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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

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

Our recent readings have revealed the mind and spirit of David, who was indeed a man after God's own heart. His thinking, his doings are a help for us as we too seek to know and glorify God,

In II Samuel, we find David was fleeing from Jerusalem, for Absalom his son had usurped his throne. We see David's trust in God's promises that he should be king over Israel. As he fled, Shimei, a man of the house of Saul, cursed David and threw stones. Abishai, a servant of David, said to him;

"... let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head."

11 Samuel 16:9.

David replied:

"... let him curse, because the LORD said to him (Shimei), Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

...Behold, my son (Absalom) ... seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him.

It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day."

II Samuel 16:10-12.

In the midst of affliction, David trusted in the Lord, recognizing that it was of God - part of His judgment because of David's failure in the matter of Bath-sheba and the death of Uriah. David was admonished by God through Nathan the prophet. He was told:

"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour..."

11 Samuel 12:9, 11.

David's quick reaction was:

"... I have sinned against the LORD..." 11 Samuel 12:13.

He took God's admonition to heart. It was still in his heart some years later as he fled from Jerusalem, leaving the throne to Absalom, and acknowledging that Shimei's cursing was of God.

He believed that "... the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day." God did requite or return him good, as he kept God's admonition in his heart and mind.

David, even though king of Israel, did suffer affliction and adversity, as God worked with him, to prove his trust in Him. We have read of his sons, born to him while he was king over the two tribes in Hebron:

"... his firstborn was Amnon (killed by Absalom)...

And his second, Chileab... the third, Absalom (usurper, killed by Joab)...

And the fourth, Adonijah (killed by Solomon as he attempted to take the kingdom at David's death)."

II Samuel 3:2-4.

David's reign as king was not easy, nor tranquil. He began to reign when he was 30 years old, reigning for seven years in Hebron, and 33 years in Jerusalem. It was about midway into his reign that he failed so seriously in the matter of Bath-sheba, as his flesh overruled his knowledge of God's law. Like all men, he was tempted by the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2: 16). He knew better, as he expressed:

"O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way."

Psalms 119:97-98, 104.

David violated three commandments: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife" - "thou shalt not commit adultery" - "Thou shalt not kill." Under the law, he should have been killed, but God in mercy forgave him, as He heard David's quick response to admonition: "...I have sinned against the LORD." However, he did suffer the consequences the rest of his life, and submitted to God's righteous judgments. Some day David may meet Uriah at the time of Christ's judgment. How quickly David would seek out Uriah, confess his faults, express his regrets, and seek Uriah's forgiveness for the evilness of his treatment.

David submitted to the consequences of his evil thoughts and actions. The child born to Bath-sheba died (II Samuel 12: 18): David mourned while the child was dying, but ended his fast when he died, saying:

"While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live.

But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."
II Samuel 12:22-23.

Another son was born to David and Bath-sheba:

"... he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.
... and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD."

II Samuel 2:24-25,

Jedidiah means "beloved of the LORD." The Almighty was just in His judgments upon David, yet blessed him in the birth of Solomon (Jedidiah), who would succeed David on his throne.

As Absalom prepared to take over the throne, David fled from Jerusalem - as the hearts of the men of Israel were after Absalom. At that time:

"...David said unto all his servants, that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee, for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart; lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."
II Samuel 15:14.

David was mindful of the words of Nathan, realizing the judgment was upon himself, and he sought to spare Jerusalem of battle, if he were to stay and fight against Absalom. David accepted and submitted to God's hand, thinking of others, rather than of himself.

Joab and those loyal to David gathered to restore the kingdom to David. When they were going out to fight against Absalom and his followers, David commanded Joab:

"...Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom..."
II Samuel 18:5.

Joab took it upon himself to kill Absalom in the ensuing battle. David mourned overmuch concerning the death of Absalom, to the point where all Israel was cast down. Joab came to David and admonished him:

"... thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably (to the heart) unto thy servants..." II Samuel 19:6-7.

