Example

Like Henry Clay and John Calhoun before him, Wilson was an exemplarist. In the King James' rhetoric he knew so well, he stated his belief that America was a divinely-appointed nation, established by God to "in truth show the way," "to show the way to the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty. . . . It was of this that we dreamed at our birth."¹¹ He praised God that Americans were *different* from other folk. In America, the whole world would find "those moral inspirations which lie at the base of all freedom."¹²

Years later, George Kennan, the architect of America's Cold War policy, articulated these same ideas, calling American international responsibilities a God-given responsibility. In an amazing essay published in 1951, "America and the Russian Future," he argues that American victory over her communist enemies will be the result of what we *are*, not of what we *do*. Here, from the pen of an internationalist *par excellence*, is perhaps the best statement of American exemplarism—the idea that America should lead the world by her example:

Any message we may try to bring to others will be effective only if it is in accord with what we are to ourselves, and if this

is something sufficiently impressive to compel the respect and confidence of a world which, despite all its material difficulties, is still more ready to recognize and respect spiritual distinction than material opulence. Our first and main concern must still be to



Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909)

Even more internationalist than McKinley, Roosevelt believed America had a duty to "shape the destiny of mankind."

achieve this state of national character. We need worry less about convincing others that we have done so. In the lives of nations, the really worthwhile things cannot and will not be hidden.¹³

Would that true Christians everywhere understood the nature and power of example as well as Kennan did! Elsewhere, he writes that Americans should feel a

certain gratitude to a Providence, which by providing [them] with this implacable challenge [that is, the Soviet challenge in the Cold War], has made their entire security as a nation dependent on pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral

and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.¹⁴

Calhoun, with his advice that we "keep our lamp burning brightly on this western shore as a light to all nations," and Clay, with his admonition that we maintain a "masterly inactivity" toward Europe, and Roosevelt, speaking softly but carrying a big stick, and Wilson, with his belief that America would "show the way to the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty"—probably none of these would have seen eye-to-eye with the communist containment strategies worked out by Kennan. Nevertheless, at one level, all these American leaders have been painted with the same brush—the idea that America is destined to be an *example* to other nations.

Their differences lie in the question of means, not goals. Some are "exemplarists," while others are "vindicators." Exemplarists, represented by Clay, Calhoun and Kennan, believe in setting an example—and that is all. Vindicators, represented by McKinley, both Roosevelts, Hamilton, Wilson, and all American presidents after Eisenhower, believe that "human nature is too recalcitrant for mere example to have much lasting effect and . . . military might, even if it doesn't necessarily make right, certainly can restrain wrong."¹⁵

Exemplarists to a lesser extent, and vindicators to a greater, have led America to "overclimb the wall," deeply entangling herself in foreign affairs. No longer distant, isolated morally or geographically, America extends herself militarily, economically and culturally into Gentile areas.

America—the Nations' Pusher

The prophet Moses recognized in Joseph this proclivity to overextend. Deuteronomy 33:17 records God's prophecy of Joseph's *world* leadership.

His glory is like a firstborn bull,
 And his horns are like the horns of
 the wild ox;
 Together with them
 He shall push the peoples
 To the ends of the earth.

The “wild ox,” rendered *unicorn* in the King James Version, is an emblem for strength.¹⁶ Moses goes on to tell what Joseph will do with his strength: “push the people, all of them, to the ends of the earth” (*The Amplified Bible*). Here, the force of the word rendered “together” is inclusiveness: Joseph will push *all* of the nations. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon* defines the verb *push* as to “thrust, gore, hence, succeed, attain, make progress, figuratively, wage war with.” So strong are its overtones of force and violence that the Hebrew

word carries the meaning of the verb *butt*.¹⁷ Here are a few biblical examples of the use of “push”:

1. In I Kings 22:11, a false prophet speaks to Ahab, who wants God’s blessing in his war against Syria (in which Ahab subsequently dies). “Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself; and he said, ‘Thus says the LORD: “With these you shall gore [*push*, KJV] the Syrians until they are destroyed.’”” This refers clearly to war-making.
2. Daniel 8:4: “I saw the ram *pushing* westward, northward, and southward, so that no beast could withstand him. . . .” Notice, an animal with horns—as an ox—is doing the pushing.

