

The background of the cover is a photograph of a winter landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of snow. In the middle ground, a small, rustic cabin with warm lights glowing from its windows is situated. Behind the cabin, a range of rugged, snow-covered mountains rises against a dark night sky. The sky is filled with stars and the vibrant, ethereal light of the aurora borealis, which appears as a soft, glowing arc of light in shades of purple, blue, and green. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

# Days of Praise

December 2023 • January • February 2024

# Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

**December 2023 • January • February 2024**

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul...Who coverest thyself  
with light as with a garment: who stretchest out  
the heavens like a curtain.”  
(Psalm 104:1-2)*

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**Introduction to**  
**DAYS OF PRAISE**

*“These words spake Jesus. ...And the glory which thou [heavenly Father] gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” (John 17:1, 22-23)*

Dear Christian friend,

The Lord Jesus taught some remarkable truths that would be hard to understand or believe were it not for His steadfastly perfect behavior, astounding teaching, and miraculous deeds.

One amazing truth is that He and the Father are one. We can't fully comprehend all that entails, but we know they were united in their serious purpose of accomplishing the work of salvation. From the text above, it seems that we please and glorify both the Lord Jesus and our Father when we are similarly united in that effort.

Thus, it's a blessing to know that we'll be meeting together each day to learn from our Savior throughout this winter quarter. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these wonderful messages to deepen our affection for the Lord Jesus and our sweet heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

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Friday, December 1

## **Making Life Count**

*“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)*

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes through the lens of poor choices. “Vanity” expresses the futility of seeking satisfaction from living life “under the sun” apart from God. The panorama of earthly ambitions, when pursued as ends in themselves, produces emptiness.

Did God originally create this world in a state of “vanity”? Absolutely not! “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). So, what happened? Adam disobeyed God’s command, and in response God said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:17). The apostle Paul underscored this consequence when he wrote, “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope” (Romans 8:20).

Believers must live life balanced between two extremes. First, we acknowledge that God provides the gift of life for us to enjoy. “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour” (Ecclesiastes 2:24). On the other hand, we should firmly acknowledge life’s limitations. “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

How are we to live in light of this reality? Solomon urges us to fear God, keep His commandments, and “remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh” (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Is this your worldview? CCM

## The Peace of the God of Peace

*“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)*

For generations, most of the world’s people have longed for peace, but the world continues to be at war. Evolutionists attribute this to ages of violent evolutionary struggle; the Bible attributes it to sin!

But it is wonderfully possible to have real personal peace even in a world at war. This is what the Bible calls “the peace of God,” and it surpasses all human understanding because it is provided by the God of peace, for the writer continues, “The God of peace shall be with you” (v. 9).

*The God of peace!* There are some wonderful promises associated with this beautiful name of our Lord. For example, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). Also, “the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The provision of God’s perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3) is specifically invoked in 2 Thessalonians 3:16: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.” Perhaps the greatest promise of all is implied in the concluding prayer of the book of Hebrews: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

There is only one other reference to the peace of God: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). The peace of God, from the God of peace, can rule in our hearts if we let it rule in our hearts. Then, as promised in our text, it will also keep our hearts! HMM

Sunday, December 3

## His Amazing Grace

*“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:1)*

These are the very first of Paul’s divinely inspired words, and in this first of his inspired greetings, he set a pattern that he would later follow in all his other epistles. He would always begin with an implicit prayer that both grace and peace, sent from God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be received and experienced by the ones to whom he was writing. Furthermore, “grace” always precedes “peace” in these salutations, because one must receive the grace of God before he can experience the peace of God.

By this strong emphasis on grace—preceding anything else he might write to the church or its pastor—he confirmed the great importance of God’s loving grace. Grace is the first essential in salvation and is the continuing vital essential in Christian living. The Thessalonians had already been saved by grace through faith, but now the grace of God their Father and Jesus Christ their Lord must also be lived out in their personal behavior, especially in their dealings with others, to whom God would also manifest His grace through them.

Paul also closed every epistle with a prayer that the grace of the Lord Jesus would continue to be with all who read them. Finally, the last of his inspired words (written while he was in prison) to his young disciple Timothy were: “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:22).

Each true Christian life must begin, continue, and end in the sustaining grace of the Savior. Indeed, the very last revealed words of God Himself in the Holy Scriptures are “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21). Thank God for His amazing grace. HMM

Monday, December 4

## **Eve and the Saving Seed**

*“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.”*  
(Genesis 4:1)

Recent translators have followed a tradition of including the word “from” in this verse. The original Hebrew does not have it. A stricter translation would read, “I have begotten a man, the LORD.” For Eve to have given birth to the Lord might sound strange, but it suggests that we should ask whether Eve could have believed she had given birth to the promised One.

Eve did not know that Mary actually *would* deliver that God-Man 58 generations later (Luke 3:23-38). Eve heard the Lord’s curse given in Genesis 3, including the promise of a woman-born Savior. God told the deceiver He would “put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Who could blame Eve if she felt that her first child would be the “seed” who would defeat the deceiver and redeem us from the curse? Eve knew she needed a redeemer. After all, the Lord had told her and her husband, “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).

Any rescue from this doom would therefore require a perfect man—one who had no sin of his own to condemn him. Only the Lord God is perfect, so *He* would have to become a man. Thus, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). Eve was possibly expressing trust in a saving Seed. We definitely should! BDT



Tuesday, December 5

## **Wisdom and Might Are His**

*“Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his.” (Daniel 2:20)*

Men have sought wisdom all through the ages, “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Others have sought great power. But then we read of Alexander the Great weeping because there were no more worlds to conquer, and we see one rich man after another who cannot bring himself to say, “It is enough.”

The problem is, of course, that they are searching for wisdom and might in the wrong places, and thus they can never be satisfied. Wisdom and might belong only to God. In the Lord Jesus Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3), and to Him has been given “all power...in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). God, revealed in Christ, is both omniscient and omnipotent, and true wisdom and true riches must come only from Him.

Therefore, “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God... and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). If we are in need of strength, we must become weak, for “when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). If we need riches, we must know poverty, for before Christ can commit to us “the true riches,” we must be found “faithful in that which is least” (Luke 16:10-11).

Daniel’s testimony, as recorded in this passage, was given to the most powerful monarch on Earth, with access to all the wisdom of the most highly educated men of the age. But neither human might nor human wisdom could solve his problem. Only Daniel, drawing on the wisdom and power of the God of creation, could meet his need. God’s servants, even today, have the same privilege and responsibility, because our God is “for ever and ever.” HMM

Wednesday, December 6

## Adding to God's Word

*“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18)*

This very sober warning right at the end of the Bible was given by Christ Himself (note verse 20) to indicate that the written Scriptures were now complete, and it would be a serious sin for some pseudo-prophet to come along presenting some alleged new revelation from God. That this warning applies to the entire Bible, not just to the book of Revelation, should be obvious but is made especially clear when it is remembered that Jesus promised His chosen disciples that the Holy Spirit “shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance,” and furthermore, that “he will guide you into all truth:...and he will shew you things to come” (John 14:26; 16:13).

This special revelation to the “apostles and prophets” of the New Testament would constitute the “foundation” of the church and would be complete when the last of these “holy apostles and prophets” were gone. (Study carefully Ephesians 2:19–3:11.) When John completed the Apocalypse, he was very old; all the other apostles and prophets of the New Testament had already died (all by martyrdom), so God’s written Word was now complete. No new revelation would be needed before Christ returns. We shall do well if we just learn what we already have received from His holy apostles and prophets.

Note also the emphasis on “the words,” not just the concepts. God was able to say what He meant, and we are wise if we take His words literally. Jesus warned about “false prophets” who would come after He left (Matthew 24:24), and there have been many of these through the centuries. The Bible as we now have it is sufficient for every need. HMM

Thursday, December 7

## **The Brightness of the Glory**

*“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:3)*

This verse constitutes one of Scripture’s most magnificent declarations of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine the phrase “the brightness of his glory.”

The word for “brightness” is used only this one time in the Bible and means, literally, “out-radiating.” The word picture conveyed is of the energy overflow from the sun. The sun constitutes a tremendous generator of energy, more than adequate to sustain all processes on Earth. However, these energies would be utterly useless for any such noble purpose if they could not somehow be transmitted from sun to Earth. They are transmitted, however, through the remarkable radiant energy known as sunlight, or solar radiation.

It is this figure that the writer is using. As the sun’s rays are to the sun itself, so is Christ to the Godhead. He is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). It is He whose “goings forth” have been “everlasting” (Micah 5:2). His glorified countenance is “as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:16). The Lord Jesus Christ is the life-giving radiation of the ineffable glory of the eternal One, from whose face one day the very heaven and earth will flee away (Revelation 20:11). “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings [or ‘outspreadings’]” (Malachi 4:2).

And through this One who mediates God to us, we can enter boldly into His presence. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). HMM

## God's Ways Are Best

*"And the word of the LORD came unto [Elijah], saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." (1 Kings 17:8-9)*

The leading of God is not always clear to our understanding or satisfying to our pride, but it is always directed to God's glory and our good. Elijah had been supernaturally fed by ravens until the brook of Cherith dried up due to the very drought that Elijah had prophesied. Then, instead of supernaturally providing water, God told Elijah to move to a village in Zidon to stay with a poor widow who would feed him.

But Zidon was the home of the idolatrous queen Jezebel, who would soon become Elijah's implacable enemy. Furthermore, he would have to so humble himself as to request that the widow share what she thought would be her last meal with a stranger whom she had never met and who had claimed to be the prophet of a God she did not know. What a strange way for God to deal with His servant!

Nevertheless, Elijah obeyed God without question, and so did the widow of Zarephath, and thus the Lord was able to perform two of His mightiest miracles of creation. At the same time, He was able to meet the deep spiritual needs, as well as the physical needs, of this unlikely duo—the greatest spiritual leader of his age and an insignificant widow. An amazing daily miracle of continuing the creation of oil and meal took place as long as the drought continued. And then an even more amazing miracle was accomplished when, for the first time in all history so far as the record goes, one who was dead (the widow's son) was restored to life (1 Kings 17:20-24), and the woman came to believe that Jehovah was the true God. God's ways may not be our ways, but they are always best. May He give us the grace always to obey His word, whether or not we fully understand. HMM

Saturday, December 9

## The Seventh Day

*“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”*  
(Exodus 20:11)

God’s word is omnipotent, and He could just as well have created an entire universe, fully populated and functioning, in an instant of time. Instead, He chose to do it in six days, with a seventh day to be set aside as a day of rest and remembrance of His completed “very good” creation. Since that time, it has been the universal practice among monotheists—those who believe in one Creator God—to measure time in seven-day weeks, with one of those days observed as a day of rest and worship of the Creator.

This divine assertion was inscribed with “the finger of God” on a table of stone (Exodus 31:18), clearly settling, once and for all, the ancient question of the age of the cosmos, at least for those who really believe in the inerrant perspicuity and authority of the Holy Scriptures. Not only did the Lord precisely equate the six days of man’s workweek with the six days of His own workweek, He then pronounced it all “very good” and “sanctified” the seventh day (Genesis 1:31; 2:3). This would have been an unthinkable thing for Him to say if there were, at that time, a great mile-deep graveyard consisting of the fossil remains of dead animals from the so-called geological ages extending all around the globe. These fossils must all be dated as post-Eden, after human sin and God’s curse brought death into the world (Romans 5:12).

Today, those who believe in God and creation should certainly continue to remember Him by observing every seventh day as a day of rest and worship in honor of their Creator, who has now also become their Redeemer and who will soon come again to reign as eternal King. HMM

## The Man of God

*“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”*  
(1 Timothy 6:11)

There are just two places in the New Testament where a person is called a “man of God” (both of which are in Paul’s letters to Timothy), and they reveal the attributes that warrant us to call someone a man (or woman) of God.

The first occurrence, found in our text, tells us that such a person should, first of all, not be one who loves money and the material things money can buy, for “the love of money is the root of all evil” (see previous verse, 1 Timothy 6:10). Instead, his pursuit should be after personal righteousness and godliness, as well as stronger faith, more genuine love for others, more patience, and true meekness.

Speaking of meekness (not weakness), Moses was called “the man of God” in the very first use of this phrase in the whole Bible, and we are told that “the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Yet, he was able to lead two million Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and then through 40 years in the Sinai desert.

The second New Testament reference to the “man of God” is in reference to his use of the Scriptures. He will recognize that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God....That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Thus, the essential characteristics of a true man of God will be a great desire for personal righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and strong meekness, accompanied by the avoidance of any taint of greed or covetousness. In terms of his Christian beliefs, he will have an unshakable confidence in the verbal inerrant truth and authority of the Holy Scriptures. HMM

Monday, December 11

## The Sons of God

*“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” (1 John 3:1)*

When John says “behold,” he uses the Greek word *eido*, which might well be here rendered “focus your mind because this fact is important!” We are called “sons of God.” The world can’t know this because the world does not know God.

We are chosen (Ephesians 1:4) and adopted (Galatians 4:5) into the family of the omnipotent Creator “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Not only that, but since we have been created “after God in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24), then as God’s “sons” we are “then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

This unique and priceless gift of sonship has the responsibilities of “sons” as well as the privileges. Yes, we are made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21), but we are also called “unto holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7) and expected to “work out” our salvation (Philippians 2:12) with fear and trembling. Although we are granted rights to “sit together” with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), we are commanded to “put on the whole armour of God” here on Earth so that we can “withstand in the evil day” (Ephesians 6:11, 13).

