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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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“NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS”

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At the Table of the Lord

“ . . . THE LORD HID THEM . . . ”

We have read today about three men of God, used by the Almighty to bring His word unto Israel: Ahijah, Baruch, and Stephen. Each was in different circumstances, different times in the history of Israel: about 950 B.C. for Ahijah, 607 B.C. for Baruch, and around 33 A.D. for Stephen—a time-spread of almost one thousand years. Yet each one witnessed against a rebellious nation—each no doubt suffered derision, hatred, physical harm, fear, for the word of God. In spite of this, each stedfastly witnessed, not only in word, but also in deeds, by example, by submission. Perhaps if we can examine the spirits of these faithful men we can find increased determination to please our Father.

AHIJAH

First, let us look at Ahijah—a prophet whom God had sent to Jeroboam to prophesy that he was to reign over ten of the tribes of Israel. To show this, Ahijah rent his garment into twelve pieces, and gave them to Jeroboam. He also spoke in warning, yet with promise:

“I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight . . . I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house . . . and will give Israel unto thee.”
I Kings 11:37-38.

About nine years after this promise and implied warning, Jeroboam did become king over the ten tribes. In his exalted position, however, he forgot and ignored God's words through Ahijah, setting up false altars, high places, and idols. Indeed his name became a byword, his evil often being spoken of as a standard to which the wickedness of Israel's later kings was compared.

Not long after Jeroboam set up the idols and false altars, a man of God was sent to warn him of his sin, but to no avail; therefore, God caused the false altar to be split and the ashes to be poured out. Jeroboam's hand, raised in anger against the man of God, was made to dry up. But

God in response to the prophet's prayer, caused the hand to be healed, an act of great mercy which should have touched the king's heart. But it did not, as we see:

"After this thing (altar split and healing) Jeroboam returned not from his evil way And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth."
I Kings 13:33-34.

Today we have read how the son of Jeroboam fell gravely ill. The king sent his wife to Ahijah saying:

". . . he shall tell thee what shall become of the child."
I Kings 14:3.

While the king recognised Ahijah's power, he knew he would not seek God's help for one so evil as himself, and so sent her in disguise. She came to Ahijah, but God had told him what to expect and what to say, for he was now old and handicapped:

". . . Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age."
I Kings 14:4.

How difficult it might have seemed to witness in his frailty against this powerful king; yet he obeyed, fearing God more than Jeroboam. He foretold that the king's son would die, and further that the house of Jeroboam would be cut off. All this came to pass; the son did die, and so did Jeroboam. How?

". . . the Lord struck him, and he died."
II Chronicles 13:20.

Can we enter into the mind of Ahijah as he experienced the hand of God upon him? Can we imagine his grief as he saw the ten tribes, and the other two tribes as well, serving idols, turning away from their God? In his old age, he stood fast against the king, sustained by the Almighty. Could we do it, Brethren and Sisters? Yet may we not be similarly required and so are helped, given the ability and strength we need, not only to be subject, but to witness by our living, our words, and by accepting our circumstances? Ahijah was a faithful witness, part of a remnant in a nation astray from God—a difficult position requiring great courage. Is this not a help for us today?

BARUCH

Also revealed this morning is the mind of Baruch—a name not so well known, yet one who was a servant of God, a companion and help to Jeremiah—again, a part of a small remnant in the midst of a nation astray. Baruch is first mentioned when Jeremiah was instructed to buy the field in Anathoth as a sign to Judah that they would again possess these fields and houses, even though now in the hands of Babylon. Jeremiah subscribed evidence to the purchase of the field and:

“ . . . gave the evidence . . . unto Baruch . . . and charged Baruch . . . Take these evidences . . . and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days.”
Jeremiah 32:12-14.

Here was Baruch standing by Jeremiah, a companion, a faithful helper, and one who also feared God. We again read of him when Jeremiah was told to write the word of prophecy in the roll of a book, and Baruch was called unto this work:

“ . . . Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, . . . upon a roll of a book.”
Jeremiah 36:4.

What care would be needed, and what a privilege to do this work for Jeremiah—all these words from the hand of God. How vital this need was, for now Jeremiah said:

“ . . . I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the Lord:

Therefore, go thou, and read in the roll, . . . the words of the Lord in the ears of the people. . . .”
Jeremiah 36:5-6.

