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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

“Take heed that ye be not deceived”

“AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD”

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“SIGNS OF HIS COMING AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD”

“NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS”

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AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

“ . . . EVERY ONE THAT TREMBLETH . . . ”

This morning our thoughts have been directed through God's word to Jerusalem. We are helped to discern the spirit and mind of our Brother Ezra as he returned to the city of his people after many years of captivity in Babylon. As we perceive his spirit, help is given to understand why God chose him for this work of building up his brethren.

Ezra was a priest, a descendant of Aaron, of the line of Phinehas, as we see from Ezra chapter 7. We remember that Phinehas, almost 1,000 years before Ezra's time, stood up against the doctrine of Balaam at Baal-peor. Because of his faithfulness, God said:

“Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.”

Numbers 25:12-13.

Ezra, like Phinehas, was also zealous for his God as we perceive in Ezra chapter 7:

“For Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

Verse 10

Even Artaxerxes, King of Persia, to whom Israel was tribute, recognized this as he commanded:

“And thou, Ezra, **after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand**, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people . . .”

Ezra 7:25

Accordingly, Ezra went to Jerusalem, first seeking God's care in the perilous journey:

“Then I proclaimed a fast . . . **that we might afflict ourselves** before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; . . . So we fasted and besought our God for all this: and he was intreated of us.”

Ezra 8:21-23.

Ezra recognized the need to be afflicted, humbled before God, as he sought His hand. In this he was heard — for God “was intreated of us” Ezra tells us.

As he and his companions journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem, he would rejoice, feeling God's protection about him; he would look forward to the work ahead.

The journey was long and arduous, taking four months; but, there was a goal, a hope at the end of it. Yet disappointment awaited him. For when he arrived in Jerusalem, he found that the priests, the Levites, and the people had failed to separate themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their abominations. What a grief this would be to our brother. In Ezra 9:3 we see his reaction:

“ . . . When I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.”

We can imagine his sorrow — that God's word had been forsaken by His people of Jerusalem, and their own desires served. Ezra did more than just grieve — he acted !

“Then were assembled unto me every one that **trembled** at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away: . . .”

Ezra 9:4.

Ezra gathered unto himself all those who feared and quaked at God's word; those who in awe of Him were determined to obey that word. They prayed with Ezra for help to bring His people back to God, to cause them to fear and tremble before Him. The result is found in chapter 10:

“ . . . When Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation . . . for the people wept very sore.

And Shechaniah . . . answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, . . . yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing . . . Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives . . . according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.”

Verses 1-3.

We perceive how the counsel of those who truly feared God, trembling at His word, caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to turn away from idolatry.

This can be a help to us, Brethren and Sisters, as we seek to serve and please Him. Do **we** tremble at His word? Are we moved to do what is right as did Ezra, fearing lest we displease Him, and so lose the blessing, guidance, and strength which He grants ?

GOD'S WARNING

Through the many years God, through the prophets, had admonished His people concerning the coming devastation upon Jerusalem, unless they turned from their evil ways. In Isaiah 32 we read:

"Tremble, ye women that are at ease; (those who do not tremble but relax) be troubled ye careless ones: . . . Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and the towers shall be for dens forever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks;"

Verses 11-14.

This was a fearful picture; yet, there was a failure to tremble, and as a consequence, the joyous city, Jerusalem, did become a desolation, even the ruin that Ezra found as he returned from Babylon. We know how he grieved and acknowledged that what had come upon Jerusalem was of God because of their transgressions, saying:

"Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day."

Ezra 9:7.

Yet Ezra and those faithful ones who feared God were sustained, even in this time of sore affliction by the promise of a time to come when Jerusalem would be the centre of God's purpose with the earth:

"Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field . . .

Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places;"

Isaiah 32:15-18.

All this is promised to those whose minds, whose hearts tremble at His word.

Further in Isaiah 66:2 we find promise and guidance:

". . . To this man shall I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

How important then in God's eyes is the ability, this need to tremble at His word.

The prophet continues:

"Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word: Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: **but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.**"

Verse 5.

Some in Israel then, as in all times, were willing and quick to say, "Let the Lord be glorified," but these were merely words; there was no fearing of God's will, but rather a disregarding, a casting out of the faithful who trembled in spirit. Is this glorifying His name?

