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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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All Communications

D. Lancaster,
227 Moston Lane East,
New Moston,
Manchester M40 3HY,
England.

J. A. DeFries,
146 Gardner Street,
Fredonia,
New York 14063,
U.S.A.

AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

MY SERVANTS

In our daily readings, we are nearly at the end of the record concerning God's prophet Isaiah. According to the chronology, the prophet witnessed at the end of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah - 698 BC. King Hezekiah had been greatly helped by God, working through His prophet Isaiah. We read of Hezekiah's acts:

"... the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 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..."
11 Chronicles 32:32-33.

Manasseh his son began to reign in his stead at 12 years of age, and he reigned 55 years. Being only 12 years old at the time of Hezekiah's death, Manasseh was born during the 15 years of life which God granted to Hezekiah, after he was healed from his fatal illness. Manasseh was an evil king, restoring the idols and groves that Hezekiah, under the teaching and help of Isaiah, had destroyed. Here were two successive kings of Judah, vastly different in spirit. Hezekiah was subject to God and greatly helped in relation to Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem and his own fatal illness. Manasseh, on the other hand, was rebellious, serving idols, motivated by the flesh, rather than by the word of God. The record concerning Manasseh is:

"...(he) did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out..."
11 Chronicles 33:2.

One was a servant of God, the other a rebel against God and His commandments.

God sent Isaiah, His prophet, to convey His word to Judah through a vision:

"The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." Isaiah 1:1.

Isaiah's witnessing to these four kings lasted for 62 years. During that time, only Hezekiah heard and obeyed God's word; and in so doing, he also became a servant of God.

Isaiah did see a vision to prepare him for his work as a prophet. In this vision, God spoke to him:

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me,"
Isaiah 6:8.

Isaiah's obedience to God's instructions brought trial and tribulation, including sorrow because there was so little response. At times he was humiliated by God's requirements. God spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz.

"... Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia..."
Isaiah 20.2-3.

How degrading, how humiliating to walk naked and barefoot for three years! Yet Isaiah as God's servant obeyed; and he rejoiced as he saw Hezekiah grow in reverence and subjection toward God.

For 62 years Isaiah was a faithful and obedient servant of God, no matter what it cost him. We might ask: What is a servant? The word comes from a root meaning to work, to serve, or to till; it is used as bondman, servant, or bondservant. In Israel there were two types of servants:

- 1) Those captured in warfare - they worked under tribute as slaves.
- 2) Those who were of Israel and became servants - bondmen paid for their work.

Because they were brethren of those for whom they served, God made provision for them. They were to serve six years, and in the seventh year go out free, and were provided with necessities as they were allowed that freedom (Deuteronomy 15:12-15). God also gave instruction concerning such a servant who loved his master, and did not want to be loosed from being a bondservant:

"...if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever."
Exodus 21:5-6.

Here was a true bond based on a true love between master and servant, developed over six years; and at the end, there was evidence of such a bond, signified by the mark through the servant's ear. A true servant of God has a hope of being identified as one who loves his Master and wants to "serve Him for ever" - which points forward to the accomplishment of God's purpose, upon Jesus' return to gather all God's servants to an eternal inheritance, based on love.

Abraham had such a servant, whom he sent to seek a wife for Isaac:

"...Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had. Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son (Isaac) of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" Genesis 24:2-3.

It was his eldest servant - one who had served him the longest, having not gone out free, but was bonded to his master and had faithfully carried out his master's instruction, motivated by love. As a result, God provided a bride, Rebekah, for Isaac, continuing the line of the seed of Abraham - those promised the hope of Israel.

In reading the last recorded words of the prophet Isaiah, God spoke of His people:

"I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts;

Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed me upon the hills; therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom."

Isaiah 65:2,7.

God's judgment was to come upon the rebels who refused to submit to His word. However, God continued:

"Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not for a blessing is in it, so will I do for my servants' sake that I may not destroy them all.

And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.

And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me" Isaiah 65,8-10.

We remember that the valley of Achor was where Achan was burned after he caused Israel to be troubled by his taking of the accursed things. The valley was named the valley of Achor or troubling. Another of God's servants spoke concerning that valley:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her (Israel), and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.

And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up

out of the land Egypt."

Hosea 2: 14-15.

