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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

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

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AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

“THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD”

In our recent readings, we have listened to God’s prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and will shortly consider Daniel. These men prophesied during Judah and Jerusalem’s last days, continuing through the captivity in Babylon. We read of the work given to God’s prophets:

“ . . . the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place.”

II Chronicles 36:15.

Even at the end, for Judah and Jerusalem, God showed His pity and desire to spare, by exhorting that they forsake their waywardness and turn back to Him. The Lord’s “rising up betimes” conveys His great concern and urgency that Judah move to correct their failings. How did they and their kings react to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and later to Daniel?

“ . . . they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

II Chronicles 36:16.

No healing, no cure because they refused His word and mocked His compassion, thus ending the nation of Israel. So the times of Gentile rule over Israel began. Jeremiah, one of these messengers, conveyed His condemnation:

“Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day (almost 900 years), I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them:

Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers.”

Jeremiah 7:25-26.

There was no remedy, and thus Judah went into captivity as Jeremiah had prophesied. In time (70 years), God in great care would deliver a remnant of them:

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation . . . saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath

charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

II Chronicles 36:22-23.

Let us look back to the time and direction of these prophets' work. Jeremiah prophesied in Judah and Jerusalem from 629 to 588 BC. — 41 years, culminating in their captivity. Ezekiel's work was with these captives in Babylon, extending for 21 years. Daniel's work with the kings of Babylon and Persia began about the time of Ezekiel's first witness, and extended for 73 years. Thus their combined work continued under God's direction for 95 years, during a difficult and often disastrous period of Israel's history.

Our most recent reading is of the prophet Ezekiel whose name means strengthened of God. It is surprising that he is addressed by name only twice in all the scriptures, but was many times called "son of man" as God directed and entrusted him with a vital work. This was a reminder to him that he was a son of man (Hebrew — Adam) and as such, was mortal and subject to temptation and ultimate death, having great need for spiritual strength. He found that necessary strength through God's hand upon him, revealing in vision His great power. We have read of him when a captive in Babylon as:

"... the hand of the LORD was there upon him."

Ezekiel 1:3.

He was shown in vision the awesome power and glory of the enthroned God of Israel, inspiring him to begin his work with those captive people. God showed him a throne:

"... and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.

As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD ..."

Ezekiel 1:26-28.

Brightness — a glittering, scintillating light shining so as to bedazzle the eyes. This was the likeness of God!

"Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which

no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”

I Timothy 6:16.

What was Ezekiel’s reaction upon seeing this “likeness of the glory of God”? We listen to his words:

“... and when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.” Ezekiel 1:28.

He could not look upon the “brightness” but heard the voice of the Lord strengthening and directing him in his work with God’s “rebellious house.” To these he was to speak God’s word:

“And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.” Ezekiel 2:5.

Inspired and strengthened, Ezekiel faithfully did witness, a true watchman in obedience to the Almighty’s word:

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.” Ezekiel 3:17.

Under the “hand of the LORD” the prophet witnessed, suffering much as God required him to be a “sign” unto His people; for example, laying on his sides for 430 days (Ezekiel 4:4-6). How could he do this seemingly impossible task? Could we, Brethren and Sisters, endure such a demanding action? The hand of the Lord was upon our brother, enabling him to do all that the Almighty required. Why was this necessary? We have read this morning God’s words to His prophet:

“... I will do unto them (rebellious Israel) after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.” Ezekiel 7:27.

They did know, as Ezekiel’s prophecy and warning came to pass. Even so, they refused to change their rebellious ways! Under God’s hand, Ezekiel continued to warn as he spoke to Israel of a vision he had been shown:

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,
And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O LORD God, thou knowest.”

Ezekiel 37:1,3.

The Almighty revealed:

“... Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel;

behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost:
we are cut off for our parts." Ezekiel 37:11.

This vision came to Ezekiel one year after their captivity. Truly these people by then would surely feel — "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost" — for all seemed to have ended for their nation. In compassion, still through His prophet's vision, there was hope given. The Almighty continued:

"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,

And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

Ezekiel 37:12-14.

Impossible! — one could reasonably feel, especially just one year after being taken captive. Yet at the end of the promised 70 years, a remnant did return to Jerusalem, and with God's help rebuilt the temple and the city.