David listened to Joab's admonition (who had killed Absalom), realizing his own behavior was wrong. He had power as king, and could have refused to receive Joab's right counsel. It was a reminder of the evil that was to come upon his house, because of his grievous failure with Bath-sheba. He accepted the admonishing, and was no doubt grateful to Joab for his wise counsel.

On another occasion, David failed when he desired to number Israel, and commanded Joab:

"Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan unto Beer-sheba, and number ye the people that I may know the number of the people" II Samuel 24:2.

Joab again admonished David:

"... Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?" II Samuel 24:3.

David's delight was to know how many men he had - taking pride in that number. In this case, exercising his power as king, David did not submit to Joab's good advice. Indeed, David himself had expressed his conviction:

"There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." Psalm 33:16.

Joab, in obedience to the power of the king, did number Israel. David must have thought about what he had done, for:

"... David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." II Samuel 24:10.

Realizing his failure, the king humbled himself before the Lord, seeking His forgiveness. He would rue that he had not listened to Joab's admonition.

The Almighty did forgive David because of his humble

acknowledgment of his failure. However, God asked, through His prophet Gad:

"...Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in the land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in the land?..."

And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great and let me not fall into the hand of man."

II Samuel 24:13-14.

David put his trust in God, realizing how he had failed to glorify God in numbering Israel. There was pestilence, which only ceased when God had David build an altar and sacrifice sheep and oxen at the threshing floor of Araunah. In submission:

"... David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

II Samuel 24:25.

As we perceive David's humility and submission, we can see why he was a man after God's own heart. In his heart he could be corrected; when admonished he quickly replied: "...I have sinned against the LORD." It took a humble spirit and a contrite heart, enabling him to act so pleasingly before God - honoring Him and not self.

Solomon, his son, took over the reign after David's death. In the beginning, Solomon also was of a humble spirit; seeking God's help. He grew and prospered, but in his old age, he was led away from God. Why was it so?

"For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."

I Kings 11:4.

Solomon himself expressed his situation:

"Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished."

Ecclesiastes 4:13.

Solomon, when chosen king in David's place, had acknowledged:

"...I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."

I Kings 3:7.

From this humble heart, as king he grew in power, wisdom, and riches. He loved his power and riches more than the Almighty. He would not listen and submit to admonition - God's hand to correct and help His people.

David was a man after God's own heart. He is our example, our help; for we fail, we sin, we displease God, even as he did. His quick acceptance of God's hand upon him to correct, to admonish, to forgive, enabled David to be pleasing to God. Indeed, God was intreated of David who put his trust in Him, as he took heed, giving glory and thanksgiving unto God.

We need help, correction, for we do fail! Are we, Brethren and Sisters, able to be admonished, ready to submit to God's hand upon us, as He leads us in that way everlasting?

J.A.DeF.

STEPHEN

From our daily portions in Acts we have been reading again of Stephen's witness. We learn of him as he was appointed by the twelve disciples, along with six other faithful men, to carry out the practical ministry to those of like precious faith:

"Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

Acts 6:2-3,5

These men were known to be faithful followers of Christ, members of His body, and were given the responsibility of ministering in a practical manner to other members of the Truth, so that the disciples' time could be freed to preach the Word.

During the early days of the ecclesia, after the Lord Jesus' ascension, believers banded together and those that were blessed with more abundance, shared with those who had less:

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common.

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold.

And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”

Acts 4:32,34-35

There was a bounty taken in, as those moved by the spirit brought goods to be shared with others of Christ’s household of faith. There needed to be appointed faithful men to oversee this work and not encumber the original twelve with these practical matters, who could then devote their time to spreading the gospel message.

Stephen was one of the men chosen to help in this work of ministering to the believers of Christ:

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”

Acts 6: 8

The power of the Spirit was passed on to these seven men by the laying on of hands by the disciples, “Whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:6) Stephen used this spiritual power in faithful works, which then made him an enemy of those who opposed the teaching of the gospel:

“Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom of the spirit by which he spake.”