3. Psalm 44:5: “Through You we will *push* down our enemies; through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us.”

4. Daniel 11:40: “At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack [*push at*, KJV]” the king of the north.

5. Ezekiel 34:21: In context, the verb *push* here seems to refer to economic coercion on the part of false ministers.

In summary, the word *push* connotes the use of force and violence typical of warfare, or the use of economic power to gain one’s ends. Fenton’s seems the most accurate translation of Deuteronomy 33:17. Joseph is

Great Men and God’s Sovereignty

Let no one ever tell you that history turns on the will of a few great men—the so-called “great man” theory of history. *History turns on the will of God*. The story of Woodrow Wilson and the First World War well illustrates that truth.

Woodrow Wilson, a university professor, came to occupy the White House on an essentially isolationist ticket. He was as committed an isolationist as his predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt, was an internationalist. From his first day, Wilson exuded isolationism, even where it was “too late.” He issued a formal apology to Colombia for Roosevelt’s underhanded tactics in acquiring Panama. The last thing on Wilson’s mind was America’s involvement in a European war; his first Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, was an avowed pacifist. History would undoubtedly have remembered Wilson as a quiet, almost self-absorbed isolationist had it not been for the “war to end all wars.”

That war was costing France and England dearly. Reluctantly, Wilson committed the United States to providing materiel support. The Germans responded by inflicting heavy damage on North Atlantic shipping. The carnage on the Continent escalated. In the

end, the President came to recognize the imperative to intervene with personnel.

Wilson, deeply religious, came to believe that the war was “a product of divine agency,” and was convinced that the world would surely look to the United States “for those moral inspirations which lie at the base of all freedom. . . . [A]ll shall know that . . . her flag is the flag not only of America, but of *humanity*.”

That is internationalist rhetoric pure and simple! Wilson came to back up his rhetoric with his proposal that the United States join the League of Nations.

The peaceful intentions of the leader of the world’s most powerful nation could not forestall God’s will from being done in Europe. In the end, Wilson was forced by circumstances to turn from passive non-involvement to active participation in the war. From peace, to war, from isolationism to internationalism—a change totally against his will and adverse to his personality. God, not the occasional “great man,” rules history. Wilson simply did what God wanted done.

(See William Pfaff, “The Question of Hegemony,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001; Charles W. Maynes, “Contending Schools,” *The National Interest*, Spring 2001.)

Like a noble and splendid prince,—
His horns are the horns of a bull:
With them he will conquer nations
And unite the Land into one.

Fenton combines the words “push” and “together” to form the verbs “conquer” and “unite.” To unite is to push together!

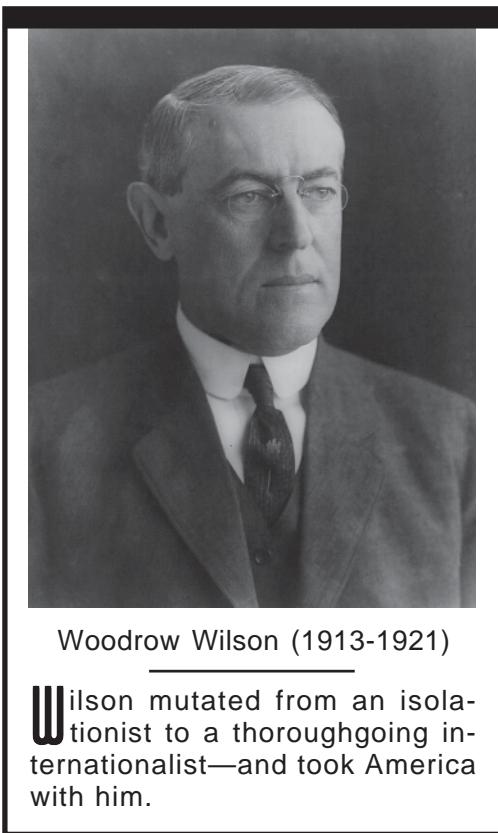
Joseph Pushes Today

But when did Joseph ever do that?

