

the church when quarrels arise it will generally be found that the basis of the quarrel is a misunderstanding or selfishness, covetousness, a desire to be chief and greatest. It behooves each of the Lord's people under such circumstances to examine well his own heart, and to see that his own eye is good before he attempts to assist his brother who has the opposite view. Having made sure of his own generosity of heart, and intent and willingness to yield, and to see and admire and approve the good in others, he will then be prepared to reason with others and to help them to also take the proper, broad, generous view of the situation.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory," urges the Apostle—neither in the church nor in the home. Love is the only motive power that should be recognized amongst those who have passed from death unto life, who are new creatures in Christ Jesus. There is generally a peaceful way

of settling all differences, and our Lord himself has set it forth, and we have presented the matter in detail in DAWN, Vol. VI, chap. vi. But, where all fails, rather than allow the spirit of brotherhood to fail and enmity or anger to prevail, it were far better that those who find themselves totally unable to fellowship in love together should seek to maintain fellowship in spirit by a separation, as in the case of Abraham and Lot. Nevertheless while this is to be approved as a final resort rather than to have internal strife, the necessity for such a course would certainly be lamentable—it would certainly imply that some if not all of the company were very immature as respects the new nature, very deficient as respects the powers of a peacemaker, very lacking in the brotherly love which can hide a multitude of faults, and endure much with long-suffering and patience, gentleness, kindness and love.

## HOW READEST THOU?—CAREFULLY?

Dear Brother Russell: I am perplexed by what I have read in the January 1 issue of the TOWER, respecting the bullock sacrificed for the Levites and the goat for the other tribes,—p. 11. Am I right in understanding you to teach that Jesus redeemed the church and the church is to redeem the world? If so how could this be harmonized with these Scriptures: (1) "Jesus Christ . . . tasted death for every man"; (2) "As all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive"; (3) "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"; (4) and that "he gave himself a ransom for all."

We reply: No, dear brother, you have misread and misunderstood the article, considerably. You have never read in any of our articles or books or sermons the statement that the church *redeems* any thing or any body. Quite to the contrary: we have often been accused of making a hobby of the ransom doctrine,—that our Lord Jesus "tasted death for every man," "gave himself a ransom for all." Surely no other writings ever more zealously upheld the *ransom* as the very center of Christian faith.

The trouble, dear brother, is that you have read into our article things which are not in it. This overbrilliance is a fault common to many of us. Do we not see it illustrated in all of our experiences with the Word of God? Which of us has not had his principal difficulty along this line of reading into or out of the Word of God enough to confuse us? We cannot, therefore, chide you for misreading our message.

Reading the article in question more carefully you will perceive that it is not discussing the *Redemption*, but the *Sin-Offering*, which is a different view of the great transaction. Briefly examining the texts you quote we find: (1)

They teach that the death of Christ is the *foundation* upon which the hope of every man's salvation rests. Whatever blessing ultimately shall come to every man must result from the *death of Jesus*, however others may subsequently be associated with him in the work. (2) The grand truth that none can ever have eternal life except by relationship with Jesus in no way hinders the Lord from using the church as his assistant and agent in bringing the world into that blessed state. (3) Truly our Lord is already the propitiation for the church's sins, because he "appeared in the presence of God for us." It is also true that the satisfaction of justice which he effects will ultimately be extended to all mankind at the close of this age and the opening of the Millennium; but this does not hinder our Lord from accepting the church as "members of his body" and sacrificing them as such during this antitypical Atonement Day. (4) Our Lord truly gave himself "a ransom for all" eighteen centuries ago, but evidently he has not yet applied the benefits to any except "the household of faith." And meantime what difference does it make to the world if by the Father's plan our Redeemer reckons to adopt the church as "members of his body" and allows these to participate in the sufferings of Christ in this present time and thus also to share coming glories?

Summing up the matter: We, believers, have no personal standing before God nor share in the sacrifice of the sin-offering. It is only those who are "beheaded," and thus cease to be themselves and are accepted as *members* of the Anointed One—the Christ—only these share the sufferings or the glory of Christ. *Jesus the Head does all the sacrificing*. All of the under priests are represented in the High Priest as his members. They all are associated, but the Head is the recognized representative of all.

## VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER

### CURRENT AFFAIRS IN GERMANY

According to the advices received from the Society's representative in Germany there is a great religious unrest there at the present time. Roman Catholics are stoutly resisting the movement known as "*Los von Rom*"—i. e., "Away from Rome"—and the tendency of our times to individual thinking on the part of its supporters. Its party in the German parliament—the Reichstag—is now very necessary to the government in connection with the passage of government measures, because the Socialist party has become so strong. Under the patronage of the Emperor, Catholics are proclaiming loudly the duty of loyalty to religion and the government, even though not a great while ago they were quite willing to inveigh against that very same government. The cry now is for the necessity of all religious people uniting in opposition to infidelity and revolutionary parties. Protestants, under similar influences, are taking somewhat the same stand, but decline to be brought too closely into union with the Church of Rome. Thus the question of the hour is held to be outward formalistic religion and patriotism to the government. Under this plea, no doubt, Socialists and Revolutionists will be more and more opposed year by year, and no doubt ourselves, and others considered out of line with the majority of "Orthodoxy," will be similarly brought under the ban, and treated as though we were in some way associated with or responsible for the revolutionary conditions and their program.

Unable to secure legislation desired by him Emperor William recently dissolved the German Reichstag (Congress) and ordered a fresh election at which a stout contest was made by the three leading parties, one of which, the Social-Democrat, had been too powerful for the Emperor's purposes. It is claimed that the Emperor appealed to the Pope to influence the Catholic vote away from the Socialist party because they were a menace to both church and state. The election certainly reflects this, for in it the Socialists lost 34 members of the Reichstag. The event was celebrated at Berlin, where noisy crowds saluted the Emperor and subsequently the Crown Prince.

The effect will be to more than ever separate the religious from the Socialists and drive the irreligious to them. Thus we see the cleavage coming along the very lines laid down in prophecy—on the one side "the beast and his image and the kings of the earth and their armies" or supporters, and on the other side the army of anarchy, which unwittingly will as "the Lord's great army" overthrow all present institutions preparatory to the Millennial reign of peace and righteousness. But let us never lose sight of the fact that the "saints," the "elect," have nothing to do with supporting or assisting either side in that awful conflict. It is the Father that shall put all things *under* the control of the Christ. It will be accomplished by the letting go of natural laws, "the loosing of the winds," which will allow human selfishness on both sides to wreck the pres-

ent civilization in a time of trouble such as was not before since there was a nation.

Emperor William at a banquet recently took occasion to emphasize his opposition to all who in any wise think or speak pessimistically, as implying and preaching trouble, —financial, social and religious—as we do. He declares that all pessimists should leave the country, and intimated that only those taking a hopeful view of matters need expect imperial favors. Nevertheless, the newspapers of Germany, religious and secular, are disputing both the accuracy and wisdom of the Emperor's words. They seem to believe that denying the existence of evils will not cure them. They are surely right; the Emperor is surely wrong: nevertheless we may readily imagine how he and others of like mind and political influence, combining with churchianity, Roman and Protestant, will be ready to go great lengths in crying "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," and in harshly treating those who proclaim the message of the Bible respecting "a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation" as being at hand. We are reminded in this connection of the experiences of Jeremiah with the king and princes of Judah—that time and again he was cast into the dungeon for proclaiming the Word of the Lord respecting approaching calamities.

