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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"

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**"AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD"
"OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD"**

This morning we have read Paul's letter to his Corinthian brethren. These brethren had been Gentiles, but now in mind and heart were brethren of Christ, heirs to the promises, the hope of Israel. For these brethren Paul prayed:

"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."
II Corinthians 1:2.

These words of comfort and help were written in the midst of his own heavy cares:

"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:"
II Corinthians 1:8-9.

With Paul, we are dying creatures because of sin; Adam's first and our own. Yet Paul knew God's deliverance and trusted in His mercy and promise of eternal life, made possible as he was baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. By this act of faith he became a new man in Christ Jesus. As such a new man, dramatically changed from being an adversary to God and His people, Paul gave unstintingly of his strength and life to serve Christ's brethren, spending and being spent in that determination. Of his humble spirit in that work we have also read this morning:

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

II Corinthians 3:5.

Sufficient - sufficiency: these words mean being able, complete, worthy or meet. Paul uses it as he wrote: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament. . . ." (Verse 6) How easily one can come to feel, as Paul warned against, that we are sufficient of ourselves, when the ability is truly given of God. "Think", as used here, implies a taking inventory of self. As we strive to do this, Paul again helps us in writing to the faithful in Philippi:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever just, . . . pure, . . . lovely, . . . are of good report. . . think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you."

Philippians 4:8-9.

"Think on these things. . . ." — take an inventory of our hearts, our brother exhorts. How many of these spirit qualities are in us, Brethren and Sisters? Looking over the last week, has our inventory of spiritual things flourished? Have we shown growth, not just for our own strength but for our brethren and our Father? Has our thinking been fastened upon the things of the spirit to help us overcome the things of the flesh and of the world, which press upon us so easily and so subtly? Paul said, "Do: and the God of peace shall be with you." HE will, with help and guidance, making us truly feel that "our sufficiency is of God". Such a mind was the result of our brother's experience over twenty-five years in the work as a "chosen vessel"—chosen and converted on the way to Damascus to persecute Christ's disciples. How much he had come to realize, as we must, that he was nothing of himself; his worthiness, his meekness was of God. In this spirit he witnessed to Jesus' name and the kingdom of God, giving the glory to the Almighty.

From these thoughts, our minds go to the portion in Numbers where we have seen the record of Aaron and Miriam's rising up in rebellion:

"... against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: . . ." Numbers 12:1.

Their real motive obviously was jealousy of Moses' position, for they also said:

"... Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? ..." Numbers 12:2.

And then in parenthesis we read of God's witness to Moses' spirit, "(the man Moses was very meek above all men. . . .)" Verse 3. Moses recognized also that "our sufficiency is of God" giving the glory where it was due. The Lord then defended Moses, His humble servant, to Miriam and Aaron:

"With him will I speak mouth to mouth. . . . wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" Numbers 12:8.

God justified Moses and rebuked his critics, and then caused Miriam to become leprous. What further vindication to Moses in that Miriam was later cleansed, only as Moses prayed for her healing. What gratitude must have sprung into his heart as this was allowed by the Almighty.

Returning now to Paul who also was the recipient of God's justifying care, we read the words he wrote to his brethren:

“. . . thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” II Corinthians 2:14.

How was he able to triumph always in Christ? Was it not through the ability and protection given of God? In that strength Paul gave his life to the manifesting of the savour of the knowledge of Christ. How did he do so? By his spending of self, by his witnessing, for which he was a “chosen vessel”, as he wrote further:

“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” II Corinthians 2:15.

How were Paul and his brethren a sweet savour of Christ? Again Paul’s teaching adds to this:

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;”
Ephesians 5:1.

Jesus was a follower of God as His dear Son of whom the Father often declared: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Do we not desire greatly to please Him also? A follower is one who acts “the same as”, making us think of God’s instruction to Israel:

“. . . Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”
Leviticus 19:2.

To be a follower of God then is to walk with Him, in His way, in His law, with His Son who did so perfectly. How we desire to be His “dear children”. “Dear” is the same word as “my beloved Son”, and is derived from AGAPE—the love which is of God and not natural to the human mind. Paul continued to instruct his brethren concerning this important command:

“. . . walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”
Ephesians 5:2.

An offering for us—Jesus fulfilled the figure in the law seen in the burnt offering where the head and the best part, the fat, were first placed upon the altar and then, the rest of the body after being washed, was joined to the head. Then:

“. . . the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.”
Leviticus 1:9.

