

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

For the First Half Year 2018

***EXPERIENCES UNDER
KINGS AND STATESMEN***

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INTRODUCTION

Every nation has laws and is ruled by a government. Laws and governments differ from nation to nation, and sometimes even oppose each other, yet laws and governments are necessary and indispensable.

Imagine a country in the throes of violent revolution, as rebels and rioters abandon laws and force the government to collapse, violating the constitution and attempting to assassinate the rulers. Is it possible for any nation and its people to survive when neither its laws nor its government are respected? What kind of existence would this be? What about liberty, dignity, respect for human rights, protection of life, and all the conditions necessary for a peaceful society? Without well-functioning governmental institutions, anarchy and chaos lead to unimaginable horrors. Therefore, governments are necessary so that the people can “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” 1 Timothy 2:2. It has been asserted that “a corrupt government is better than no government at all”; but the holy Scriptures say, “The powers ... are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1), which is the same as what Jesus said to the governor: “You could have no power at all ... unless it had been given you from above.” John 19:11, *New King James Version*.

From one country to another, large organizations of courts, lawyers, and judges deal with old and new laws that are published in large volumes occupying a lot of shelf space. Beyond that, thousands of norms regulate every aspect of human life, and every year parliaments enact new laws and regulations.

In the midst of all these laws, rules, and regulations live billions of people, including the people of God. Traditions, habits, governments, and laws differ from country to country; and often, even in the same country, modern laws are different from older ones. How should Christians live and behave as they are scattered in countries across the globe? The divine principles include the following: “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. 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. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” 1 Peter 2:12-17.

“But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:2. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are love-

ly, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." Philipians 4:8, 9.

But what does the Christian do when human laws oppose the eternal law of God, as is frequently the case in these last days of human history? The mentality of the world frequently influences governments and enacts laws that are incompatible with God's principles. For example, think of the laws that require one to work on the holy Sabbath day, that impose military service with arms in time of war, or that readily grant divorce, thus ending a marriage covenant in a quick, "easy" way. Laws that allow abortion, euthanasia, and marriage of people of the same gender all directly violate the principles of life and divine law.

In every case, the inspired answer is that God's people distinguish between His law and human law and between their commitment to God and their duty to the government, as we read in the following verses: "Render ... to all their dues." "Render ... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Romans 13:7; Matthew 22:21.

The same principle is stated in the Spirit of prophecy: "... It is our duty in every case to obey the laws of our land, unless they conflict with the higher law which God spoke with an audible voice from Sinai, and afterward engraved on stone with His own finger. 'I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.' He who has God's law written in the heart will obey God rather than men, and will sooner disobey all men than deviate in the least from the commandment of God. God's people, taught by the inspiration of truth, and led by a good conscience to live by every word of God, will take His law, written in their hearts, as the only authority which they can acknowledge or consent to obey. The wisdom and authority of the divine law are supreme." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 361.

Dear brothers and sisters, these lessons have been prepared in view of the difficult situations confronting God's people around the world now and that will become more intense and complex in the days ahead. They include examples from Scripture in which the Lord interposed in the lives of His children and worked miracles for those who loved Him and were resolute in remaining faithful to Him and His law, regardless of the consequences. God's people gained the victory even when it appeared humanly impossible. May the Lord help us, as we look at these experiences again, to learn from the lessons that He gave His people in the past and that He will give them today to prepare for the upcoming tests and victories.

—*Brothers and sisters of the General Conference
and the Ministerial Department*

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Sabbath, January 6, 2018

Result of Accepting Wise Counsel

“... Let it be remembered that to the obedient alone will the promises of blessing, support, and guidance be fulfilled.” –*Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1881.

“Christ’s followers are required to come out from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean, and they have the promise of being the sons and daughters of the Most High, members of the royal family. But if the conditions are not complied with on their part, they will not, cannot, realize the fulfillment of the promise. A profession of Christianity is nothing in the sight of God; but true, humble, willing obedience to His requirements designates the children of His adoption, the recipients of His grace, the partakers of His great salvation.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 441.