Acts 6:9-10

Many Jews would not accept the word of Truth preached through Christ, which Stephen expounded, and because they could find no fault to charge him legally they conspired maliciously against him:

“Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law." Acts 6: 11-13

Their accusations against Stephen were similar to those made against the Lord Jesus. Being devoid of the spirit, they were steeped in the letter of the Law and the traditions of men and were determined to silence His teaching regardless of the miracles He performed. Stephen came against this same opposition as he witnessed in Christ's name.

As he was brought before the council to defend himself, Stephen began by expounding upon the history of God's people from the time of Abraham through the sojourn in Egypt and the deliverance from there by Moses. Throughout this narration, he pointed out how Israel had repeatedly been stiff necked, rebellious and slow to hear the help and instruction sent to them by the hand of God through the prophets - and now they had willfully murdered the Son of God, sent into their midst to be their Messiah and Redeemer:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." Acts 7:51-53

Their reaction to Stephen's witness was an outpouring of the flesh:

"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Acts 7:54

However, because Stephen's spirit was different, his reaction was one of gentleness and peace as he witnessed to the vision given him at that moment:

"But he (Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him." Acts 7:55-58

They killed him for his faithful witness, and even though suffering great pain, his last words were forgiving:

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Acts 7:59-60

Stephen gave his life quite literally for the Truth, but he died in hope, believing in the promise of resurrection with the return of the Lord Jesus, hoping for a place in His kingdom if found acceptable.

He had no way of knowing that his faithful witness would be remembered by a young man who watched his stoning, consenting along with other Jews to his death. When this young man, Paul, was himself later visited by the voice of the Lord Jesus, his harmful wayward walk was made evident to him. After this shocking realization, repentance was made to his old way of life and he became one of Jesus' most stalwart ministers, travelling the world to preach the gospel message of Christ.

How Paul would mourn his past ignorance and false zealotry that harmed many of Christ's followers, including his part in the death of Stephen. Perhaps these memories fueled his attitude of humility and his zealous desire to give his entire life to the growth of Christ's word among all men. Paul spent of himself tirelessly, even denying himself the comfort of a wife and family so that he might devote his whole life to the service of the Truth.

Unknown to them, Stephen and Paul's lives were intertwined, only God knowing what their witnesses would mean in the end to one another. If both are granted, as we feel they may be, the crown of victory at the judgment seat of Christ, how quickly Paul will seek out Stephen's company and in turn how grateful Stephen will feel to know that his personal witness was used as a catalyst in Paul's life as he worked to add more souls to the Truth through his own ministry.

It is an encouragement to us today to read of both Stephen and Paul, for they were examples of lives submitted totally to God's guidance and direction and thus were guided and helped in His way, for God knows and loves those that are His.

M.C.S.

WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

In the history of the Truth there have been a number of members who have propounded a doctrine that withdrawal of fellowship leaves those who have been so dealt with, in an unreconcilable position. In other words such are beyond any possibility of repentance. It is as well, that those of such an extreme belief, are in a very small minority.

R. Roberts about 135 years ago, was asked the following question:-

" - - - is there no portion or portions of the sacred Scriptures, that will bear out the idea that I am anxious about - that those who really thought they were serving God from a pure heart fervently, and concerning whom there was no room to doubt that their hearts and minds were elevated to God, and had the thoughts of their minds moulded and guarded by the Divine Testimony, as far as conscience and the utmost sincerity could guide them? - - - Is there any portion or portions of Divine Truth that indicates the possibility of those having an opportunity of embracing the Truth at the resurrection or any other period, that being clothed upon with immortality, they shall live for ever; that is, those concerning whom there is no doubt that they were conscientious in principle, so far as they could discover the meaning of God's word, and warm in their attachment to Him whom they really considered the Redeemer of mankind, and their Redeemer by faith in him, and what they conceived to be his gospel?"

It will be seen, that the main thrust of this question concerns some who stumble over a true understanding and upholding of the Truth. One example of such, are those who leave the Ecclesia and so are withdrawn from, over their divergence from true understanding, and upholding of Bible principles as upheld by the Ecclesia. Such say they are sincere, in their determination to follow what they wrongly state is a truth, which, of course, the Ecclesia cannot accept.

R. Roberts' reply to his questioner is very interesting.

" - - - Do they (the scriptures) reserve a future opportunity for such in darkness as think they are in the right way?