The valley of trouble will be transformed into a "door of hope" for those who have striven to be God's servants, as bondmen, joined by love to their Master.

Isaiah spoke of God's provision for His servants, and His punishment for those who did not serve Him:

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed."

Isaiah 65:13.

The Almighty provides for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He also provides for His servants the blessing of being allowed to partake of his Son's victory in the bread and wine, as we have remembered His victory here this morning. We remember Jesus' words to His apostles:

"... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:53-54

Surely His servants shall rejoice at THE day of the LORD, as Isaiah records:

"Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit"

Isaiah 65:14.

His servants look forward with joy, yet with fear, to the accomplishment of God's purpose, when they will be gathered to the Lord Jesus, and will hear:

"...a voice came out of the throne (Christ's), saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants and ye that fear him, both small and great.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

Revelation 19:5-6.

Further, Isaiah spoke:

"... for the Lord God shall ... call his servants by another name."

Isaiah 65:15.

Jesus made clear what brings about a change in name, as He spoke to His disciples:

" This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth

not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” John 15:12-15

Further help is granted concerning the new name, as John wrote of Jesus:

“He came unto his own, and his own (Jews) received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power (authority) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” John 1:11-12.

God calls those whom He knows can respond to His word - servants, then friends, and ultimately, if faithful, the possibility of being sons of God for eternity. Such will be joined to Him as the 144,000, the four and twenty elders, and the four living ones who will be granted eternal life, as kings and priests in His kingdom. We remember Jesus' words to those sheep at His right hand, having been judged as faithful:

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

God further spoke to his servants through His prophet Isaiah: “...behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying” Isaiah 65:17-19.

This is God's purpose to be accomplished through His Son when He returns to establish His kingdom, as He had revealed to Isaiah His servant:

“And it shall come to pass in the last day, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD; to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

Isaiah 2:2-5.

The underlined portion of God’s word is carved into the wall of the United Nations’ building in New York City. Yet the world, even at this moment, is involved in a war against Islamic terrorism which is taking the lives of many. There will be no solution to this “valley of Achor” (trouble), until the coming of the Lord Jesus, to make it a “door of hope” for those who are God’s servants. Such are those bound to him through love, who have said: I do not want to go free, for I love my Master, and I want to serve Him for ever. We know the way from His word. We hope and pray that we may be granted the blessing of being no longer servants, by becoming the “friends” of Jesus Christ, who are therefore given “power (authority) to become the sons of God ... through belief in His name.”

What blessing - what hope - what mercy - what grace the Almighty has showered upon all those who have striven to be His servants - bondmen and bondwomen- bound by bands of love.

J.A.DeF.

NAMES WRITTEN IN HEAVEN

We have been granted an opportunity to recently read of the privileged position that the disciples held with the Lord Jesus.

A position we too can in a measure share as we endeavor to walk as His followers. In Luke we read of a private conversation He had with them:

“And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:

For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, end have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”

Luke 10:23—24

Their position of privilege, so close to the Lord Jesus, was to witness firsthand the coming of the Messiah, as foretold by the Law and the prophets. They were also to learn the gospel message and be prepared to teach it to others after His death.

There were seventy others that He sent forth to witness and teach, as we read in Luke:

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

Luke 10:1-2

The work was to be enlarged and these seventy were sent out as a type of advanced team to prepare the people to receive the Lord Jesus, for we are told from this reference in Luke that He was to follow later to the cities they had visited.

Their work helps us to reflect upon our own work of witnessing today. We of course do not have the power of the spirit they were given to heal the sick and perform miracles - our work is done in "sackcloth" — a much subdued form of their witness. However, we are in following Him, to prepare ourselves and any that we may come in contact with, for His return through obedience to the Father's word. The seventy had great success for we read:

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name"

Luke 10:17

They had joy because they were able to heal all kinds of disease - both physical and mental, making a great witness through His name. Likewise in verse 10 He told them:

"But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say. Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

Luke 10:10-12,16

They were thrilled by the evidence of God's power vested in them, for the sick were healed as well as many new followers of Christ were added because of their faithful witness. However, the Lord Jesus tempered their joy, saying:

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10:19—20

It would be natural for those seventy to take satisfaction in this work, and this power could even become a temptation if they forgot it was not their own but God's. However, Christ warned them not to rejoice in their accomplishments but rather in the fact that through their obedience, their names were written in heaven, having found favor with God.