A KING’S DREAMS

1. What dreams did the Lord give to the Egyptian Pharaoh? What impression did they make on him?

GENESIS 41:1-8 *And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. ²And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. ³And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. ⁴And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke. ⁵And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. ⁶And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. ⁷And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. ⁸And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.*

“The king of Egypt had in one night two dreams, apparently pointing to the same event and seeming to foreshadow some great calamity. He could not determine their significance, yet they continued to trouble his mind. The magicians and wise men of his realm could give no interpretation. The king’s perplexity and distress increased, and terror spread throughout his palace.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 219.

INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAMS

2. To whom did the Lord give light concerning the sovereign's dreams? What was the meaning?

GENESIS 41:25-32 *And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. ²⁷And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. ²⁸This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he showeth unto Pharaoh. ²⁹Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: ³⁰And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; ³¹And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. ³²And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.*

"The general agitation recalled to the chief butler's mind the circumstances of his own dream; with it came the memory of Joseph, and a pang of remorse for his forgetfulness and ingratitude. He at once informed the king how his own dream and that of the chief baker had been interpreted by a Hebrew captive, and how the predictions had been fulfilled." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 219.

3. In view of the coming years of abundant harvests that were to be followed by famine, what counsel did Joseph give the king?

GENESIS 41:33-36 *Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. ³⁵And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. ³⁶And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.*

"The interpretation was so reasonable and consistent, and the policy which it recommended was so sound and shrewd, that its correctness could not be doubted. But who was to be entrusted with the execution of the plan? Upon the wisdom of this choice depended the nation's preservation. The king was troubled. For some time the matter of the appointment was under consideration. Through the chief butler the monarch had learned of the wisdom and prudence displayed by Joseph in the management of the prison; it was evident that he possessed administrative ability in a preeminent degree.... Further inquiry by the king proved the correctness of his report. In all the realm Joseph was the only man gifted with wisdom to point out the danger that threatened the kingdom and the preparation necessary to meet it;..." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 221.

4. Were Joseph's suggestions logical? Whom did Pharaoh propose and then appoint to carry out the plan?

GENESIS 41:37-44 *And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. ³⁸And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a*

man in whom the Spirit of God is? ³⁹And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: ⁴⁰Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.⁴¹ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. ⁴²And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; ⁴³And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

"... The king was convinced that he was the one best qualified to execute the plans which he had proposed. It was evident that a divine power was with him, and that there were none among the king's officers of state so well qualified to conduct the affairs of the nation at this crisis. The fact that he was a Hebrew and a slave was of little moment when weighed against his evident wisdom and sound judgment....

"From the dungeon Joseph was exalted to be ruler over all the land of Egypt. It was a position of high honor, yet it was beset with difficulty and peril. One cannot stand upon a lofty height without danger. As the tempest leaves unharmed the lowly flower of the valley, while it uproots the stately tree upon the mountaintop, so those who have maintained their integrity in humble life may be dragged down to the pit by the temptations that assail worldly success and honor. But Joseph's character bore the test alike of adversity and prosperity.... Through Joseph the attention of the king and great men of Egypt was directed to the true God; and though they adhered to their idolatry, they learned to respect the principles revealed in the life and character of the worshiper of Jehovah." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 221, 222.

PREPARATION FOR THE CRISIS

5. What was done during the seven years of plenty? What measures were taken to store the necessary provisions for the coming famine?

GENESIS 41:47-49 *And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. ⁴⁸And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. ⁴⁹And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number.*

"At the very opening of the fruitful years began the preparation for the approaching famine. Under the direction of Joseph, immense storehouses were erected in all the principal places throughout the land of Egypt, and ample arrangements were made for preserving the surplus of the expected harvest. The same policy was continued during the seven years of plenty, until the amount of grain laid in store was beyond computation." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 224.

6. What happens in a country that suffers famine for not just one or two years, but uninterruptedly for seven years?

GENESIS 41:54-57 *And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. ⁵⁶And*

the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.