To this, there is but one answer: that there is but "one faith, one hope, and one baptism"; (Eph.4:5) - - - Our sympathies

may incline us to demur at the fate of such as we esteem excellent, who are outside of the Divine arrangement but sympathy is blind, and might be as naturally exercised toward animal pets. The sole question is, What is the Divine will? To this we must be trained to bow, even if requiring the sacrifice of ourselves. (see Luke 9:24:

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”)

It is unsafe to speculate in the direction of benevolent possibilities, not only unrevealed but inconsistent with what is revealed. It is unsafe, both with regard to ourselves and the influence we may have upon others. Our only wisdom is to accept our position, and save ourselves (Acts 2:40), and as many others as we can. It is hard to learn but wise to remember that out of Christ man cannot put God under any obligation. Conscientious exertions in a wrong direction creates no rights beyond the present life. Conscientious and benevolent sympathy are as much attributes of the brain-flesh as the more odious impulses. - - - It has pleased God to adopt a way of His own in releasing men from this. What can we do but fall in with this way? relinquishing as futile all conceptions our limited intellects may form as to how God ought to proceed or may proceed. To encourage hope apart from his way is dangerous. To run strictly in the groove of that way is safe. “God’s moral government is a phrase largely burdened with the theories of the schools, all of which have this grand fallacy at the bottom, that man is a creature as everlasting as God Himself. When we come to see that “all flesh is as grass”, and that man is a creature of a day, vanishing in successive generations under the operation of the law of sin and death, it considerably alters our thoughts about moral government. It brings us to accept our position as earth-borns, having no everlasting rights and no power of creating them; and humbles us to the grateful acceptance of the “high—calling” to which God is inviting men through his Son.”

We see therefore that R. Roberts was against the false belief of a second chance, but this concerned the end result, not situations of “withdrawal of fellowship” in the present dispensation.

The scriptures make it clear that withdrawal does not make those so affected to be necessarily in an unredeemable position. Note the following scriptures:-

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;
And that they recover themselves out of the snare of the diabolos.---" (2 Tim.2:25-26)

" - - - joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.---" (Luke 15:7)

"The Lord --- is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

So we see the criteria for deciding the position of one gone astray, is not a finality through withdrawal of fellowship, but the striving to be right through acceptable repentance.

THE PARABLES

We have read in the book of Luke, many of the parables that the Lord Jesus used in His ministry. The Concordance explains a parable is a similitude, illustrating one story through another. The Lord Jesus often used parables in His teaching and was asked by His disciples why He did so:

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear." Matthew 13:10-11,13,15-16

The gospel as taught by the Lord Jesus in parable was for those with willing eyes and ears, for hidden within the story of the parable

was the kernel of Truth meant for those whose hearts could be touched.

In Luke chapter 15 we are told, "publicans and sinners" drew near to Him as He taught the multitude. The Pharisees and scribes were offended by His close association to those they considered sinners, for they looked upon themselves in no need of repentance. He then used a subject - the life of a shepherd, which would be common to many of them, to rebuke their attitude of superiority:

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Luke 15:4-7

The Lord Jesus went on to teach the difference between the two classes of people in Israel at that time - the common man and the scribes and Pharisees, when he taught the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as recorded in Luke chapter sixteen.

The rich man represented the scribes and Pharisees, those highly esteemed among men, while the beggar Lazarus, was as the common people - despised by the elders and those in authority. In this parable, the rich man after living a life of luxury, died and was transported to hell.. The beggar Lazarus, after living a life of misery, died and was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom". The rich man cried out in torment to Abraham:

".Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Luke 16:24-26

This parable has caused many in the world to be led astray by the false belief of heaven going at death, and the continual torment

in the flames of hell for evildoers. These false beliefs were shared at that time as well by the Pharisees.

The Lord Jesus used their misunderstanding to instruct them of the gospel message. He came to bring life and spread the spirit of love as contained in God's Word and indeed there was a "great gulf fixed" between the Truth He taught and the letter of the Law and traditions of the elders held by the Pharisees. And like Lazarus of the parable, the Lord Jesus was despised for the message He brought.