◆ Deuteronomy 33:17 certainly does not refer to the time of Joseph’s conquering Palestine. Neither ancient Israel at large, nor Joseph particularly, sought to unite her enemies! Furthermore, ancient Israel’s efforts were *local*; it pushed the nations off the land—and that not fully, but it certainly did not push all the nations of the earth at that time.

◆ Nor does this passage refer to America’s conquering the various Indian nations in the 19th century and before, uniting the continent. This interpretation rings hollow because America’s suppression of the North American aborigines was *local*, never entailing a world-wide pushing.

It is not in past events, but in current ones, where we find fulfillment of Deuteronomy 33:17. *God is surely referring to Israel’s ambition to build and rule a global village, a world*



Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921)

Wilson mutated from an isolationist to a thoroughgoing internationalist—and took America with him.

government, pushing all the nations of the world together. Today, America works assiduously to build “permanent alliances”—military (e.g., NATO), economic (e.g., the IMF and

the WTO), financial, cultural, educational, scientific and technological (many through the auspices of the United Nations). Americans today speak of NAFTA rather than of “manifest destiny”; not content to limit their marketplace to the lands God fixed for them, they have jumped the wall, striking complex business and economic deals with Gentile nations, all for financial gain.

America today aspires to lead a global village. She uses her almost inestimable economic clout to that end, and enforces her aspirations through extensive, virtually worldwide, military ventures. Is there any better way to describe America’s activities today than by saying she has *overclimbed* the wall, *pushing* peoples together around the globe?

Yes, indeed, God planned that 21st century globalism would be “made in America.” He knew that America, which properly should serve as an example to the world though the “masterly inactivity” of her “national character,” would eventually come to *push* the nations of the world to adopt her system of government (democracy) and her economic structure (capitalism).

Next month, we will look at the teeth Manasseh bares as she pushes the nations together—its warrior culture.

—Charles Whitaker

Endnotes

¹ Jeffrey Madrick, *The End of Affluence: The Causes and Consequences of America’s Economic Dilemma*, Random House, New York.
² G. J. Ikenberry, “Don’t Panic: How Secure Is Globalization’s Future?” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2000, p. 145. Mr. Ikenberry’s remarks appear in a review of Robert Gilpin’s book, *The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. See also, Martin Wolf, “Will the Nation-State Survive Globalization?” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 179.
³ William Pfaff, “The Question of Hegemony,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001, p. 221.
⁴ Roosevelt would never admit it, of course, but he was working hand-in-hand with the British efforts to create a world economy. No anglophile, Roosevelt called Henry James, who left his native America to take up residence in England, a “dirty little snob.”
⁵ Quoted by Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “The Present Danger,” *The National Interest*,

Spring 2000, p. 57.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.
⁷ Philip Gold, “The Essentials of Self-preservation: What Our Military Can’t Live Without,” *Policy Review*, December 2000/January 2001, p. 33.
⁸ William Pfaff, *ibid.*, p. 229. Pfaff is quoting Norman Angell in his 1910 best-seller, *The Great Illusion*.
⁹ Eliot Cohen, “Counting the Dead,” *The National Interest*, Fall 1999. Mr. Eliot’s comments appear in his review of Naill Ferguson’s book, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
¹⁰ Josef Joffe, “Where Germany Has Never Been Before,” *The National Interest*, Summer 1999, p. 49. Mr. Joffe is associate of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University.
¹¹ Quoted by William Pfaff, *ibid.*, p. 227.
¹² Quoted by William Pfaff, *ibid.*, p. 226 (emphasis added).
¹³ Quoted by William Pfaff, *ibid.*, p. 224. Forty-eight years later, Kennan retrenched

for his exemplarist stance. In the *New York Review of Books* he wrote, “[T]his planet is never going to be ruled from any single political center, whatever its military bases.” He continues, it is “unthought-through, vainglorious, and undesirable” for Americans to see themselves “as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world.” Did Kennan come to doubt the power of example because nations are no longer “more ready to recognize and respect spiritual distinction than material opulence?” Or did he come to perceive the moral decadence of America, and thus the impossibility of her leading the nations by the force of her “national character?”
¹⁴ Kagan and Kristol, *ibid.*, p. 57.
¹⁵ H. W. Bands, *What American Owes the World*, 1998.
¹⁶ See Numbers 23:22 and Job 39:9-11 for other uses of the Hebrew word.
¹⁷ In the King James Version, the Hebrew word is translated “gore” in Exodus 21:28, 31.