- 7. At this point, how did Joseph view his prior experiences? What were the wonderful results for many people through the Egyptians' accepting the good advice?**

GENESIS 45:7, 8 *And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

“Joseph regarded his being sold into Egypt as the greatest calamity that could have befallen him; but he saw the necessity of trusting in God as he had never done when protected by his father’s love. Joseph brought God with him into Egypt, and the fact was made apparent by his cheerful demeanor amid his sorrow. As the ark of God brought rest and prosperity to Israel, so did this God-loving, God-fearing youth bring a blessing to Egypt....

“It was God’s design that through Joseph, Bible religion should be introduced among the Egyptians. This faithful witness was to represent Christ in the court of kings. Through dreams, God communicated with Joseph in his youth, giving him an intimation of the high position he would be called to fill. The brothers of Joseph, to prevent the fulfillment of his dreams, sold him as a slave, but their cruel act resulted in bringing about the very thing the dreams had foretold.”—(*The Youth’s Instructor*, March 11, 1897) *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 256.

PROMISES TO THOSE WHO HEED GOD’S COUNSEL

- 8. How unusual is it for a king to accept the suggestions of a young foreign slave? What promises does the Lord give to all who act on His counsel, as did the Pharaoh in Joseph’s day?**

PROVERBS 19:20 *Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.*

JEREMIAH 23:18 *For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it?*

PSALM 73:23, 24 *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. ²⁴Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

“Those who seek to turn aside the purpose of God, and oppose His will, may appear for a time to prosper; but God is at work to fulfill His own purposes, and He will make manifest who is the ruler of the heavens and the earth.”—(*The Youth’s Instructor*, March 11, 1897) *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 256.

“Here are the promises, plain and definite, rich and full; but they are all upon conditions. If you comply with the conditions, can you not trust the Lord to fulfill His word? Let these blessed promises, set in the framework of faith, be placed in memory’s halls. Not one of them will fail. All that God hath spoken He will do. ‘He is faithful that promised.’”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 630.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“How was Joseph enabled to make such a record of firmness of character, uprightness, and wisdom? In his early years he had consulted duty rather than inclination; and the integrity, the simple trust, the noble nature, of the youth bore fruit in the deeds of the man. A pure and simple life had favored the vigorous development of both physical and intellectual powers. Communion with God through His works and the contemplation of the grand truths entrusted to the inheritors of faith had elevated and ennobled his spiritual nature, broadening and strengthening the mind as no other study could do. Faithful attention to duty in every station, from the lowliest to the most exalted, had been training every power for its highest service. He who lives in accordance with the Creator’s will is securing to himself the truest and noblest development of character. ‘The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.’ Job 28:28.

“There are few who realize the influence of the little things of life upon the development of character. Nothing with which we have to do is really small. The varied circumstances that we meet day by day are designed to test our faithfulness and to qualify us for greater trusts....

“The most precious gifts are of no value unless they are improved. The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 222, 223.

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Sabbath, January 13, 2018

Blessing Overrides Hostility

“If the descendants of Abraham had kept separate from other nations, they would not have been seduced into idolatry. By keeping separate from other nations, a great temptation to engage in their sinful practices and rebel against God would be removed from them. They lost in a great measure their peculiar, holy character by mingling with the nations around them. To punish them, the Lord brought a famine upon their land, which compelled them to go down into Egypt to preserve their lives. But God did not forsake them while they were in Egypt, because of His covenant with Abraham. He suffered them to be oppressed by the Egyptians, that they might turn to Him in their distress, choose His righteous and merciful government, and obey His requirements.” —*The Story of Redemption*, p. 147.

1. When Joseph sent an invitation to his father to move to Egypt, who came with him? All together how many emigrated from Canaan to the new country?