This was a foretaste of what the Almighty will do when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom, with Jerusalem as its capital. To that city God will assemble as kings and priests those who, through the ages, have submitted to His word. Now spirit creatures, they will be gathered before God's throne, able to look upon His presence and rejoice, saying:

"... Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Revelation 4:8, 11.

Jeremiah will be there, Ezekiel will be there, Daniel will be there! Joined with them will be those who in their time of probation have bowed down before God, acknowledging His compassionate hand.

Brethren and Sisters, we have that hope, but only as we recognize that we, like His prophets, are sons of men, condemned to die, yet living in the hope of salvation through God's mercy. Let us remember that as Ezekiel saw the vision of God's "brightness" by the river Chebar, he had to look up to see the whirlwind, the

brightness, and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God, before he fell upon his face and heard God speak. In considering these things, let us remember Jesus' words to His disciples as He gave them signs of His return:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

Luke 21:27-28.

J.A. DeF

THE LORD STOOD BY

We have recently been following in the book of Acts, Paul's endeavours to carry out the work given him of God. A witness which at times caused him great suffering, yet which he pursued earnestly.

In the midst of his preaching at Jerusalem, he was taken into protective custody by the Romans, who feared the Sadducees and Pharisees would cause him harm, so great was their animosity against him because of his message. After this incident, in order to bolster his courage, the Lord sent Paul further instructions through a vision:

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome":

Acts 23:11.

Paul, being a natural born Roman was entitled to appeal his case before Caesar in Rome. This was done not specifically to save himself, but because he had been instructed by God to take His word to Rome, as he had done in Jerusalem. He would remember Jesus' words to Ananias, who baptized him shortly after his conversion in Damascus, saying:

"... I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Acts 9:16.

When we read of Paul's sufferings while witnessing, we realize how insignificant in comparison are our own tests and trials. Yet to us who struggle to walk in His ways, as did Paul, the Almighty grants the same encouragement, standing nearby ready to help and strengthen.

In a similar circumstance at Corinth, Paul preached of Christ to the Jews of this city:

“And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.”
Acts 18:4-5.

However, many of the Jews at Corinth would not receive the gospel of Christ, opposing Paul and falsely accusing him. It was the same violent reaction to his preaching as he had received in Jerusalem. Can we imagine how this would cause him fear for his life and great discouragement? Yet in the midst of this turmoil, there were some who heard and were converted, providing Paul with a sense of comfort and fulfillment in his witness:

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”
Acts 18:8-11.

Paul would cherish these words of encouragement sent from God, feeling Him close at hand during such daunting times.

Again Paul found himself in perilous circumstances while being taken by ship to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. The vessel was caught in a storm for several days and those on board feared for their lives. In the midst of this fearful situation Paul again received the Spirit's comfort:

“And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve,

Saying, fear not Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Acts 27:20-25.

What an example of faith and courage Paul has left for us today as during his witness he confronted violence, the threat of physical harm, shipwreck, scourgings & imprisonment, all in the cause of promoting the gospel of Christ. Why did he persevere in being known as a child of God when faced with such enmity and difficult trials? He answers this question in his letter to the Romans:

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:16-18.

Paul's courageous example speaks to us today to stand firm in our own witness of Christ, trusting in the One who has promised to stand by all His children, as He did to Paul. God knows our every need and will provide abundantly as we submit in obedience and humility to the circumstances given us. Let us in this hope Brethren and Sisters, walk on in faith, never fearing.

M.C.S

"SEVEN SHEPHERDS AND EIGHT PRINCIPAL MEN"

(Dr. J. Thomas)

"Speaking of the Messiah, Micah saith concerning him, "Now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And he shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come into our land; and when he shall tread in our fortresses; then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight anointed men. And they shall lay waste the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof; thus shall he deliver from the Assyrian when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our frontiers."

What the names of these fifteen personages may be who are to conduct the military operations of the Jews against the entrances into the land of Nimrod, cannot be stated with certainty. They will rise up among the Jews; for saith Micah, "We will raise them against the Assyrians when he treadeth in our fortresses." "Shepherds" is used in Scripture for the rulers of nations, who are supposed to take