This speaks of how our labors in the work of witnessing to His Truth today should be viewed. We may become dejected because

it does not bring great numbers or results, with only a few responses here and there. However, we are to recognize this work does go forth and though meager the results at times, we plant and it is God that gives the increase. It is His work and not our own.

Of his fellow laborers in the work, Paul wrote:

“. . . I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.”

Philippians 4:3-4

The understanding of that gospel and an obedience to it, along with a faithful laboring therein, will predicate those written in the Book of Life. That hope is confirmed in John’s vision recorded in Revelation:

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

Revelation 3:5

John goes on further in Revelation to describe the judgment from that Book of Life:

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Revelation 20:11—13

There can be no misunderstanding of the parameters of this judgment, just as the Lord Jesus understood the task set before Him - to do the will of God by repressing His own flesh nature through the understanding of His Word.

We can understand more fully why the Lord Jesus emphasized to His disciples and particularly to the seventy to rejoice because their names were written in heaven.

As we continue in the work of witnessing, we have not the power of the disciples or of the seventy to perform healing or miracles, yet if done faithfully, we too have the hope of having our names written in heaven, through His mercy.

M.C.S.

A FAMINE OF HEARING

"Behold, the days come saith the LORD GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. - - -"

(Amos 8:11)

The latter day fulfilment of the above has arrived! Almost one young person in ten has never heard of the "Ten Commandments". But even worse, young people who have some awareness of the term "ten commandments", are not able to name a single one.

A recent investigation into the beliefs of 1000 people, revealed that seven per cent of 15 to 24 year olds had never heard of the Commandments. Even an older age group (35 to 44) revealed some older people do not know what the Ten Commandments were. Most elderly, up to the age of 64, did know, however. The most commonly known commandments were "Thou shalt not steal", and "Thou shalt not kill", which nearly half of all surveyed could remember. But what a revelation of deterioration in mankind's understanding of the divine mind.

Elderly people can remember that in their schooling as young persons, the "Ten Commandments" were given to them for their memorising. But it obviously is not so today. Furthermore this modern condition indicates that even formal religion of the various churches, is not seeing attendance by young people as in previous times.

The blessing of the "Ten Commandments" cannot be exaggerated. To summarise, they form the foundation of civilised existence (from Deuteronomy):

- * I am the LORD thy God.
- * Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image - - -. Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them. - - -
- * Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
- * Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it (set apart) - - - in it thou shalt not do any work, thou - - - nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant. - - -
- * Honour thy father and thy mother. - - -
- * Thou shalt not kill.
- * Neither shalt thou commit adultery.

- * Neither shalt thou steal.
- * Neither shalt thou bear false witness. - - -
- * Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet. - - -

The keeping of these "Ten Commandments " made life wholesome for those who responded to the heavenly instruction. But when departed from, the world becomes a sad and suffering place in which to live.

God should be recognised as the Provider and so be lovingly thanked. The vain worship of anything other than the One Eternal God, is a demeaning of the intellect of creatures given a superiority over the other forms of life, and very God dishonouring. The unguarded speech of oath-taking reveals abject failure to honour the Eternal, who is the source of all good. Rest-days that have been an out come of the 4th commandment have curbed the exploitation of labour, and underlined there is really more for man than mere toil. And what a needful thing is the care for parents by their children, which the 5th. commandment requires. In looking at the 6th. commandment, it brings to mind the change that has taken place over the last few decades. A murder, in the remembrances of the elderly, was a startling seven days wonder in their younger days. Today the continual stabbings and shootings, particularly in city centres, is taken for granted, and each terrible happening is quickly forgotten about, except in the case of the family that is stricken by it. And on the matter of adultery, need we make much comment? The world is full of infidelity. Stealing is also so prevalent, that stores are resigned to loss of goods, and take this into consideration in their pricings. And the law-courts, dealing with much legal wrangling, indicate deterioration in the observing of the 9th. commandment. In conclusion, what of the 10th. commandment? Finance arrangements through Stock Markets and other monetary devices, have brought about a diminishing of the well being of people approaching retiring age, after a life time of work and preparing for an easier old age. Their effect upon pension schemes is a glaring example of world failure to accept the importance of the 10th. commandment.