EXODUS 1:1-5 *Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. ⁵And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already.*

“No tax was required of Joseph’s father and brethren by the king of Egypt, and Joseph was allowed the privilege of supplying them liberally with food. The king said to his rulers,

Are we not indebted to the God of Joseph, and to him, for this liberal supply of food? Was it not because of his wisdom that we laid in so abundantly? While other lands are perishing, we have enough! His management has greatly enriched the kingdom.'” —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 178; *The Story of Redemption*, p. 104.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL’S RAPID INCREASE

2. What extraordinary phenomenon occurred after Joseph and his generation died?

EXODUS 1:6, 7 *And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. ⁷And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.*

“The Israelites had already become very numerous; they ‘were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.’ Under Joseph’s fostering care, and the favor of the king who was then ruling, they had spread rapidly over the land. But they had kept themselves a distinct race, having nothing in common with the Egyptians in customs or religion; and their increasing numbers now excited the fears of the king and his people, lest in case of war they should join themselves with the enemies of Egypt. Yet policy forbade their banishment from the country.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 241, 242.

3. What thoughts arose in the mind of the next Pharaoh when he saw that the Israelite population was rapidly growing? What plan did he put in place to slow down this growth?

EXODUS 1:8-11 *Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. ⁹And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: ¹⁰Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. ¹¹Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.*

“This new king of Egypt learned that the children of Israel were of great service to the kingdom. Many of them were able and understanding workmen, and he was not willing to lose their labor. This new king ranked the children of Israel with that class of slaves who had sold their flocks, their herds, their lands and themselves to the kingdom. ‘Therefore they did set over them taskmasters, to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure-cities, Pithom and Rameses.’” —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 178, 179; *The Story of Redemption*, p. 105.

4. Despite the slavery, increased hours of work, and heavier burdens, how could it be seen that the Israelites were especially blessed by the Lord?

EXODUS 1:12-14 *But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. ¹³And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: ¹⁴And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.*

“They compelled their women to work in the fields, as though they were slaves. Yet their numbers did not decrease. As the king and his rulers saw that they continually increased, they consulted together to compel them to accomplish a certain amount every day. They thought to subdue them with hard labor, and were angry because they could not decrease their numbers and crush out their independent spirit.” —*The Story of Redemption*, p. 105.

DRACONIAN MEASURES

5. What cruel plan did the Pharaoh initiate to limit the increasing multiplication of the people of Israel? How effective was this in limiting the expansion of the population?

Exodus 1:15-21 *And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: ¹⁶And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. ¹⁷But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. ¹⁸And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? ¹⁹And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. ²⁰Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. ²¹And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.*

“Failing to accomplish their purpose, they proceeded to more cruel measures. Orders were issued to the women whose employment gave them opportunity for executing the command, to destroy the Hebrew male children at their birth. Satan was the mover in this matter. He knew that a deliverer was to be raised up among the Israelites; and by leading the king to destroy their children he hoped to defeat the divine purpose. But the women feared God, and dared not execute the cruel mandate. The Lord approved their course, and prospered them.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 242. See also *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 105, 106; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 179, 180.

6. Not satisfied with the previous results, what other cruel order followed?

Exodus 1:22 *And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.*

“As the king of Egypt was informed that his command had not been obeyed he was very angry. He then made his command more urgent and extensive.” —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 180.

“The king, angry at the failure of his design, made the command more urgent and extensive. The whole nation was called upon to hunt out and slaughter his helpless victims. ‘And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.’” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 242.

HOSTILITY DEFEATED

7. Following the dark night of slavery and suffering, how did God intervene and save His people?

DEUTERONOMY 26:8 *And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders.*

JEREMIAH 32:21 *And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror.*

“The Egyptians had learned the expectations of the children of Israel and derided their hopes of deliverance and spoke scornfully of the power of their God. They pointed them to their own situation as a people, as merely a nation of slaves, and tauntingly said to them, If your God is so just and merciful, and possesses power above the Egyptian gods, why does He not make you a free people? Why not manifest His greatness and power, and exalt you?” –*The Story of Redemption*, pp. 113, 114.