Sonship also demands the “chastisement” of the Father (Hebrews 12:8) and the careful additions to our faith of the character disciplines of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (2 Peter 1:5-7). Earthly sonship must “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM III

Tuesday, December 12

## **The Seed, the Water, and the Word**

*“So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.”  
(1 Corinthians 3:7)*

This verse is a salutary corrective to the common somewhat boastful claim of the evangelist or the personal “soul winner”—that “I won John to Christ,” or “I led Mary to the Lord.” On the other side of the coin is the similar man-pleasing testimony that “I was won to Christ by Pastor Brown’s sermons.” While it is commanded and is urgently important that each Christian be a faithful and earnest witness for Christ, it is needful to give God alone the credit for one’s salvation, since it is only He “that giveth the increase.” We can be grateful whenever God uses something we have preached or written or said to bring someone to Himself, but He is by no means limited to such human efforts, and it is the sin of pride to take credit for what only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

The Christian’s ministry is necessarily limited to “planting” and “watering,” but these constitute a tremendous responsibility and a privilege of eternal value. And even these are productive only if centered around the Holy Scriptures, because both the seed that is planted and the water that enables it to grow are said to be the Word of God. Even the great evangelist the apostle Paul must say, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Nevertheless, we do have many gracious promises that if we are faithful in planting and watering, God will give the increase, and we can share His joy. “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6). “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). HMM



Wednesday, December 13

## Cain and Abel

*“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” (1 John 3:12)*

These two brothers stand as contrasting prototypes. Cain was the first child born after the Fall who embraced the “wicked one” in spite of all the firsthand and face-to-face knowledge of God’s redemptive plan and offering of grace (Genesis 4). Cain’s arrogant lifestyle is noted in Jude 1:8-11. Abel, in contrast, was a man of great faith (Hebrews 11:4) who was both righteous (Matthew 23:35) and a prophet (Luke 11:50-51).

Adam and Eve would have taught the boys (and their other children) about God and the knowledge of the sacrifice (covering of skins) for their own sin. It is clear that sheep were not kept for food (Genesis 2:16) since Cain provided food (as instructed by God—Genesis 1:29). Abel provided clothing and sacrifice.

The events of the Fall would suggest that this sacrifice was an established practice (Genesis 3, the “covering” of skins—the Hebrew word for atonement means “to cover”). Furthermore, the language of Genesis 4:3 (Hebrew translation “at the end of the days”) requires a specified time period when they brought (Hebrew translation “came with”), probably to the door of the garden (Genesis 3:22-24), an offering (used consistently of voluntary tributes to God, Exodus 30:9-10). It is completely parallel to “the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” as later used by Moses in Leviticus 9:3-10.

Such specified action is hardly accidental. Thus, Cain’s rebellion and heinous fratricide revealed an evil heart that *would not* repent. May God protect us from such evil. HMM III

Thursday, December 14

## Living Life Well

*“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:19)*

We all face death as a consequence of sin (Romans 5:12). But wisdom can be cultivated in one’s heart by remembering death’s reality. “A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Death reminds us to think soberly about living life wisely.

Look at the connection between the two halves of Ecclesiastes 7:1. The Hebrew word for “ointment” (perfume) can be a symbol of joy (Ecclesiastes 9:8), prosperity (Job 29:6), and a metaphor for reputation (Song of Solomon 1:3). Solomon combines their meanings to emphasize the significance of reputation and death. “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart” (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

Reputation matters. “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1). As an example, Ruth, a redeemed pagan Moabitess, compassionately cared for her mother-in-law. Boaz affirmed the good report of Ruth’s actions by saying, “It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband” (Ruth 2:11).

When one has lived a life well, especially for the honor and glory of Christ, the day of death will be a celebration of that life. Paul affirms this reality with this command: “Lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Timothy 2:2-3). CCM

Friday, December 15

## Doing Righteousness

*“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” (1 John 3:7)*

Every genuine Christian knows that part of the salvation gift is the promise of being made “unblameable in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). We sometimes have trouble, however, with the concept of present-tense holiness in our everyday lifestyles.

John speaks of the abiding Christian who “sinneth not” (1 John 3:6). Indeed, such a Christian “doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:9) because, John notes, the “seed” of God “remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Furthermore, “whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

It’s accurate to translate those passages with the “continuing” implication of the Greek structure (i.e. “does not continue in [the practice of] sin,” etc.). However, the emphasis is on an obvious, continuous, clearly embraced *lifestyle* of righteous living!

The visible transformation from a worldly conformity (Romans 12:2) begins with a desire for “the sincere milk of [God’s] word” (1 Peter 2:2), fashioning ourselves after God’s holiness “in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:14-15). Neither are we to let sin reign in our bodies, but we are to yield ourselves as “instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:12-13). Since we are “risen with Christ,” we are to “mortify” the fleshly appetites, “put off” emotional outbursts that reflect an ungodly nature, and “put on” godly attributes so that whatsoever we do is done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:1-17). HMM III

## O Praise the Lord

*“O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.” (Psalm 117:1-2)*

Psalm 117 is especially noteworthy for two reasons. First, it is the middle chapter of the Bible, and, secondly, it is the shortest chapter, with only two verses. Thus, it is significant and appropriate that its theme be that of universal and everlasting praise. The very purpose of human language is that God might communicate His word to us and that we might respond in praise to Him.

The word “nations” in verse 1 refers specifically to Gentiles, while “people” seems to refer to all tribes of people. Two different Hebrew words for praise are used so that the verse could be read “Praise the LORD, all ye Gentile nations; extol him, all ye peoples of every tribe.” In any case, the sense of the exhortation is to urge everyone to praise His name.

The Hebrew word translated “merciful kindness” is also rendered as “loving kindness,” or simply “mercy” or “kindness.” Whichever is preferred, the significant point is that it has been *great* toward us. This word (Hebrew *gabar*) is not the usual word for “great” but is a very strong word meaning to “triumph” or “prevail.” An example of its use is in the story of the great Flood. “And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth” (Genesis 7:19). In fact, it is used four times in this account of the “overwhelmingly mighty” waters of the Flood (Genesis 7:18-20, 24).

God’s merciful kindness has prevailed over our sin and the judgment we deserve in a manner and degree analogous to the way in which the deluge waters prevailed over the ancient evil world. God’s mercy and truth are eternal, and this will be the great theme of our praise throughout all the ages to come. HMM

Sunday, December 17

## Speaking in Parables

*“And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” (Matthew 13:3)*

The Lord Jesus Christ often taught His disciples through parables, and this verse both contains the first reference to parables in the New Testament and also introduces the first and most important of all His parables—the parable of the sower. Jesus Himself indicated that an understanding of this parable was a prerequisite to an understanding of all His other parables. “Know ye not this parable? and how then will you know all parables?” (Mark 4:13).

Many people have the mistaken idea that Jesus spoke in parables in order to help unbelievers better understand spiritual truth, but Christ told His disciples, “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matthew 13:11). The parables were given for the instruction of His disciples, not to convert unbelievers. In fact, these parabolic teachings were symbolic so that unbelievers would not understand them!

But as far as His disciples are concerned—those who believe and seek to obey His Word—the parables are vitally important, especially this foundational parable of the seed sower. The seed to be sown is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), and the field is the world (Matthew 13:38). Much of the ground will not receive the seed at all, and much is too full of stones or weeds to allow fruit to grow, but some will be productive ground. Now, since the sower is Christ (Matthew 13:37) and the seed is His Word, the disciple’s function is simply to allow the indwelling Spirit of Christ to apply the appropriate passages from the Word to the hearts of those who read or hear. He also should, in so far as possible, prepare the “ground” to receive the Word, removing stones and thorns and digging it up to make it fertile and receptive soil when the seeds are sown. HMM

## **In Him Is No Darkness**

*“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)*

Light is the most fundamental and important form of energy, and energy includes every phenomenon in the physical universe. It is appropriate for John to affirm that God is light because everything created must reflect the character of its Creator. The term “light,” therefore, has come to be applied not only to light in the physical sense but also to that which is true in the intellectual realm and holy in the moral realm.

In terms of truth and genuine knowledge, “the entrance of thy words giveth light” (Psalm 119:130). “In thy light shall we see light” (Psalm 36:9). Without God’s truth, there is only darkness. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Bible also speaks of light as moral holiness. “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light....And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:8, 11).

There are still other analogies. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Not only is light symbolic of life itself, but it also depicts God’s daily guidance for our lives. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Since there is no darkness in God, “if we walk in the light as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7), there remains no excuse for any darkness in our lives. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). HMM

Tuesday, December 19

## **Thou Art the God**

*“And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.” (2 Kings 19:15)*

Good King Hezekiah was in what seemed a hopeless situation. The mighty armies of the Assyrian empire had been sweeping through the surrounding countries in an orgy of destruction and plunder, and now were at the gates of Jerusalem, demanding its surrender. Grossly outnumbered, the choice seemed either to capitulate or die!

But there was one other choice—Hezekiah could pray! The blasphemous Rabshakeh gloated that none of the gods of the other nations had been able to save them from the Assyrians... but that was beside the point. These other gods were mere personifications of natural processes, possibly energized by evil spirits, but all of these had been created in the first place by Hezekiah’s God. “For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (Psalm 96:5). And that was true of Assyria’s gods as well. All ancient pagan religions were evolutionary religions, rejecting the concept of true creation and a true Creator God.

Hezekiah knew the true God who had made heaven and Earth, and he could pray in reliance on His word. God could dispatch and empower just one of His mighty angels in answer to Hezekiah’s believing prayer and thus destroy the great Assyrian host in a single night! “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand:...So Sennacherib king of Assyria, departed” (2 Kings 19:35-36).

This God—maker of heaven and Earth—is still on His throne and can still hear and answer the prayers of those who call on His name. HMM

Wednesday, December 20

## The Triune Comforter

*“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*

One of the titles of the Holy Spirit, especially as used in the King James Version, is His beautiful identification as “the Comforter.” The Greek word is *parakletos*, meaning literally “one who is called alongside to help.” A familiar verse is John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.” He is our teacher, our guide, our helper, our Comforter.

The same word is also translated “advocate,” meaning an attorney for the defense. In this capacity, it is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Though we are guilty and lost sinners, He takes our side before the Judge, pleading the sacrificial offering of His own blood for our sins, and we are saved (1 John 2:2).

Even the Father is our “paraclete,” according to the verses cited above. He is “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (Greek *paraklesis*), and as we pray to our heavenly Father, He indeed does provide great consolation in every hour of trouble and sorrow.

Thus, each person of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—serves as Comforter (“paraclete”) to the believer, as needed, who also has access to the “comfort of the scriptures” (Romans 15:4). But there is still another “comforter.” Each believer receives such comfort so that we ourselves “may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” HMM



Thursday, December 21

## **Pride Goes Before Destruction**

*“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)*

This is the middle verse of the entire book of Proverbs, and, in view of the obviously structured original verse divisions throughout the book, it may well have been divinely designed as such. In any case, the sin of pride is so deadly, it is appropriate that a solemn warning concerning it should be placed here right at the heart of God’s book of true wisdom.

The sin of pride was the primeval sin of Satan. “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:17). It was the sin by which Satan led Adam and Eve to fall. “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5), he had said. It is always the “easily besetting” sin of Christian leaders, especially those who have assumed such leadership prematurely. “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). Even Jesus was 30 years old before He began to teach.

Though pride is not named as such in the Ten Commandments, in reality it is implied in the very first one. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). The essence of all false religion is evolutionary humanism—worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Pride and unbelief are two sides of the same coin. When men and women refuse the word of their Creator, it is fundamentally because they want to be their own “gods,” as did Adam and Eve. Human pride is the hidden root of humanism, and of evolutionism, and of “every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is the very essence of the sin nature that we have inherited from our first parents. How carefully we need to guard against this secret sin of pride. If we do not, it will inevitably lead to humiliation and defeat. HMM

## These Things

*“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:8)*

In this first chapter of Peter’s last epistle, he refers to “these things” (one word in the Greek) no less than six times. That they are extremely important things is evident from our text, but if these things are lacking, one is spiritually blind and has forgotten what Christ did for him in salvation (v. 9). However, if he does “these things,” he will never fall (v. 10).

What then are the things that Peter stresses so urgently? Verse 8 makes it obvious that they constitute simply the hierarchical catalog of Christian attributes listed in verses 6 and 7—that is, faith, virtue (strength of character), knowledge, temperance (self control), patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (unselfish love).

The same word is used in verse 4, where it explains how we are enabled to acquire these traits of Christian character. “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [‘by these things’] ye might be partakers of the divine nature.”

When these things characterize our lives, we become nothing less than Christlike. He, in His humanity, was all these things as He shared our nature, and we have become partakers of His divine nature when we manifest them.

The wonderful thing is that they are all mediated to us through the gracious promises of the Word of God. God promises, we believe and then receive! There is an effectual promise for the achievement of each stage in the growth of a Christlike character. Indeed, as Peter had already said by way of introduction, “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). HMM

Saturday, December 23

## God's Standards

*“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)*

It is remarkable how different are our human standards of value from those of God. But what should be the criteria by which men recognize hearts of lovingkindness, attitudes of justice, and characters of righteousness? These are the attributes of our Creator and Savior, and it is our achievements in these areas that determine our real standing, in the scales of eternity, before Him. Human wisdom, might, and riches easily generate pride, and pride is “the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).

Thus, the Scripture has to remind us “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:...That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26, 29). We should, indeed, desire wisdom, might, and riches, but not as measured by the world. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). “As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10). “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Let lovingkindness become the standard of true wisdom, justice the measure of real power, and righteousness our criterion of riches. All are found fully only in Jesus Christ.