care of the people as shepherds do their flocks. Jehovah says concerning Israel, "My flock was scattered and became a prey, because there was no shepherd." (Ezekiel 34:5, 8). This is their condition at this day, and will continue to be till the crisis of the Assyrian's fall. But concerning them at that time, it is written, "I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed (or rule) them; and they shall fear no more, nor be destroyed, neither shall they be lacking, saith Jehovah." (Jeremiah 23:4). They will be powerful shepherds that can remove all cause of fear from the Jews. Now of these we know that the chief shepherd is "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel", after the type of Joseph (Genesis 49:24), which stone is Jehovah's shepherd and associate, who was to be smitten by the sword (Zechariah 13:7 : Matthew 26:31). This shepherd associated with Jehovah is named David; because he is beloved, and descended from David "according to the flock". Thus it is written, "I will set up one shepherd over Israel, and he shall feed (or rule) them; my servant David shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd --- and a prince among them --- and king over them --- for ever." (Ezekiel 34:23-24 & 37:24-25). Of this associate of Jehovah and ruler of Israel, Micah says, he should be born in Bethlehem Ephratah; smitten with a rod upon the cheek; stand and feed in the majesty of the name of Jehovah, his God; and deliver Israel from the Assyrian (Ch. 5:1-6). Jesus, the great Nazarite of Israel, was born there, and smitten on the cheek (Matthew 26:67); which is an earnest that the rest of the prophecy will be as literally fulfilled in him.

Jesus, then, is one of the fifteen: who are his fourteen associates? Twelve of them, we would answer, are those to whom he said, "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones judging (ruling or feeding as shepherds) the twelve tribes of Israel, when the Son of Man (the chief shepherd) shall sit on the throne of his glory in the regeneration (Matthew 19:28). Paul and John the Baptist, it is probable, may be the other two. Here are altogether fifteen shepherds of Israel, who will certainly not be "idle shepherds" at a time when the Holy Land to the entrance into Nimrodia has to be delivered from the armies of the Assyrian.

When judgment under the whole heaven is given into the hands of the saints (Daniel 7:22), these fifteen pre-eminent personages will not be exempted. Fourteen of them are doubtless of those "who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4); and as he contends with the Assyrian to expel him from Canaan with the entrances of the land of Nimrod, they will also be

skilful and zealous co-operators with him in the war (Revelation 19:14). They co-operated with him in preaching the gospel of the kingdom; why should they not also be his special co-workers in "beating off the enemy from the Euphrates unto the Nile of Egypt; that their brethren of the stock of Abraham, "ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and outcasts in the land of Egypt" may go and bow themselves down before Jehovah in the "holy mount in Jerusalem". (Isaiah 27:12-13); in other words, that the kingdom may be "set up", and "restored again to Israel" in their land?"

**"- - - THE DAY OF THE LORD! TO WHAT END IS IT
FOR YOU? - - - ."**

(Amos 5:18)

Obviously the above words imply that there will be some who will be disappointed and displeased when the prophecy is fulfilled. Jesus also speaks of this aspect:-

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? - - -

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me - - - ."

(Matthew 7:22-23).

As the millennium approaches some minority religions are voicing great expectations. The Denver-based "Concerned Christians" group have sent some of their members to Jerusalem, whose leader has prophesied he will die on the streets of Jerusalem in December. But they are not the only ones. Fellows of the "First Temple of the House of David" are also there. They are preparing to be on the Mount of Olives on the last day of this year. It is understandable that Israeli security forces are concerned having learned that the "First Temple of the House of David" have had links with the "Branch Davidic" cult of Waco, Texas. The members of that cult died in a fire at their American headquarters known as Mount Carmel (in 1993) after a shoot-out with the police. Others (called "End-Timers") from the United States, gather together each Wednesday evening on the Mount of Olives for prayer and for song, they are in expectation of Christ's descent from heaven upon the top of the mountain.

Arabs have been taking note of this fervour. The "Mount of Olives Hotel" has written to religious groups in America posing the question, "How would you like to be staying at the Mount of Olives Hotel the day Jesus returns?" The owners who offer this

accommodation are Palestinian Muslims.

As the months go by, it can be expected more will go to stay in Israel for the approaching millennium. The Israeli police are planning for this, because some cults have openly taught the destruction of the Muslim shrine, which is on the site of the first and second Jewish Temples, and greatly venerated in Muslim tradition. Israeli authorities fear that some fanatic may try to blow up the mosque, to hasten Christ's Second Coming, and the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple.

Security at the Mount has therefore been increased, and it is expected that four hundred police will be operating there, with special camera surveillance and warning sensory devices. Jerusalem's commander of police has spoken of these preparations; fully aware of the "messianic" activity in expectation of the year 2000.