Living Stones in God's House

Excitement is in the air. A tingling sense of expectation courses through the crowd. The king—King Solomon himself—is about to appear, but that is just a small part of the buzz. Israelites from Dan to Beersheba are gasping in awe at the most beautiful structure they have ever seen: the new Temple of God.

What was once Araunah's rough threshing floor has been transformed into a glorious Temple Mount, complete with Temple glistening in the early sunshine, magnificent courtyards, ornate walls, myriads of priests in their special garb, and countless Levites scurrying to get everything ready. Children gape at the 120,000 sheep and 22,000 bulls that will be sacrificed this day (I Kings 8:63). The bleating and lowing of the animals add to the sounds, excitement and pathos of the day. Not only are thousands of Israelites here, but also numerous royal guests and courtiers from kingdoms far and wide have assembled to honor Israel's God and pay homage to their king.

As a visitor takes in the sights and sounds, he marvels at the large white boulders forming the Temple's walls. He hears men explaining to all within earshot about the tasks they performed in constructing the marvelous edifice. One quarryman, showing his son a huge, polished stone, explains how masons quarried and cut it to exact specifications so it could be inserted perfectly as part of the Temple wall. The little boy wonders how that huge stone got from the quarry site to the Temple Mount. His father smiles and with unmasked pride tells the story of *that* rock, for it was one he personally finished.

This scene may seem a long way off in time, but it is really quite current. We do not often think of ourselves in terms of such a Temple stone, but we are! God, through the apostle Peter, calls us special stones that He is shaping and polishing to be part of an even more glorious Temple, the holy House of God:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, *you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

Solomon's Temple was only a *type* of the true House of

God, the real Temple, the church of God (I Corinthians 3:17; II Corinthians 6:16). Solomon's building was the "Temple of God" because of God's presence, and so it is today. God now lives in *us* by His Holy Spirit, just as His *shekinah* glory hovered above the golden Mercy Seat covering the Ark in the Holy of Holies. If God is active and present in us, we are living stones and part of His spiritual Temple.

Just as the Temple had many types of stones, rocks and boulders making up the foundation, flooring, walls, roof and pillars, so will God's spiritual Temple. The spiritual Temple of God is a work in progress. Undoubtedly, God is excited to see its different elements taking shape. He is building us, as living stones in a living Temple, "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Jesus Himself says that a well-constructed house is built on the rock (Matthew 7:24-25). The foundation of the spiritual Temple has been laid and cannot be changed (I Corinthians 3:11); Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which He builds His church (Matthew 16:18). The eminent Jewish historian Josephus says about the foundation of Solomon's Temple: "Now, therefore, the king laid the foundations of the temple very deep in the ground, and the materials were strong stones, and such as would resist the force of time" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.3.2). Impressive, certainly, but the spiritual Temple's foundations are even deeper!

Now the rest of the Temple stones are being prepared and finished: us, God's called-out ones. It will instruct us to study a few of the types and analogies we can glean from Solomon's Temple, remembering that we are "living stones" that make up the holy new Temple.

The Peaceful Assembly

Have you been to a construction site lately? Stop and listen. It is a noisy place. One will hear the banging of hammers, the rasping of saws, the blaring of radios, and the rumbling of truck engines. It is not a quiet and peaceful environment. A most fascinating aspect of Solomon's Temple is that it rose in a peaceful, quiet environment:

“And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built” (I Kings 6:7).