What a sobering responsibility for Baruch; he would no doubt fear and tremble. Nevertheless, he did read it before all in the temple. Then he read it to the princes, and they were afraid and took the roll to King Jehoiakim. The king read only a small part, and then in anger took the roll and burned it, yet he felt no fear for what he had done, even though the princes protested in fear. The king, enraged, commanded:

“ . . . take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet:
. . . .”
Jeremiah 36:26.

He no doubt sought to destroy them, just as he had the rolls of the book, that the witness of God might be silenced. But we are reassured:

“. . . the Lord hid them.” Verse 26.

The Almighty was a covering, a protection to His faithful witnesses; and further He commanded that the roll of the book be rewritten by Baruch from the mouth of Jeremiah—thus frustrating the efforts of the adversary. How impressed Baruch might feel, how cared for, how inspired by the immutable will of God. Yet being a mere man, his first reaction was one of distress:

“. . . Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.” Jeremiah 45:3.

Perhaps this is an understandable response to adversity; especially he would be grieved as he wrote of all the dreadful judgments to come upon Judah. Also, he would have sorrowed as he saw the book destroyed by the king. Woe—grief added to sorrow. Have not each of us at a time in our probation felt this near to despair? It is the natural response of a frail human mind. Yet Baruch was helped as God answered through Jeremiah:

“Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land.

And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord.” Jeremiah 45:4-5.

How easy to fear, to grieve at judgments we know God will bring about. How easy to think of self, instead of God's way; how natural to want to be esteemed. Perhaps Baruch might have felt a bit lifted up as he brought the roll to the temple, to the princes, and even the king. Still God's mercy was extended and He promised:

“. . . but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.” Verse 5.

How would our brother's life be given him for a prey? This word is most often used as spoil—that belonging to the victor in a battle. Was the Almighty saying to Baruch that because of his faithfulness, his striving to be the victor in the battle between the man of flesh and the man of spirit,

God would protect him and give him his life as a reward? How encouraging to him and also to us.

Baruch and Jeremiah later went down to Egypt with rebellious Judah, and there continued to witness against them. There they were protected from the judgments poured out on Judah. Once again “. . . the Lord hid them.” Brethren and Sisters, are we not sustained in our struggle to get the victory by the example of Baruch? While we may in weakness feel as did our brother at times, that God has added grief to our sorrow, let us remember Baruch—how his life was given to him, and let us believe that ours can be as well.

STEPHEN

Lastly the spirit of Stephen is revealed for our help. He was chosen by the apostles for the work of witnessing because he was:

“. . . a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit . . .”
Acts 6:5.

As he went about the work given, he was able to perform miracles, attesting to the power of God and the purpose of Jesus. This aroused the enmity of the scribes and elders who caught him and brought him before the council, using false witnesses. Of Stephen we are told:

“. . . all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”
Verse 15.

His countenance, even in great trial, was like that of a messenger of God, through whom the Spirit of God worked. That Spirit must have shined forth as he condemned Israel for crucifying the Son of God. He also reminded them:

“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? . . .”
Acts 7:52.

Perhaps Stephen had in mind Ahijah, Baruch, as well as others. He was sustained in his severe testing by the knowledge and assurance that “the Lord hid them” because they were his messengers. Stephen thus was helped to faithfully speak of God’s purpose; and although he lost his life, he gained it, perhaps remembering God’s words to Baruch:

“. . . thy life will I give thee for a prey.”

As Stephen died, we read he was:

“ . . . calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59.

He appealed for God’s help to be steadfast in his witness, to endure the pain of being stoned, to reveal to all who watched that here was a man of God. One who watched was Saul, perhaps “pricked” by what he saw. Stephen also prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Was not his life being offered through Jesus as a living sacrifice, one which he prayed might be as Paul later wrote:

“ . . . holy, acceptable unto God. . . .” Romans 12:1.

Did not the Lord Jesus say as He died in obedience:

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: . . .” Luke 23:46.

Stephen prayed that his living, like that of Jesus’, might be acceptable, well pleasing to his Father.

Shall we not then, Brethren and Sisters, take help from the example of these faithful men, whom we have come closer to today? Perhaps a careful look at their names can further encourage us:

Ahijah means brother or kin of God.