What is overlooked in all this fervour is the emphatic declaration of Jesus Himself:-

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

(Matthew 24:36).

A BIBLE CLASS

"MAN ALSO KNOWETH NOT HIS TIME"

Ecclesiastes 9:12

Our consideration is a part of Solomon's God-given wisdom, preserved to help us in our struggle to glorify Him in what we do and how we live. It is a reminder that all men have one sure end:

"All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

... there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

Ecclesiastes 9:2-3.

All men inevitably die, yet there can be hope while one is living, as Solomon declares:

"For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." Ecclesiastes 9:4-5.

In life there is hope, the opportunity to live in obedience to God's word, with the promise of life eternal when Jesus returns to resurrect and judge those who know what God desires and are thus responsible. Those accounted acceptable at that judgment will be granted eternal life as kings and priests with Jesus in God's kingdom to come upon the earth. Those rejected by Jesus will return to the grave from which there is no escape. With this in mind, God warns through Solomon's words:

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest."

Ecclesiastes 9:10.

Whatever goal we may set our hearts upon, the only opportunity to achieve it is during our lifetime. Wisdom clearly says to do your utmost to achieve it now, for that time is short. If our desire is to honor God, obeying His will, longing for a place in His kingdom, and following the example of Jesus, we are told to "do it with thy might." Otherwise, if our goal is success, riches, honor for self, this world's rewards, do it with all your strength, for life is short and death is forever. There will come a time to all men when opportunity is gone!

As we seek to honor God now, we hear Solomon's warning: "I . . . saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

Ecclesiastes 9:11.

We do not know when time or chance will occur, for we cannot foresee the future. But those seeking to walk according to God's word — His "little ones" — can be cared for, guided and sustained under His merciful oversight. David, a man after God's own heart, sought that care and he prayed:

"Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O, thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.

Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

Psalms 17:7-8.

God did manifest during David's lifetime many loving kindnesses

and mercies. Yet to be fulfilled are further "sure mercies" because of his faithful life's work done with "all his might." David died, as do all men, but had the living hope of a part in God's kingdom with Jesus, giving glory eternally to the Father.

Solomon further helps as we ponder our verse under consideration:

"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Ecclesiastes 9:12.

Man does not know when his time of opportunity will end, even as the fish in the net, or the bird in the snare. Man has no control over his life nor can he see ahead, except we do know that death inevitably comes to all. It is also sure that the Lord Jesus will return to judge those who have known God's word. Jesus Himself taught by the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), who looked for the coming of the bridegroom, taking their lamps with them. "The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" and therefore were prepared. But "... they all slumbered and slept":

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

Matthew 25:6.

All ten did go out to meet him; but only the five wise, having honored God's word, were allowed to enter into the marriage.

"... they that were ready (prepared) went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut."

Matthew 25:10.

To the foolish virgins' plea: "Lord, Lord, open to us" — the door remained shut, as he answered:

"... Verily, I say unto you, I know you not."

Matthew 25:12.

The message of the parable is:

"Watch therefore (be ready), for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

Matthew 25:13.

Do these warnings provoke us to ask ourselves: How are we spending our lives? How ready have I striven to be? Are we spending our time of probation preparing for His coming, applying our "might," doing His will? What will Jesus find us doing when He returns? Paul reveals how we ought to be occupied, as we truly recognize that "man also knoweth not his time":

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools (unready), but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Ephesians 5:15-17.

"Redeeming the time" means "buying it up" — spending it wisely, increasing our faith and determination to do our Father's will. Life can be busy, our minds occupied by material things which now seem important; but let us listen to James as he instructs:

"Go to now, ye that say, To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." James 4:13-15.

Truly "man also knoweth not this time!" Let us use what time we have to love and obey our Father, and to love our "neighbours" as ourselves.

J.A.DeF.

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY (F.R.S. 1878)

The true "Christian philosophy" is the wisdom of the cross, which in other words is the "preaching of immortality through a crucified and risen Christ", and the joyful acceptance of the position of ignominy and social reproach, which the hope thus created brings upon all who on this account stand apart from the organized machinery of this evil world, waiting for the Kingdom of God.

The true "Christian mission" is that which invites men to faith in the promises of God; and to repentance and baptism for the remission of sins; on the ground that Christ, who was crucified for sin, has been raised from the dead as the Almighty's assurance to all men that He intends in a now soon-coming day, to "judge the world in righteousness", and to "govern the nations upon earth" by Jesus Christ.