No wonder then that many have not even heard of the "Ten Commandments, particularly in the younger generation. How truly has come to pass the latter day fulfilment of the prophecy:-

" - - - a famine in the land - - - of hearing the words of the LORD. - - - "

(Amos 8: 11).

DIVINE INTERVENTION

Often overlooked in the record of the Lord Jesus' witness, is the evidence of God's intervention for His protection against those who intended to do Him harm.

As Jesus brought the gospel to His hometown of Nazareth, He was met with disbelief - no doubt since many had watched him grow to manhood from a young boy. After reading from the scriptures in the synagogue there, He testified:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Luke 4:18-21

This scriptural reading was taken from the book of Isaiah, speaking prophetically of the work of the Lord Jesus. His brethren from Nazareth, having observed his growth from a child, did not believe He was the one promised:

"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?"

Luke 4:22

They reasoned that if He was Joseph the carpenter's son, how could He be the Messiah? Knowing how their minds worked, He answered:

". . . Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, & a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."

Luke 4:24-27

When those of Nazareth heard this rebuke, they were incensed for they felt that because they were Abraham's seed, they were automatically entitled, regardless of their faithlessness.

"And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him

unto the brow of the hill where on their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.
But he passing through the midst of them went his way,"

Luke 4: 28-30.

His friends and neighbors from Nazareth rose up to destroy Him - carrying Him out to the brow of the hill to throw Him down because they resented the truth of His teaching. However, they were not allowed to harm Him, for God intervened to protect His Son.

When in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, the Lord Jesus healed an impotent man who had been crippled for 38 years. When the man was healed, he walked carrying his bed with him. The elders confronted this "work" done on the Sabbath day.

"The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk."

John 5:10-11.

They wanted to know where this man was who had healed him, but the Lord Jesus had "conveyed himself away" from among the multitude that had gathered. Again, he was saved from harm, for His time of suffering had not yet ended.

At another time when He taught of the hope of resurrection through belief on Him as the Son of God, the Jews in rage tried to stone Him:

"Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

John 8:59

The truth He taught was before their eyes in the miracles and healing He performed, yet they were spiritually blind and their ears were deaf to His words of salvation:

"If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.

But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand."

John 10:37-39.

These circumstances of animosity and unbelief could have been frustrating for Jesus, but He took strength in the protection and care given of God - a shield from all harm, for the time of His sacrifice had not yet come.

". . . Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come."

John 8:19-20.

He had learned from the Psalms and the prophets that He would be betrayed by one close to Him and handed over to the authorities to be put to death. Yet now was not the time. When that time came, He prayed for the strength and courage to submit and complete what was required of Him so that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

So many times He had been rescued from the mob by God's hand, yet when the time was fulfilled, He had to willingly lay down His life as a freewill offering. When that time was come, and He was taken by those sent by the chief priest and the elders, it is recorded that:

"In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled."

Matthew 26:55-57.

David knew the same help in time of trouble and trusted in the hand of God to protect, for he too was surrounded by many adversaries:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea:

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah."

Psalm 46:1-3.

God has provided a means of escape for all those who obey Him through belief in His Son. Just as the Lord Jesus was protected from His adversaries during His ministry and after His crucifixion was delivered from the bonds of the grave, rising on the third day, so too will God surround and keep all those that are His through Him.

M.C.S.

A BIBLE CLASS

“CYRUS, HE IS MY SHEPHERD”

Isaiah 44:28

The background of this subject helps us to comprehend God’s message. The chronology reveals that these words were conveyed by Isaiah in 712 BC, the time of Hezekiah king of Judah. Nine years earlier, 721 BC, Shalmaneser king of Assyria had captured and exiled the ten tribes of Israel. In 712 BC, Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem. At the same time, Hezekiah was told that he would soon die from a fatal illness. He was a faithful king, greatly helped by the work of Isaiah. In 712 BC he was tested: Would he rely upon his God? Would he seek help through the prophet Isaiah? He did, and as a result God spoke reassuringly to the king through Isaiah:

“Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun (Jerusalem) whom I have chosen. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.”

Isaiah 44:2,8.