If we must “glory” in something, let it be the cross. “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). HMM

## When God Became Man

*“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.” (Hebrews 2:7)*

We cannot comprehend what it meant for the infinite Creator God to become finite man, even coming “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3). Nevertheless, we can, and must, believe it, for “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3).

The Scriptures have given us a glimpse of the “emptying” that His incarnation required—the setting aside of certain outward aspects of His deity. He had been “so much better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:4), but He had to be “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9)—“put to death in the flesh” (1 Peter 3:18).

The eternal Word “was God” (John 1:1), but it was necessary that “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). “The world was made by Him” (John 1:10), but “the princes of this world ...crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

He “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:6). That is, He was not fearful of losing His deity and, therefore, did not have to cling to His divine nature and attributes as He became man. Thus, He “made himself of no reputation” (emptying Himself of the outward form of God) “and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7).

Yet, that was only the beginning. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He suffered hell for us that we might enjoy heaven with Him.

Because He was willing to be so humiliated, He will one day be crowned with glory and honor. “God also hath highly exalted Him,...that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:9, 11). HMM

Monday, December 25

## What We Celebrate at Christmas

*“And [Joseph] knew her [Mary] not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.”*  
(Matthew 1:25)

The actual birthday of Jesus was sometime in the fall (September or October) rather than in December. The date is of lesser consequence, however, than the *reason* for the celebration (Isaiah 1:18). Heaven itself celebrated the birth (Luke 2:8-14). And after the shepherds got over their fear, they couldn't stop telling the news.

Then there were the wise men from the east who came to worship the one “born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:1-2). They got there well after the birth, having put their lives on hold, and willingly gave of their time and treasures to honor this great King while they rejoiced with “exceeding great joy” (Matthew 2:10). Surely all Christians should worship and rejoice as well as open our treasuries when we celebrate Christ's birth.

But if we just focus on the *birth*, we may miss the *greatest* reason for the commemoration. After all, there was nothing uncommon about the physical process. But the *conception*, now *that* was miraculous (Luke 1:35)! The eternal “Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The great Creator and Son of God, “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20), submitted to the will of the Father and “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). *That* was why heaven celebrated.

Counting back nine months from around September puts us pretty close to the end of the previous December. Perhaps our sovereign God has orchestrated events so that we would celebrate the real miracle of the conception: “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). HMM III

Tuesday, December 26

## David's Great-Grandmother

*“And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.” (Ruth 4:17)*

No one knows for certain who the human author of the fascinating book of Ruth may have been, but it must at least have been written by a contemporary of David, able to carry the genealogy of Ruth's descendants down to her great-grandson, David. Quite possibly the story was told directly to David himself by his great-grandmother.

In any case, when David later became king, he must surely have been intrigued by the providential circumstances that had led to his anointing. He would have read Genesis 49:8-12, in which Israel had said that a member of the tribe of Judah would be the ruler of the children of Israel some day. He must also have marveled at the wonderful grace of God that brought Ruth, a Moabitess, into his ancestry, despite the proscription in Deuteronomy 23:3 stipulating that Moabites should not be brought into the congregation of the Lord. He undoubtedly noted also that Nahshon, who was the grandfather of Ruth's husband, Boaz, had been the chief captain of the tribe of Judah when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (Numbers 1:4-5, 7) but that he had apparently failed in that role and perished in the wilderness, with his fellow tribesman Caleb being permitted to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:22-24). Yet, Nahshon, rather than Caleb, became David's ancestor.

David, like Ruth and like Nahshon, and like everyone of us, has been brought into the great family of the King not because of his own merits but by His marvelous grace! We have been born again “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). HMM

Wednesday, December 27

## Lift Up Your Eyes

*“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.” (Isaiah 40:26)*

Our text makes three majestic statements about the cosmos, each reflecting true scientific insight as well as the work of each person of the divine Trinity. The omnipresent Father has “brought out” an infinite “host” of organized systems in the cosmos—galaxies, stars, planets, animals, and people. All are capable of description mathematically, “by number,” and thus all bear witness to their great Designer. Chance processes never generate organization or complexity, so special creation by God is the only legitimate explanation for the “numbered” host of heaven.

The Son is the omniscient Word of information, description, and meaning. Every system in the cosmos is not only numbered but named! That is, in the mind of its Creator, it has a function and has been coded to fulfill its purpose. The Second Law states that systems never code themselves but rather always tend to distort the information originally programmed into them. Only an omniscient Creator could thus implement the divine purpose for every created entity.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is the omnipotent Energizer who activates and empowers every system. The Second Law says that energy becomes less available as time goes on, so only the Creator could provide the energy to activate the designed, programmed cosmos in the beginning.

When we finally look up and really “behold who hath created these things,” we must see God the Creator—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. HMM

## The Gospel and Health

*“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” (Matthew 4:23)*

This is the first mention of “the gospel” in the New Testament, and it is significant that Christ was emphasizing, first of all, the long-range future aspect of the gospel, the Kingdom. In that great day, all manner of sickness and even death itself will be eternally healed, when the earth’s age-long curse, pronounced originally because of man’s sin (Genesis 3:17), is finally removed (Revelation 22:3). As a token of this future deliverance, He demonstrated His power by supernaturally healing great numbers of needy people.

The next verse elaborates further on the ubiquity of His healing ministry—“all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy” (Matthew 4:24). No one was omitted. It was not a matter of only those who had faith, or those with psychosomatic ailments, or any other distinction. Everyone was healed of every infirmity of every kind!

Nothing was too hard for the Lord to cure—not even psychiatric disorders or demon possession. However, it was not that way later on in His ministry (e.g., Mark 6:5) nor in that of the apostle Paul (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:20) or the other apostles (e.g., Matthew 17:14-16). Evidently the tremendous scope of this initial healing ministry of the Lord was intended to serve as a type and promise of what will occur worldwide and eternally when His kingdom comes and His will is done on Earth as it is in heaven. In the meantime, this record serves to assure us all that He who came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom should indeed be received by faith right now as the great King of all creation! HMM



Friday, December 29

## The Twofold Call

*“And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.” (1 Samuel 3:10)*

There are a number of other times in Scripture when the Lord repeated a second time the name He was calling, always at a time of great significance and urgency. Once had been to Moses: “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am” (Exodus 3:4).

God then ordained Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. When He called Samuel, it was to lead His people out of the chaos of the period of the judges and to prepare them for the Davidic kingdom. The first time God had called in this fashion was to Abraham, and then it was to confirm that he had passed God’s final test for the fulfillment of the great promise concerning the blessing on his seed. “And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I” (Genesis 22:11).

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus spoke thus unto all His rebelling nation: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,...Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:37-38). Before this, He had spoken both in grief and in encouragement to Peter, who must be prepared to lead the disciples later on. “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31-32). Finally, when the Lord was ready to call Paul as His apostle to the Gentiles, He met him on the road to Damascus: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4).

The last calling in the Bible is not a twofold call but fourfold! “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). HMM

Saturday, December 30

## The Grace of God in Creation

*“He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts 14:17)*

There is abundant evidence of the mighty power and wisdom of God in the vast cosmos and the tremendously complex world. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

But in addition to such evidence of His wisdom and power, there is also wonderful evidence of the grace of God in nature. Although “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22), laboring under the awful curse on the ground imposed by God when Adam sinned (Genesis 3:17), it has been so subjected “in hope,” with God’s promise of ultimate deliverance from the “bondage of corruption,” and “we are saved by hope” (Romans 8:20-21, 24).

This goodness of God is evidenced in the daily victory of light over darkness, the annual return of spring after winter, and the oft-repeated triumph of life over death. Although individuals die, new souls are born; and always, there is hope. Man must eat his bread in the sweat of his face as he labors to wrest a living from the cursed ground, but God does send the rain and the fruitful seasons, and the food is grown. Though he must eat of it in sorrow all the days of his life, somehow God nevertheless fills his heart with food and gladness. And all of the labor and sweat and sorrow is “for thy sake” (Genesis 3:17), urging man to return to God for both his daily bread and his eternal salvation. How foolish is the man who receives all these gifts of God’s grace without acknowledging their source. “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness...not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). HMM

Sunday, December 31

## Count Your Many Blessings

*“Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.” (Psalm 65:11)*

At year’s end, a Christian should stop to count his blessings. If he does this fairly and fully, no matter what his problems may have been during the year, he will have to confess that God, as always, has crowned the year with goodness.

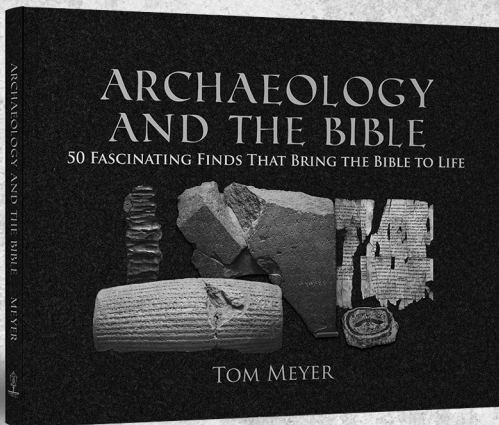
The coronation figure is frequently used in Scripture to speak of God’s blessings in the Christian life. For example, “Bless the LORD...Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:2, 4). Even our testings and trials are always in the context of God’s grace and love. Christ Himself wore a crown of thorns so that we may be crowned with mercy and salvation.

Consider also Psalm 5:12: “For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield.” The word “compass” is the same Hebrew word as “crown,” with the basic meaning “encircle.” Other jewels in the believer’s year-end crown are God’s grace and glory. “[Wisdom] shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee” (Proverbs 4:9).

Then there is the wonderful testimony that “thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5). Finally, the believer’s crown is none other than the Lord Himself. “In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people” (Isaiah 28:5).

Most Christians have an abundance of material blessings for which to thank the Lord. Even if they have none of these, however, God has crowned the year with goodness and favor, with lovingkindness and tender mercies, with grace and glory and honor and, best of all, with His own presence. “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). HMM

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Monday, January 1

## **The Beginning of the Year**

*“A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” (Deuteronomy 11:12)*

This phrase, “the beginning of the year,” occurs only twice in the Bible, here in Deuteronomy 11:12 and in Ezekiel 40:1. In this passage, the Lord, through Moses, is speaking of the promised land that He had prepared for the children of Israel, “a land of hills and valleys, [that] drinketh water of the rain of heaven” (Deuteronomy 11:11), promising great blessing on the land and its people if they obeyed God but judgment if they disobeyed.

Although these promises were made specifically with reference to Israel, the principle surely would apply worldwide, for God “hath made of one blood all nations of men...and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord” (Acts 17:26-27). It certainly has applied to America, for God has certainly blessed our nation most abundantly, founded as it was in its beginnings on the principles of God’s words. Sadly, however, there are now many signs that His blessings are being withdrawn, with judgment imminent, because of the widespread apostasy and moral decay that have overtaken us.

Here, at “the beginning of the year,” we can pray that America will return to the God of our fathers before it is too late and final judgment falls on our once-blessed nation. In the words of our text, “the eyes of the LORD” are on us “from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.”

In addition to prayer, we personally can work and give and vote and live in ways that demonstrate our own personal trust in God and His Word, as well as our deep concern for our families, our churches, our nation, and God’s eternal plan for His great creation. HMM

Tuesday, January 2

## The Branch of the Lord

*“In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” (Isaiah 4:2)*

One of the fascinating titles of the promised Messiah is that of “the Branch.” Here He is called “the branch of the LORD,” along with “the fruit of the earth.” As the first, He is “beautiful and glorious.” As the second, He is “excellent and comely.” “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem [or ‘stump’] of Jesse [that is, the father of King David], and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1).

In addition to the two references in Isaiah, there are two in Jeremiah and two in Zechariah. In both Jeremiah passages, He is a Branch of David. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch” (Jeremiah 23:5). See also Jeremiah 33:15.

In Zechariah’s prophecy, He is called God’s servant and God’s man. “For, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH” (Zechariah 3:8). “Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD” (Zechariah 6:12).

This fourfold presentation of the Branch of David, the Branch as a servant, the man who is the Branch, and the Branch of the Lord beautifully corresponds to the fourfold gospel depiction of Christ as King (Matthew), Servant (Mark), Perfect Man (Luke), and Son of God (John).

Just as a branch when it first begins to shoot forth appears small and fragile and easily broken, so would the Messiah first appear to be inconspicuous and unattractive. “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2). Yet, this same fragile branch will one day become a great vine with innumerable branches (John 15:5) that will spread its excellent fruit throughout all the earth. HMM

Wednesday, January 3

## Pray Anyhow

*“Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.” (1 Samuel 12:23)*

Samuel had served the children of Israel as their faithful judge for many years, and the Lord had blessed them and their land. Nevertheless, they began to want a king and pressed Samuel to get one for them. Finally, Samuel anointed Saul to be their king, but both Samuel and the Lord Himself were displeased with their demands.

Nevertheless, Samuel’s great heart, both for the Lord and for His people, is revealed in the promise of our text. Although he was hurt and disappointed because he had led them successfully and justly his whole life, he would still pray for them and teach them. This is a great example for Christian leaders or workers today who through no fault of their own have been replaced by someone else.

Intercessory prayer is not easy, especially if our prayers are not appreciated by those we pray for. Nevertheless, it is a type of prayer ministry that especially pleases the Lord, and that is more important than human gratitude. “I exhort therefore,” said Paul (no doubt reflecting God’s own desires), “that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Paul would even urge prayer for the emperor, Nero, who had imprisoned him and would eventually have him put to death.