Genuine "Christian charity" is that highest and purest form of love of which human nature is susceptible and which is generated by the truth, understood and affectionately embraced. It consists in kindness on the basis of the truth and for the truth's objects, and therefore done in the way the truth directs; for the true charity

rejoices exclusively in the truth, and cannot, therefore, fellowship the designs of individual or organised iniquity.

The true "Christian spirit" is the spirit of Christ, and the spirit of the apostles and prophets, which was a spirit of hate and hostility towards evil; and a spirit of faithful loving zeal towards the truth and all its uncompromising friends; and also, at the same time, a spirit of benevolent enterprise in all the interests which centre in Christ; and a spirit of the tenderest fostering compassion towards the helpless and needy of Christ's flock.

The real "Christian nations" are the nations contemporary with the existence of the kingdom of Christ, who shall receive the new law from Mount Zion; and shall be enlightened and made blessed in Abraham's gloriously exalted seed, the Christ."

**"BUT ALL THEIR WORKS THEY DO FOR TO BE SEEN
OF MEN"**

Matthew 23:5

Our verse under consideration was spoken by the Lord Jesus to His disciples and the listening multitude, concerning the scribes and Pharisees.

As respected members of Israel's society, schooled in the law, those Pharisees should have been examples of how the law was to be kept in a spirit of love, as the Almighty intended. However, they went to extremes in abiding by the letter, while ignoring its spiritual message of love and humility. It was for this reason that Jesus warned His disciples and the multitude saying:

"... do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men:"

Matthew 23:3-5.

They desired to appear holy and pious before men, while inside their intentions were very much different, being controlled and directed by fleshly thinking.

With guile, hoping to entrap Jesus, one of the Pharisees asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" The Lord Jesus answered with clarity and confidence:

"... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

THE REMNANT

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Matthew 22:37.

The Law of God was based on love — love for God foremost, and secondly for one’s fellow man. Without this and a true spiritual understanding, the scribes and Pharisees had added their own fleshly interpretations and traditions, wresting its true intent, while burdening their brethren with the keeping of trivial matters. Not being governed by the spirit, their works were not motivated by love, nor done in service to God, but rather to impress others of their own “piety” and to their own glorification, not God’s.

Jesus also condemned them for making broad their phylacteries and enlarging the borders of their garments. The practise of wearing phylacteries was derived from the law as recorded in Deuteronomy:

“And thou shalt bind them (His Word) for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:8-9.

Phylacteries were small leather boxes containing verses of scripture that were bound to the forehead and hand. They were a visual reminder that His word was to be kept close, before one’s eyes and governing the hand’s every action, that nothing be done which might offend the Almighty. The placing of a fringe on the borders of their garments was also adapted from God’s word spoken to Moses:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:

And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:”

Numbers 15:38-39.

The fringe on the border was a reminder of His commandments. As they moved, the fringe would sway and catch the eye, constantly reminding them that every step of their walk was to please God and not themselves.

Those broad phylacteries and enlarged borders on their

garments were in themselves not pleasing to God if the wearer failed to grow in obedience and humility. When worn only to impress onlookers and made larger to attract attention, they gave glory only to self, not to God, producing no growth in the spirit man.

The law's purpose was to expose human nature for what it is, compared to what God expected of His people — given to make sin exceedingly sinful. To emphasize this point, the Lord Jesus gave an example of one who lived "to be seen of men" and another who looked for God's reward:

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Luke 18:10-14.

How did the publican know he was a sinner? From studying the law. Through being perceptive and seeing what he was naturally from its teaching, he condemned himself, unlike the Pharisee.

How important for us as well, not to seek men's esteem, but rather to strive for God's esteem by living in the spirit, displaying obedience, love and humility to God and to our fellow man.

Paul, a Jew and Pharisee from birth, was converted to the gospel of Christ, walking in a newness of faith and belief. From his background, he was well qualified to write to his Roman brethren, explaining who is a true Jew in the Spirit's eyes:

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Romans 3:28-29.

In like manner he wrote to those at Ephesus saying:

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of

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Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;
With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:"
Ephesians 6:5-7.

To do God's will from the heart, with true obedience in the spirit of the law, is to circumcise the heart, cutting off or suppressing the carnal tendencies therein. Let us take heed Brethren and Sisters to constantly examine our words and actions, that they be not done "to be seen of men", but done seeking the Almighty's approval and esteem, that we might hope to serve Him eternally when His Son returns.