When the rich man realized he could not move from his place of torment, he beseeched Abraham to send one to his brethren to teach them not to follow in his ways, but Abraham's answer was:

". . . They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. And he (rich man) said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."
Luke 16:29-31

How ironic that the One in their midst would rise from the dead, yet they too refused to hear His words of Truth. Their hearts were hardened, for they valued their position of authority and esteem and would not be humbled or seek repentance.

We are warned from the lesson of this parable of the sorrow that will come upon some when the books are opened and judgement is meted out at Christ's judgment seat. For those who refuse to be humbled during this life and become spiritually as little children, Christ has said in answer to His disciples' question of "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?":

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:2-4

M.C.S.

A BIBLE CLASS

"DISPUTED ABOUT THE BODY OF MOSES"

Jude v. 9

Jude wrote his epistle to his brethren:

"...that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:" Jude v. 1.

He expressed concern about his brethren:

" . . . it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude v. 3

What was his concern? Why did he exhort them in this manner? His next words make it clear, as he wrote of a dangerous situation:

"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jude v. 4.

There was need to contend against those who by false teaching sought to pull down those of the spirit - the enmity present between good and evil since the time of Adam and Eve's fall in the garden. The word "contend" used here in verse 3 means to fight, to labor, to fervently strive. This is the labor of those who love God, reverencing Him in striving to give honor and glory to Him. Jude also wrote of "contending" in verse 9:

" . . .when contending with the devil . . ."

This word has a different meaning: to condemn, to judge, to go to law, to call in question - giving the thought of punishment rather than striving to build up. There are therefore two means of contending: (1) to exhort brethren to fight for the truth and (2) to wait for God to condemn, punish, bring to judgment those who are the enemies of God's people. Such have "crept in unawares" and have turned the "grace of our God into lasciviousness" - that which is filthy, unclean Mark gives us knowledge concerning those who seek to corrupt the holiness of the truth:

" . . . That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

Mark 7:20-23.

Paul added his concern over the same trouble:

"... lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed."

II Corinthians 12:21.

Jude, in exhorting his brethren to strive earnestly for the faith, used the example of Sodom and Gomorra. Of all the people in these two cities, only four were spared God's judgment; and one, Lot's wife, looked back to the evil, and was changed to a pillar of salt. Peter wrote of Lot's witness in Sodom, and God's deliverance, as He:

". . . delivered just (righteous) Lot; vexed with the filthy conversation (manner of living) of the wicked:

(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

II Peter 2:7-9.

Righteous Lot, vexed by the evil, witnessed against it to no avail. He left Sodom at God's command, and God destroyed Sodom. The Almighty delivers those who earnestly contend for the Truth, and he condemns to destruction those who are ungodly men.

Jude also used this fact to help his brethren in their contending for the Truth:

"... Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

Jude v. 9.

Michael, God's messenger, disputed (or, as the word means - used words, God's words) against the adversary concerning the body of Moses. He contended not about Moses' personal being, but

about the complete, whole body that Moses led under God's hands through the wilderness.

We might wonder what Jude had in mind concerning this experience of Moses and Israel. The record in Numbers 16, concerns the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses, who was the head of the body of Israel. These three men - one, a Levite, a priest and the other two of the tribe of Reuben:

" . . . rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, ... and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" Numbers 16:2-3.

These three conspired with 250 of the princes to overthrow Moses and Aaron, moved by the jealousy of the flesh! What was Moses' reply to this uprising?

" . . . when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:

And he spoke unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the Lord will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he (God) hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him." Numbers 16:4-5.

Moses, appointed by God to lead Israel, turned to God for help. God granted it as he requested:

"If these men die the common death of all men ... then the LORD hath not sent me.

But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD."

Numbers 16:29-30.

We know what happened:

"And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder....

And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up ... and all the men that appertained unto Korah ...

They and all that appertained to them, went down alive

into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."

Numbers 16:31-33.