Spiritism is said to be making considerable progress in Germany, too. Books on the spirit land, proclaiming that the dead are not dead—that all when they seem to die pass to a more complete enjoyment of life—are having wide sale. As already pointed out, Spiritism is bound to have a mighty influence in the next few years in deluding the people: everything is surely well prepared in that direction. The views of Christendom, that the dead are alive, have been thoroughly absorbed by the public; and as now doubt is creating individual thought along religious lines, Spiritism steps to the front, claiming to have the only torch to light the gloom beyond, and many are walking in its false light. It is difficult to know in advance how serious its misleadings may yet become—everywhere throughout Christendom. From Germany also comes confirmation of a report current there for a certain kind of "revival" has sprung up in India, attended with peculiar manifestations of an unseen power—apparently a counterfeit of some of the manifestations in the early church following Pentecost—speaking with unknown tongues, not leading, however, toward intelligent knowledge of the Lord and his plan, but toward fanaticism.

#### "TONGUES OF FIRE"

From all part of the world, but especially from the Pacific coast, come reports of what its friends call a fresh Pentecostal blessing—an outpouring of the holy Spirit, etc., and what its opponents call a religious insanity. The movement is amongst so-called "holiness people" of various sects and parties—"missions," as their meetings are generally styled. People who have been seeking and claiming "divine healing" seem to be among the most susceptible. Amongst these are some who give evidence of deep sincerity and a superficial knowledge of God's Word. Though generally swift to speak and slow to hear, they, through indolence or fear, neglect systematic study of the divine message. They seem to come under the head mentioned by the Prophet (Hosea 4:6), "My people perish for lack of knowledge."

Reports of the movement in various directions seemed so absurd that we declined to believe them, supposing that since they were sent out by the secular press the facts must surely be misrepresented. Now, however, the "flame," as it is called, has reached Pittsburg, where at one of the Christian Alliance Missions we have an ocular demonstration of this delusion.

What we see here corresponds well with the general reports from elsewhere. The meetings are "bedlam:" everything is confusion, prayers to God are yelled or groaned or barked,—yelped. Now and then someone "gets the blessing" and falls in a trance-like condition on the floor, to remain rigid, perhaps, for hours. Another begins to talk some sort of gibberish interspersed with English. Another in a different guttural mumbles and then gives an interpretation in English. These are said to have the "unknown tongues" of Pentecost; but we remember that foreigners present did recognize those tongues as *bona fide* and got a gospel message from them.—Acts 2:8.

The people in attendance pay little heed to what is uttered by these "tongues" and their interpretations. Some are simply curious and attend as a free show: others are too engrossed with their desire to have a trance or an "unknown tongue" to do anything else than groan their prayers to God for those "gifts," as evidences of his favor.

Frenzied hugging and kissing and rolling on the floor (reported from elsewhere) are amongst the evidences that these poor people are surely under some spirit influence. And it certainly does not appear to be "the spirit of a sound mind."—2 Tim. 1:7.

It is quite true that there was confusion at Pentecost, caused by so many speaking at once in foreign languages; but nothing in the record implies insanity or fanaticism: nor could we expect either of such sound logicians as the apostolic epistles show them to have been. On the contrary our experiences corroborate the declaration of St. Paul, that the operation of the holy Spirit of God in our hearts and minds has been favorable to the development of greater soundness of mind, by reason of our heed to the Word and its wisdom, which cometh from above. A WATCH TOWER reader in Los Angeles, Cal., writes that a neighbor woman got this so-called gift of tongues, and that a reputable Chinaman hearing her said that he understood her quite well—that she spoke his dialect of Chinese. Pressed for an interpretation he declined, saying that the utterance was the vilest of the vile.

In our judgment the facts justify the conclusion that these "flames" are of an unholy spirit, of Satan: that he is now producing a poor counterfeit for the deception of a class whom he cannot reach through Spiritism, Christian Science, Hypnotic New Thought nor Higher Critic Evolution theories.

It is asked, Why would the Lord permit Satan to delude honest souls? We reply, that he has permitted "doctrines of devils" these many centuries amongst the heathen (1 Tim. 4:1), some of whom doubtless are also sincere. The time for the binding of Satan is not yet—though we believe it is very near. (Rev. 20:2.) Doubtless Satan realizes better than we can how the binding or restraining is coming, and is actively maneuvering to avoid it; while God on the other hand is willing to permit his activity because it can now serve a purpose—a sifting work—which must reach and touch every class and condition of professed Christians everywhere;—to test and prove them. Thus we consider this one of the many delusions of our day. Mark the Apostle's forceful words respecting this day of trial with which this age ends and the next is ushered in. He says: For this cause "God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." Why? "That they [who fall] all might be [thus] condemned"—be manifested as not right, as out of harmony with God—as unfit to be of the "bride" class. But why so? "Because they received not the truth in the love of it," but "had pleasure in untruth."—2 Thess. 2:10, 12.

In other words, the "present truth" has been sent hither and thither throughout the bounds of Christendom that, like as a magnet would attract all the particles of steel within the radius of its influence, the truth might attract all the Israelites indeed, for further schooling and ripening, preparatory to their "change" to kingdom glory. Meantime, the Lord allows Satan to organize various human agencies, those not of his "very elect," that such may fall farther and farther from the truth, until finally none will "stand" except the elect, and they "on the sea of glass mingled with fire." (Rev. 15:2.) All others are to fall more or less, though some will subsequently be rescued from the catastrophe—"saved so as by fire."—1 Cor. 3:15.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST AS AN ESSENTIAL

In the *North American Review* Professor C. A. Briggs, D. D., D. Lit., in an article entitled, "Criticism and Dogma," states as follows:—

"When it is said that the doctrine of the virgin birth is essential, it is meant that it is essential to the system of doctrine and the faith of the Christian church. The church can no more dispense with that doctrine than it can dispense with the incarnation of Christ himself. It is not, however, essential to the faith or Christian life of individuals. The doctrine may for various reasons be so different to them that they cannot honestly accept it. They may content themselves with the doctrine of the incarnation and refuse to accept any doctrine as to its mode. They may even go so far as to deny the virgin birth, and hold to the theory of ordinary generation without accepting the legitimate consequences of that doctrine. Theologians are not always consequential. Men are responsible for what they believe and teach, not for what others think that they ought logically to believe and teach. The church may, and in the present situation and circumstances of Christian Theology, ought to tolerate opinions which it cannot endorse.

"Christian dogma is in a process of reconstruction, owing to the partial adoption by theologians of the principle of development. Science and Philosophy are also in a condition of reconstruction and restatement. Confusion of thought is inevitable under these circumstances. The church, the most stable of all human institutions, can afford to be patient and charitable, and to wait until its scholars have removed the difficulties that in this age envelop Christian dogma. These can only be overcome in the arena of chivalric scholarship, not in ecclesiastical courts ruled by ecclesiastics, who are usually more concerned about the forms of things than about their reality. Christian scholars as a body are not at all dubious as to the virgin birth. It is not at all a question of Biblical criticism, but of Christian dogma. They are generously inclined towards those who at present are either doubtful about it, or even disposed to deny it. Biblical and historical scholars are just as decided in its maintenance as dogmatic theologians. For it is a dogma which is inextricably involved in the christological principle that lies at the basis of Christian dogma and Christian institutions. They cannot possibly recognize that the birth of Christ was by ordinary human generation, for that would be a revival of the Nestorian heresy and be a denial of all the Christian philosophy of the centuries, with all the serious

consequences therein involved. It would turn back the dial of Christianity nearly two thousand years: it would break with historical Christianity and its apostolic foundation, and imperil Christianity itself."

#### NEWS FROM KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Dear Brother:—

You are aware that on January 14th we were visited by a disastrous earthquake which has almost completely demolished the entire city. We are glad to report that no injury has occurred to any of the Lord's people, so far as we have heard, save that one interested friend, who was a constant attendant here, was killed.