Even Jesus had said that we should “pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). The Lord Jesus is the greatest intercessor of all. For when we sin (and all sin is sin against the Lord), He is our “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), and in fact, “he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Therefore, should we not also be prayer intercessors? HMM

Thursday, January 4

## **Be Continually Being Filled**

*“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” (Luke 1:15)*

This prophecy of the angel Gabriel, bearing as it does a tremendous testimony to the character of John the Baptist, contains the first reference in the New Testament to the unique Christian doctrine of the filling of the Holy Spirit. John was the first Christian witness, directing his own disciples to Christ (John 1:35-37) and clearly preaching the gospel of salvation through Christ alone (John 3:26-36). It is significant that he was filled with the Holy Spirit all his life. Jesus is also said to have been full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) and was undoubtedly so filled from the time of conception (Psalm 22:10), but the explicit statement is made only of John.

The fullness of the Spirit is available for every believer, of course. In the New Testament, both of John’s parents were said to be so filled on a specific occasion (Luke 1:41, 67). The disciples of the Lord were filled with the Spirit many times (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52). Peter was said to be filled with the Holy Spirit on at least one special occasion (Acts 4:8), and Paul at least twice (Acts 9:17; 13:9). One of the qualifications sought in the first deacons was that they were to be men full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:3), and one of those chosen, Stephen, was specifically so described (Acts 6:5; 7:55). Barnabas was another Spirit-filled Christian believer (Acts 11:24). Undoubtedly there were many others. In fact, every believer is commanded to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). The reference in this key passage is not to a one-time event but to frequent fillings. “Be continually being filled” is the literal rendering. HMM



Friday, January 5

## Too Hard or Too Small

*“Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.” (Jeremiah 32:17)*

This mighty declaration of faith in the Creator of heaven and Earth was given by Jeremiah in respect to a mundane sort of need—the need of assurance that his real estate investment would be safe even if he were forced to be away from it for many years. There is nothing too small for the Lord, just as there is nothing too *hard* for Him, and He delights to “shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Since God created all things, He certainly can control all things. If a person really believes the very first verse of the Bible—the simple declaration that the entire space/mass (energy)/time universe had been called into existence by God—then he or she will never find it difficult to believe any of the other declarations or promises of His inspired Word.

In response to Jeremiah’s great statement of faith, God gave him the assurance he sought. “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). God, who made the sea, could roll back its waters to enable His people to pass through its very midst unharmed (Exodus 14:29). He who made the earth could cause the earth to cease its rotation to give His people victory (Joshua 10:12-14). There is nothing too hard for the God of creation!

We can be confident that 21st-century problems are no more difficult for God than those of 600 BC. May our mighty Creator grant us trusting and obedient hearts in both the great problems and the small problems of life. In this verse, the Hebrew word for “hard” is the same as for “wonderful” (Psalm 107:8). God delights in transforming the hard things of life into the wonderful works of God! HMM

## Proofs of the Pudding

*“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.” (1 John 2:29)*

The little book of 1 John provides a treasure trove of “proofs” that demonstrate the reality of the invisible spiritual change brought about by the new birth.

There are two emphases: proofs based on personal experience and proofs based on intellectual awareness.

Here is a short list of proofs we experience.

- Obedience to God’s commandments (1 John 2:2-5)
- Experience of God in our lives (1 John 2:13-14)
- Obvious “antichrists” in the world (1 John 2:18)
- Worldly ignorance of Christianity (1 John 3:1)
- Sinners’ ignorance of righteousness (1 John 3:6)
- Our love for fellow Christians (1 John 3:16-18)
- The indwelling Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13)
- Our love for godly behavior (1 John 5:2)

Here are proofs we have intellectual confidence in.

- The Holy Spirit’s anointing (1 John 2:20)
- The holiness of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:29)
- The Father’s love for us (1 John 3:1)
- Our eternal bodies to be like Christ (1 John 3:2)
- Hating a brother is like murder (1 John 3:15)
- Scripture’s message of eternal life (1 John 5:13)
- Assurance that we belong to God (1 John 5:19)
- Assurance that Christ has come (1 John 5:20)

These evidences are primarily for the believer. That is, they are intended to assure the believer’s heart and mind of his security in Christ. John’s list is not intended to be complete but only to focus our thoughts on the obvious. When you count your blessings, remember these. HMM III

Sunday, January 7

## Withering Man

*“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.”*  
(Isaiah 40:7)

This passage compares people to fleeting flowers. Both have a finite earthly existence. Each generation of flowers, for example, shrivels and falls from the plant, its glory fading and then vanishing. Likewise, each generation of man—indeed, each individual person—shrivels and fades in a single lifetime. The psalmist said it this way: “My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass” (Psalm 102:11).

Science confirms this. Biologists track a relentless accumulation of mutations, or DNA differences, during a person’s lifetime. These contribute to the typical symptoms of aging and many cancers. But biologists have also tracked mutations that accumulate across generations. They show that mankind as a whole will also wither.

Perhaps Peter had this in mind when he wrote, “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Peter 1:24). We each and all need a Savior!

The process of aging reminds us of life’s brevity. What will happen afterward? The gospel is the only message that offers a real cure for the terminal illness toward which our individual aging and collective withering point. To those who trust Christ, it promises everlasting life in bodies that never fade.

So, how should you “prepare to meet [your] God” (Amos 4:12)? “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). BDT

## Not Giving, but Sowing

*“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully.” (2 Corinthians 9:6)*

As John Calvin pointed out long ago in expounding this key passage, “We are not *giving*, but *sowing*” when we contribute of our financial means to the work of the Lord, for it miraculously is considered by the Lord of the harvest as seed sown in the soil of the hearts of men.

And it is a rule of the harvest that, other things being equal, the more seed planted, the more harvested. He who is deficient with his seed must necessarily anticipate a meager crop.

Of course, a bountiful harvest presupposes not only an abundance of seed but also good soil, properly prepared, watered, and cultivated. It is no good simply to give money to anyone or any cause, any more than it is good simply to throw a seed on a rocky slope or city street or weed-infested yard. One is responsible to give where God’s Word is honored—not just to give, but to give responsibly.

Furthermore, even though an abundant harvest is promised, the motive in giving is also vital. The harvest is souls—not gold! “God loveth a cheerful giver”—not a conditional giver (v. 7). “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity” (Romans 12:8). Often God does bring financial blessing to a Christian who has proved faithful in the grace of giving, but this is so he can give still more and thus lay up still more treasure in heaven. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). “Therefore,” as Paul said, “see that ye abound in this grace also” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

And as we give, we must never forget that Christ has given more. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9). HMM

Tuesday, January 9

## The Scars of Sin

*“But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.” (Judges 16:21)*

The sad end of mighty Samson, who once had been so greatly energized and utilized by the Lord, is also an allegory and a grave warning to every Christian. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15).

Satan knows our individual weaknesses and tempts us accordingly. Many Christians have fallen into sin through some Delilah, but probably many more have fallen into sin through pride, or covetousness, or compromise, or apathy.

First, sin blinds. We are commanded to grow in Christ, adding to our initial faith the attributes of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, kindness, and love (2 Peter 1:5-7). Otherwise, “he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9).

Then, sin binds. It may not be with chains, as with Samson, but unconfessed sin quickly enslaves its practitioners. “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19).

Finally, sin grinds. Instead of the promised freedom from restraint, a sinful life soon becomes a “grind,” tedious and tasteless, like “the dog turned to his own vomit again” (2 Peter 2:22).

Samson did return to God again before his death, but he was still blind, and bound, and grinding. God forgives, but the effects of sin are not easily removed. How much better it would be never to yield to the temptation at all. HMM

Wednesday, January 10

## **Biblical Creation Is Essential**

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Genesis 1:1-5)*

The doctrine of creation is foundational to comprehending the whole Bible. One can’t change the beginning narrative—even tamper with the smallest Hebrew letter—without incurring the consequences voiced by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-19).

Biblical creation is essential for correctly grasping and understanding the gospel. The true gospel begins in Genesis when God proclaims, “God created the heaven and the earth” and is further expanded with God’s promise to the serpent that He will put “enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Yahweh speaks in Genesis 1 and then speaks right through Scripture until its climax in Revelation 22:18, when He warns, “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Either you believe the book of Genesis to be historically true or you don’t. If you don’t believe the clarity of Genesis, then you are left with believing deceptive forms of a naturalistic worldview (Colossians 2:8). CCM

Thursday, January 11

## Assurance Before God

*“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” (1 John 3:19)*

There is a chain of reasoning in this context that is important to understand. Our hearts will be “assured” before God (1 John 3:19) if we love the brethren in “deed and in truth” (v. 18). A lack of that heart assurance condemns us (v. 20). If our heart does not condemn us, then we will have “confidence toward God” (v. 21).

It is worth noting that John uses the word “love” 26 times in this little letter. The word “know” is used 31 times, but the word “assure” is used only once (our text) and the word for “confidence” just four times. In each case, the promises of boldness in prayer or trust in answered prayer are based on our obedience.

Apparently, the key to an effective relationship with God, especially the key to a confidence in our prayer life, is a ready, visible, and instant response to God’s requirements for the believer. To the degree that we abide in Him (2:28), we will be confident when He returns. Our ready love for the brethren will keep us bold before God in our prayers (3:21), and our Christlike lifestyle will give us boldness at the judgment (4:17).

Meanwhile, absolute and steady belief in God’s salvation will remove any doubt that God hears us when we pray (5:14).

There is a continuing loop in these messages. We gain confidence as we “do” truth. We find more boldness as we understand God’s answers to our needs and prayers for others. That, in turn, increases our confidence that God is listening to our prayers, making our hearts all the more confident in our relationship with our heavenly Father. HMM III

Friday, January 12

## Twelve Legions of Angels

*“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”  
(Matthew 26:53)*

In 1 Chronicles 27:1-15, David assembled 12 “courses” (i.e., legions) of fighting men to protect him. Each would serve him one month out of the year when the nation was at peace, but presumably all would have reported for duty in time of war. Since each contained 24,000 warriors, they combined to form an immense personal army numbering 288,000.

By contrast, Christ, David’s greater Son, had at His command “more than twelve legions of angels.” These were not mere soldiers, as those guarding David were; these were angels. Consider the power of just one angel in the days of King Hezekiah. “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses” (2 Kings 19:35). Simple multiplication shows that 288,000 such angels could handle 53 billion soldiers. And Christ had access to more angels than that!

Humanly speaking, Christ did not have to submit to brutality and death. But Christ was not only human; He was also the offended but loving God who had come to redeem His own. “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) had “come to do thy will, O God...By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:9-10). “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “All this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 26:56). JDM



Saturday, January 13

## Overcome Them

*“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)*

This is one of the most reassuring promises in the Bible for the believer. Because “we are of God” and because He is in us (as the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 3:16) and is “greater...than he that is in the world,” we have *already* overcome!

I firmly believe that there are no empty promises in the Bible, and I know that this passage is true. But there are times when I do not feel like I am over anything. Just what does this promise promise? And who are “them” that I have to overcome?

To begin with, the Greek word means to conquer, overcome, prevail, or get the victory. It is translated similarly in speaking of the Lord’s ultimate victory as He assumes the throne in heaven to bring about the end of the age (Revelation 5:5). And in the same way, we are to conquer as we “reign in life” (Romans 5:17) because we are “born of God” (1 John 5:4). The Lord Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33), and since we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we too will get the victory over the world (1 John 5:5; Romans 12:2).

The “them” are those who are driven to embrace ungodly antichrist doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1) and worldly philosophies (James 4:4). They are those who “love the world” (1 John 2:15-17) and seek to spoil (plunder and/or take captive) the people of God (Colossians 2:8). We, on the other hand, are to prevail over evil with good (Romans 12:21) and take them captive with the mighty “weapons of our warfare” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), which are the Word of God and prayer (Ephesians 6:13-18). HMM III

Sunday, January 14

## No King in Israel

*“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6)*

Four times in the book of Judges we are told that “there was no king in Israel in those days” (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), indicating that the book must have been compiled either by Samuel (the last judge) or someone else of his or a later generation. The first and last of these (which is the final verse in the book) add that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” With no centralized government, there were only tribal leaders. Occasionally, one of these would acquire followers from other tribes; these were the “judges” whom God raised up to lead the people out of bondage on the occasions of widespread repentance and prayer.

The intervening periods were times of oppression by enemies and moral and spiritual chaos among the people. They did have a King, of course, but they refused Him, as did the men in the parable who “sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). When they finally requested a human king, Samuel rebuked them for saying, “Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king” (1 Samuel 12:12).

Lest we be too critical of the ancient Israelites for rejecting God as their king and going each his own way, that is essentially what people are doing today. “There is no fear of God before their eyes,” and they are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (Romans 3:18; 2 Timothy 3:4). When every man believes what is comfortable and does as he pleases, he in effect becomes his own god, and this is nothing but humanism. But just as this ancient humanism was empty and the people soon desired a human king, so modern atheistic humanism will also revert to pantheism, and the world will then yield to a humanistic king to lead them on to a final deadly confrontation with the true King of kings. HMM

Monday, January 15

## The Incarnate Wisdom

*“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.” (Proverbs 8:22-23)*

The book of Proverbs repeatedly extols the virtues of true wisdom founded on the fear of the Lord. In the eighth chapter, however, beginning at verse 22, the theme changes, retreating far back in time to creation itself and even before. The statements in the next 10 verses, especially, must be of an actual divine Person. From the New Testament perspective, especially with John 1:1-14 as the definitive exposition, it becomes clear that the divine wisdom of Proverbs 8:22-31 is none other than the incarnate Word of John’s prologue.