Here was a figure to Israel pointing forward to Jesus being offered as the head of His body, and later the members of His body, having been cleansed, united to Him; all as a sweet savour unto His Father. It is striking that the Hebrew word for burnt offering is also used as "ascent", a going up, as would the smoke of that offering ascend as a sweet savour to God. The root of this word is found also in the titles of some of David's Psalms—Psalms of degrees or ascent, breathing of his desire to to up to Zion and to be in his living, a sweet savour ascending unto the Lord. This can be only as we, Brethren and Sisters, join ourselves to Jesus, our Head, and allow that fire of the spirit to consume our fleshly ways, thereby creating a sweet savour to our Father.

Going further into this morning's readings, we have witnessed the faithfulness of Joshua and Caleb as they withstood the faithless rebels who feared to go up into the land of Canaan because of the giants. To those who rebelled Caleb said:

"... Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."
 Numbrs 13:30.

Caleb and Joshua's spirits were to obey their God, go up (ascend?) into the land, and in that faithful effort offer a sweet savour unto God in believing that His power would be sufficient to conquer whatever stood in the way. For their faithfulness they were nearly stoned by angry Israel, but again were cared for by the Almighty who was pleased by their reliance upon Him, in believing "we are well able to overcome".

This conviction was Paul's strength too, as he witnessed to the power in the words given by the Almighty:

"For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:
 To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"
 II Corinthians 2:15-16.

Paul's work as a chosen vessel was much like that of Caleb and Joshua's as they urged their brethren to rely upon the Lord. Those who heard and did submit to His word perceived the savour of life, but those who rebelled against it knew only death, forbidden the promised inheritance. Paul then asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?"—who is able, who is meet to be a savour of life unto life? Is it not those who like Paul, like Caleb, believe "we are well able to overcome" and that "our sufficiency is of God"? We, Brethren and Sisters, are weak, dying creatures, subject to sin and death; yet God

in His mercy has called us to life through Jesus Christ. As we strive to be joined to Him let us put away all the uncomely things of the flesh which are abhorrent to Him, allowing the Spirit's fire to consume them, causing a sweet smell to ascend unto our Father. Helping us in this life's work, we have the example of Mary who anointed Jesus' feet and as a result:

"... the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."
John 12:3.

One there, Judas Iscariot, objected to what he considered to be a waste of precious ointment, to whom Jesus replied:

"... Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this."
John 12:7.

Mary clearly perceived the work of Jesus. too, she knew His ultimate offering would be His life as, unblemished, He died upon the cross, a sweet savour to God. Of her faith Jesus said:

"She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.
... this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."
Mark 14:8-9.

This scriptural record is a memorial of her faith even today, inspiring us to do what we can, "coming aforehand" in all things, to honor God and His Son. Mary must have denied herself much in order to buy the precious ointment with which she with perception and love anointed Jesus.

As we think of these faithful, trusting witnesses—Paul, Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Mary—finding them examples of those whose lives were a sweet savour unto the Lord, we may well ask, What made it possible? Was it not a willingness to give of themselves, not counting the cost, ever ready to the service and glory of God? They recognized the privilege and honor of being allowed to do such works, and acknowledged that while they were bound to give their best, it must be done not in reliance on their own strength and ability, but in the earnest and yielding spirit of:

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;"
II Corinthians 3:5.

J.A.DeF.

"OH THAT MEN WOULD PRAISE THE LORD"

David's 107th Psalm, inspired by the Spirit, presents an opportunity to reflect upon the goodness of God to His people. In love He does not leave man in doubt, but discloses through His Word a divine plan for the earth and the place provided for those faithful who endure. To those righteous who will be so blessed at that time David says:

"The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.
Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD."
Psalm 107:42-43.

What is it that the righteous are to see and rejoice in? What do the wise need to do?"

"... give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."
Psalm 107:1.

In this pruned song, David reflects upon God's mercy toward His people throughout the ages and on four different occasions he exclaims, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" As one examines these works it is readily seen that God controls the affairs of all the earth, yet to only a few who can perceive is understanding and help granted. David speaks of the example of Israel journeying through the wilderness towards their promised dwelling place:

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.
Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.
And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.
Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"
Psalm 107:4-8.