We remember Jesus' words:

"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

John 17:4.

Surely the Lord Jesus was one who had regard to His Father's word, fearing lest He fail to fulfill all that the word required of Him. Those who truly fear God are of a humble and contrite spirit, not putting any value upon their own fleshly thinking.

If there is a true spirit of trembling, there follows a great care to do that which pleases God. At times it is possible to feel that one does quake; but, the test is when it comes down to doing that which is pleasing, but difficult, we may fall short with disastrous results! In this connection, we think of Eli, who honoured his sons above God in spite of the warning of the man of God who came to him, speaking for the Almighty:

"Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"

I Samuel 2:29.

When Israel went out to battle against the Philistines at this time, they were smitten before them, and the elders of Israel said:

"... Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to day before the Philistines? ..."

I Samuel 4:3.

Was this a questioning, a fear a seeking of God's counsel and help? It would not appear to be, for the rest of the verse reveals the mind:

"... Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the land of our enemies."

I Samuel 4:3.

No! This was not a sincere questioning, a trembling, a halting, waiting for His help, ready to change. It was rather a taking of matters into their own hands, without God's direction — taking the ark into battle, feeling it would prevent defeat at the hands of their enemies. However, there was an overlooking of the fact that if God were displeased, His presence would not be with them under any circumstances; and, even more so as they persisted in their misuse of the ark. We know that disaster struck. The ark was captured by the Philistines, and Israel was smitten with a very great slaughter.

What of Eli, where was he? We are told:

“ . . . Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God.”

I Samuel 4:13.

It was not enough for Eli to merely tremble. Indeed, it was not the “trembling” which we are exhorted. Eli surely realized it was wrong to take the ark, must have realized that Israel, because of their imperceptiveness and disobedience, were vanquished by the Philistines. But also he would know it was because of his failure to condemn his sons, as God had already warned him. Eli allowed sentiment to overcome his fear of God. With God's help, he could have removed his sons from the priest's office; he could have stopped Israel from wrongly taking the ark. But no, while he feared and was apprehensive, he did not tremble in godly fear; he did not act, and we know the result:

“ . . . The glory is departed from Israel . . . ”

I Samuel 4:22.

Is there not help for us in this example, Brethren and Sisters? The need is to tremble before God, which will ensure that fear translates into action which is pleasing to God.

“FAITH WITHOUT WORKS”

In our recent portion, the Apostle James speaks of faith and the works which must accompany faith. He tells us:

“ . . . faith without works is dead.”

James 2:20.

He then takes our minds back to Abraham as an example of one who showed faith by his works:

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? . . .

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”

James 2:21-23.

Abraham indeed trembled at God's word, and so with purpose and trust he took Isaac to Mount Moriah and prepared to offer him there. His actions evidenced his trembling, his reverence for God's word, as he was ready to give up his son whom he loved, and in whom were the promises of God. Because of his steadfastness, this faith was imputed unto him for righteousness, and Isaac was spared. He was called the "Friend of God." What blessing resulted because of his doing what he knew had to be done if God were to be glorified.

FRIENDS OF GOD

It is our struggle, our desire to be friends of God. The Lord Jesus recognizing this desire in His brethren and sisters, shows us how it can be possible. "Ye are my friends," He said, "if ye do whatsoever I command you."

John 15:14.

— and further impresses us:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:"

Verse 16.

What a blessing, Brethren and Sisters, that God has chosen a few to go forth and bring forth fruit, enduring fruit. What a responsibility as well. How like in a small way the work of Ezra as he was sent to Jerusalem. He glorified God by doing that work faithfully, trembling at God's word as did those who he gathered to him. These faithful brethren were the means of freeing the restored Jerusalem from the defilement of the nations round about — a few chosen to do His work.

How few there are today who truly tremble at His word. As Jesus has told us, these last days are to be as the days of Noah, when only eight souls feared God and knew His salvation. Does not the example of Ezra, and others whom we have considered, help in our determination to cling to the hope of salvation, no matter what the cost may be in the way of trial and affliction? Let us in this resolve give heed to Paul's words:

"Wherefore, my beloved, . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you both to **will** (desire) and to **do** of his good pleasure."