The Lord Jesus Christ, indeed, fits perfectly all the statements in this particular section of Proverbs, which then gives marvelous new insight into the events of creation and the divine fellowship in the Godhead before the creation. Note that in these first two verses, the Lord’s “ways” were prior to His “works” and that He “possessed” His Son “from everlasting.” This is the profound doctrine of “eternal generations” whereby the Son is “brought forth” continually from the Father, forever manifesting Him in His creation.

The New Testament makes it plain that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the incarnate wisdom of God. He is the “Word” by whom all things were made (John 1:1-3). He is “the truth” (John 14:6) and “the light” (John 8:12) by whom alone men can come to God and follow Him. He is called “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” in 1 Corinthians 1:24, and He called Himself “the wisdom of God” in Luke 11:49.

All of the vaunted knowledge of the world’s thinkers and scientists is empty and futile apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, for in Him alone are found “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). HMM

Tuesday, January 16

## The Everlasting Mercy of God

*“O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” (Psalm 136:1)*

God’s mercy is a monumental theme in Scripture. The English word appears some 341 times in the Bible. The four Hebrew and three Greek words appear a total of 454 times and are also translated by “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness,” “favor,” “compassion,” and “pity.” Of the 66 books of the Bible, only 16 do not use one of the words for mercy. Even though “mercy” is an important concept, it is somewhat difficult to prescribe a definition for it, especially since “grace” is occasionally coupled with it.

In the first reference where “mercy” is used, Lot has just been expelled from Sodom by the angels of judgment. In spite of the command by the angels that Lot and his daughters “escape to the mountain,” Lot begs: “Oh, not so, my LORD: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life,...this city is near...Oh, let me escape thither” (Genesis 19:17-20). And later, the New Testament saints are told to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). In these and other such passages, the two terms appear to address similar subjects.

However similar they may appear to be, these words are not synonyms. “Grace” is most often associated with the sovereign dispensation of totally undeserved favor, and it is specifically connected to salvation. “Mercy” is more often connected to the withholding of judgment. “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13).

Set aside some time today to read and meditate on this psalm. You will find the day less wearisome if you do.  
HMM III

Wednesday, January 17

## **A No-Name Sandwich**

*“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name.”*  
(Genesis 11:4)

According to Genesis, people after the Flood built the Tower of Babel to make themselves a name. This theme runs through the Scriptures and our lives. We sinners exalt our own names. We want credit! This self-centeredness might drive us to outpace others in a career or to offer words that make us look wise. But at Babel, they took this desire to its extreme by collaborating on a monument of self-exaltation.

One snag with self-made names is that they rob God of the glory He deserves. After all, the Lord gave us any knowledge, intellectual ability, or physical prowess we may have. It is also idolatry since it implies we believe we can save ourselves. “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:5).

The brief account of Babel in Genesis 11 is sandwiched between “name” passages. Genesis 10 names Noah’s major descendants, and Genesis 11:10-28 names the generations from Shem to Abram. In contrast, God chose not to honor the names of the wicked Babel builders. In other words, even the literary structure in Genesis emphasizes the futility of trying to make a name for oneself.

What should we then do? “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:16). Magnify the Lord’s great name and receive in the end “a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Revelation 2:17). BDT

Thursday, January 18

## The Gods Shall Perish

*“Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.” (Jeremiah 10:11)*

This is a unique verse. Jeremiah, the second-longest book in the Bible, is written in Hebrew except for this one verse! Why would Jeremiah make this remarkable exception here?

This verse was written in Aramaic, which was the official language of the great Babylonian empire—the world’s chief nation at that time. The Babylonians, as prophesied by Jeremiah, were soon to be used as a weapon in God’s hand to punish His chosen people, carrying them into exile and captivity, and the main reason for such punishment was apostasy. God’s people had corrupted the worship of the true Creator God with the teachings and idols of the Babylonians and all the other nations around them who had rejected God.

Jeremiah had repeatedly condemned this apostasy, showing that God’s people were to be punished by the very nations whose religious philosophies had so attracted them.

But those nations needed also to understand that this was not because of their own strength nor the merits of their own gods. Thus, Jeremiah appropriately inserted a special word to be conveyed to the Babylonians in their own official tongue. Only the true God, who made the heavens and the earth, is in control of the heavens and the earth.

The same type of warning, delivered in the “official” language of the modern world (“science?”), is needed even more today than it was in Jeremiah’s day. Today’s “gods”—Marx, Darwin, etc.—are even less deserving of trust than Zeus or Baal, and yet professing Christians have gone after them in droves. It is urgent that we call them back to the true Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ, urging them—before God’s judgment falls once again—to repudiate every vestige of evolutionary humanism. HMM

Friday, January 19

## Where Is Jesus Now?

*“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.” (Matthew 24:26)*

The above warning was given by Christ in His famous Olivet discourse about His future second coming, right after He had predicted that many “false Christs” would first come, deceiving many (v. 24). That prediction has been fulfilled many times during the following centuries, but He Himself has not yet returned, in spite of the claims of these latter days.

However, His present location is no secret. After His resurrection and final instructions to His disciples, “he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). We must remember that He arose bodily from the grave, then ascended bodily to God’s throne, and that “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven” (Acts 1:11) will return. Until He returns, therefore, He is seated bodily at the right hand of the presence of the triune God in heaven. In fact, there are no less than 21 references in the Bible to the Lord Jesus now being at the right hand of God.

It is not strictly correct to say or sing that Jesus can come into our hearts unless it is clearly understood that He is there symbolically in the presence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. In this way, “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6) so that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17).

In the physical sense, however, the Lord Jesus Christ, still in His physical but now immortal body, is at “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3) and will remain there until He returns physically back to fulfill all the remaining promises in the Scriptures and to establish the kingdom for which He created us. HMM

Saturday, January 20

## **In the Days of Thy Youth**

*“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

Here is the wisest counsel a young person can receive. Though it was first written many years ago, it is more relevant than ever today when young people are being bombarded daily with the propaganda and practices of evolutionary humanism. They urgently need to realize that despite these pressures, they are not products of chance, with pleasure their only aim in life. They are special creations of God, with a high and holy purpose destined for them by their Creator.

If they will only recognize this fact, acknowledging God, in Christ, as Creator and Savior while they are young, trusting and obeying His Word as they mature, they can anticipate a life of fulfillment. “I have been young, and now am old,” David said, “yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25).

If they refuse their Creator in the days of their youth, however, then it will become increasingly difficult to remember their Creator as the years go by. Few are converted in later life. They can only anticipate the bitterness and regrets of old age and death, as described so vividly in the verses following our text. Under the figure of a decaying house symbolizing their aging bodies, the forlorn picture is drawn of fading eyesight, trembling hands, buckling knees, sleepless nights, easy irritability, increasing senility, and other aspects of approaching death—all with no pleasure in them because they long ago had forgotten their Creator. Remember now thy Creator, young man, young woman! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Therefore, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). HMM



Sunday, January 21

## **Job and Adam**

*“If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom...” (Job 31:33)*

The patriarch Job lived long before Moses and the writing of the Pentateuch, yet he knew about Adam and his fall, and likewise about God’s curse on the world because of Adam’s sin.

Note the following references in the book of Job to death and the curse. “Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1; compare Genesis 3:16). “All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust” (Job 34:15; note Genesis 3:19).

Evidently, Job still had access to the records of primeval history, either by verbal tradition from his ancestors or perhaps through actual written records of the ancient patriarchs handed down from Adam to Moses.

There are also a number of references in Job to man’s original creation. After speaking first of the beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, Job asks, “Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:9-10). Note also Elihu’s testimony: “The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4).

The book of Job was almost certainly the first written of all the books of the Bible, and it testifies abundantly that the knowledge of the true God and His creation was still the common heritage of mankind at that time. Job knew the Lord and never tried to hide anything from Him, as Adam had done. His ancient testimony is still true today. Quoting what must have been an early revelation from God, he wrote, “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). HMM

Monday, January 22

## Many False Prophets

*“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)*

There is an unusual emphasis in the New Testament on false prophets. The Greek word *pseudoprophetes* appears 11 times and has no corresponding word in the Old Testament.

Of the 298 usages of “prophet” in the Hebrew Scriptures, eight of them are connected to “false” prophets, and only in relation to visions and dreams. In the New Testament, the *pseudoprophetes* are workers of “miracles” and “signs and wonders.”

John gives the warning to “try the spirits” because many false prophets are now here. Prior to Christ’s coming, the false “dreamer” (Deuteronomy 13:1-5) would readily be exposed when his prophecy did not come about. Such a false prophet was to be executed!

But the prophets of the “last time” (1 John 2:18) will perform great wonders (Matthew 24:24) and can “seduce...even the elect” (Mark 13:22).

Here’s the problem: They come from among Christians! Peter warns us in 2 Peter 2:1-3 in five ways.

- They come from a “Christian” background.
- They deny the biblical Lord Jesus in some way.
- They will become very popular, especially with emotionally motivated people.
- They will degrade doctrines of the Bible.
- They will stimulate greed to attract followers.

We are warned to test every one of them, and when they do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, we are to reject their teaching and not have any fellowship with them (2 John 1:9-11). They are dangerous (Matthew 7:15)! HMM III

Tuesday, January 23

## Praying According to His Will

*“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” (1 John 5:14-15)*

This promise is comprehensive and unlimited—a tremendous assurance of answered prayer. But there is one proviso—according to His will! There are a number of Christians who, with all good intentions, have argued that it evidences a lack of faith to add the qualification “if it be thy will” to one’s prayer. But this can hardly be true in light of the example of Christ Himself when He “prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

The question is how to know whether or not we are praying according to God’s will. One key, of course, is to search the Scriptures. God’s will can never contradict His Word, and it is foolish to ask God to do something that the Scriptures themselves forbid. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

When, however, we sincerely desire God’s will to be done, and so far as can be determined there is no biblical or personal barrier hindering our prayer, then we can pray in confidence even if we yet don’t know for certain God’s will in the matter. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:26-28). HMM

Wednesday, January 24

## The Integrity of the Written Word

*“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”*  
(Deuteronomy 4:2)

In addition to the numerous times when the writers of the Bible asserted that what they wrote came directly from God (e.g., Leviticus 1:1; Jeremiah 1:4; Revelation 1:1), there are at least four warnings against tampering with these revealed words.

The first is our text above, in which Moses commanded neither to add to nor diminish from anything he had written. This warning was supplemented later with the following: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

Moses wrote the opening books of the Bible, and it was appropriate that he should give such a warning. The last warning was by John at the very end of the whole body of Scripture, and his warning was even more severe. “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Since John was the last apostle, it is clear that this warning is against any later attempt to add some new “revelation” to the now-complete Word of God.

Then, very near the middle of the Bible, there is this: “Every word of God is pure:...Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6). And remember also the words of Christ: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). So, don’t mess with the Word of God! HMM

Thursday, January 25

## The God/Man

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.” (1 John 1:1)*

It has been said, quite cogently, that John’s gospel assumes the humanity and undertakes to prove the deity of Jesus Christ, whereas John’s first epistle assumes His deity and then seeks to prove His humanity. The Lord Jesus Christ was both fully God and perfect man.

John, in his gospel, says: “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). In his epistle, he says: “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:2-3).

His deity had been fully demonstrated by His mighty miracles and by His bodily resurrection. However, there were many who questioned His true humanity in John’s day, as they do in ours. Even today, many cultists, as well as liberals, try to make a distinction between the man Jesus of Nazareth (whose absolute deity they reject) and “the Christ,” an ideal spirit or idea of some sort, who is not actually a living being but who may come upon or indwell certain people at times.

Such a concept John vehemently rejected, attributing it to the spirit of antichrist. They had heard Him; they had touched and handled Him. There was no doubt whatever that both before and after His resurrection He was a true man—in fact, a perfect man—as God intended man to be. He could die for our sins because He was sinless man; He could take away our sins because He is omnipotent God. HMM

## An Unlikely Testimony

*“And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?” (Numbers 22:28)*

This tale of a donkey talking has been the object of great ridicule by skeptics. That it is not an allegory or fable, however, but a real historical event was confirmed in the New Testament by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 2:15-16).

There is no naturalistic explanation for it, of course, but to insist that the event was impossible is simply to deny the power of God. Such miracles of creation are very rare, however, and there must always be a good reason when God intervenes in the laws that normally govern His creation.

One reason in this case, obviously, was to rebuke the prophet Balaam, who was resisting God’s will simply for monetary gain. Balaam’s voice itself would soon also have to be constrained and controlled by God to force him to do God’s will (Numbers 22:38; 23:16, 26; 24:13), blessing Israel instead of pronouncing the curse for which he was to have been paid by the Moabites, who were desperately trying to keep God’s people out of the Promised Land. The Moabites also needed an unforgettable rebuke. They were apostate descendants of Lot, who had known the true God (Numbers 25:1-3), but they were determined to thwart God’s purposes.

There may be another, more universal reason: God is concerned about His animal creation, caring even for every sparrow (Matthew 10:29). The animals have been placed under man’s dominion, but they are for his service, his instruction, and his enjoyment—not for his abuse.

Thus, Balaam’s donkey was providentially allowed by God to rebuke not only Balaam but also anyone who would unnecessarily abuse one of His specially and beautifully designed animal subjects. Most Christians need to be much more sensitive to this concern of God. HMM

Saturday, January 27

## He Hath Chosen Us

*“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4)*

Although we cannot really *understand* how God could choose us (same Greek word as “elected”) before the creation of the world, we can rejoice in the fact and praise Him for “his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9). The preceding verse (Ephesians 1:3) testifies we have received “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” all “according to the good pleasure of his will” (v. 5), “according to the riches of his grace” (v. 7), and “according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (v. 9). It must thus all be “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (v. 6).