A remarkable thing is that many of the heads of business houses were killed, which will cause some delay in business restoration. Hundreds are under medical treatment, woefully mangled. But what makes me sit in wonder continually is that our meeting hall is the only place of religious worship in the city that is standing and in a condition to be used; and it is all brick like the others, save that the two upper rooms which we occupy are of heavy frame set on top of the lower building, making it more dangerous. Our faith has been greatly strengthened by the experience. The Lord be praised!

Yours faithfully,

J. A. BROWNE,—Kingston, Jamaica.

### SHALL WE SING UNITEDLY?

"Many men of many minds," writes the poet; but God's people are striving daily to have "the mind of Christ" and to "all mind the same things." We commend this same course in respect to our hymns. When we meet in One-Day Conventions and General Conventions let us be able to sing unitedly. We now have, prepared at considerable trouble and expense, two hymn books with music: one of these, *Hymns of Dawn*, containing beyond all dispute 333 of the best of all hymns of all denominations, is supplied in cloth

binding, 35 cents, postpaid, about one-fourth the usual price; the other is a choice collection of 54 new hymns. *Zion's Glad Songs*, at 5 cents, postpaid. Are not these enough? Do we know them all so as to sing them well? Each one, of course, has the liberty to buy and to sing as he may please, but is it expedient to distract with too great variety? We incline to think not; and hence keep in stock and supply only the above described.

### HARVEST WORK AMONGST THE BLACKS

Quite recently Present Truth reached our dear Brother Booth, who for some years has been engaged in missionary work in Central Africa amongst the blacks. So greatly impressed was he with the Scriptural presentation of the *DAWN* volumes that he made a long journey to Allegheny to confer with us respecting the possibilities of presenting the harvest message to the Christian converts of Africa, with whom he has been considerably in contact. Brother Booth was the originator, we understand, of the so-called "Industrial Missions" of Central Africa. These established industries amongst the blacks, instructed them in agriculture and other arts of civilization, at the same time bringing the Bible, and the Redeemer and redemption taught therein to the attention of the natives. Several of these missions started by Brother Booth have since passed into the hands of others, and some have come under denominational control.

We informed our dear brother that we, too, were interested in the colored people—yea, in all mankind; but that seeing the way of the Lord more particularly than we once did, we no longer feel that the salvation of the world is a responsibility upon our shoulders, but upon the Lord's, where it belongs; and that as we had come to understand his Word we found therein that he had not neglected his responsibility to his creatures, but had made a full provision through Jesus for all the sons and daughters of Adam, and that in due time under the Millennial kingdom all are to be brought to a knowledge of the truth. We assured him of our sympathy with mission work and with every kind of good work for the reformation and uplifting of all the members of our race, but that our understanding is that the harvest work differs considerably from a sowing work, a planting work. We explained that the harvest time into which we have entered is in our view designed of the Lord for the ripening or perfecting of character amongst those who are his; that from amongst these the elect number may be completed, and that following their glorification they, with the Master, as the kings and priests of the coming age, will promote the knowledge of the Lord and every good work, and restrain Satan and every evil influence, that every creature may come to know the Redeemer—that every knee may bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God.

#### EARNEST CHRISTIAN CONVERTS

It was then that Brother Booth surprised us by telling us that if manifestations of Christian love were to be taken as

an indication of Christian character (to which we agreed) then he could assure us that there were some as true Christians amongst the blacks of Africa as any he had ever found amongst the whites anywhere. He surprised us greatly by narratives of his own experiences amongst this simple people of nature and how much of real kindness he had experienced at their hands. Trusting in the Lord, he went without spear or sword or gun over hundreds of miles amongst savage tribes, some of them cannibals. He found them savage toward their enemies, yet kindly disposed toward those whom they could trust as friends. The white people, however, they did not recognize as friends, and this was his chief difficulty. They threatened his life, and when asked why, they said, "We know you white men: first you come with the little book and talk peaceful words; then you inform others and they come with guns and kill us and take our property and force us to labor in the carrying out of their plans, so that we become slaves. We do not want you; stay in your own country that your God gave you. Let us keep our country and live in happiness as heretofore." Brother Booth was obliged to tell them that he could not answer for his brethren—that he regretted to say that there was considerable truth in their charges; but that as for himself they could see that he brought no gun, no weapon, but merely the little book, and it had a message in it that would make them happy as it had made him happy. "Kill me if you wish to. If God's time has come for me to die I am ready and willing—perhaps this is the place where God intends I shall die. But let me tell you about the little book and what it says." Thus he would get them to listen to him and to listen to the Scriptural story of sin and how it came, of the death of Christ and its value in the sight of God, and how they all could be partakers of the blessings from that sacrifice, and by turning from sin and giving their hearts to the Lord could have divine joy and peace instead of bitterness and anger and strife.

Brother Booth told us that many of the natives are zealous for knowledge, and that some of them have become very earnest preachers of the Word and quite willing to lay down their lives, if the occasion required, in the service of the truth so far as they understand it. He told us that in South Africa quite a number of educated negroes are owners and editors of newspapers, having gotten their education in various colleges. He urged that many of these blacks of South Africa and also of Central Africa should be of just

the right condition of heart and mind to receive the glad message of the Millennial morning and the establishment of the reign of righteousness in the hands of the great King and the glorified church. He says that he himself had felt so depressed by the conditions surrounding him there, and by the thought that all who were not brought to a knowledge and love of the Savior were going to eternal torment—that his mind was greatly distressed, and he felt sure that there was something radically wrong with his message. He had returned from Africa to Scotland in perplexity as to what would be his best course. It was at this time that he came into contact with some of the friends of the truth in Scotland and had the DAWNS put into his hands. He besought us to undertake some missionary work on behalf of the poor blacks, amongst whom he has labored for now fifteen years.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that we fell in line with Brother Booth's proposition, inferring that the Lord had guided him to us, and was now directing us respecting another part of the harvest work. The Society accordingly has for a time undertaken Brother Booth's expenses as its missionary to those peoples with whom he is acquainted. He can speak several of their languages, which others he can reach through interpreters, and some in South Africa can read English. He was quite surprised when we informed him that the WATCH TOWER has a regular list of subscribers in Africa to the number of forty—not very many, it is true, but after all quite a good many, everything considered. Brother Booth started on his mission shortly after the first of the year, and by the time our readers get this he will be at work. It will be some time before he will have anything to report, and then it will require a considerable time to reach us. Meantime we have assured our dear brother of the love and sympathy of the Lord's dear people who are rejoicing in present truth, and bid him God speed, and pray for the harvest work amongst the savage tribes. Who knows but what there are some true grains of ripening wheat in that far-off land, to whom the Lord would send the present harvest message for their further development and perfecting before they can reach the garner.

#### NEARER FIELDS WHITE FOR HARVEST

Already quite a little work is under way amongst the

negroes of Jamaica and Porto Rico, as was exhibited in the report recently published in these columns. But Brother Booth's zeal for the black brethren has had the effect of stimulating our interest in them, and the more we reflect on the subject the more deeply interested do we feel in the harvest work amongst these people right at our doors. Brother Booth emphasized the fact that many colored people have great reverence for God and considerable honesty of mind, and that as a rule they are ready to investigate, especially when the presentation is made by the whites, and when they can see consistency of life in the would-be teacher.