Philippians 2:12-13.

Only as there is fear and trembling can we work out (perform or complete) our salvation.

THE REMNANT

As we struggle to do this, we are encouraged by the example of those like Ezra, whom God sustained in the struggle to uphold the light of the Truth.

Paul continues for our help:

“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”

Philippians 2:15.

The world looks upon trembling with contempt, as a sign of weakness; but, what strength there is for those who, like Ezra, tremble before God and receive His perfect help.

J.A.DeF.



JOSIAH

When reading in II Chronicles of the kings of Judah, we are perhaps impressed as we read of the life of Josiah, who began his reign, as we are told in chapter 34, verses 1 and 2, when he was eight years old and he reigned 31 years.

“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years.

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left.”

Perhaps we are impressed because his reign even though starting so young, was a faithful reign.

He “walked in the ways of David his father”, not in the ways of his immediate father Amon, who was evil and who had done as his fathers before him, serving false gods and allowing the children of Israel to turn from God. Yet, here comes one so young in year’s yet perceptive of God’s ways, so that much of his work was to correct the ills of his fathers before him. Perhaps it is of significance that we read in II Kings the other record of Josiah’s reign: II Kings 22:8-11.

“And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord, And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord.

And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book.

And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.”

Josiah was in the process of rebuilding and making repairs to the temple, and in the process of doing this, found the book of the law; and when he discovered its contents he rent his clothes. Because of their longstanding failure to do according to the law, they had gone away from God, serving false gods, and so we see Josiah’s sensitivity of spirit as he rent his clothes in grief.

“Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto

the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us."

II Kings 22:13

We see his immediate desire was to "inquire of the Lord" and then reveal to the people their failures and the failures of their fathers before them, in order to turn them again into the way of the Lord. We see Josiah's progress in this regard as the rebuilding of the temple went on:

II Kings 22:3-7

"And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people:

And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber, and hewn stone to repair the house.

Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully."

How great an influence Josiah must have had upon the people. He revived their desire to move and do the work within God's house, and do it faithfully. Was there perhaps something that Josiah was able to convey to the people over whom he ruled? We are given a key to this when we read in II Chronicles 36 in speaking of one of the sons of Josiah that came after his rule had ended:

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord."

verse 12

From the above verse we are able to infer that when the word of the Lord was spoken to Josiah from the prophet Jeremiah, that it had a humbling effect upon him. When we look at Jeremiah 1:1-2 we see Jeremiah's words spoken in the 13th year of Josiah's reign, making the king 21 years of age at this time — still young, but old enough to assume the responsibility of God's work.

"The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Ariathoth in the land of Benjamin:

To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign."

As we read of the history of Josiah we learn that he reinstated the keeping of the Passover in the 18th year of his reign when he would be 26 years of age. In Josiah's humility and anxiety to do the will of God he would recognize the valuable precepts taught by the keeping of the Passover. The Passover brought to mind the deliverance of Israel from Egypt's bondage, saved by the strong hand of God, the sacrifice of the lamb, the blood on the doorposts which saved all those that sheltereth therein. It spoke of the need to have a covering, to be sheltered in God's house if there were to be any hope of life at all. After reading the law, Josiah would realize just how far the people of God had strayed from these precepts and laws, and he set about in humility and zeal to turn his people back to God.

Jesus spoke in Matthew 18:1-4 of the great need for humility, the same humility that Josiah must have possessed:

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Humility — the ability to put down the flesh and recognize our need to submit under the hand of God is the only means of entering into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus tells us.

Didn't the Passover speak of this? — the lamb, gentle and submissive, sacrificed and its blood sprinkled upon the doorposts providing a sure hiding place from death?

Much help had been given by God for it had been prophesied many years before that one would come to rid the house of Israel of its filthiness:

"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.

And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord: Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name: and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee."

I Kings 13:1-2

This prophecy was indeed fulfilled by Josiah as we read in II Kings 23:15-16 of his faithful work:

“Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.

And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.”

Josiah’s name translates as **“whom Jehovah heals”** and we can understand how through his humility and zeal for the Lord, a breach was healed between God and His people, for Josiah’s reign is one of the few recorded as righteous.