It is clear from this passage that God’s choice of us was not simply a matter of His foreseeing our choice of Him but was a choice solely by His own will and grace. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit” (John 15:16). This in no wise lessens our own responsibility to trust in Christ and to believe “the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:12-13), even though in our finite minds we cannot understand how to correlate these two concepts. Both are true because both are taught in His Word, and both are occasions for rejoicing because they reflect both His love and His omnipotence.

God told Jeremiah, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). Before the world began, God knew each of us and loved us, and prepared to die to save us from our sins and then to draw us to Himself. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6). We can only thank and praise Him, and then seek earnestly to live fully for Him all our days. HMM

Sunday, January 28

## The Enduring Work of God

*“Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.” (Ecclesiastes 3:14)*

God is both omniscient and omnipotent. He has the wisdom to know what is best to do and the power to do it. Thus, He makes no mistakes and never needs to go back and revise or redirect something He started. What He does is forever!

This fundamental principle has many profound implications. It anticipates the basic scientific law of conservation, the most important and universal law of science. The basic physical entities that comprise and organize all natural processes—energy, mass, momentum, electric charge—are all “conserved” throughout nature, being neither created nor destroyed in the present natural order of things.

The same applies to the basic kinds of plants and animals—evolutionists to the contrary notwithstanding. “After its kind” is the universal law of reproduction, and there is not the slightest evidence in the real data of biology that this law has ever been violated or even *could* be violated.

And it also applies to the created cosmos as a whole. Many Scriptures (e.g., Psalm 148:1-6) assure us that the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the renewed earth, will continue to function through all the endless ages to come. Nothing can defeat God’s primeval purposes in creating them.

Most of all, it applies to our great salvation: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him” (Psalm 103:17). “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” (Daniel 7:14). “My salvation shall be for ever” (Isaiah 51:6). “The word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). The remarkable principle of universal conservation is given “that men should fear before him.” HMM



Monday, January 29

## **Spirit of Antichrist**

*“And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”*  
(1 John 4:3)

The four passages in the New Testament that use this term are unique to the apostle John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). The term itself is a transliteration of the Greek compound word *anti* plus *christos*, meaning one who is “against” Christ.

John distinguishes between “the” Antichrist (1 John 2:18) and the “many” antichrists against whom we are continually fighting today.

Although a sincere Christian should be aware of the Antichrist (the “man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10), far more caution is urged to identify and fight the *spirit* of antichrist that is already here!

To begin with, it should be noted that there is no specific word for “spirit” in 1 John 4:3. The English word is supplied by the translators to clarify the obvious meaning of the text, that it is the attitude or character of antichrist of which we are to be wary. Those who have this spirit are liars (1 John 2:22), mainly because they refuse to accept the truth that Jesus is the Christ.

Further rejection of that truth centers around denial of the incarnation of Christ, that Jesus is the Creator God come in human flesh (1 John 4:3 and 2 John 1:7). Those who would deny *that* truth embrace the very core of all lies and become *anti* Christ.

Such persons are like the thief and the robber who harm the sheep (John 10:1), embrace another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9), and teach other doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3-7).

From such as these we are to turn away (2 Timothy 3:5).  
HMM III

Tuesday, January 30

## The Great Commission

*“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)*

The so-called “great commission” of the Lord to His disciples is found in somewhat different form in each of the four gospels and in still another form in the first chapter of Acts. To get the full message of the commission, all five must be analyzed and organized together.

The most familiar statement is in Mark 16:15 above. This was in the upper room and must have followed the words recorded by John: “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

The commission was then further defined as recorded in Luke 24:47-48: “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”

Still later, on a mountain in Galilee, He told the disciples (literally), “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Not only were they to preach the saving gospel, implemented by true repentance unto remission of sins, based on His death, burial, and resurrection (Luke 24:46), but then to “disciple” people, baptize them, and indoctrinate them in all His teachings.

Finally, just before His ascension, He summarized the commission once again: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Above all, we are to go and to witness to all people in all places, as God enables. HMM

Wednesday, January 31

## Sinuing Against the Lord

*“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” (2 Samuel 12:13)*

A basic truth is expressed in this confession of David’s. Every sin—not only the sin of blasphemy or of unbelief—is essentially a sin against the Lord and His nature of absolute righteousness.

This does not mean, of course, that sin hurts no one except God. In David’s case, his sin resulted in the murder of a faithful soldier, Uriah; the implication of Bathsheba in David’s adultery; and then the death of his infant son. It probably also contributed to the subsequent sins of two other sons of David, Amnon and Absalom. Furthermore, as Nathan said, it had “given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (v. 14).

Nevertheless, it was, above all else, a sin against God. God had chosen David as king and had blessed him abundantly, yet David was not content and elected to make his own decisions in rebellion against the will of God and the Word of God. But when he was made to realize, by Nathan, what he had done, he immediately repented of his sin and thereby received forgiveness.

God, in His grace, has made a wonderful provision for forgiveness and restoration because “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Therefore, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7, 9).

Confession must be specific and sincere, of course, not general and superficial, to be effective. But if this is done, then we can exclaim joyfully with David: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” because he first, as he said, “acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid” (Psalm 32:1, 5). HMM

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Thursday, February 1

## How to Know the Truth

*“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17)*

The apostle Paul, in his last epistle, wrote about certain philosophers who would be “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). In the next verse, Paul makes it clear why such people, no matter how scholarly or well educated they seem to be, are still incapable of accepting real truth. “So do these also resist the truth,” he says (v. 8). They could not learn the truth because they were not willing to believe or obey the truth when they learned it. For example, a very vexing controversy among modern Christians is whether or not the Genesis account of six-day creation can be so interpreted as to accommodate the billion-year, geological-age system of Earth history.

Perhaps the difficulty, in this as well as in other such doctrinal controversies, is a basic *unwillingness* to believe doctrines plainly revealed in God’s Word when they conflict with doctrines based solely on human reasoning. When the Lord Jesus spoke the words of our text, He was speaking to arrogant religionists who regarded Him as nothing but an itinerant preacher, rejecting His teachings even though they knew these teachings were fully biblical.

His rebuke of these hypocrites is truly a timeless criterion for recognizing God’s truth and knowing His will. Such a heart does not try to twist God’s Word to accommodate a human philosophy, nor does it try to accommodate one’s personal will by persuading oneself that it is God’s will. God’s will is always consistent with God’s Word, which is written to be easily understood by anyone who is willing to believe His Word and do His will. HMM

Friday, February 2

## The First Sacrifice

*“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord GOD make coats of skins, and clothed them.” (Genesis 3:21)*

This action by the Lord is very significant. God Himself apparently sacrificed some of His animal creation (possibly two innocent and blemish-free sheep) in order to provide clothing for the first man and woman. In the first place, this tells us that clothing is important in God’s plan for human beings; nudity became shameful once sin entered the world.

In the second place, we learn that symbolically speaking, clothing must be provided by God Himself. Man-made “aprons” of fig leaves will not suffice, as they represent human works of righteousness that can never make us presentable to God. “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). However, God has sacrificed His own “Lamb of God” (John 1:29), pure and spotless, yet also willing to die for us. Thereby “he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10), fashioned from the perfect righteousness of the Lamb.

But in order to do this, the innocent blood of the sacrifice must be shed, for “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). When sin entered the world, there also came “death by sin” (Romans 5:12), and “without shedding of [innocent] blood is no remission [of sin]” (Hebrews 9:22).

We do not know how much of this could have been comprehended by Adam and Eve as they watched God slay their animal friends so that they once again could walk with God, but it changed their lives. Just so, when we really see “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19) spilled in sacrifice for our redemption, our lives also are forever changed. He hath covered me with the righteousness of Christ. HMM

Saturday, February 3

## A Certain Young Man

*“And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.” (Mark 14:50-52)*

This “certain young man” is mentioned only in Mark’s gospel and was almost certainly John Mark himself. A rather obscure character in the New Testament, yet the Lord chose him to write what is probably the earliest of the gospel records of the life of Christ. If so, his account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is the first record we have of the most important events in all history.

Mark’s family (Acts 12:12) apparently was prosperous enough to own a home in Jerusalem with a large upper room where the disciples (even 120 of them, Acts 1:14-15) could meet for prayer after the resurrection. This was possibly the same “large upper room furnished and prepared” (Mark 14:15) where the Lord’s last supper took place. Note that Mark’s account says, “And in the evening he *cometh* [not ‘goeth’] with the twelve” (v. 17). Thus, Mark—probably as a teenager—was very likely an intensely interested observer of all the moving events that took place in the upper room both before and after the crucifixion and resurrection.

He may well have overheard the conversation with and about Judas, and then watched as the disciples went out to Gethsemane. Perhaps Judas returned with the soldiers, and Mark, already in bed, grabbed a “linen cloth” and rushed out to warn Jesus. The soldiers found Jesus first, however, and Mark had to watch the disciples flee, and then finally had to flee himself.

In any case, this close proximity to these great events made such a profound impression on him that he was later led to write about them, very probably working closely with Peter (1 Peter 5:13), and Mark’s gospel was the result. HMM

Sunday, February 4

## Before the World Began

*“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Titus 1:2)*

There are some things that God, even in His omnipotence, cannot do. He cannot fail in His ultimate purpose in creation, for one thing. He cannot do wrong or be wrong, for what He does is right and what He says is true, by definition. And God cannot lie, so whatever He has promised, He will perform.

One of His most glorious promises is that of eternal life, for this promise was made even before He made the world, including space and time. But how could anything take place *before* time began? The same word is used in 2 Timothy 1:9: “his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Similarly, Romans 16:25 speaks of “the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.”

Our very minds are locked in space and time, and therefore we cannot even conceive of anything “beyond” space or “before” time. Nevertheless, God is the Creator, and even “the worlds [that is, the *aeons*, the space/times] were framed by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3). He *created* time and space and all the phenomena that exist in time and space, and the fact that we cannot *comprehend* this simply confirms the Scriptures. “Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?” (Isaiah 40:13). “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6).

But what we cannot understand, we simply *believe*, for God cannot lie. Even though the worlds had a beginning, and our lives each had a beginning, the world will never end, and our lives will never end, for God will never end! We receive, by faith, His immutable promise of everlasting life, given us in Christ Jesus, according to His own purpose and infinite grace, before the world began. HMM



Monday, February 5

## The Mind of Christ

*“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16)*

The mind of the natural man is “a reprobate mind” (Romans 1:28), a “carnal mind” (Romans 8:7), and a “defiled” mind (Titus 1:15), characterized by a daily walk “in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18).

When a person is born again through faith in Christ, however, he should be “transformed by the renewing of [his] mind” (Romans 12:2) and should henceforth seek to conform to the mind of Christ in every attitude and every decision.

But what is the mind of Christ? As our text says, “Who hath known the mind of the Lord?” Paul echoed the same question to the Romans: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?” (Romans 11:34).

There are many aspects to His infinite mind, of course, but the key is undoubtedly the great attribute of sacrificial love. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who...became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-6, 8).

Thus, following His example, we should “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). We should constantly “consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest [we] be wearied and faint in [our] minds” (Hebrews 12:3). We should receive “the word with all readiness of mind” and serve “the Lord with all humility of mind” (Acts 17:11; 20:19). Herein is the mind of Christ. HMM

Tuesday, February 6

## **Our Adversary, the Devil**

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”*  
(1 Peter 5:8)

This grave warning concerning the devil was given not only to young Christians, easily subject to temptations, but also to “the elders which are among you” (v. 1). It often seems, in fact, that Satan’s greatest victories are won when he can cause the fall of a Christian leader, thereby not only destroying that leader’s influence for Christ but also giving “great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:14). The devil is a roaring lion, but he doesn’t come as such. If he did, the intended victim would flee.

He is, above all, the one “which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), “transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). As he did with Mother Eve, the “subtle” one will insidiously appeal to our pride, or our aesthetic sense, or our appetite, or our desire for material things.

Peter could speak from bitter experience. Satan had desired to “sift you as wheat,” Jesus had told him, but he foolishly boasted that he would stand true (Luke 22:31-34).

No wonder Peter could warn with such urgency: “Be sober, be vigilant.” Note particularly that in the context, he is especially warning against greed (1 Peter 5:2) and pride (vv. 5-6). We must not allow Satan to “get an advantage of us,” Paul says, “for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Though Satan is deceptive and powerful, we need never fall to his tempting if we simply—along with staying sober and vigilant—“submit [ourselves] therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). HMM

Wednesday, February 7

## **Messianic Hope in the Midst of Rebellion**

*“Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent...and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing.” (Ezekiel 17:22-23)*

Yahweh directs Ezekiel to deliver a perplexing riddle targeting rebellious Israel and its leaders. The word for riddle is *māšāl*, normally translated “proverb,” which means in this context a mystery meant to be discovered. If you take time to read the entire chapter, you’ll see three main divisions: the parable stated (vv. 3-10), the parable explained (vv. 11-21), and the parable’s solution, including Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel and His promise to redeem (vv. 22-23).