Josephus adds:

Now the whole structure of the temple was made, with great skill, of polished stones, and those laid together so very harmoniously and smoothly, that there appeared to the spectators no sign of any hammer, or other instrument of architecture, but as if, without any use of them, the entire materials had naturally united themselves together, that the agreement of one part with another seemed rather to have been natural than to have arisen from the force of tools upon them. (*ibid.*)

What a beautiful picture! This is what will happen when God completes *His* Temple! Living stones will come from all around the world, from different “quarries.” God needs gems, stones and boulders of different shapes, sizes, materials and colors to finish His beautiful House. Thus, God is calling people from all personality types, backgrounds, races, and strengths so each can be the precise stone He needs in a specific place in His Temple.

There will be many needs, tasks, jobs, and projects in God’s Kingdom. He knows exactly what “stone” He wants and where He needs it. We are those stones, planned for a specific spot for which God is preparing us. Because of His grace, blessings and gifts, we will be fulfilling a precise role in His holy Temple.

The Assembly Point

The quarry is wherever we are now, where God is cutting, shaping, and polishing us to fit into the masterpiece He is building. We lose sight of this sometimes because we do not see the whole Temple coming together. How could we? We are still in the quarry where all we can see are a few other stones perhaps similar to ourselves. We cannot see the stones from the other quarries: first-century Christians, patriarchs, prophets, kings, true Christians throughout history, or even all the believers alive today. We do not see the whole picture yet—and will not—until all the stones arrive at the Temple Mount.

I Kings 5:17-18 records: “And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple. So Solomon’s builders, Hiram’s builders, and the Gebalites quarried them; and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple.” Much of the rock chosen was probably the hard white limestone found near Jerusalem, but Solomon’s builders found many other beautiful stones, boulders and pillars from all over the known world.

Blocks of stone, or granite, or marble are not hewn out of a rock mass easily. If rocks could speak, they would probably complain bitterly about the harshness of the chisel and saw. We too are required to endure hardships

and setbacks. Suffering is part of the process of quarrying, sizing, polishing and preparing us, the living stones, for our roles in God’s Kingdom.

In I Peter 5:10, Peter prays, “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” The hewing, chipping, sizing, and polishing are all vital parts to making each stone fit the Architect’s blueprints please the Master Builder, God the Father. The church is His House, the “House of God” (I Timothy 3:15).

Even Jesus experienced “the quarry,” as God perfected Him for His dual role as High Priest and King of Kings, by what He suffered:

[Jesus], in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:7-9)

A great deal of sacrifice awaits us once we commit ourselves to the salvation process, which prepares us for our responsibilities in the Temple of God. That process is not all fun! If we do not feel the shaping going on, we will. It must! Many valuable stones lose as much as *sixty percent* of their initial size and mass before they are considered finished as beautiful jewels. We must sacrifice significant parts of our lives, habits, cultures, reasoning, and values to be *transformed* into one of God’s jewels (Malachi 3:17), a gem fit for our Master, which is His will and desire for each of us (Romans 12:1-2).

God Will Finish It

The quarry work equates to the trials we go through during our conversion. Some of it is correction, given lovingly by the Master Artisan. During this process, especially when things seem rough, we can easily feel we will never “make it.” This would be true except for the work of the Master Artisan.

In a parallel analogy, God likens Himself to a Potter and us to clay (Isaiah 29:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6). The clay cannot make itself into a vessel of honor (Romans 9:21), but the Master Potter has the necessary skills. It is no different with stone in the Temple. By itself, a freshly quarried block of marble will never end up like the polished marble masterpiece across the yard.

God is absolutely confident He will have a holy, spiritual Temple in the end, which will make the glory of the former Temple pale in comparison (Haggai 2:8-9). A competent builder knows his project is as good as done because he is confident in his ability to plan, build and finish it. How much more this applies to Almighty God!

God is so sure He will finish this task that He talks about

it as if it is already accomplished! Paul uses past tense verbs: God has “prepared [us] beforehand for glory” (Romans 9:23), and He has already “delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13). Notice the certainty of Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

If we cooperate with the Builder, we need not doubt either. The apostle Paul confidently states, as he awaits execution, that he knows a crown of righteousness awaits him (II Timothy 4:6-8). He reminds us that God will give a crown to all who love Christ’s appearing (verse 8).