Moses contended with Korah, Dathan and Abiram by the word of God, but he left the judgment, the punishment of the rebels against God, Aaron and himself - saying, in effect: "The Lord rebuke thee" God did, vindicating Moses and Aaron, and revealed to the whole congregation that Moses and Aaron were His appointed heads over Israel. Moses and Aaron had great trust in God that He would contend in judgment against those who had "crept in unawares."

Jude, having used this example, spoke to his brethren:

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Core (Korah)." Jude v. 11.

Jude then exhorted his brethren and ourselves today:

"But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time . . .

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,
Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Jude vs 17-18,20-21.

Let us heed Jude's inspired words to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." In such faith let us wait upon God, with the conviction: "The Lord rebuke thee."

J.A.DeF.

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

“Thus saith the LORD GOD; because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours, in possession: - - - ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people.” (Ezekiel 36:2-3)

“Therefore thus saith the LORD GOD; surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen - - - which have appointed my land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despitiful minds, to cast it out for a prey.” (Ezekiel 36:5)

Last November the leader of the Palestinians died. He had reigned for 35 years as chairman of the P.L.O. which organisation had been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Israelis, men, women and children; and also of quite a large number of Arab opponents. He was born in Cairo in 1929 (not in Jerusalem, as was claimed), and became the chairman of the then five-year old P.L.O. in February 1969. Within twelve months terrorism commenced with the hijacking of aircraft and shortly afterwards there was the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. There were moderate Palestinians who were opposed to such violence, their criticisms were unjustly silenced. In 1982, when through the United Nations resolution 242, recognising Israel's right to exist, it seemed agreement might be reached between Jew and Arab, the Palestinian leader refused to accept the proposition. Over the years atrocities continued, such as the massacre in the Netiv Meir school in Maalot in May 1974. Previously in March 1973, P.L.O. commandos executed the American ambassador to the Sudan and his deputy. Such behaviour was terrorism, so greatly lamented at the present time; but historically it has been shown to have been afflicting the earth long before the Iraq war.

Though the Palestinians are a poor people, their leader was a rich man; not only with cash accounts, but also with investments in various prosperous companies. This fact had no influence against his popularity. When his body was flown back from the hospital in France, and eventually brought to the Palestinian West Bank following a military funeral in Cairo, attended by kings, presidents and dignitaries from more than 40 countries, the scene was of thousands of grief-stricken Palestinians surrounding his flag-draped

coffin. But to thinking people of the West the past is not reviewed with admiration; as the Scripture has so pertinently declared, "ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are in infamy of the people." One comment published in the British National Press read as follows:-

"(He) was a freedom fighter who never stopped the fighting -even when he was offered freedom, the fighting continued. At best he was ambivalent to violence; at worst he was directing it. - - - I will remember (him) for the proliferation of suicide attacks across the Middle East. - - -"

The writer of these remarks hoped that the death of the Palestinian chairman might mark the start of a real peace process.

It appears that Western leaders are thinking on these lines, as a meeting between the American President and the British Prime Minister expressed the hope of doing more to bring peace to the Middle East. As the President was congratulated on his re-election, the British leader declared that as long as he was in office, Britain would continue to have a strong alliance with the United States, and optimistically the President said "there is an excellent prospect for achieving a two-state solution (Palestinians and Israelis) during his second term in office; but the onus was on the Palestinians to develop a democracy."

With the removing of the Palestinian leader, perhaps a change is coming. The scripture does say concerning a "land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people - - - (a) land of unwallled villages; - - - that are at rest - - -"(Ezekiel 38): that a final clash over Israel will then come. We ask the question, is that time getting nearer with the now, possibility, of new leadership in the Arab world, changing particularly the politics of the Middle East?

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS FEBRUARY 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: Hamburg, Forestville & Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

We are grateful for encouraging response to our monthly mailing of invitations to the general public to write for literature concerning the purpose of God with this earth. Each month brings a few requests from this "bread cast upon the waters".

The annual winter get together is scheduled for February 19th, God willing.

J.A.DeF

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.00 am.

Thursdays: Bible Class 2.00 pm.

Now we are into the new year, work is continuing from various directions; and we are mercifully helped by an overruling care, giving guidance, for which we should be grateful.