The Almighty was there to encourage Hezekiah, as it came to pass that he was cured of his fatal disease, and his life was prolonged for 15 years. In addition, the great army of Sennacherib was defeated without even an arrow being shot into Jerusalem. Indeed, there is no God like the Almighty — able to do all things on behalf of those who put their trust in Him!

God further spoke through Isaiah, revealing the weakness of idols:

“They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?

Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.”

Isaiah 44:9-11.

Ashamed - confounded - confused was the result, for such idols are powerless, cannot speak, move, prophesy - let alone perform miracles or reveal power, as does the Almighty, the ONE God. That ONE God further spoke to Hezekiah:

“Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel: for thou art my

servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Isaiah 44:21-22.

Only God can do such things, and does for those whom He calls to be His people - those who return to Him, He redeems. What mercy - what grace - what longsuffering - what love! Can an idol do thus?

The Almighty spoke further to Hezekiah and to Jerusalem:

"Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee... I am the LORD that maketh all things...

That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish;

That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof:

That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers."

Isaiah 44:24-27.

In Hezekiah's time, Jerusalem was saved intact by the intervention of God. Hezekiah was given an additional 15 years of life. After his death, evil kings, with the exception of Josiah, went back to the worship of idols, neglecting and refusing the power of God for dumb and immobile man-made idols. As a result, in 588 BC. some 124 years later, Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the temple was burned, and the city laid waste. The surviving Israelites were taken captive to Babylon as a consequence of their relying upon idols; rather than on God who had formed them. They were a captive people for 70 years in Babylon, as God spoke through another of His servants, the prophet Jeremiah:

"And the whole land shalt be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Jeremiah 25:11.

Jeremiah further spoke for the Almighty:

"For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Jeremiah 29:10-11.

At the end of their 70 years of captivity, the Almighty brought

about the conquest of Babylon in the reign of Belahazzar. Darius the Median took the kingdom of Babylon; and, shortly thereafter, Cyrus took over as king of the Persian empire in the year 536 BC - 70 years after the first captivity of Israel. This is recorded for us in the Second Book of the Chronicles:

“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 throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing 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 (God’s) people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.”

11 Chronicles 36:22-23.

Cyrus knew of God’s power - through the work of Daniel. He was charged by the Almighty to let Israel go at the end of 70 years - thus fulfilling Isaiah’s words concerning Cyrus in the time of Hezekiah:

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.”

Isaiah 44:28.

Under Jeshua and Zerubbabel, some 50,000 of Israel returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the walls and the city of Jerusalem were restored.

God thus chose Cyrus as His means of accomplishing His purpose. As such, he was a shepherd - or as the word means, one who tends to a flock. He, a Gentile, was caused by the Almighty to use his power as king of Persia to accomplish the purpose of God with Judah. The LORD caused Cyrus to let His people go - just as He caused Pharaoh to let Israel go. God through Isaiah has spoken to Cyrus:

“For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”

Isaiah 45:4.

To “surname” involves the giving of an additional name. His name was Cyrus; was his additional name “my shepherd” - as God charged him to let His people go?

The word of God is sure, giving help, mercy, and hope to those who seek to serve Him. The hand of God is always there to lift up, to give His people strength and courage to walk in His way. Such are sustained by the promise of the gospel to be accomplished through Jesus Christ - even as the Almighty caused Judah to rebuild

the house of God and the city of Jerusalem. God spoke through Isaiah of that promise:

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established . . .

And many people shall go, and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. . . out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD."
Isaiah 2: 1-3,5.

J.A.DeF.

HEARING

"Unto You That Hear Shall More Be Given"

Mark 4:24

In our verse under consideration, the Lord Jesus was explaining the meaning of a certain parable to his disciples in order that they fully understand its meaning. Why did He so often preach using parables? Isaiah explains:

"...Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."
Isaiah 6:9-10.

He used parables so that only those who heard His message and sought more understanding (like the disciples), and were motivated to change their living accordingly, would be helped to perceive its full meaning.

As He explained this parable to His disciples, His particular emphasis was upon, "**you that hear**" - those who embraced its teaching and exemplified it in their living, as a witness of their fellowship with Him and His Father.

To illustrate this point, the Lord Jesus said:

"Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? And not to be set on a candlestick?"
Mark 4:21.

If the teachings of His word are not plainly seen in the lives of those who embrace it, it is like a candle whose light is hidden. To these who hear His word He says:

"Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it

shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given." Mark 4:24.