The Temple Comes Together

After God has planned, selected, hewn out, polished and finished every piece, stone, pillar, and block, they must be transported to the assembly point. There, the Temple comes together quietly. All the parts of the Temple, from all over the world, are conveyed to one place and assembled in peace and quiet. In Solomon’s day, the Temple rose on a historic spot, Mount Moriah, where Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac (II Chronicles 3:1; Genesis 22:1-2). Traditionally, it is believed to be the peak now covered by the Dome of the Rock.

When and how does this happen for the holy spiritual Temple of God? We are clearly told in I Thessalonians 4:16-19; I Corinthians 15:50-52; Matthew 24:27-31; and Revelation 15:2. The last trump sounds its loud, triumphant peal, the voice of a mighty archangel thundering. Earthquakes, thunder and lightning spread over the earth. Jesus describes His return as lightning flashing across a night sky, visible to every person in the world. He first resurrects those who have died in the faith. Then those still alive are changed into glorious spirit beings faster than one can blink an eye. The saints, now like Christ, see Him as He is. Christ will send His angels to gather the living stones to Him in the air, and upon Him they assemble as God’s Temple. Each one fits in a preordained position representing a specific role.

Our places in the Temple are foreordained, foreknown as surely as the apostles knew Jesus was preparing them to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Jesus, the prophets and apostles form the strong underpinnings on which the Temple derives strength. Some living stones will form the flooring, others will rise as walls, and some will function as supports. A few, the Philadelphians, will be pillars connecting the superstructure to the foundation (Revelation 3:12).

The holy Temple of God—His family and church—assembles so perfectly that Paul uses the expressions “fitly framed” (Ephesians 2:21, KJV) or “joined and knit together” (4:16). Tradition says not even a thin knife blade could be inserted between the stones. When God gives us the position He has planned for us, we will be amazed at how perfectly we fit.

When Solomon’s Temple stones were put together, in many cases, it was the first time those particular stones had ever been in proximity to each other. We may find ourselves working with other spirit members of God’s household from millennia ago, with whom we fit so perfectly that all will be amazed. David says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

The Temple Dedication

Realizing the Temple’s significance, Solomon waited eleven months from the time its construction ended before dedicating it just before the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel would be in Jerusalem (I Kings 7:2). Some commentators surmise this occurred during a jubilee year as well.

How perfect! When Jesus returns with his Bride, who will also be the living Temple of God, He will liberate this world from Satan and sin. It will be the actual fulfillment of the meaning of the Jubilee, when debts are forgiven, captives set free, and everyone receives a new start!

Solomon dedicates the Temple with much dignity, pomp and ceremony (I Kings 8; II Chronicles 5–6). God inspires him to dedicate it with a noble, humble and worshipful prayer (I Kings 8:22-61), followed by a fourteen-day feast accompanied by lavish sacrifices. God shows His pleasure and acceptance by filling His House with a cloud so profound that the priests must leave the building. This signified to all present, including the vast foreign entourage, that the sovereign God was there.

The King will host a marriage supper for His Son and His Bride when the real Temple—the sons and daughters of God—assemble to form the true House of God. Jesus sets the tone for His new order by serving the Bride. Surely, Solomon’s dedication is but a type of what will be the most glorious dedication ever witnessed in the universe, any time, anywhere.

We are handpicked stones, chosen by God the Father Himself; we are on the Builder’s spiritual blueprints. Sometimes the construction is painful, but the result is worth it. It will work out best for us if we cooperate with Him in His work, chipping out what He does not want, shaping and polishing what He does. If we focus on His righteousness, grace, love and strength, we will get through this essential finishing process.

What a glorious new Temple God is constructing! When we take our places in it, our lives will finally make sense, and we will be prepared exactly for our place. What a glorious time that will be!

—Staff

Faith to Face the Fire

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come to understand more fully how He thinks and decides. Again, as we take on the mind of Christ, we further prepare for “real life” in God’s Kingdom. Prayer, then, becomes a tool for bringing our minds in line with God’s mind.