Also of significance in going to Matthew chapter 1 speaking of the genealogy of the Lord Jesus we read in verse 17:

“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.”

When we map out these generations, there are indeed 14 from Abraham to David; and also 14 from David to Josiah; and from Josiah to Christ another 14 generations.

Because of Josiah’s humility to God he was used as a healer on behalf of God’s people. We can recognize the healing power of humility when we read the words in I Peter 5:5:

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

These words could almost describe how Josiah submitted to Jeremiah’s words. God resists the proud, but He didn’t resist Josiah, but used him to heal the breach that was there. Going on in I Peter 5:6-7

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:
Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

Caring, or healing as the word means, a looking to God for help and strength and guidance. How Josiah did this, and the resulting help can be an influence to us likewise if we can humble ourselves.

When we look at those faithful mentioned in the genealogy of Matthew chapter 1 we receive extra help from the meanings of their names:

THE REMNANT

Abraham	— father of many nations
David	— beloved of God
Josiah	— one whom God heals
Jesus	— salvation

We can see that the people whom God loves He will heal and bring to salvation, to the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom, the promises of God all possible through the name of Jesus Christ. Was this what Josiah realized, that through humility, healing would come from God and the hope of salvation? Perhaps we can be helped to show this same humility as we keep the words of David's Psalm 131 in our hearts:

“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever.”

A song of Ascent — not usurping or proud spirit, but humble and child-like seeking God's help and guidance. Can we absorb these words into our living, seeking God's love and healing for through humility lies God's promise of salvation for his people.

M.C.S.



Lessons from the Book of Job

In the book of Job a point is reached where Job's accusers could say no more. They had tried to convince Job that what had come upon him was for transgression, but what that was they could not determine.

Job would not accept their inferences. He knew of nothing he had done that would make him a transgressor; furthermore his brethren were wrong in making his trial all the more acute. Oh, if it were the other way round Job knew what he would do:-

"I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you.

But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief"

(Job 16:4-5)

But Job's friends would not heed his appeal, and so Job had come to the conclusion that for all their profession of seeking his good, they were really distorting and exaggerating.

"But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value."

(Job 13:4)

No, Job could not go along with them; if they could show him where he had transgressed, then he would listen. But of course, they could not show him, for there was no transgression to show! Hence Job's words:-

"God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

(Job 27:5-6)

It is important also to note what Job had said to his friends earlier:-

"Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred.

How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?"

(Job 6:24-25)

So a point is reached as follows:-

"So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes."

(Job 32:1)

Yes, the supposed three friends had no evidence; and as Job would not admit he was wrong, because in his own sight he felt he was right, then they could say no more.

But now comes Elihu's intervention:-

"I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment."

(Job 32:7-9)

Though these words were technically correct, was Elihu right in his attitude and spirit? The scripture makes it evident that when Elihu opened his mouth he was angry. Now to be angry at the start of an effort to help is hardly the right way to commence is it?

"So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.

Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.

Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he.

When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled."

(Job 32:1-5)

Furthermore even if Job had faltered somewhat in his argument, and in some respects had erred in his spiritual outlook, he was not in transgression in any specific way as his "friends" had implied. Therefore it is shown that Elihu in his technical approach failed to bring a mellow consideration of the sufferings that Job had endured, including the wrong and hurtful implications of the words of Job's "friends". Elihu obviously, had not had the experience of suffering, to engender in himself a personal recollection of such, which would have moderated his technicalities.

How many have failed, in like manner, in the history of the Truth, even to these last days.

Elihu, obviously, wanted to say many things. So he commences in Job chapter 32 and goes on and on, through chapters 33, 34, 35, 36 and chapter 37.

When a person has to say a lot in the hope of making his argument effective, a caution is needed in the mind of the hearer. There have been some even to the present day who have not exercised this caution, and so have declared that:-

“He (Elihu) was ‘in God’s stead’, to minister God’s blessing.”

It is true that Elihu had perceived the wrong of Job’s three “friends”.

“Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say.

Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words:

Lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man.”

(Job 32:11-13)

Yes, they had condemned Job, but had not convinced (convicted) him.

This is not God’s way! God may condemn a man, but first of all God works convincingly (i.e. if a man will not harden himself) and this gives the man the opportunity, by conviction, to condemn himself.