This is much in the same thought as Paul expressed to the Galatians:

"Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Galatians 6:7.

If much effort is put forth, then the spiritual rewards to that man, both in this life and at Christ's judgment seat, shall be great. Contrariwise - those who receive the knowledge of the Truth, yet do not apply it in their living today, cannot hope for the reward of life eternal at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Lord Jesus taught of this vital doctrine through the parable of the talents as recorded by Matthew:

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

Matthew 25:14-15.

In this parable, each servant was given a portion of the master's goods to manage until he returned. In like manner, all who receive His Word of Truth, must apply it in their living, with the hope that through its influence they may work to be transformed from men of flesh to those who reflect the Spirit's fruits of love and peace in their every word and deed.

From the parable, those servants who increased their master's goods were praised for their diligence and devotion, and allowed to enter into the "joy of thy lord". The servant who did nothing with what he had been given, who made no profit, (no effort to spiritually increase in the qualities of his Lord), was condemned:

"Thou wicked and slothful servant. . . Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 25:26,28-30.

Of this same judgment seat, where all the responsible will receive their just rewards, Paul writes:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

11 Corinthians 5:10.

Those who were found approved in the Lord's parable of the talents, made increase of their master's goods, while he who showed no fruits, was cast into darkness - removed from God's light. The test is to see if there has first been a hearing of the word and then an application of it in one's living. Hearing though is not enough, for without action there can be no increase. Further in 11 Corinthians Paul makes this point very clear:

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." 11 Corinthians 9:6.

There were many in Israel who heard our Lord's words, but because they didn't put self aside, yielding to the spirit's requirements in humility, they showed no spiritual increase. They were as James describes, "hearers only":

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But who so looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

James 1:22-25.

M.C.S.

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

“For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark - - - So shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:38—39)

A recent letter to the National Press in England was significant. Its questioning was very apt, as follows:-

“I recently returned to the U.K. having lived - - - (abroad) for more than 22 years. What has happened to the country? The nation of shopkeepers has turned into a nation of shoppers. There appears to be no, or very little, desire to work. Why should there be, when you can have a great life on benefits? - - -

Life in general appears to revolve around television, soccer and scandal, with no respect for law and order.

If a young child has no discipline they are lost for life. When they grow up they will have no foundation to guide and nurture the next generation.

The rot has set in. Surely someone at the top has the vision and drive to turn this shambles back into the respected nation it once was?”

The writer arriving back from a more rural part of the earth after a number of years is obviously amazed at the great change that has taken place. But this deterioration is not confined to Britain, it is seen to a greater or lesser degree in all the industrial nations particularly. Divorce and remarriage is common. Children take drugs and are dishonest, and if reprimanded turn violent. City centres have become very dangerous places after dark.

How truly the prophecy of Jesus has come to pass, as He warned that at the end the general world situation would be as in the days of Noah. The scripture tells us:-

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them. That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; AND THEY TOOK THEM WIVES OF ALL WHICH THEY CHOSE - - - And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

(Genesis 6: 1-5)

The warning words of Jesus, in the main, are completely ignored. So bad behaviour grows, and violence and murder increases. What a sign it is of the near return of He, who only has a solution for the evil which now mars this good earth.

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS JANUARY 2005

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

Sunday: Breaking of Bread: 11:30 a.m.

Sunday Afternoon Class: 1:45 p.m.

Midweek Bible Class: Forestville, Hamburg & Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

As another year is upon us, minds wonder what it will bring. Many have goals to achieve, works to be done, hopes to be fulfilled.

There is only one goal; one hope which is of real consequence - the coming of the Lord Jesus to accomplish God's purpose with the earth. Man is not in charge of his destiny, much as he would like it to be so.

It is with hope and yet with fear that we look to the time of His return when peace, justice and righteousness will fill the earth.

J.A.DeF

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.00 am.

Thursdays: Bible Class 2.00 pm.

As this new year commences the mind is caused to wonder what the coming days will reveal.

The world has become a dangerous place, with weapons developed that can bring mass destruction in an instant.

God, the Creator, is certainly aware, for He is a God that is near and not afar off. In His good time He will prevent the evil overwhelming the beauty of His handiwork.