Baruch signifies blessed.

Stephen means crowned—a sign of victory.

Are we not called to be of the family of God, kin to all the faithful? Are we not greatly blessed in His care and promise? And are we not to endure, in the hope of a crown of life, if we can but overcome?

J.A.DeF.



WITH ONE ACCORD

We have recently been reading in the Acts of the work of the apostles who were called to witness to God's truth. Stephen, Peter, Paul, Silas and many others, all called to reveal the purpose of God's kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ. In an overview of this work, we are helped in our time of sackcloth witnessing to value our place in God's sight, when we contemplate just how this work by the Apostles was accomplished so successfully.

We read through much of the Acts that not only those actively involved in witnessing had the work in mind and in prayer. In Acts 1:14 we read:

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

We can see from this verse, that all were in “one accord” in the work. Also in Acts 2:1-2:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”

Again, together in one place with one accord. Let us go on to the 46th and 47th verses of this same chapter:

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Again the emphasis is placed upon the single-mindedness of all in performing the work given. Likewise we read in Acts 4:23-24:

“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief, priest and elders had said unto them.

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which has made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:”

Here there was a glorifying of God in unity of purpose because they could see with great joyfulness that the work of witnessing was being guided by the Spirit. Also verses 31-33 state:

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”

Further in chapter 5 verses 12-14 we read :

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch.

And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women).”

These were works performed by the Spirit, the hand of God amongst them because the heart and mind of all was of one accord. Although these kinds of works are not performed now in our time of sackcloth witnessing, is there a help in it all for us today? As God works with us today, are we to be mindful of that work, so that we can reveal a singleness of mind and purpose asking God’s help and care?

In Acts 5:17-20 we read of when the apostles were in prison:

“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation.

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”

THE REMNANT

And verses 41 and 42 . . .

“And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

We see in these verses how indeed the work was guided by God, and with this added confirmation of the angel's appearance to them, these brethren rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. Their faith and persistence was bolstered by the fact that because this work was of God, nothing could hinder it.

Going to Luke chapter 6 we see another side which may come from our witnessing, as it did to our brethren of old, verses 22-23 :

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.”

Jesus here speaks of the shame or reproach that God's children must share, the natural enmity between those led by the spirit of God and those led by the flesh. It is in striving to be separate that this reproach can be seen and felt. It is a test for us today to see whether we will stand and witness to the name of Jesus Christ, or if we will shink under the reproach given.

We read recently in Acts of when Paul was taken captive by the Jews. When released by the chief captain, he took advantage of the opportunity and spoke of the name of Jesus Christ. He did not take advantage of the situation for his own gain, but for God's. We too, when given an opportunity, should be careful that our actions reflect a true witness to His name, even though we may be hated by the world for our stand, just as those before us were.

“And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth.”
John 17:13-17.

As Jesus spake these words to God, they are recorded for our help and we see their value to remind us not to be part of the world. Do we suffer at times the shame and reproach that comes from not being part of the world? We must, for we will surely be tested in this manner.

What did Jesus mean when he spoke of His brethren having His joy fulfilled in themselves, (John 17:13)? Let us go to Hebrews 12:1-3 where we may be helped to find the answer :

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Was it not eventually a joy to Jesus that because of His singleness of mind and purpose in overcoming His flesh, being hated all the while by the world, that He now sits at the right hand of God? Yes, we can say he does now know the joy of victory. But how can we attain that same joy through our trials and testing? Let us look to I Peter 4:12-14 :

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you :

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you : on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."

This is the spirit of joy and rejoicing that should be in our minds and hearts as we witness to our desire to serve God, and be together in one accord. But how can we better be united in one accord? Let us read Peter's words in I Peter 5:8-9 :

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour :

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

If we can have our brethren always in mind, knowing that the same afflictions and tests will come upon us all, we can be of one mind and be a strength and support to one another as we wait in hope for His return. As we long for His coming, does that same joy and rejoicing that Jesus knew in overcoming the flesh, dwell within us all, binding and fusing our hopes and goals in one accord ?

M.C.S.