But no, the friends do not do this for Job, and how many thousands upon thousands have done the same, over the ages; failed to convince with real conviction, and so have failed God, and also themselves, when purporting to be working for God. What a lesson!

Now Elihu had perceived this in the three “friends”. Why then is even Elihu suspect? With Elihu it is all “I”, “my”, “me” and “mine”.

Thirty-one times does he refer to himself in chapter 32, the first of the chapters which record his discourse. On and on and on. Did Job have a chance to reply? Well, it seemed that a half chance was given which was quickly snatched away.

“Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace and I will speak.

If thou hast anything to say, answer me: speak for I desire to justify thee.

If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.”

(Job 33:31-33)

Job did keep silence under this harangue, in which appeared further false accusation as already experienced previously from his other three “friends”:-

“What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walketh with wicked men.

For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.”

(Job 34:7-9)

In fact Job did not doubt God and did not exalt himself in pride, but simply failed to understand God in the difficulties of his immediate experiences. Job spoke honestly, though misguided by his tortured feelings. The three friends, however, were merely showing a facade of honesty, which in many many cases throughout the history of the Truth is a cover of a persistent policy which in actuality is as corrupt as it is evasive.

Men of such calibre cannot be trusted, because through long practice of duplicity they have become so dulled in conscience as to lose the sense of what is wrong. Job was not like this, his declarations were at least honest:-

“If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom:

Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out of the door?”

(Job 31:33-34)

“If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain;

If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life:

Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.”

(verses 38-40)

Wherein then was Elihu the other spokesman dishonest? Surely a proud and arrogant spirit, which may be correct in most aspects, is also to a degree dishonest when professing to be standing for the truth and speaking for God?

So from the book of Job emerges some very searching lessons to help us, in a degree, to see ourselves our nature, in a true light. The flesh is so very very deceitful, and who among us can search the heart? It is only, as we look at such lessons, as contained in the book of Job, that we can get a deeper insight into what we are, and thereby be precipitated to greater endeavour to rise above the beggarly nature of this body of sin and death.



“I am the First and the Last”

We read in Revelation 1 verses 17-18: “ — — — Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore — — —.” To help us to understand the meaning of these quotations we are led to consider verses 10 and 11 of this chapter:-

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last:

and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto unto the seven ecclesias — — —.”

Further we read in chapter 2:8:-

“And unto the angel of the ecclesia in Smyrna write;

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”

What then are we being shown? — the first and the last which was dead and is alive? We can be sure that the Lord Jesus was the firstborn from the dead and as the complete body of Christ will be made up of each and every faithful member, even to the last one to be called, do we begin to see the meaning of this first and the last? and seeing that the “first and the last” has been dead and is alive are we not also being shown the certainty of the resurrection! as we read in John 11:25-26:-

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die — — —.”

The Spirit is aware of all the weakness to which the flesh is heir, and perhaps one of the greatest of these weaknesses is shown in the fact that we need to be reminded constantly of the great hope held out to each individual called. We need to be exhorted daily if we are to eventually overcome, this nature which we bear, just as we need to take food continually if we are to be sustained. It is also a divine provision that we are warned at the outset that the revealing of Christ will “come to pass with speed” which is the literal translation of the words of Revelation 1 verse 1 “things which must shortly come to pass.”

That the Spirit is all-seeing is shown by the words of Rev. 2 verse 9, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) — — —.”

How powerful are these few words just tucked in, so to speak, — “but thou art rich” — again to emphasise the point that God is not unmindful of His children that never a sparrow falls to the ground without He is aware of it.

“ — — — and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, **and are not**, but are the synagogue of Satan.”

There are times in our lives when we think that God has forgotten, but no — here is the divine assurance that He does know and is very mindful of every one of His chosen people. I know the injurious speaking of those which say they are chosen, but are not — for they are of the synagogue of the adversary. How comforting then are these words, especially in time of distress, to know that the great God in heaven is looking down and that He knows who are His, even from the first to the last.

To such is the message of chapter 2 verses 10-11:-

“Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer — — — ye shall have tribulation ten days: **be thou faithful** unto death, and I will give thee (i.e. from **the first** of the faithful **to the last**) a crown of life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias — — —.”