This speaks to us as well, for we today walk in a spiritual wilderness, a world which has His Word but either ignores it or distorts His message to suit its own fleshly ambitions. At times we too may become faint—hungry and thirsty for spiritual sustenance,

yet as they of old cried out for help so too, can we, assured that He will nourish and strengthen as we struggle to walk in the right way. This succor however, is granted only as we follow His hand and recognize through our experiences, the wonderful works He has done on our behalf.

Sadly, man's memory of God's goodness may soon evaporate and the appreciation once felt is often replaced with pride and rebellion when God's direction does not suit. David reminds of the fate of such who will not yield, even as those in the wilderness who came to loathe His provisions:

"Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High:
Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help."

Psalm 107:11-12.

But to His little ones, those of a humble heart, looking to Him as a Father, will He hearken and show compassion; for when they cry He has promised to answer as He has done countless times in the past:

"Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.
He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder."

Psalm 107:13-14.

One who cries unto God gives praise, for that believing man, trusting in the Lord's power, has revealed a faith that God only can save him from his distress.

Paul also taught of God's lovingkindness and compassion, speaking of those of old to his Roman brethren:

"For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

Romans 9:15-16.

God's mercy is extended, not because of man's goodness, for no flesh is good in His sight: all fail and come short of the mark set by His Son the Lord Jesus. Yet His compassion and lovingkindness is extended to those struggling to be faithful to that example.

Explaining the reason for God's mercy upon some, Paul refers to Pharaoh, one who felt the hardness of His hand because he refused to acknowledge His direction in men's affairs:

"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power

in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will be hardeneth." Romans 9:17-18.

The deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt is referred to by Paul as a reminder of God's mighty power against those who oppose Him, also of His beneficence toward those who seek to follow in His way:

"What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." Romans 9:22-23.

Realizing God's mercy, it is important our response be as David wished, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" It is a kindness far beyond fleshly thinking to show love to one from whom it may not be fully returned.

How truly bountiful is God's goodness, far beyond our full comprehension that some are permitted to know and hope in the ultimate of His purpose and love. In the end there will be praise to God by all who through His mercy have overcome. The redeemed from among men will sing hallelujahs, praises to Yah, in a world that will have learned of His true power when His Son rules supreme. That power is seen today in measure, working to guide and direct, but only as one is sensitive to indication and grateful for its presence. "The righteous shall see it, and rejoice"—and so must we now as we read of those wonderful works performed in the past and also when His hand is felt in our living today. So that in the spirit of David we too may say, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

M.C.S.

BIBLE CLASS
"THE SHOUT OF A KING IS AMONG THEM"
Numbers 23:21

This verse under consideration was spoken by Baalam as Israel neared the border of their promised inheritance under Moses' leadership. About to pass through the Amorite's land, they asked King Sihon to allow them through, promising:

"...we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's highway, until we be past thy borders."
Numbers 21:22.

Sihon refused and gathered his people to battle against Israel. However, because God was with them, the Amorites were defeated:

"And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.
And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok. . ."
Numbers 21:23-24.

Israel's reputation had preceded them out of Egypt—the fearsome plagues upon the Egyptians, the opening of the Red Sea with the defeat of Pharaoh's army and their journey through the wilderness, being led by the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night. Thus it was known to all the surrounding nations that this vast company was led by a God so mighty none could withstand. Moab was the next region to be crossed and having heard of the Amorite's defeat, Balak their king greatly feared Israel's arrival:

"And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.
And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.
And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel."
Numbers 22:1-3.

Fearful because of all that Israel had done to the surrounding nations, Moab attempted another approach to defeat them, sending a message to Balaam, one who professed to have the special gifts of a prophet:

“..Behold there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.” Numbers 22:5-6.

Balaam built seven altars, offering oxen and rams, but because God was with Israel, instead of cursing, he was forced to admit:

“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?”

Numbers 23:8.

Balak then brought him to another point from which he could overlook the vast company of Israei and make another attempt to curse:

“And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.”

Numbers 23:14:

But again he was unsuccessful and Balaam said to Balak:

“God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.” Numbers 23:19-20.

God, their king, was working with Israel to care and protect, having already done many wondrous things on their behalf. Balaam saw this and knew he could do or say nothing contrary to God’s will, for Israel would prosper. He tried several times to curse Israel. Instead God caused him to speak the words of our consideration:

“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.”

Numbers 23:21.