We wish to call the attention of the friends in general to this quarter of the harvest field, with the suggestion that in quite a good many of the little gatherings there is more than a sufficiency of talent for the service of the church as leaders of Berean Studies, etc., and that some might find time and good opportunities for presenting the divine plan of the ages to colored Christians of their vicinity. Would it not be worth while to visit some of their meetings, and in a wise and kindly manner tell them very briefly something about the end of the age, the dawn of the Millennium, and the kingdom that then is to be established in the earth, etc., and to proffer a lecture on the chart of the ages if they desire? We believe that invitations of that kind would be frequently accepted, and doubt not that some amongst the blacks would respond earnestly. Our hopes along this line are supported by the fact that in various parts of our country Berean Bible Study classes have already been started amongst the colored friends. Indeed, of a number of these dear brethren we could surely say that, in rightly dividing the Word and clearly presenting it to others, very few amongst the whites will be found their superiors. We could also say of them that, so far as their knowledge goes, their standard of integrity and morality seems to be equally high with them as with the white brethren. Our suggestion is that the white brethren shall seek to carry the message to the blacks as opportunity may afford. This does not signify that the colored brethren should desist from serving those of their own race and color in their own localities. We will be glad to cooperate according to our judgment of the Lord's will with any, either whites or blacks, who desire to engage in this section of the harvest field.

## TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES

St. Paul's words, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he hath purchased with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20:28), were never more worthy of our attention than now. From our vantage point on Zion's watch tower we see clearly that, while the Truth is progressing grandly in all directions, the "evil day" is upon us, the time of testing those already blest and enlightened. It is not, therefore, merely a question of who shall be blest with the ear to hear the message of present truth, but additionally, "Who shall be able to withstand" in that *evil day*, and having done all to stand the final tests (Eph. 6:13), and be acclaimed—"more than conqueror through him who loved us" and bought us with his precious blood.

We perceive the attack of the adversary, referred to in our caption, in every direction;—the grievous wolves of error and ambition among "your own selves." We must sound the alarm and tell you that "the hour of temptation" is come—the one for which we have been preparing for the past thirty years. With the knowledge granted us let us not slumber at the critical moment; but soberly and prayerfully and faithfully meet the situation.

Let us remember that our *knowledge* means an added responsibility, and that it will avail us *nothing* except as it is combined and active with *love*, which is the bond of perfectness, the fulfilling of the divine law or requirement. How many blessings the Lord has granted us, and opportunities to put on the whole armor of God that we might be able to withstand the very trial now upon us!

Wisely did the Apostle first say, "Take heed to yourselves." That is our first responsibility. We should each first examine our own hearts to see whether we are to any degree moved by jealousies, or ambitions, or any selfish motive. To do this effectively we must not measure ourselves with others, nor yet by our own imperfect standards,

but by the Lord's standard—perfect love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, with *all* thy mind, with *all* thy being, with *all* thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbor [and especially thy brother in the Lord] as thyself." Oh! what brotherly-kindness, what tenderness of word and act, what sympathy of thought for each other's weaknesses, what appreciation of each other's better traits, what long-suffering kindness and patient forbearance in love, what care for each other's welfare, rights and liberties, as for our own, this would imply and produce!

"Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith!" writes the same Apostle. Doctrinal soundness is very important, but not enough; we must also be "in the faith" in the sense of *exercising faith in the Lord*—in all of life's affairs, and especially in all the affairs of his church. If ever we allow *expediency* to swerve us from the Scriptural program in the affairs of the church it manifests that we are not "in the faith" as God designed. For confidence in God and his overruling wisdom and power would never permit expediency to say, "Let us do evil that good may follow"—Let us take an unscriptural course for the best interests of the Lord's cause. The faith dictates that to *obey God* is better than sacrifice, and that he is able to make all things work for good to all who love and serve him.

Dearly Beloved, let us, then, remember that this is our test and now our testing time; and let *love* for the Lord and his brethren and his Word be constantly in command of our lips, of our conduct and, above all, of our hearts. "If ye do these things ye shall never fail, but so an entrance shall be granted us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

What is thus true of all, is specially true of those honored with a special stewardship in the church—the Elders—in this the hour of trial that is upon the whole world and peculiarly upon "the very elect."—Rev. 3:10.

# THE OATH-BOUND COVENANT

Genesis 15:1, 5-16.—FEBRUARY 24.

*Golden Text*—"He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

In our last lesson we noted the unwise choice made by Lot, the result of which was his closer association than was necessary with the ungodly of Sodom. Additionally it exposed him to the same difficulties to which his neighbors, who were not under the special providence of God, were exposed. It appears that Sodom and the surrounding cities of the Jordan valley had for some time been paying tribute to Chedorlaomer, whose capital city was several hundred miles further north. When they ceased to pay tribute Chedorlaomer sent an army—composed in part of recruits from various subject kings on the way—to take possession of Sodom as instead of the tribute money. Together with spoil of gold and silver and other valuables numerous captives were taken, of whom to make slaves. Lot, his family, his servants and his property were taken, sharing in all the burdens of the Sodomites. We can well imagine his discouragement and self-condemnation—that he had not only experienced vexation in his new home country by reason of the unrighteousness of his neighbors and the contaminating influence upon his family, but now he was sharing with them in the vicissitudes of his present condition, whereas had he remained with Abraham, his uncle, matters might have been different: evidently God had a special protecting care over Abraham—he was not captured nor despoiled.

Although Abraham was noted as a man of peace, we find him very loyal to principle in connection with this trouble. Two of the captured ones escaped and brought word to Abraham of the capture of the Sodomites, with Lot and his family. The man of God was not long in deciding respecting his proper course. Summoning all of his servants capable of assisting in such an emergency, 318 in number, he armed them and set out for the deliverance of his nephew. We are not to suppose that the army which captured the Sodomites was a large one, even though the names of four kings are introduced in connection with it. This was not a very long time after the flood, and the entire population was not as yet very large. The suggestions of higher critics about vast armies, great cities, etc., at this time, are out of harmony with the facts—first, the shortness of time after the flood; and, second, the ability of Abraham, with 318 men, to even make an attack and disconcert and confuse the army and deliver Lot and the Sodomites and all their goods. These facts all agree that the cities, the armies, the kingly powers of that day, were very meager in comparison to what we have in mind when we use similar terms in our day. In all probability the armies of the four kings combined did not exceed a thousand men, and the entire population of Sodom probably much less. The building of a city in those times would correspond more nearly to the building of a fort in our day. Thus, for instance, we read that Cain went to the land of Nod and built him a city—a house or villa for himself and his family.

Abraham's heroism in the matter was fully matched by his generosity, for not a particle of the spoil would he take for himself. The characters which the Lord loves and chooses are those which are unselfish, generous as well as just. In these respects Abraham showed that he had a considerable measure of the original image of God still remaining with him, not obliterated by the fallen conditions through which himself and his ancestors as members of the race of Adam had passed. On the other hand we see in Lot a less noble character naturally, a less strong character. This is evidenced afresh in the fact that even after this experience and deliverance he continued to reside in Sodom, to choose the life of luxury and ease, unfavorable to himself and his family, morally and religiously. Abraham chose the better part: his God was his friend, in whom he delighted; and such experiences in life as would best enable him to comply with the divine arrangements respecting him were the ones that he chose, and to the attainment of which he pressed his energies.

## REPETITION OF THE COVENANT

We have already referred to the fact that God agreed to make a covenant with Abraham while he was still living in the land of Chaldea, and that the covenant itself was consummated and made applicable to Abraham from the time that he set his foot upon the land of promise in obedience to the divine call. But for his encouraging and the strengthening of his already great faith, God repeated this promise over and over in different terms. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1, 5, 18; 17:1-10; 18:19; 21:12; 22:16-18.) There was in fact but one covenant, but various statements of it.