M.C.S.

AT A FUNERAL

As we meet here at this sad time, where can we get comfort if not from the HOLY WORD of God, the source of all life? let us then consider His word:-

1 Corinthians 15:22 says:-

"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

And so Isaiah chapter 9 declares:-

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. - - -

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given - - - and his name shall be called Wonderful - - -."

Isaiah 53:6 also says:-

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all - - - . He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities;"
These words of course refer to God's Anointed One, Jesus. What a comfort they are in the presence of death.

1 Corinthians 15:51 declares:-

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - - - .

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption - - - then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

“The king of the south.” (Daniel 11:40)

Writing on the subject of “the king of the south”, Doctor Thomas in the nineteenth century said:-

“But the lion-power of Britain has not yet attained the limit marked out for it by the finger of God. The conquest of Persia by the Autocrat will doubtless cause England to conquer Afghanistan, and to seize upon Dedan that she may command the entrance to the Persian gulf, and so prevent him from obtaining access to India either by land or sea. Possessing Persia and Mesopotamia, the apprehension of his pushing still further southward, and perhaps establishing himself on the north-eastern coast of the Red Sea, and so taking them in the rear and gaining access to India by the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, will also be a powerful motive for the merchants of Tarshish and its young lions to take possession of all the coast from the Gulf of Persia to the Straits, and thence to Suez, by which the lion-power will not only become the Sheba and Dedan, but also the Edom, Moab, and Ammon, of “the latter days” --- the power to which they then belong --- I have no doubt, will be the British ---.”

What a lot has happened since Dr. Thomas wrote those words. Britain became “the empire on which the sun never set.” It was indisputably the master of the seas. It was the victor in two World Wars. At the conclusion of the 1939-1945 war it had very great military power. But then over the decades its empire dwindled away, and the costs of its conflicts had undermined its economic strength. The inevitable conclusion was that Britain could no longer be regarded as a world power. But then came the Falklands War; and later the Gulf War to free Kuwait from the forces of Iraq. As the ally of the United States Britain proved itself to be a force to be reckoned with, and that Dr. Thomas’ comments all those years ago were still fundamentally correct even though many changes have affected Britain.

The recent punishment of Iraq by air strikes, proves that Britain still dominates along with its more powerful ally. It is military technology that now dictates. The United States and Britain are feared because of the weapons they are now able to produce. Iraq has a large army, but it has no answer for missile technology.

Here then is the modern "king of the south"; and in weighing over the global role of Britain's reduced forces, but enhanced military technology, a significant picture emerges.

Britain has members of its armed forces in Bosnia, Macedonia, Turkey, Cyprus, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Belize, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar. It has ships and submarines operating in the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. Geographically, then, its operations are mainly in the south, and of course the United States on an even greater scale is also operating world wide in the south; in these places there is an increasing military commitment by the U.S.A. and Britain.

At the time of writing Russia has voiced its disapproval of Britain and the U.S.A. for the bombing of potential military sites in Iraq. Obviously Russia is uneasy about such a show of power. But the significance of all this is that the "king of the north" is still there. And for all the changes that have taken place in Britain's circumstances, it is, along with the United States, still the "king of the south".

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

HAMBURG, NEW YORK, Corner Southwestern Blvd. and Pleasant Ave.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.

Sunday Afternoon Class 1.45 p.m.

Midweek: Bible Class: Forestville, Hamburg and Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

We join our Manchester brethren in sorrow for the sudden death of our sister Nora Francis. A gentle help and example to us all, she now sleeps waiting for the coming of Jesus who will resurrect and judge all who know His Father's will.

For those left behind, we pray for their comfort and join with them in turning to our shared hope of eternal life, then to be freed from all fleshly struggles and tears, if it is God's will.

By the time this is in print, the first stirrings of spring will foretell of the new growth as "winter is past, the rain is over and gone", filling our hearts with the hope of the soon appearance of the One who will "make all things new".

J.A.DeF.

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.00 a.m.

Thursdays: Bible Class 7.15 p.m.

It is with sadness that we report the sudden death of Sister Nora Francis on the 15th December, 1998 (aged 86), and was buried at Manchester on the 23rd December.

Sister Nora, who was baptized on the 9th November, 1940, held firmly to the faith throughout all those years despite bereavements and difficulties which she endured with patience and faith and was an example to us all.