The nations that came up against Israel such as the Egyptians and the Amorites did fear the shout of Israel’s king, for as long as they obeyed God’s precepts, His might and power would be used

on their behalf. This was true for Israel and has been so for all the faithful from the beginning, for the voice of God, or the shout of their king is ever among them, for good.

There was no way Balaam could defeat Israel while God was with them, however we read of a later time when Israel brought upon themselves a cursing because they had turned away from God:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.”
Numbers 25:1-2,4.

Only as there was obedience, was God in their midst. However, when they turned away and walked not in His precepts He removed His power and lovingkindness. This tells us that as long as we strive to be obedient and faithful, we may trust that the shout of our king is among us in the form of God’s help and care. We know the Lord Jesus will return with a shout to summon the responsible to His judgment seat, following which He will reign as king over God’s heritage.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:”

I Thessalonians 4:16.

The responsible dead and those alive at His return who are judged acceptable will rejoice together exclaiming:

“Thou. . . hast redeemed us to God by thy blood. . . And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”
Revelation 5:9-10.

It is now during the time of probation, that the voice of God must be heard and obeyed in order to keep alive the hope of being allowed among that immortal throng who will, through the power of the Spirit, carry out the commands of The King in their midst.

M.C.S.

PARTIAL INSPIRATION—the trouble of 1885 (continued)
Christ's estimate of the Old Testament—(Robert Roberts)

"In what estimate, then, did Christ hold the Scriptures of the Old Testament, of which Scriptures, Josephus, a Jew of the first century, speaks thus:

'How firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do: for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them: but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrine and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in number, and frequently in time to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws and the records that contain them.' (Josephus book 1)

Christ alludes to the Old Testament under various names. He speaks of "the Scriptures", "Moses and the prophets", "the word of God", "the things that are written", etc. But, whatever be the form of the allusion, he never speaks of them without recognising their divine authority, expressly or by obvious influence.

1/ He makes the fact of a thing being written in the Scriptures always a sufficient reason for its reception as divine.

His answers to the tempter in the wilderness were all of this character, e.g.: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt.4:10) Of John the Baptist, he says, "This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger, etc." (Matt.11:10). Justifying his violent expulsion of mere traders from the precincts of the temple, he said, "It is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, etc." (Matt.20.13) He supported his doctrine concerning the holy character of the true children of Abraham by saying, "It is written in the prophets, they shall be all taught of God". (John 6:45) He referred to his approaching sufferings in Jerusalem as the accomplishment of "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man" (Luke 18:31). He combated an objection of the Pharisees by saying, "What is this then that is written" (Matt.20:17). Explaining the meaning of his sufferings to his disciples after his resurrection, he said, "Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer" etc. (Luke 24:46)

The apostolic record shows us Jesus using this phrase on many other occasions, but these are sufficient. The use of it could not be accounted for except on the principle that he regarded the

Old Testament as a divine document. His references in the form of this phrase extend from Moses to Malachi, taking the historical books and Psalms between.

2/ His statements concerning the writings of Moses and the prophets, are all of a character that recognise them as divine.

These statements occur in various connections, but they are all of one character. When he said, "I am not come to destroy (the law and the prophets) but to fulfil" (Matt.5:17), it was as good as saying that the law and the prophets were divine, for with man there can never originate anything for the Son of God to "fulfil". He expressly said, "All the prophets and the law prophesied till John" (Matt.11:13). This affirms the matter in question. He made Abraham in parable say, "They have Moses and the prophets: LET THEM HEAR THEM" (Luke 16:29): which he could not be imagined to have done on any supposition but that Moses and the prophets were divine. He accused his disciples of being "slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets had spoken" (Luke 24:25) which would not have been a ground of accusation unless "all that the prophets had spoken" were divine. After his resurrection, on the journey to Emmaus, he began at Moses, "and going through all the prophets," he expounded to the two disciples "the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

"Moses, the prophets and the psalms" (thus endorsed by Christ as divine) are practically the whole Bible. The historical writings are not distinguished from the prophets, because they were all the work of prophets—Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, and the inspired seers and scribes. That Christ's recognition extended to the whole Scriptures will appear more particularly from the next proposition."

(To be continued)



"YE SHALL AFFLICT YOUR SOULS"

Today we have listened to the instruction of God given to Moses for His people. How often we read, "The LORD spake unto Moses," as He imparted His law for Israel. To those who perceived its spirit, this law was a "schoolmaster to bring (them) unto Christ, that (they) might be justified by faith."