In our present lesson we have one of these repetitions of the covenant with some peculiar features. (V. 1.) In a vision the Lord assured him that he should not fear, that his God would be his shield and his exceeding great reward. Quite probably a fear had come to Abraham, in connection with the

deliverance of his nephew Lot, that the kings whom he had ignominiously defeated would return better prepared, better on guard, and wreak their vengeance upon him, and that thus he might be interrupting, interfering, with the promise God had made that he and his posterity should inherit the land of Canaan. The declaration, "I am thy shield," would set at rest any doubts or fears along this line, as we elsewhere read, "When he giveth quietness who then can make trouble?" If the Lord would shield him how then could all the kings of earth do him harm or interrupt the divine program for blessing him and his posterity? The other statement is also worthy of notice: "I am thy exceeding great reward." Already he was the recipient of God's favors, rewards for his faith and obedience, and the promises also were in the line of rewards. But the statement here made went beyond all this and enumerates a still higher, grander truth, namely, that as Abraham had given himself fully to God, the latter now declares that in a sense he would give himself to Abraham, he would be his reward—to have his friendship, his fellowship, his love, his care, would be the highest and best reward that could possibly be given to Abraham for his fidelity.

And are not these precious promises applicable to the spiritual seed of Abraham? Is not this the essence of the Apostle's declaration to the church—"All things are yours, for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's"? Again we hear the Apostle saying, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. 8:33.) Again we hear the Master's word to the same class, "The Father himself loveth you." (John 16:27.) O, what rest and comfort it brings to our hearts, amongst the trials and vicissitudes of life, to realize in the depths of our hearts that these are not merely words but truths. But only as we are able to realize an obedient faith are we able to apply these gracious promises to ourselves or to rest therein. This same thought is expressed respecting Abraham (v. 6), "He believed in the Lord." The word in the original signifies more than mere belief; it signifies what only believers can fully comprehend, viz., a rest of faith in God.

## "HE COUNTED IT FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS"

At first we are inclined to say, How strange it is that God should count our faith for anything—how simple, how easy a matter faith is! Why should it be valuable in God's sight? But the more we come to know ourselves the more we come to value faith, to realize that it is a scarce commodity in the world and even amongst Christians, professed believers. Under some conditions faith is very easy; indeed to disbelieve would be difficult. After this manner we understand nearly all the conditions of the Millennial age will be framed, so that the world in general will find it difficult to disbelieve in God, his power, his justice, his love. Then the reward will be merely for the obedient, though some faith will doubtless be required as well. Now, on the contrary, the reward is merely on account of faith, though what obedience is possible is required, too. "According to thy faith be it unto thee," was our Master's expression, and it represents a general principle of divine dealing now.

God is now seeking for a faith-full people, and declares that those whom he will find will be peculiar in this respect from the majority; not many great, not many wise, not many learned according to the course of this world have and exercise this faith—chiefly the poor, rich in faith, may be heirs of the kingdom. Let us seek to cultivate continually faith in the Lord, in his Word, in his providential care. This is not trusting in the creeds and the theories of men, which might be merely credulity, but trusting in the Word of the Lord, which liveth and abideth forever. As God counted such faith to Abraham as so much of righteousness, so he counts to us of this Gospel age, who are children of Abraham by faith. We are not righteous in a full, perfect, complete sense of that word. Even with our hearts turned to the Lord, and with the best of intentions, we cannot do the things that we would; but as to those who can exercise faith, and who do exercise it in harmony with divine righteousness to the best of their ability, God will count their efforts as though they are perfect! How gracious an arrangement! How lovingly we should show our appreciation by still greater faith and still harder endeavors to walk in the path of righteousness which faith dictates.

## THE STARS OF HEAVEN, THE SANDS OF THE SEASHORE

In other statements of this promise or covenant God directed Abraham's mind to the stars and to the sand of the seashore and to the dust of the earth as illustrations of the numbers of his posterity. As yet Abraham had no child: every testimony of this kind was therefore to him a testing of his faith, a suggestion that he should inquire first for a



beginning of these matters; and as days and years passed by the testing of faith was increased, yet to our joy we find that Abraham was full of faith in these promises, never doubting the power of God in some way to accomplish all that he had given him reason to hope for. Here we find a lesson for ourselves. Other promises have been made to us, some of which seem to be utterly impossible of attainment. Shall our faith stagger and shall we begin to doubt? or shall we hold fast to the Word of the Lord, nothing wavering, nothing doubting? In order to do so we must discriminate clearly between the words of man and the Word of God, so that we may reject the words of man, resting nothing upon their promises, but our entire weight of trust must rest upon the Word of the Lord.

How solicitous this should make us to have before our minds clearly and distinctly just what things God has promised to them that love him. In accord with this fact we find that God's most earnest and loyal children are continually desiring to grow in grace and to grow in knowledge of him through his Word and through his providences, and that more and more they are cutting and drifting away from the creeds and theories of men, those which appear to be good and those which are manifestly vile, evil, injurious. The Scriptural statement is, respecting all such things, "If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20.) Hence the Scriptures again say that those who have nothing but their own dreams and fancies to preach may do so, but those who have the Word of the Lord should preach it and not themselves nor their fancies and dreams.—Jer. 23:28.

In the light of the New Testament we may see more in these various promises than Abraham or others not thus enlightened by the holy Spirit. We can see that the spiritual seed of Abraham, Christ and the church, are represented in this simile of his seed being as the stars of heaven, and we also see that the other part of the statement—that his seed shall be as the sand of the seashore—will have a fulfilment in Abraham's natural posterity, the Hebrew people, and in that still larger class of all nations referred to in the statement, "I have constituted thee a father of many nations." (Gen. 17:5.) How this deeper, clearer view of the promise enlarges the horizon of our eyes of understanding, and enables us to grasp with more and more distinctness the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which is yet to be manifested to every creature of our race, giving all opportunity of becoming children of Abraham—of full faith in and obedience to God. For that glorious opportunity the Apostle declares the whole creation is groaning and travailling, waiting until now—waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and, more than this, waiting until the sons of God are selected, tested, accepted, and then manifested in glory.

#### THE INHERITANCE OF CANAAN

It is proper to speak of an earthly and a heavenly Canaan, but it is a mistake common to too many to apply all the promises of God that are yet future to the heavenly. There are earthly promises still unfulfilled, and one of these is referred to in our lesson (v. 7). The Lord here distinctly informed Abraham again that he intended to give that land to him and his posterity. That there might be no doubt as to the literalness of this, the Lord said to Abraham on another occasion, Lift up now thine eyes and look to the north and south and east and west, for all the land thou seest to thee will I give it and to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession. (Gen. 13:14; 17:8.) How could the land Abraham saw be the heavenly city, which neither he nor we have ever seen? To make the matter doubly sure we have the word of Stephen on the subject (Acts 7), who declares that it was the literal land, and yet that Abraham had not received so much as to set his foot upon, but that he had faith that he would get that land, and Stephen also had faith that it would ultimately be given to Abraham and his posterity. Our faith is and should be the same. Abraham is to have a grand portion, and the land of Palestine is to be an element of his blessing and inheritance. True, we read that Abraham dwelt in tents and not in a city, with walls, etc., for his protection; he was thus a pilgrim and a stranger, with no continuing city. He would not, like Lot, live in Sodom, for he desired a better country, even a heavenly. That is to say, he was waiting for the time that God intended that he should inherit this promise, anticipating the establishment of God's kingdom at the second coming of our Lord, and preferring the solidity, the establishment, the security of that city, thinking the security of any earthly city of small account. And we see that in this he judged rightly. He was safer where he was, with God for his companion and divine promises for the walls of his salvation, than he could

have been in any earthly city. Surely the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God, will be established with great power and glory, and nothing shall injure and destroy in all the Lord's holy kingdom. Then Abraham's desires and anticipations will have been realized, and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.