What a wonderful prospect is awaiting all those that attain to the standard as set by the Lord Jesus, for in due course they will be able to echo the words of Revelation 1 verse 18:

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore — — —.”

J.S.



The Signs of His Coming and of the End of the World.

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad.

Therefore, they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.

Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?”

(Habakkuk 1:13-17)

The metaphor of the Spirit though simple in its terms is powerfully and marvellously profound. Men are as fish, netted in the policies of their leaders, to be used, fed upon so to speak, to provide plenty and ease for those who manipulate them in whatever way the policies of the times indicate. Yet these systems, of whatever kind, and all systems to a greater or lesser degree are the same, are worshipped and upheld even by those caught up in them and exploited by them. The greatest worshippers of the systems, of course, are those who exercise the power to drag their lesser fellows into those pursuits they deem advantageous for themselves.

The focal point of where such a situation is leading, and has indeed led during the sordid history of mankind, is the sharply focalising question:-

“Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?”

(verse 17)

At the time of writing, the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has been taking advantage of the Easter holiday to protest its fears for the future. The people of this organisation were availing themselves of a practical opportunity, and also using an occasion in the Church calendar to help their emphasis of how opposed to the teachings of Christ and His sacrifice is the production and siting of nuclear missiles.

Will those who hold the net listen? No! Thousands upon thousands of people flooded into the county of Berkshire, forming a human chain linking the Greenham Common Cruise Missile Site

with the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Research Centre and the Burghfield Royal Ordnance Factory. This was followed by a mass move northwards to Glasgow, where the people of Glasgow were to be reminded what a nuclear explosion over their city would mean, when they beheld a mass of people lying down upon the pavements simulating death from radiation weaponry.

Of course the people who hold the net do not like this sort of thing. Anything, which in their view, jeopardises their calculations is to be shunned. An aircraft was sent over Greeham trailing a banner inscribed "C N D Kremlin's April Fools", and in West Germany, at Neu-ulm, the Police were out to resist demonstrators at the military base, using specially trained police dogs to help prevent and detain. Will these mild protests change the policies of those in control? The certain answer is, "No", for it is the scriptural one.

The present systems of men will allow for no relaxation, in general terms, from the policy of gathering "in their drag" to use the power acquired from their manipulated masses to pursue whatever they think fitting and advantageous.

The cry and question of the prophet to the Most High was, "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?" The answer of the Spirit is:-

"God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.

His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise."

(Habakkuk 3:3)



NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

EDEN, NEW YORK: Grange Hall, Church Street.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.

Sunday School 1.30 p.m.

Bible Class: Midweek: Forestville, Orchard Park and Buffalo.

Alternate Week: Revelation Study.

By the time this is in print, the Manchester Fraternal Gathering will have been held, God willing, and our minds will have been with our brethren in their assembling together.

Encouragement is given in the continued and sustained interest of one seeking His way of salvation.

We have been grateful for an easy winter, making long distance travelling easier, especially so as there have been many devastating storms to the south and west.

J.A.DeF.

“PENTRIP” Black Rock, Portmadoc.

Breaking of Bread: Sundays 11.30 a.m.

Bible Class: Midweek:

We are encouraged as we hear of the good work going on in the Ecclesia and of the Young People in Sunday School and at Class.

We here in isolation are strengthened too by the wonderful works we have been able to look upon recently; snow, hail, ice and wind. Now we are reading in the daily readings of the great power behind these works.

Also the raging sea with its unusual force and high tides each day is so spectacular at this time. The words written concerning this come to our mind: “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further” — this is marvellous.

How thankful we have this knowledge, with all its implications.

We pray that it may be possible in the approaching summer months for the Brethren and Sisters to meet with us to find strength and counsel these occasions bring.

per D.L.

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall Annexe, Audenshaw, Manchester.

Breaking of Bread: Sundays 11.30 a.m.

Young People’s Class: Sundays 2.00 p.m.

Bible Class: Thursdays 7.30 p.m.

We were grateful for the provision of the Fraternal Gathering of Monday, April 4th and for the messages. A true token of the unity which exists even in these troubled times. This is a source of mutual comfort and encouragement as we journey together striving to help each other upon the way to salvation, in His abundant mercy.