In our portion this morning, the Almighty instructed Israel concerning the day of atonement. This feast (Yom Kippur) is kept today by the Jewish people but its true meaning is lost, for it is kept according to the letter of the law and not in the spirit of God's teaching. This holy day was given as a foreshadowing of Jesus

Christ and His work, as Paul reveals:

“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood be entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

Hebrews 9:11-12.

God revealed through Moses how the high priest was to enter through the veil into the most holy place once a year with blood, to offer first for himself and then for his people. The blood of the bullock (for himself) and of the goat (for the people) was to be sprinkled before and upon the mercy seat, that atonement might be made. Can we imagine the high priest's care and awe as he entered inside the veil? How meticulously he would observe the divine directions. He would take coals from the altar, put them into the censer, placing in them the holy incense as he entered, so that the cloud of incense would cover the mercy seat “that he die not”. (See Leviticus 16:13) If these instructions were not exactly followed, the high priest would die. This danger would instill a sense of fear, an awareness of God's holiness and awesome power, causing him to tremble lest he fail to glorify His God. For His people God explained further:

“... this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all. . . .”

For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you . . . that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.”

Leviticus 16:29-30.

Still further direction was given:

“Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: . . . ye shall afflict your souls. . . .”

For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.”

Leviticus 23:27,29.

To be cut off meant perishing. How important then was that day of atonement to our brethren in Israel. It must be kept with a willing and careful mind, precisely as divinely commanded lest there be a dying or a cutting off. It was indeed a day of covering, of “kippur”, revealing the Almighty's great mercy in its provision.

How sobering to realize that only those who afflicted their souls could receive that atonement. This tells us there must be a self-chastening, humbling or gentling. Why was it required that each

brother and sister afflict his soul on that day? It was a day of covering, of taking away the guilt of sin through the blood of the sacrifice, carried into the presence of Yahweh as He dealt with Israel. Those desiring to be so covered would need to humble self, confess failure and acknowledge the need for a covering of that failure. This takes a putting away of self-esteem, for if there is "the pride of life" some would not in their hearts afflict their souls, and so would lose the atonement so mercifully provided. Let us, Brethren and Sisters, allow our minds to dwell upon this need for a gentling of the soul. David helps us as he meditated upon this and exclaimed as we have read this morning:

"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."
Psalm 119:67.

Our brother's experience helps us to realize that affliction, humbling of soul, is an essential part of submitting to the word of our Father. David amplified his thoughts relating to affliction:

"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."
Psalm 119:75.

In firmness and stability the Almighty demands obedience, a humbling of self under His mighty hand. To those who do so, He will unfailingly bless. Just as unfailingly He will cut off those who fail to submit. He is always fair, always just, always righteous. We in turn must heed and submit to His judgment, for such is affliction of soul. David learned this by bitter experience, for he said: "thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me". Can we see why our brother was moved to write:

"Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness (affliction) hath made me great."
Psalm 18:35.

How much this man valued that divine working, realizing it was in God's purpose to humble him. The Almighty in mercy afflicts, gently as He perceives response, more strongly as there may be resistance or lack of perception. He desires to strengthen that yieldingness of mind and spirit which praises Him. Again the spirit of David helps us:

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.
The humble (afflicted) shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God."

Psalm 69:30-32.

In their need, in trial or in perplexity, the Almighty will answer those who seek Him in humility of mind, for without a lowly spirit, the need for His mercy is not perceived. Daniel, who was in great need, cried for help. His God answered through an angel:

“ . . . Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten (afflict) thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.”
Daniel 10:12.

So it can be with ourselves, Brethren and Sisters. The Almighty will hear as He sees a gentling of self, and will give help to face whatever He in righteousness places upon us. True submitting of self must be manifest in sincerity and recognition of truth, not done merely as form or habit, for that is an offense to Him. When Israel turned away from His word, God was offended and sent His prophet, saying:

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression. . . .
Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? . . .
Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.”
Isaiah 58:1,3,4.

The Almighty's rebuke was stern but clear, and further help was given:

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?
. . . to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? . . . and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”
Isaiah 58:6-7.

How easily we humans can hide from our own flesh nature, not acknowledging failings, shutting our eyes to the needs of others, thinking largely of self and its concerns. Such fail to gentle their flesh, and so their offerings and supplications are not acceptable, their failures not covered. In contrast to this unseeing spirit we think of Jesus' words concerning those who, showing care for others, gave of themselves, providing for their brethren's needs:

“ . . . Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”
Matthew 25:34.