If we would examine the various promises in detail they are that the land of Canaan should be the heritage of Abraham and of his seed forever; that he should have a son who would be his heir and inherit the promises; that his seed, descendants, would ultimately be as the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven, innumerable; that he should be the father of a great nation; that he should be the father of many nations, and that through him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

#### "WHEREBY SHALL I KNOW?"

Abraham had already testified his faith in God's promises in a general way. He did not doubt them, but when now the Lord reiterated the fact that the land was to be his, he thought it not improper to ask for some word indicating the way in which the blessing should come—"O, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? What outward signs and evidences will help my faith to grasp these great promises you have made to me and which I thoroughly believe?" It was no more a sin for Abraham to ask the Lord to confirm and strengthen his faith than it would be for us to ask the same for ourselves. And God seems ever ready to help the trustful. How many assistances to faith he gives us without chiding when we come to him in a trustful and faithful attitude of mind. This is illustrated in our day by the difference in the Lord's treatment of those who look skeptically upon the Scriptures, the Bible, and those who look upon it from the standpoint of faith. The first mentioned find plenty to establish their skepticism; all the higher critics, the educated of the world, are in their company. On the other hand, those who are looking at the Word from the standpoint of faith and trust are blessed; to them it is opened—"He that seeketh findeth."

God at once gave Abraham his oath in confirmation of the promise. By a peculiar method God bound himself to Abraham by what is termed the "covenant of blood." A full description of it is given in the lesson; a heifer of three years, a she-goat of three years, a ram of three years, a turtle dove and a young pigeon were sacrificed, and the Lord represented himself as passing between the parts of these sacrificed animals, and was thus swearing by a covenant or sacrifice of life-blood to the promise he had given. The Lord was represented by a lamp of fire.

Then came the answer to Abraham's question, "Whereby shall I know? Give me some of the particulars relating to the matter of how my posterity shall inherit. Give me a view of the future." The Lord did give Abraham a glance into the future of his people, saying, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them: and they shall afflict them four hundred years." This need not be understood to mean that Israel would be in bondage for four hundred years nor that they would be afflicted all the years they would be in a strange land. Rather the thought seems to be that not until four hundred years would his posterity return to that land to inherit it according to the promise; that in the meantime they would suffer rigors, hardships, be in servitude, suffer affliction. The punishment upon the nation holding them in servitude is also mentioned—the Lord would judge them, and after four hundred years the seed of Abraham would come out of bondage with great substance and very rich. It would be in the fourth generation, we are told, that his descendants would return to Canaan, and an explanation of why the long delay is given in part in the statement, "The iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full": as though the Lord had said to Abraham, The Amorite has a prior hold upon this land, but I know the outcome with them, that they will get worse and worse and that eventually it will be the course of justice toward them to expel them—but not yet; the time for the change is not ripe. So long as they follow a reasonable course they will be permitted to remain, but when their cup of iniquity is full the land shall then be turned over to your posterity forever.

Abraham was not told how long it would be before his posterity would go into that captivity which would end in four hundred years at the fourth generation; he was merely told that it would not occur during his lifetime—"Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace, thou shalt be buried in a good old age"; none of these calamities can come upon your posterity while you still live. We remember the fulfilment of

this prediction; that for a time Abraham's posterity dwelt in Canaan as he himself had done, in tents, without seeking an earthly city or government. We remember that the famine drove them out of Canaan and they went down into Egypt as the guests of Pharaoh and Joseph, Abraham's grandson, who was then governor of Egypt through a divine arrangement. We remember that while matters went peaceably for a time, by and by Joseph died and Pharaoh died, and then began one hundred and ninety-eight years of servitude and affliction, which continued until the Lord sent Moses and delivered Israel at the close of the 400 years mentioned in our lesson.

#### LESSONS FOR THE SPIRITUAL SEED

We may be sure that the horror of great darkness and the coming down of the fire to devour the sacrificed carcasses represented more than merely the dark picture of the servitude of Abraham's natural seed before they should go back to Palestine. We may be sure that the Lord, who made this covenant, had more in mind the spiritual seed than the natural. The Apostle Paul tells us so, for referring to this Oath-Bound Covenant he declares, "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of his promise, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable [unchangeable] things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor to our souls both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that which is within the veil." (Heb. 6:17-19.) The holy Spirit here, through the Apostle's pen, informs us that this oath was given to Abraham, not solely on his own account, as might appear, but specially on account of us, the spiritual heirs, the heirs of promise. The

Apostle points out that Christ is the great inheritor, and that we who are Christ's are joint-heirs with him in this covenant promise, and that thus through Christ and the church the entire promise will be made effective to Abraham and his natural seed as well as to all the families of the earth.

The darkness of that hour suggests to us the sufferings of this present time, the fiery furnace of affliction, the "better sacrifices" established in and upon the merit of our dear Redeemer's death and the ultimate great blessing that is to follow. Now what we have is still a hope. Abraham is dead; his natural posterity have failed to attain the blessing; the higher favor secured by our Lord Jesus through his own obedience unto death has been extended to the faithful of the Jews and the faithful of every nation, whom the Father has drawn through his grace and truth, and yet we have this promise as a hope, but it is anchored to Christ, who is within the veil, a spirit being. By faith we realize a relationship to him, and that the darkness and suffering of this present time will soon be ended; by faith we realize that the glorious things which God hath in reservation for them that love him far more than overbalance the trials and difficulties of the pilgrim journey; by faith we see that as soon as the entire body of the Anointed One shall be completed and glorified, then a great blessing is due to begin with Israel after the flesh, and to extend through them also to every creature. Ah, how gracious is our Lord's provision! How kind for him to give us such a strong consolation through not only his repeated testimony of the truthfulness of this great matter, but also of his oath which confirms, secures, makes positive every element of the promise! What manner of persons ought we to be in all manner of holy conversation and godliness! What more could the Lord say to us than he has said!

## ABRAHAM'S PRAYERS FOR SODOM

Genesis 18:16-33.—MARCH 3.

*Golden Text:* "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."—Luke 18:1.

There are several very interesting matters connected with this lesson. Abraham had been living in Canaan and Lot in Sodom for a considerable time, when, at the noon hour, three men one day appeared to Abraham—strangers. He was prompt to show them hospitality, and Sarah his wife joined. The Apostle evidently referred to this incident in the words, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for some thereby have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:2.) Present-day conditions render such hospitality less necessary, especially in cities where public boarding-houses and hotels are expected to care for the strangers. There is danger, however, that the blessing which goes with hospitality is to a large extent missed by a considerable number of people. While the modern methods have some advantages, the general tendency of all of them is toward greater selfishness—neglect of our neighbor, whom the Lord would have us love as ourselves—not neglecting to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith.—Gal. 6:10.

To whatever extent these divine injunctions are disregarded we are in danger of losing a blessing, of failing to cultivate generosity, and, on the contrary, cultivating selfishness. God is the great Giver "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift"; and in proportion as his children would return to his image they must cultivate his spirit of benevolence, generosity, kindness, helpfulness—especially to the poor and the needy and the strangers. We are not wishing to suggest the receiving of any and every person into the home, which might be a very dangerous practice; but we do urge that the changed conditions of our time be not allowed to make our hearts hard, selfish and unthoughtful as respects the interests of our friends or neighbors, and the stranger. We cannot afford to do so, for "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his," and this would mean the loss of those things which God hath in reservation for them that love him.

#### THE LORD AND TWO ANGELS

The three strange men, Abraham afterwards learned, were angels, one of them the special messenger of Jehovah. We feel confident that this one was the Logos, the Only Begotten One, through whom the Father's power was exercised, so that by him all things were made that were made. (John 1:1.) We are clearly to distinguish between our Lord's appearance here as a man and the appearance of his two companions, the angels, as men, and our Lord's subsequent appearance in the world as the man Christ Jesus. The two were totally different. In the first case the spirit nature

was retained, and a human body was merely created and used temporarily for a special purpose, just as our Lord after his resurrection as a spirit being appeared in various forms as a man, but was not really a man. When the due time came for the redemption of Adam and his race it was necessary that our Lord should become a man—perfect, complete as was father Adam in his original creation—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." When he thus became a man, or as another Scripture expresses it, "was made flesh" (John 1:14), it meant the complete laying aside of the spirit nature before enjoyment—a change or transmutation to another nature, the human.