The first great eagle in this chapter represents Babylon’s leader, Nebuchadnezzar. The highest branch of the cedar represents the nation Israel. The eagle transports the “topmost shoot,” Israel’s remnant and key leaders, including Daniel and his friends, who were carried into Babylonian captivity. The eagle then planted a “seed from the land,” King Zedekiah, who reigned as Jerusalem’s first “puppet king.” Zedekiah violated his oath both to Yahweh and Nebuchadnezzar, and sought an alliance with Egypt, the parable’s second eagle (vv. 7, 12-14).

Our Father’s love towers above Israel’s disobedience as He takes a twig, a tender shoot, from the lofty tree and plants Him, the Messiah, in response to man’s critical need for a Savior (Isaiah 52:13–53:2). Israel’s Messiah is our Savior as well, promising to hear our prayers if we cry out to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith (Psalm 107; Romans 10:9-11). CCM

Thursday, February 8

## **Cast Away Your Transgressions**

*“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 18:31)*

Ezekiel likely penned this call to repentance in 592 BC, six years before the fall of Jerusalem. He hoped that Israel would turn from their transgressions and seek God. Chapter 19 begins with “Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel” and references the past and future fates of evil kings of Judah—Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and the present king, Zedekiah. What are the implications of Ezekiel’s call to action and warning for today?

One, we are responsible for our own sins, and the consequence of sin is death (Romans 5:12). But “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” and become a new creature (Romans 10:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17). God is faithful and just to forgive believers if we confess and repent of our sins (1 John 1:9).

Two, leaders are responsible for where and how they lead their followers. The kings of Judah led their people into rebellion, and they suffered God’s judgment. Believers must not let themselves become victims of “grievous wolves” who would lead them into sin (James 3:1-2; Acts 20:29). Paul warns, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Ephesians 5:6-7).

Three, if we “cast away” our transgressions, God offers hope and salvation. This is available not only to the house of Israel but to everyone through Jesus Christ. Through Him, we can be “born again” (John 3:3) and be given “a new heart and a new spirit.” How will you heed Ezekiel’s sober but encouraging plea? CCM

Friday, February 9

## An Early Christian Hymn

*“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)*

Some scholars have concluded that the four verses following our text were set to music and sung by the early Christian church. The hymn constitutes a praise of Christ for His nature and work. Let us look at it, with insights from the Greek not always apparent in the English.

Stanza One: His character. “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (v. 22). The words “no, neither, found” imply a careful scrutiny, with no sin or guile (i.e., craftiness) found. Total perfection.

Stanza Two: His life. “Who, when he was reviled [i.e., a bitter, heart-rending wound], reviled not again; when he [continually] suffered, he threatened not [even though He had great resources at His disposal]; but [continually] committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (v. 23).

Stanza Three: His sacrifice. “Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree [carried up the cross and offered Himself as on an altar], that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes [literally, one bleeding stripe. Christ was so brutalized by His tormentors that He was simply one big wound] ye were healed” (v. 24). Our healing is past tense, at the point of salvation. It does not refer primarily to physical healing, for in this context, and in Isaiah 53, from which the hymn is quoted, spiritual healing is stressed.

Stanza Four: His mission. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned [have been turned back] unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (v. 25).

He has done it all! He lived a sinless life and died as a worthy sacrifice, just so He could turn us back into His blessed fold. JDM

Saturday, February 10

## The Mercy of the Lord

*“The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.” (Psalm 145:8)*

Not one of us deserves God’s mercy, for “we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6), and “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). What we deserve is death and eternal separation from the God who made us. Nevertheless, “it is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not” (Lamentations 3:22). “He hath not dealt with us after our sins....For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him” (Psalm 103:10-11).

It is by His mercy, not our merit, that we are saved. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Ephesians 2:4-5). It is “according to his abundant mercy” that He has “begotten us again unto a lively hope” (1 Peter 1:3).

In fact, one of the very titles of God is “the Father of mercies” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Over and over the psalmist assures us that “his mercy endureth for ever” (26 times in Psalm 136:1-26; also Psalm 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; etc.). His mercy is not only infinite but eternal.

How can one possibly reject His mercy? “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” (Romans 2:4). Sadly, most do. Instead, the divine challenge is “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2). This is our logical response to God’s great mercy! HMM

Sunday, February 11

## Song of the Rock

*“And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.” (2 Samuel 22:1)*

This is the first verse of a remarkable poem inserted here near the end of 2 Samuel. With certain significant exceptions, it is the same as the 18th Psalm. David wrote many wonderful psalms, but this is the only one also found in the historical books and so must have special significance. In view of 2 Samuel 23:1-2 (“these be the last words of David”), it may even be David’s last psalm, as slightly modified by him from Psalm 18, just before his death.

In 2 Samuel 22:2-3, he ascribed nine wonderful names to God: rock, fortress, deliverer, God of my rock, shield, horn of my salvation, high tower, refuge, Savior. In the midst of this unique list of metaphors appears his statement of faith “In him will I trust.” Although this psalm flows from David’s personal experiences, these words are quoted in Hebrews 2:13 as coming from the lips of Christ in His human incarnation. Thus, the song is actually also a Messianic psalm. Its testimonies go far beyond the experiences of David, reflecting the mighty events of Christ in creation, at the judgment of the great Flood, and His work as our Redeemer. It is significant that the concluding name in David’s list is Savior, which is the Hebrew *yasha*—essentially the same as “Jesus.”

Two of the names (Hebrew *cela* and *tsur*) are translated “rock” but refer to different kinds of rock. They are the same words used for the rocks from which God provided water for His people in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11), except that the order is reversed. One is the great rock of provision, the other the smitten rock of judgment. Our God of creation, Jesus Christ, is our daily sustenance but first must also be our sin-bearing Savior. HMM

Monday, February 12

## A Bag with Holes

*“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.” (Haggai 1:6)*

This biting description of a frustrating lifestyle, penned by one of the Jewish post-exilic prophets, is both preceded and followed by this appropriate admonition: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways” (Haggai 1:5-7). When a professing believer somehow never seems to have enough, and his money bag seems filled with holes, it is time for him to consider carefully his ways before the Lord.

After all, our God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and is well able to supply all our needs. In context, Haggai is rebuking the people of Judah for tending to their own welfare and neglecting the work of God. “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled [paneled] houses, and this house [that is, the unfinished temple in Jerusalem] lie waste?” (Haggai 1:4).

Herein is an eternal principle. Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things [that is, food and drink and clothing]. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:32-33). If these necessities of life are not being provided, we urgently need to consider our ways. Are God’s kingdom and His righteousness really our first concerns?

We often quote the wonderful promise “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). But we must remember that this promise was given to a group of Christians whose “deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality,” because they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:2, 5). HMM



Tuesday, February 13

## The Importance of Reading

*“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” (1 Timothy 4:13)*

In this video age, Christians are in grave danger of forgetting the importance of reading. The word translated “reading” in this verse is the Greek *anagnosis*, a compound word meaning essentially “renewed knowledge.” A sermon or lecture is knowledge heard; an educational film or video is knowledge seen; but reading is knowledge that can be read, rehearsed, reviewed, and renewed again and again, until fully and securely learned. In fact, it is necessary for students to take notes, even when hearing a sermon or seeing a film, if they expect to retain any knowledge received by such means.

The importance of reading is also pointed out by the verb used in the verse. “Give attendance” means, literally, “continue steadfastly.” It is so translated in Acts 2:42: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.”

Reading and studying the Scriptures are especially necessary for a fruitful Christian ministry, but even this is not really enough. The Bible also commands us always to be ready to give an “answer” (Greek *apologia*, a systematic defense) to everyone who asks a “reason” (Greek *logos*, a logical explanation) for our Christian hope (1 Peter 3:15). To do this requires steadfast continuance in the study not only of the Bible but also of other sound literature as well. A truly effective and influential Christian is an informed Christian, armed with facts and sound counsel, prepared and capable both in his own professional field of practice and in his spiritual service as a Christian witness.

It is significant that Paul, just before his martyrdom and while imprisoned in a damp, cold Roman dungeon, still desired his books to read (2 Timothy 4:13). The conscientious Christian must never cease to study and to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). HMM

Wednesday, February 14

## Sweet Naamah

*“Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green.” (Song of Solomon 1:16)*

These words begin King Solomon’s tender expressions of love to his beautiful young wife. Solomon wrote a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32), but apparently this was his favorite, for he called it his “song of songs” (Song 1:1), and it clearly centered on his beloved, whom he called “my sister, my spouse” no less than four times (Song 4:9-12; 5:1), thereby intimating both their spiritual and marital relationship.

Rehoboam was Solomon’s only son, as far as recorded, and his mother’s name was Naamah (2 Chronicles 12:13), meaning “pleasant.” Since he was 41 years old when he inherited Solomon’s throne and since Solomon had only reigned 40 years (2 Chronicles 9:30), the marriage of Solomon and Naamah must have been formalized when Solomon was quite young, long before he was married to Pharaoh’s daughter or any of his other 700 wives. Naamah was then and always his one real love, in spite of his spiritual defections in old age. His counsel to young men near the end of his life was “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days...of thy vanity” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Note that Solomon called her “fair” and “beloved” in our text, and then “pleasant.” The Hebrew word for “pleasant” is very similar to “Naamah,” as though Solomon were calling her by a shortened form of her name as a term of endearment. The same word is occasionally translated “sweet.” Naamah was surely a sweet, pleasant maiden but also a capable woman in mind and heart, fit to become a queen.

Solomon’s song for and about her is an inspired ode to true marital love and thus can even be a figurative testimony to the love of Christ, the “greater than Solomon,” for His church (Matthew 12:42). HMM

Thursday, February 15

## Jesus as Job's Mediator

*“Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.” (Job 9:33)*

Like a clear light that might dispel Job's dark and miserable thoughts, this righteous but suffering man longed for mediation with the God he had trusted for so long. His soul ached for a daysman, or mediator—someone to understand exactly all of Job's intentions, thoughts, sins, and faith, and who had perfect knowledge of the plans and purposes of God above. This kind of mediator could wrap one arm around Job's shoulder, his other arm around God's “shoulder,” and reconcile the two.

When God shockingly showed up and “answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1), He did not supply a mediator. However, He did show He had been listening the whole time and had some purpose for Job's trials. That was enough to reestablish Job's trust and worship. God provided all Job needed at that time, but what about Job's desire for a mediator? What about all of our desires for that same kind of mediator? For who but a mediator could ever restore sinners to a right standing with a holy God?

Jesus, God incarnate, became the exact mediator that Job had earnestly hoped for. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). The Lord Jesus, our long-awaited Mediator, came at last! His coming both fulfilled Job's longing and offered hope to those who, like Job, submit themselves to God's mercy. BDT

Friday, February 16

## Job's Whirlwind

*"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind." (Job 38:1)*

What form would the Lord take if He were to speak with us? The Lord spoke to Abraham and others in the appearance of a man. "And [Abraham] lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him" (Genesis 18:2). At the end of their conversation, "the LORD went his way" (Genesis 18:33).

God appeared as an angel to Hagar, Sarah's servant and Abraham's concubine. "The angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly" (Genesis 16:10). Hagar did not react with the fear that others did when accosted by angels appearing in bright glory, such as the shepherds "keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). And the Lord looked quite different to Moses when He "appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (Exodus 3:2).

But God spoke to Job from within a whirlwind. Perhaps storm clouds had approached as Job's cadre conversed. Job stated, "He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them" (Job 26:8). Moments later, Elihu said, "Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou" (Job 35:5). Whether natural or supernatural, the whirlwind arrived, and God granted Job the direct discourse he had longed for (Job 23:3-5).

Whichever mode God chooses to reveal Himself, it is always the right one. Nowadays, any literate person to whom the gospels are available shouldn't lament over God's silence like Job did. God ultimately chose to reveal Himself through His Son and "even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Ephesians 2:5).

Praise our Maker, who reaches out to us. BDT

Saturday, February 17

## **The Beginning of the Creation**

*“For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.” (Mark 13:19)*

The phrase “from the beginning of the creation” or equivalent occurs at least six times in the New Testament, indicating beyond question that the world was created at a definite beginning-point of time. All other cosmogonies, on the other hand, are evolutionary cosmogonies, which deny a real beginning for the space/time cosmos at all.

What almost seems a redundancy in our text is the phrase “the creation which God created.” Evidently the Lord thought it vital to stress the fact of divine creation, especially as the great last-days “affliction” draws near.

That the “creation” mentioned in this verse refers explicitly to the cosmos is evident from the parallel passage in Matthew 24:21, where the same prophecy is rendered as follows: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time.” Here, “world” is actually the Greek *kosmos*, referring to the ordered universe of heaven and Earth. Thus, according to the Bible, the entire universe (including even time itself) came into existence at the “beginning” when God created it, as recorded in Genesis 1:1.

Note especially the significance of Mark 10:6 in this connection: “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.” Jesus was here quoting from the account of the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27) and included what seemed an almost incidental confirmation that God created them not after many billions of years of cosmic evolution but from the very beginning of creation! Man and woman were not divine afterthoughts, as evolution would imply, but were the very reason why God created the universe in the first place. HMM

Sunday, February 18

## Spirits of Truth and Error

*“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (1 John 4:6)*

Here we are given assurance that we will be able to tell the difference in people by the way they respond to the Word of God. The emphasis is on the believer’s ability to *discern* a spirit (attitude or character) of truth or error among those to whom we witness.

This is important because we are told not to cast “pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6) and to “shake off the very dust” from our feet against those who will not receive our witness (Luke 9:5).

Others disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness when they are really the ministers of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). How can we tell which is which?