Finally, faithful, fervent prayer increases the compassion and awareness of the one praying. It shows our brotherhood with those who are ill or oppressed or in need, as we go to the One who can truly do something positive about the problem. Striving together in prayer with others for the same purpose brings about a unity with them (Romans 15:30; II Corinthians 1:11)—something we could all use these days.

God knows what He needs to do and what He will do before any of our prayers go up to Him. Usually, we are the ones who must change our minds so that we come in line with His way of thinking about a situation. He does not need someone whom He acknowledges is inferior to tell Him what needs to be done. He certainly hears our prayers, but because He is sovereign and faithful, He answers them as we want only when it accords with His purpose for us. Otherwise, His answer is “No” or “Not now.”

Faith’s Reality

Paul defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). We could put it another way: Faith is believing that God is there, in control, and will do for us whatever is best for us. It is believing that no matter what happens, even if it is or seems to be “evil,” that God allowed it or even initiated it for our ultimate learning and growth. If we truly

believe these things, we can live accordingly.

An interesting exchange occurs in Mark 9:23-24: “Jesus said to [a man with a demon-possessed son], ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” This man had earlier brought his son to Christ’s disciples, who could not heal him. He did not know if this would be another time when his prayer would seem to fall on deaf ears, as had been the case throughout the child’s life. His sense of unbelief came because of witnessing God’s seemingly intermittent intervention and involvement in his and his son’s lives. In a way, it resulted from God’s apparently inconsistent way of dealing with everything in life. We may have perceived God’s approach like this some time in our past.

This man believed, much as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego believed, knowing that God *could* intervene to heal his child, but he did not know whether God *would* do so. Far from demonstrating a lack of faith, it is approaching life realistically. Faith is not foreknowledge of God’s actions, but trust that whatever action God takes is best. In both of these situations, God intervened only after they had shown this confidence in Him. And by casting out the demon, Jesus certainly helped to bolster the father’s faith!

We must recognize that God’s intervention occurs for reasons far more important than because He is a “nice God” who answers prayers. Strictly speaking, God establishes no precedent by intervening to save others. We have no guarantee that He would do the same for us in a similar situation because many other factors could be at work to cause Him not to intervene for us. Frankly, a human being would have to be remarkably godly to be absolutely sure what God would do in any situation.

Not knowing what God will do is a matter of trust and a willing and peaceful submission to His will. We show that we defer to God’s wisdom of the best thing that needs to

happen for us to gain the maximum spiritual benefit.

We can begin to apply this understanding immediately. God has either caused or allowed many of our plans, desires, and actions to derail and fail. Rather than being discouraged about them, we can be confident and at peace that God in His wisdom had a perfect reason for their failure. If we consider them deeply enough, we will probably figure out why and have reason to rejoice in God’s handling of our affairs.

When We Pray

When we pray to God, we must trust and yield to God’s own faithfulness toward us. We have to know without doubt that He *can* deliver us—and ultimately will deliver us spiritually. We must also learn not to be terribly disappointed when He does not intervene in the way we think He should. We have to trust that, if He does deliver us, there is a purpose for it, and if He does not deliver us, there is also a purpose for it. Whether or not God delivers us as we think He should does not necessarily indicate that we lack faith.

God is aware of all of the suffering that goes on in the church, in our families and around the world. He knows every hair on our heads and every sparrow that falls (Matthew 10:29-31). He, however, is working out a purpose, and sometimes our suffering plays a role in fulfilling it. As loyal children, we have to be willing to play it to please and glorify Him.

Often we do not know what our situation is all about, and God is certainly not quick to tell us. For us, it is a matter of believing, just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, that no matter what, we will not compromise our beliefs. Although we may not like what is happening in the moment, we must also be willing to yield to whatever God allows. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were not keen on being thrown into the fire—and did not know if they would survive it—but they trusted and yielded in absolute faith to God.

—Mark DeSomer

BIBLE STUDY:

THE THIRD RESURRECTION

Revelation 20 clearly describes three resurrections. We have previously seen that the first resurrection will take place at Jesus Christ's second coming. It will include only the "just," who will be raised to life and clothed with immortality (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:33). After Christ's Millennial rule, God will resurrect those who in past ages died in sin and ignorance, having never had a chance for salvation, and in many cases having

never heard of Jesus Christ or seen a Bible. Others were spiritually blinded, and God will resurrect them in a second resurrection (Romans 11:7).