This was necessary, because it was a man who had sinned, and because the divine law required a man's life for a man's life as the ransom price. But no such transmutation was necessary for the work mentioned in our lesson. The Lord and his two angelic companions could have appeared to Abraham as to Moses as a flame of fire in a burning bush, or as the bright angel appeared to Daniel, or as an angelic form with less glory and brightness; but God was dealing with Abraham according to faith—he wished him to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. Hence the angels appeared as strange men and were entertained as such, and Abraham's hospitality was demonstrated and became a lesson to all the children of God. Furthermore, the faith of both Abraham and Sarah was tested on this occasion by the Lord's predicting the birth of Isaac shortly, to the amusement of Sarah, who was then old and who doubted, and to the confirmation of Abraham's faith in the promise already given him and trusted in for twenty-five years without sign of accomplishment.

#### THE CRY OF SODOM

Still hospitable, Abraham accompanied his visitors, whom he had now discerned to be celestial beings appearing in human form. As they moved in the direction of Sodom the Lord is represented as holding a colloquy with himself as to the propriety of intimating to Abraham what might be expected as a judgment upon Sodom, of whose wickedness Abraham certainly was aware. We are given to understand that the fact that Abraham thus far had proven faithful, and that to him belonged the ultimate promise of the blessing of all the families of the earth, was one reason why he was informed respecting the fate of Sodom, "For I have known him [become intimate with him, made a covenant with him, revealed myself to him], to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judg-

ment; that the Lord may bring upon him that which he has spoken of him." Thus we see by this indirect teaching that there is method in the Lord's revelation. Matters are made known to his people not merely to satisfy curiosity, but especially because they are in relationship to the Lord and because they are to learn certain lessons in connection with their experiences of life that may be helpful to them in the ultimate work to which they have been called.

In this case, we remember that Abraham had the promise that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, and this included the Sodomites as well, as we shall see later. Abraham then, believing the Word of the Lord, had a right to expect that in some way or other, either then or in the future, he and his posterity would have to do with righteous judgment upon the Sodomites. Besides, the Lord is pleased to have those who are in harmony with him know the equity, the justice of all his dealings. "Come, let us reason together," shows us this principle. (Isa. 1:18.) But the Lord never reasons with any except those who have faith in him and trust in his promises. These are the truly wise, of whom it is written, "The wise shall understand [matters as they become due], but none of the wicked shall understand" (Dan. 12:10); and again, "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show them his covenant."—Psa. 25:14.

Explaining his mission the Lord declared that a great cry had come up to heaven from Sodom and that he was about to investigate, which implied that forbearance had ceased to be of avail and that the time for Sodom's punishment was at hand, and so Abraham understood the matter. We are not to suppose that merely rumors of matters reached the Lord, and then special investigating committees were sent, but rather that this affair was stated in simple language, so that Abraham and all who have read the record since might know that the Lord takes full cognizance of the affairs of earth, that he does not ignore our conditions, and that while he is plenteous in mercy, and long-suffering and patient, he nevertheless "will not always chide, neither hold back his anger forever": a time of retribution shall come.

This is the same thought to which the Apostle Peter draws our attention in connection with the end of this Gospel age and the trouble which will then be precipitated upon the world of mankind. He represents God as having great mercy, long suffering and willingness, that all might turn unto him and live. Nevertheless he shows that a change of dispensation will come, but that justice will be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and that all who will not obey that great Prophet shall be ultimately destroyed. (Acts 3:23.) In this connection the New Testament refers to Sodom and its sister cities as illustrations of the fact that God will not always chide. We read that the calamity which came upon the cities of the plain were set forth as an example, "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire"—[utter destruction, not eternal torment]. (Jude 7.) Thus eventually God will destroy all evil doers with an "everlasting destruction [not preservation in torment or otherwise] from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power."—2 Thess. 1:9.

#### LOVE IN ABRAHAM'S CHARACTER

This one little incident in Abraham's life shows us something of the loving benevolence of his heart, and causes us to love and appreciate him more than ever. The intimation that judgment upon Sodom was near would upon a cruel and loveless heart have suggested a very different course from that pursued by Abraham. Such would have said, "Well, that is an awfully wicked community; they certainly deserve all you could give them; they could not be worse. I told my nephew Lot that he was making a mistake in going to live with such a deplorable set, and having his family intermingle with them; it will serve them all just right whatever kind of punishment you mete out to them."

But Abraham was not at all of this disposition: his heart at once went out in sympathy, and benevolently he surmised that although the plain was notoriously wicked there might at least be fifty righteous persons there—not righteous in the absolute sense of being perfect, but in a relative or accommodated sense of doing right to the best of their ability. (Rom. 8:4.) Abraham had the spirit of a mediator: he said to himself, God has been wonderfully gracious to me every way, and now that he has opened this subject to me I will make bold to tell him of my heart-sympathy for the people, and to express a hope that he will be generous to them. Then he adds, "Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous in the city, wilt thou consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far

from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

If these words surprise us—to think that Abraham would dare to call in question the righteousness of the Lord—we should remember that he did not have the blessed advantage that we possess, namely, of the guidance of the Word of God and the enlightenment of the holy Spirit, whereby the Lord's people since Pentecost have been begotten again and granted insight into the deep things of God. We may indeed esteem that this was Abraham's way of putting a question to the Lord rather than criticising him—"If you would destroy the righteous with the wicked, show no difference, would it be just? Lord, show me how this would be just. Surely you would do right. I would like to see how justice would be compatible with the course I understand you to have in mind."

#### PARALLELS IN OUR EXPERIENCES

Similar questions come to us now. Financial disasters come, and probably as often affect the righteous as well as the wicked; storms and tempests do injury to their interests; indeed, sometimes the Lord seems not only not to show favor to the righteous, but, if anything, permits, as in Job's case, more peculiar disasters to fall to their lot. Under the instructions of the great Teacher and his various assistants, the apostles, we have learned that our interests as new creatures are sometimes best served by difficulties in the flesh, and that God's promise that all things shall work together for good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose, is true. The Lord supervises the experiences of his faithful, so that these afflictions shall seem but light, and shall work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory as new creatures, in the life to come.

Abraham's love of righteousness and sympathy for all who desired to do right was manifested in this petition. It suggests to us that God, in choosing him as one through whom some of his blessings should flow to the world of mankind in due time, made a good choice. We may be sure also that all who will be associated with Christ in his Millennial kingdom, either as members of the bride class on the spirit plane, or as members of the great company, or of the ancient worthy class of princes (Psa. 45:16), must all have such a broad benevolence and desire to do good and to favor the righteous in every way, else they would not be fit for the great work to be entrusted to them.

And as we have noted the character which God chose in Abraham, we may feel sure that the calling and drawing of the Father are chiefly if not exclusively to the same class of benevolent hearts. We cannot say that God has not drawn some very selfish persons into close fellowship with himself, and that none of this class will ever attain to a share in the kingdom itself or in its work; but we may surmise that this would be very nearly the truth, "The liberal soul shall be made fat." The stingy, the selfish, the ungenerous, we incline to think, will not be drawn, not be called to a participation in the kingdom. Not that any of us have anything whereof to boast in the way of generosity—not that the grace of God is not able to effect a wonderful transformation from selfishness to generosity—but because those who are most selfish have proportionately less of an eye to see and less of an ear to hear of the message of God's mercy and grace and boundless goodness, and therefore will be less in sympathy with the various features of the divine plan as respects the present and the coming age and its work. So that as a measure of love would seem to be indispensable to our drawing, we see most assuredly that a full development of love is absolutely necessary to our attaining the prize of our high calling.