He further spoke:

“... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Matthew 25:40.

It will be only those who did not hide from but battled their fleshly nature—in effect, afflicting their souls—who will know the atonement promised by a merciful God.

It is marvellous that God, as a Father, does work with His children to humble, to gentle. We bring to mind Moses' words to Israel as they prepared to enter the land:

“... thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble (afflict) thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.”

Deuteronomy 8:2,3,5.

During those forty years of humbling and chastening in the wilderness, many were afflicted but few gentled: Joshua, Caleb, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas, to name a few. Even these faithful ones failed, yet did not hide from their own flesh, always seeking forgiveness and that special covering in the day of atonement.

As we think about this holy day—the day when the guilt of the afflicted in Israel was covered—we are helped to perceive more powerfully the blessing God provides for His true children. Just as the high priest entered into the most holy place and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the mercy seat, so Jesus has given His life and entered into the holy presence of His Father to atone for His people, those who have sought help to gentle their souls for the serving of God and not self. As we remember that life given to accomplish this, at His Table this morning, are we not strengthened, more surely empowered to put aside self-centred, fleshly thoughts, to the end we may hope to hear Jesus' words:

“... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Matthew 25:21.

J.A.DeF.

Signs of His Coming and of the End of the World

Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent."
(Isaiah 14:29)

It may be said that the above prophecy relates to past events, which indeed it does. But as in much of scripture, there is another meaning applying to a future fulfilment. The chapter does conclude with a message of comfort:-

"- - - there shall come from the north a smoke - - -
What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation?
That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people
shall trust in it."
(verses 31-32)

The Soviet Union is broken up. The world thinks the great northern power is now diminished; and the nation now to dominate world affairs, is the U.S.A. But the word of God states that from the root of the diminished power will come something worse, described as "a fiery flying serpent".

Significantly, then, certain rumblings are heard. A Russian military spokesman has warned that the West had better not meddle in Russia's internal affairs. He claimed that the Western alliance is being deceitful over economic aid to Russia, and might even invade former Soviet territory under the pretext of ensuring "international control" over the former Soviet nuclear weaponry. He declared that the military high command will draw a line on disarmament to ensure the maintenance of the fighting capability of the Russian forces.

Suspicion of Western intentions was voiced by a former chief in the Soviet Secret Service, who said that Western reports about leaks of nuclear technologies and scientists from Russia were all parts of a ploy mounted by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States to persuade the world of the need for "direct international control" over Russia's military and civilian nuclear potential. That conflicts in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and the Transcaucasian republics "might cause a direct Western interference under the pretext of a need to ensure "international control" over the nuclear potential."

Russia's emergence as a new military power, effectively replacing the former Soviet Union, was against the long-term interests of the U.S.A., Japan, and Nato nations. There was evidence of a double-cross in Western efforts "to stabilise the economic situation,

to smooth over national contradictions, while at the same time encouraging the disintegration process inside Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States."

Russia, then, has still an hostile element, and it is also going to ensure that it remains a powerful military nation.

Meanwhile as the American presidential election approaches, there is considerable activity by the present U.S. Government to produce a political settlement over the Palestinian issue. With the change of Government in Israel, it does seem possible that a semblance of agreement may be reached, which then will be paraded in the U.S.A. by America's present leaders in the hope of saving the President from electoral defeat, and also lull Israel.

So the scene is being set for the latter day fulfilment:-

"Rejoice not thou, WHOLE Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: (former Soviet hostility to Israel), for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice - - -"

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

HAMBURG, NEW YORK, *Corner Southwestern Blvd. & Pleasant Ave.*

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.
 Sunday School 1.45 p.m.

Bible Class: Midweek: Forestville and Hamburg
 Alternate Week: Revelation Study

Recent counsel with our brethren in Manchester has been a help in arriving at a decision. It is also confirmation of the Spirit's words, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety". We are grateful for such a provision and for the unity of mind and spirit it has brought.

J.A.DeF.

MANCHESTER, *Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.*

Sunday: Breaking of Bread 11 a.m.
Thursday: Bible Class 7.15 p.m.

As Autumn approaches we are caused to consider how quickly the seasons pass by. We are then made to reflect that the witness to the Truth has also a set time—after which opportunity for response will have passed.