MANASSEH

The account of Manasseh is that of a long leadership. Manasseh was only twelve years old when he came to the throne following the death of Hezekiah his father who died at the age of fifty-four years having done that which was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that David his father had done. Now it is recorded that his Mother's name was Heph-zibah, and we cannot help thinking of the words in Isaiah 62:4, where we see the meaning of Heph-zibah explained in the margin — "My delight is in her." But how faithless to such a name was Manasseh as the book of Kings explains:—

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.

For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name."

...(2 Kings 21:2-4).

So the false worship was co-mingled with the true worship; but we see a principle revealed concerning responsibility:—

"And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:

Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.

But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel."

(verses 7-9).

Yes, Manasseh seduced them, but though he was the instigator the people were held responsible, for the record says "they," the people, "hearkened not." As a result God sent His message by His prophets :—

"And the Lord spake by his servants the prophets, saying,

Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols :

Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle." (2 Kings 21:10-12).

Continuing, God explained the evil which was approaching :

"And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab : And I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies :

Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day." (verses 13-15).

Everything was to be turned upside down. The dish wiped clean of its residue and turned upon its face. This was because, in the eyes of the Spirit, they were to blame for going along with Manasseh's seduction. So the lesson of responsibility is shown here most unmistakably. The record however goes on to explain the further depths to which Manasseh sank :—

"Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another : beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

(verse 16).

Innocent blood was shed, in his case very much innocent blood. Yet he had a long reign. Fifty-five years he was the leader of the people, which was a very long time. Why did God allow it? Was it not a testing of His people? Furthermore this bloodstained man died in his own bed, unlike

others who had shed innocent blood before him. What was the reason for this? Why did God withhold His hand? Surely, though God was displeased, He had not utterly forsaken His people?

Perhaps we should go to the book of Chronicles for elaboration:—

“So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.

And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.”

(2 Chron. 33:9-11).

So we see from these verses that Manasseh indeed had to pay a penalty for the deeds he had done. He was caught with the thorns; one translation describes the word to mean Hooks. Yes, he was snared or hooked despite his clever seductive ways. He had actually and figuratively become entangled in misery as a result of his own behaviour. That he was now in a very miserable condition is shown in verses 12-13:—

“And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.”

God, we see, was very merciful just as God previously had been to Ahab, who also humbled himself, so that the foretold evil was not brought about in Ahab's days. The deliverance which came so unexpectedly and miraculously to Manasseh had a great effect upon him, as indeed also the rigours of his punishment. So we read:—

“Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.

And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.

And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.

Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only."

(verses 14-17).

Could all those years of idolatry become rectified by a few years of reform? that is indeed a question. We read the words of Jeremiah:—

"And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem." (Jer. 15:4).

The record in Chronicles does show considerable repentance, but did Manasseh go far enough? He took away the strange gods and the idol out of the temple, and all the altars that he had built in the temple mount and in Jerusalem. Did he destroy them? The record says rather that he cast them out of the city. Was that going far enough seeing he had introduced these things? Should he not have destroyed these things and ground them to powder; how much more would he have cleared himself by so doing. Yes, he repaired God's altar and sacrificed peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings thereon. Yes, and commanded the people to serve God. But did he go far enough? Let us again look at the words of 2 Chronicles 33:17:—

"Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only."

Should Manasseh have allowed this, considering the great responsibility he had for these things? We look at the careful instruction of the law of Moses:—

"Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places." (Numbers 33:52).

also the specific instruction of Deuteronomy 12:2-8:—

"Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:

And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God.

But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.

And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks :

And there ye shall eat before the Lord your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee.

Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes."

Seeing, then, that Manasseh had built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, to fully repent he needed to break them down again. But he didn't ! A compromise came into being :—

"They did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only."

Yet Moses' law had forbidden this, which Manasseh had introduced again. So the pagan worship continued with a new label upon it as it has done to this very day and time.

So we see God very merciful to Manasseh, but that Manasseh was too far gone to completely recover himself even though there was a great improvement; hence he continued for that very long reign of fifty-five years. Let us note perhaps the significance of how he was buried. Concerning Hezekiah the record says :—

"And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death."

(2 Chron. 32:33).

Concerning Manasseh it says :—

"So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house." (ch.33:20).

In his own house—no place with the sons of David !

“Let your light so shine before men”

(Matt. 5:16).