#### GROWING IN GRACE, IN MERCY, IN LOVE

The Lord answered Abraham that if there were fifty righteous, well-intentioned people in Sodom it would not be destroyed, and Abraham perceived that he was not more just nor more generous than the Lord. But as he thought over the matter it occurred to him that there might perhaps be one or two less than fifty, and so he asked if the city might be spared if there were only forty-five. The reply was, Yes: the Lord still as benevolent or more benevolent than Abraham: he was merely finding out the goodness of the Lord. His own courage increased, the spirit of love and benevolence having begun to operate, and he queried of the Lord whether now forty would secure mercy upon the city. The answer was, Yes. Abraham had not yet touched the bottom in seeking to measure the Lord's goodness. Step by step he increased his request. Would it be



spared for thirty? Then would it be spared for twenty? until finally he asked the Lord if he would spare the city for ten. In every case the answer was, Yes. In every case the Lord was proven to be no less just, no less generous, than his servant. He had not yet been blessed as we have been with the anointing of the eyes of his understanding to an appreciation of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which passeth all understanding.

There is a lesson for us in all of this—a lesson that we should be more and more like our Father which is in heaven, whose message is, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"; and again, "If ye do not from the heart forgive those who trespass against you, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."—Matt. 5:7; Mark 11:26.

#### THE DEPTHS OF GOD'S MERCY

Abraham's solicitude was not for the wicked but for the righteous, and so our sympathies should be with all who in every place love righteousness and hate iniquity—to do them good, to serve their interests, to render them assistance, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith. Abraham's prayers were not for the wicked but for the righteous. "Shall the righteous suffer as the wicked?" was his plea. It is to be remembered, however, that some who now pray for the wicked do so under the misconceptions handed down from the "dark ages," that the wicked are not destroyed, but preserved either in a purgatory of suffering or an eternity of torture. This ungodly, unscriptural, unreasonable thought had not yet been introduced to the world; the plain word death still meant death, and the hope for a future was that of a resurrection of the dead in God's due time, and under more favorable conditions than in the present—when God's kingdom would be in power, in control.

When Abraham subsequently heard the result of the disaster—that only his nephew Lot was found a righteous man, and that the Lord delivered the one from destruction, and delivered on his account some who were not as worthy of his favor, members of his family, it must have brought a blush to his cheek—to think that he had questioned the justice of God in supposing that he was about to destroy, with the wicked in the city, as many as fifty righteous when here he beheld God's loving mercy even to the extent of delivering the one righteous person and some of his dear ones. Thus it is with us all: we are finding continually that the "heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind";—that in our poor, imperfect, fallen condition we have no measures that will reach to those lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which passeth all understanding. Truly, as the Word declares, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my plans loftier than your plans."

#### STILL NEW BEAUTIES SEEN

While our minds are contemplating the glories of God in connection with this incident of the destruction of Sodom, let us remember that now he has shown us a still deeper degree of sympathy and love in his provision for the whole world of mankind through the great Redeemer, Abraham's son, our Lord. What more do we see? Ask the Lord himself and hearken to his answer, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you"—of Bethsaida and Chorazin and Capernaum. What is this? A day of judgment? Is not the judgment of Sodom

past? Yes, truly they were declared of the Lord unworthy of life and were cut short. To quote the words of inspiration, They were haughty, they neglected the poor and the needy and committed abomination, and the Lord took them away from life in the great catastrophe which came upon their city "as he saw good." (Ezek. 16:49, 50.) That our Lord had these very people of Sodom in his mind is evidenced by his own words, "fire came down from God out of heaven and destroyed them all." They had a day of judgment and now met their doom and were made an example of, illustrating God's indignation against all unrighteousness, and his will that all evil-doers shall be destroyed. What then did our Lord mean by referring to a day of judgment future? Will they be judged again?

We answer, Yes. They will be judged again, not in the sense of punishing them a second time for their evil deeds—they have already suffered for those. The promised day of judgment means a fresh time of trial pending. But how can this be? Is God not satisfied with his previous judgment respecting this people? Is he not satisfied respecting his decision concerning Adam and the entire race—that none are fit for eternal life because of the impairment of sin, because under the sentence of death?

#### "A RANSOM FOR ALL, TO BE TESTIFIED"

Ah! the key to this promise of a judgment day in the future for the world of mankind, including the Sodomites, lies in the fact that by divine arrangement "Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man"—"gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Thus we see that he paid the penalty for the Sodomites and for all the rest of us—the death penalty. Hence God's original sentence or judgment, which would have meant the everlasting destruction of us all, has been met, has been satisfied. It was from this standpoint that God spoke to Abraham in advance about the coming day of judgment, and predicted that then Abraham's seed, Christ, would bless all the families of the earth. It was not explained to Abraham how divine justice would be met and the sinner released through a ransom. This we see because it is in the past, and, more clearly than he, we may understand, guided by the Apostle's words, that "God hath appointed a day [the Millennial age] in the which he will judge the world in righteousness [grant the world a fair trial that will take cognizance of these weaknesses and frailties through the fall] by that man whom God hath ordained"—Jesus and his church, his bride.—Acts 17:31.

From this standpoint of present truth, unfolding of the divine plan, how we perceive the riches of God's grace and loving kindness, not only toward us who have accepted of his favor through Christ and received of his holy spirit as his servants and handmaidens, but his proposed blessing in due time upon the world of mankind in general, the majority of whom are in the great prison-house of death, of which Jesus has the key (Rev. 1:18), that in due time the holy Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh—that all the blind eyes may be opened and all the deaf ears unstopped, to the glory of God and for the assistance of all mankind, who, under those favorable conditions, will turn wholly and completely to the Lord to serve him with full purpose of heart—and as for the remainder who will not so do, after all this opportunity, they shall be utterly destroyed from amongst the people.—Acts 3:23.

## INTERESTING QUESTIONS

#### TRADING WITH OUR "POUNDS"

**Question.**—In a recent article in the WATCH TOWER you interpret the Parable of the Pounds and say that the "pound" that is given to each of the servants is *Justification*. How then can the pound be taken away from the unfaithful servant and be given to the most faithful one? Is it possible to thus transfer *Justification*?

**Answer.**—Possibly we should have been more explicit in the article you refer to. We probably left too much for inference. We should have explained in detail that while what the Lord gives to each servant is *Justification*, the effect of that gift is the possession by the servant of *special opportunities as a justified person* that he would not have had without. Suppose the ten persons of the parable presented themselves for service—desiring to be the servants of the nobleman—desiring him to grant them some opportunity for rendering him service. Suppose that in order to be recognized as his servants and to be able to trade at all it was necessary for them to receive and wear a livery or costume provided by the nobleman. The gift of the costume would be

the acceptance of them as servants and constitute their opportunity for serving him.

So it is with us: However much we may desire to be the Lord's servants we are imperfect, weak through the blemishes of the flesh, through our fallen nature. We are incapable of doing anything in the Lord's service that would be acceptable until first of all he justifies us. This all-important justification places every servant of God on the same footing in relationship to him and his service—each one justified reckoned as being a perfect man from the divine standpoint—all his blemishes are fully covered by the precious merit of our Redeemer, the Nobleman. So long as we wear this livery (justification) we have opportunity in God's sight of rendering acceptable service; and since he will count to us not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, mind or heart's desires, therefore the one who has least as respects his natural talents has the same standing before God as the one who has the most, because both are justified or made equal and right as perfect men, reckonedly. This, then, is the "pound" that is thus given to each one who enters