Scripture speaks of yet one more resurrection for the group not dealt with in either of the other two. This third resurrection is a resurrection to the second death, for those resurrected will be cast into the Lake of Fire and burned up.



1. Whom does God raise in the third resurrection? Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:29.

COMMENT: The incorrigibly wicked are the last of mankind to be resurrected from their graves—from "the sea" (where they may have perished), from death (without burial), or from *hades* (a grave in the ground). God Himself will sentence these unruly, miserable human beings—hopefully few—and whoever is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

2. Will the wicked realize what they will be missing? Luke 16:19-31; II Peter 3:10; Ecclesiastes 9:5.

COMMENT: In the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, the latter, a heartless person, speaks to Lazarus while being "tormented in this flame." This alludes to the wicked being cremated when God burns up the earth, turning it into the final Gehenna, called elsewhere "the Lake of Fire." The rich man is raised out of his grave at the end of God's plan for humanity on earth. Because the dead know nothing, he does not realize the passage of time, but he certainly realizes that he has failed to receive salvation. He sees "a great gulf fixed" between him and those who are with Abraham in the Kingdom of God. At this point, it is impossible for anyone to change his fate.

3. Will Jesus "answer the knock" of incorrigibly wicked human beings? Luke 13:22-30; Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23.

COMMENT: Many will seek to enter the Kingdom of God but be barred from it because of flagrant sin. Jesus will refuse to answer the knock of unruly sinners who have rejected salvation, though they weep and grind their teeth when they find out they cannot enter God's Kingdom. When the third resurrection arrives, all humanity will have had the opportunity to be saved; everyone's ultimate destiny will have been eternally set. It will be too late for anyone who, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, sins willfully and thereby rejects eternal life. Those who reject God and His way of life must then reap the consequences of that decision—the second death following the third resurrection to judgment.

4. Does God care whether everyone perishes? II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:3-4; Hebrews 10:26-31.

COMMENT: God does not want anyone to perish but desires all to come to repentance. However, to those who refuse His mercy and trample the sacrifice of His Son Jesus

Christ as if it were vile, He is a God of justice and righteous judgment. These, who leave Him with no alternative but to put them to death for eternity, will know what He earnestly desired them to achieve.

5. Does every human being eventually have to choose between God's way of life and Satan's? Genesis 2:15-17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Romans 6:23.

COMMENT: Since God made man with the power of volition, man must choose either His way or Satan's way, either life or death. All humans must die at least once (Hebrews 9:27). From Abel's time until now, even the righteous have suffered the first death, from which God will resurrect them to eternal life. But the second death is final.

6. What will God do after the second death of the wicked? II Peter 3:7-13; Revelation 21:1-5; Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:9, 11, 29.

COMMENT: After describing the destruction of the wicked, the apostle John immediately mentions God creating a new heaven and earth where only righteousness dwells. He then gives a glowing account of the peace, happiness, beauty and glory that will characterize this new earth where the righteous will eternally dwell.

7. What will ultimately happen to the wicked? Daniel 12:2; Malachi 4:1. Where will the righteous be? Daniel 12:3; Malachi 4:2-3; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:34-38.

COMMENT: Daniel and Malachi speak of the wicked who will awake in a resurrection to shame and everlasting contempt, having rejected eternal life, while the righteous will awake to everlasting life as glorified sons of God, living and serving their Creator eternally. In the third and final resurrection, the wicked will be made to see that they have scoffed at God's priceless offer for salvation. As punishment and as an eternal example, they will be annihilated in the second death.

The doctrine of the resurrection is the truth that the God who resurrected Jesus Christ will also raise all the dead to life. For some, that resurrection will be to eternal life. For others, it will be to physical life with an opportunity for eternal life. For a few, it will be a resurrection to the second death. If we obey, serve God the Father and Jesus Christ, and overcome our sins, we have a wonderful future ahead of us: We will inherit all things.