In Matthew 5:14 we read the words of the Lord Jesus, “Ye are the light of the world.” These words were addressed to His disciples as we gather from verses 1-2:—

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,”

In verses 5-6 He says:—

“Blessed are the meek (the teachable): for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness — i.e. God’s righteousness and not their own, as proved by the record in John 7:37:—

“. . . Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

As the prophet Isaiah endorses in chapter 55:1, 3-4:—

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.”

We know that David is described as “a man after God’s own heart.” Why was this if it was not in his readiness to acknowledge his sin without qualification.

How merciful God is when we are in transgression, but is not the way to obtain this mercy contained in Isaiah 55:6-7 as this surely puts a limit to the time for seeking and to call upon Him, namely, while He is near:—

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous

man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

How perilous is our position if we constantly seek to justify ourselves when we know we are wrong, and nullify our confession by qualification, and if we do, how long will God tolerate such a position ? Isaiah 42:14 says : “ I have long time holden my peace.” Surely this verse indicates that there is a limit to God’s patience and this applies just as much to ecclesias as to individuals. “ Ye are the light of the world ” is addressed to those who have become enlightened and so we read in verse 16 :—

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

It is not shewing forth the light to parley with evil, for it is only by showing forth God’s righteousness and not our own that we can glorify the Father which is in heaven. Not only must we uphold what is right but it is equally important to condemn that which is wrong, for :—

“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”
(Matt. 18:14).

The whole object of Matthew 18 is to save those who are perishing, but there are limits set for our guidance quite plainly recorded in verses 15-17 :—

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother.

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ecclesia : but if he neglect to hear the ecclesia, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

When these instructions are carried out faithfully it is also a compliance with Matthew 5:16 — “ Let your light so shine before men . . . ” which is the only way to give glory and honour to the Father.

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

“ Men’s hearts failing them for fear . . . ”
(Luke 21:26).

What a hopeless hope is offered by the world. Recently news headlines proclaimed “ American President not to give up space arms.” The American Defence Secretary said that the planned anti-missile system promised to make offensive weapons obsolete and then uttered the significant remark that it is “ the only thing that offers any real hope to the world and we will not give that up.”

It is not absolutely clear what is being planned by the U.S.A., but ten feasibility research contracts led by ten different American companies are under way. Whether it would be based upon pulse lasers, particle beams, or some other high energy devices either singularly or in combination is not known.

Britain and other Western European countries have accepted nuclear weapons from America which are targeted on sensitive areas of Russia. The propaganda put forward is that this is the way to ensure “ peace by strength,” and is generally accepted as the only feasible and sensible thing to do. How powerful propaganda has become. For the true and simple fact is that Russia has responded by bringing forward extra nuclear devices, targeted on Britain and other European nations which have the American rockets, so cancelling out any possible superiority. And if space arms are the only things that offer “ any real hope ” what is the point in proliferating these deadly ground based armaments which only attract either retaliation or encourage pre-emptory elimination ?

Of course international talks about talks go on between the great powers of the United States and the Soviet Union in a show of endeavouring to move towards an improvement in East-West relations. Britain through its Foreign Secretary has expressed determination to work for better relations with the Eastern bloc. It is all words, and no more, for all the while research and building up of armament stockpiles continue; even Britain in its minor role is devoting a considerable proportion of its wealth to war devices to the detriment of the well-being of its own people.

Is this the hope for the world? When will men realise that they can have no hope in men and less in those who govern them?

No, the only hope is from God as the unswerving sublime message clearly shows:

“Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. . . . And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.” Isaiah 32:1-2 and 17.

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.

Alternate Week: Revelation Study.

The annual Sunday School party is planned, God willing, for February 16th.

We are grateful for the help granted in the work of His house, both here and with our brethren across the sea, and pray that His will may be done.

J.A.DeF.

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“PENTRIP,” Black Rock, Portmadoc.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.

Bible Study: Midweek.

We are now looking towards the summer months and the hoped-for visits of the Brethren and Sisters.

We are grateful that we have been helped through the dark winter.

We still try to bear witness as opportunity arises.

per D.L.

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MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall Annexe, Audenshaw, M/cr.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 10.30 a.m.

Thursdays: Bible Class 7.30 p.m.

We have been grateful for letters received appreciating the work of this magazine which does give encouragement.

We are endeavouring, as opportunity presents, to do the work required of us.