The spirit of truth is relatively easy to discern. Those who hear the Word (Mark 4:18-20) and receive the Word with all readiness of mind (Acts 17:11) are of the truth (John 18:37). Such people come willingly to the light (John 3:21) and ask for a “reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

The spirit of error can be more difficult to discern. Its source is Satan (John 8:44), who deceives (Revelation 12:9) and uses his servants to manipulate and mislead (Ephesians 4:14).

Some of these run among God’s family and live “in error” (2 Peter 2:18). They can be fruitless trees and “raging waves... foaming out their own shame” (Jude 1:12-13), or like “tares” among the wheat that even the angels have trouble recognizing (Matthew 13:38-40). These won’t *listen* to truth.

Our job is to be ready to give the answer to the one and to reject the other. HMM III

Monday, February 19

## **The Ordinances of Men**

*“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” (1 Peter 2:13-14)*

The phrase “ordinances of man” literally means “human creations.” Since only God can really create, that means we must regard laws of legislatures or presidential orders or even kingly decrees as having divine authority. Therefore, in order to maintain a good witness before men, God expects us to submit to all these man-made laws and directives.

That even includes such unpopular laws as speed limits. Christians should not be tax cheats or anything that tends to undermine legitimate authority, and certainly should never break any of the multitude of laws that are based upon or consistent with the laws or commandments of God. We rightly must honor our leaders, not only great presidents such as Washington and Lincoln, but all who have positions of authority. Remember that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1), even though there are occasions when (for good and justifiable reasons) God gives power to unworthy men.

Such ungodly leaders will be themselves judged by God in His own way and time. Our job is simply to “render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:7).

The one great exception to this principle, of course, is when their laws go against the laws of God. Then, “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) and be willing to take the consequences. “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16). HMM

Tuesday, February 20

## How to Please the Lord

*“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” (2 Corinthians 5:9)*

In this verse, Paul expresses the strong desire to be “pleasing to” (the idea behind “accepted of”) the Lord Jesus Christ. It should likewise be our own ambition—whatever we do and wherever we are—to please Him. This, of course, will make a difference in what we do and where we go!

The Scriptures give us a number of specific ways in which we can be confident of pleasing Him. For example, “we then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). That is, our criterion should be pleasing Him—not ourselves. Similarly, we are warned that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). That is, our thoughts and deeds must not be governed by worldly considerations.

By suffering, willingly, for His sake, we can please Him. “If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [‘well-pleasing’] with God” (1 Peter 2:20).

“Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). We must walk by faith if we would please the Lord. This is not faith in the abstract but specific truth—faith to believe the revealed Word of God and to act on that faith.

God is pleased with generosity. “But to do good and to communicate [to share what we have with others, for His sake] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). This certainly includes sharing the gospel as well as our material possessions. “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Finally, when our ways please the Lord, we have this gracious promise: “ whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). HMM



Wednesday, February 21

## The Lord and Inspiration

*“And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying...” (Leviticus 1:1)*

This introductory verse to what many erroneously consider a dry and difficult book of the Bible actually introduces a remarkable phenomenon. All the rest of the chapter consists of a direct quotation from the Lord Himself. In fact, most of the rest of the book also consists solely of the direct words of God, except for an occasional interjection of a statement that God was still speaking. In all, 717 of the 832 verses in Leviticus (that is 86%) consist of the very words of God, directly quoted. This is more than any other book of the Bible, except for the books of the prophets, some of which also consist almost entirely of verbatim statements from God. The same situation is found in lesser but still substantial degrees in other historical books, not to mention the extensive quotations from the sermons and discourses of Christ in the four gospels.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit used many different means by which to convey the Scriptures (all of which are verbally inspired and fully inerrant) to writing, it is also true that on many occasions what amounts to the “dictation” method was used by Him. Evangelicals have often been intimidated by the scientists’ ridicule of this “mechanical theory” of inspiration, but they should not be. God is well able to use whatever means He chooses to reveal His word to men, and we should simply take Him at His word!

Leviticus is a guidebook for the consecration and cleansing of God’s people—especially His priests. In the New Covenant, all believers are priests and therefore are expected to be consecrated and pure. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). HMM

## When the Lord Comes

*“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” (Genesis 15:1)*

This is the first of the great “I am’s” of Scripture, and it was given to Father Abraham at a time of both great victory and great despondence. The Lord had enabled Abraham’s little army to vanquish a much larger Amorite host, but then, still childless, he was suddenly overwhelmed by his loneliness and vulnerability in an alien land.

Then Jesus came! When Christ much later affirmed His eternal self-existence to the Pharisees (“I am,” He had said), He claimed that Abraham had seen His day and rejoiced (John 8:56). This experience, recorded early in Genesis, was, no doubt, that great occasion. As the living Word (John 1:1) by whom all things were made (v. 3), He assured Abram that He Himself would provide all needed protection (“thy shield”) and all needed blessing (“exceeding great reward”). And then it was that “he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal existing Creator and Redeemer of all things, is no less able today than then to be our protection—and *our* provision as well.

Note also that it was the Word of the Lord that came to Abram in a vision. This is the first use of the Hebrew word *dabar* in Scripture to mean “word,” and here it is the Word of God personified. This still further identifies the vision with the pre-incarnate Christ, who would eventually become God’s incarnate Word (John 1:1, 14).

Thus, as to Abram, God says, “Fear not!” Adam, indeed, was justifiably afraid when *he* heard the voice of the Lord (Genesis 3:10), for he had only a fig leaf for a covering. But, like Abram, we have a strong shield, which is none other than the Lord Himself. HMM

Friday, February 23

## To the Praise of His Glory

*“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Ephesians 1:5-6)*

Theologians of great ability and unquestioned sincerity have argued the meaning of predestination for centuries. Since the question involves the eternal, inscrutable counsels of the infinite Creator, it is evidently impossible for finite humans to comprehend its full meaning. But we don't have to understand it before we can rejoice in its truth. The Scriptures (especially our text) teach that the purpose of God's predestinating work is that we might glorify Him and His amazing grace! We have been predestinated to become adopted sons of God, “to the praise of the glory of his grace.”

Then it is said that we have been predestinated to a great inheritance, in order “that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (v. 12). We have been “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,” and, again, this is all “unto the praise of his glory” (vv. 13-14).

Note also that He has “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (v. 5). “We have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (v. 11). We have also been predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29)—predestinated unto eternal holiness, sonship, heirship, and Christlikeness! Surely such gifts are cause enough for us to praise eternally the glory of His grace.

That is, indeed, what we shall do in the ages to come. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21). And since we are to be testifying to the praise of the glory of His grace throughout all ages, it behooves us to do so now as well. HMM

Saturday, February 24

## The Alabaster Box

*“And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.” (Mark 14:3)*

This unusual incident is reported also by Matthew and John, who says the woman was Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and Martha. John says that she also “anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment” (John 12:3).

This is a remarkable story of devotion, and, as Jesus prophesied, “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (Matthew 26:13). At present-day prices, the lovely container and its aromatic contents would be worth at least several hundred dollars. Yet, Mary gladly broke her alabaster box (so it could never be used again) and poured its costly perfume over her Lord, from His head to His feet, thus anointing His whole body. Then, as the ointment ran down to His feet, she wiped them clean with her long hair.

The disciples were shocked at this seeming waste, but “Jesus said, Let her alone....She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying” (Mark 14:6, 8). Little did they know (still less did Mary know!) that in just one week His battered body would be laid in a grave, anointed with myrrh instead of spikenard, and wrapped in burial linens instead of Mary’s hair. But Jesus knew, and Mary had “done what she could” to show the reality of her love for her Lord. It had cost her dearly—not only in material possessions but also in sacrifice of all pride and self-esteem, and the Lord was honored. “She hath wrought a good work upon me,” He said (Matthew 26:10), and that’s what counts. HMM

Sunday, February 25

## The Magnified Word of God

*“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” (Psalm 138:2)*

The Word of God is not greater than God, of course, but is greater than His name, and this is itself inestimably magnificent. The “name” of God represents all that He is and all that He does and is supremely deserving of the praise of all His creatures.

But we can only know His name—what He is and what He does—through His Word. The full exposition of His character of truth and His acts of love and mercy can be discerned only through His Word, which thus becomes greater than His name by manifesting and revealing His name.

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). We believe on His name, and thereby receive Him, by trusting His Word of truth and appropriating His forgiving mercy. We deny His name by doubting His Word and despising His proffered salvation.

The Word of God is “light” (Psalm 119:105), and “thy word is truth” (John 17:17). It is living and energizing (Hebrews 4:12). It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous altogether (Psalm 19:7-9). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable....That the man of God may be perfect” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

May God enable us, in full sincerity of heart and mind, to “worship” (literally to “bow down” to His Word) in everything He says—believing and obeying His promises and His commandments.

There are many who charge Christians with placing too much emphasis on the written Word, but it is impossible to place too much emphasis on the Bible, for God Himself has magnified His Word even above His name! HMM

Monday, February 26

## The Prayer of Faith

*“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” (James 5:15)*

Without examining the various interpretations of this somewhat controversial passage, we merely note that one of the main ingredients of effective praying is faith. There are others, of course (praying in God’s will, no unconfessed sin, unselfish motives, etc.), but all these must be “mixed with faith” to be effective (Hebrews 4:2).

There are many such exhortations to pray in faith. Jesus said, “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22). Another example is James 1:5-6: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” And another: “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24).

Every Scripture passage must be viewed in context, of course, including the context of the entire Bible. The “faith” we must exercise is not only a spiritual confidence that God will answer (and this, clearly, is necessary) but also faith in God as Creator (and therefore able to answer!), Christ as Savior (therefore justly willing to hear), and in the Holy Scriptures as the written Word of God. James warns any man without genuine faith, “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:7-8).

True biblical faith is faith in God the omnipotent Creator (Hebrews 11:3), faith in Christ as redeeming Savior (John 3:16-18), and obedient faith in the revealed Word of God (1 John 3:22). Then we can believe in confidence that God will indeed answer our prayer of faith. HMM

Tuesday, February 27

## Seducing Spirits

*“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (1 Timothy 4:1)*

These “latter days” are surely characterized by the tragic departure from the faith on the part of many. Unfortunately, even many of our churches have followed what should certainly be exposed as “seducing spirits,” embracing lies taught under the influence of Satan. A list of such false teachings and practices within the church would surely implicate many. Let us look at the examples Paul gives in the next few verses.

First, he identifies the leaders and teachers of these errors as hypocritical liars who intentionally deceive their prey. They have deadened any possibility of right attitude by hardening their minds and searing their consciences (v. 2).

Next, we are given examples of their heresy: “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving” (v. 3).

Many cults and pseudo-Christian groups have fallen into these traps, but both the institution of marriage and the provision of foods were specifically created by God for man’s enjoyment and blessing (marriage: see Genesis 1:28; 2:18, 24; foods: Genesis 1:29; 9:3). They are to be “received with thanksgiving” to a loving Creator, “sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Each of these and all of God’s creation are “very good” (Genesis 1:31) if used properly.

But the main point of this passage is that we should guard against the heresy of false teachers and from imposing on ourselves and our fellow Christians a false piety—practices that may make us feel “holier than thou” but that in reality impugn God and His creation. Rather, let us be among those “which believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3) of God’s loving provision of creation. JDM

Wednesday, February 28

## The Law and the Spirit

*“Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.” (Leviticus 23:16)*

This commandment represents the initiation of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost (“fiftieth day”) that many years later was the day on which the Holy Spirit came to the church waiting in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4). There were seven such annual “feasts of Jehovah,” all outlined in Leviticus 23, beginning with the Passover commemorating the deliverance from Egypt and culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles in memory of their entrance into the Promised Land after dwelling in tents in the wilderness.

The middle feast of the seven was Pentecost, which seems to have been the anniversary of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. It was scheduled 50 days after the “morrow after the sabbath” of the wave-offering of the “firstfruits” (Leviticus 23:10, 15), which in turn seems to have been the Passover sabbath on the 14th day of the first month (Exodus 12:2, 6). It was on the third day of the third month that God came down on Mount Sinai to give the law (Exodus 19:1, 11, 16). Jewish time-reckoning included both the first and last days of a time period in figuring the number of days between two events, so both the Lord’s appearance on Sinai and the annual Feast of Pentecost seem to have been 50 days after the Passover offering.

And so was the coming of the Holy Spirit! When the Holy Spirit came to the upper room, there were fiery tongues and a mighty wind (Acts 2:2-3). On that great day, Peter announced to Israel, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), and we have received His great promise of the indwelling Law in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:15-17). HMM



Thursday, February 29

## Entertaining Angels

*“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2)*

Angels are not human men or women; they are spirits—in fact, “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Nevertheless, God has given them the remarkable ability to take on the actual appearance of men when the need arises.

The allusion in our text to some who have unwittingly played host to angelic visitors probably refers to Abraham, who entertained God and two angels, appearing as men, one hot day long ago in “the plains of Mamre,” and then to his nephew Lot down in Sodom, who offered the hospitality of his home to the two angels that evening (Genesis 18:2; 19:1). Because of the wicked reputation of the Sodomites and then their rapacious desire to abuse Lot’s two guests, these angels the next day enabled Lot and his daughters to escape when there came down “fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24) to destroy that city.

Most of us have never seen an angel—that is, unless we, like Abraham and Lot, have unwittingly encountered them. But the fact is that they are there when needed! “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psalm 34:7).

In fact, the Bible records a number of miraculous occurrences that actually involved the agency of one or more angels to bring them about. For example, the prophet Daniel passed an entire night in a den of hungry lions because, as Daniel reported the next morning, “My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me” (Daniel 6:22).

God indeed is able to deliver us when we have a special need and when we call on Him in faith. HMM



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