“This was His purpose in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. At the burning bush Moses received from God the message for the king of Egypt: ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me.’ Exodus 7:16. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God brought out the Hebrew host from the land of bondage. Wonderful was the deliverance He wrought for them, punishing their enemies, who refused to listen to His word, with total destruction.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 9.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Pharaoh boasted that he would like to see their God deliver them from his hands. These words destroyed the hopes of many of the children of Israel. It appeared to them very much as the king and his counselors had said. They knew that they were treated as slaves, and that they must endure just that degree of oppression their taskmasters and rulers might put upon them. Their male children had been hunted and slain. Their own lives were a burden, and they were believing in, and worshiping, the God of heaven....

“There were but a few families that first went down into Egypt. These increased to a great multitude. Some were careful to instruct their children in the law of God, but many of the Israelites had witnessed so much idolatry that they had confused ideas of God’s law. Those who feared God cried to Him in anguish of spirit to break their yoke of grievous bondage and bring them from the land of their captivity, that they might be free to serve Him. God heard their cries and raised up Moses as His instrument to accomplish the deliverance of His people.” –*The Story of Redemption*, pp. 114, 147.

“What you need is to see your dependence upon God, and to have a resolute heart. Be a man where you are; show strength of character where you are; be able, through Jesus Christ, to say, ‘No, I will not do this great wickedness, and sin against God.’” –Letter 48, 1887.

* * *

Facing Royal Opposition

“Every additional evidence of the power of God that the Egyptian monarch resisted, carried him on to a stronger and more persistent defiance of God. Thus the work went on, finite man warring against the expressed will of an infinite God. This case is a clear illustration of the sin against the Holy Ghost. ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ Gradually the Lord withdrew His Spirit. Removing His restraining power, He gave the king into the hands of the worst of all tyrants—self.” —(*Review and Herald*, July 27, 1897) *Conflict and Courage*, p. 89.

1. What great mission did the Lord entrust to Moses? Was it to be expected that the Pharaoh would easily accept the request for the Israelites to be freed?

EXODUS 3:10, 18, 19 *Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt....* ¹⁸*And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.* ¹⁹*And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.*

“Moses was commanded first to assemble the elders of Israel, the most noble and righteous among them, who had long grieved because of their bondage, and to declare to them a message from God, with a promise of deliverance. Then he was to take the elders before the king,...

“Moses was forewarned that Pharaoh would resist the appeal to let Israel go. Yet the courage of God’s servant must not fail; for the Lord would make this the occasion to manifest His power before the Egyptians and before His people. ‘And I will stretch out My hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.’” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 253.

2. Full of his own authority as ruler, how did the king express his feelings of independence from God and declare his own self-will?

EXODUS 5:1-5 *And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.* ²*And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.* ³*And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.* ⁴*And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens.* ⁵*And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.*

“When the Hebrew leader came before the king with a message from ‘Jehovah, God of Israel,’ it was not ignorance of the true God, but defiance of His power, that prompted the answer, ‘Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice?... I know not Jehovah.’ From first to

last, Pharaoh's opposition to the divine command was not the result of ignorance, but of hatred and defiance." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 333.

"Of all nations presented in Bible history, Egypt most boldly denied the existence of the living God and resisted His commands. No monarch ever ventured upon more open and highhanded rebellion against the authority of Heaven than did the king of Egypt. When the message was brought him by Moses, in the name of the Lord, Pharaoh proudly answered: 'Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go.' Exodus 5:2, *A.R.V.*" —*The Great Controversy*, p. 269.

HEAVENLY SIGNS AND WONDERS

3. What sign did the Lord give to urge the Egyptian ruler to set the Israelites free? What was his reaction to the signs and miracles?

EXODUS 7:1, 2, 10-13 *And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. ²Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.... ¹⁰And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the Lord had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. ¹²For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. ¹³And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.*

"Again Moses and Aaron entered the lordly halls of the king of Egypt. There, surrounded by lofty columns and glittering adornments, by the rich paintings and sculptured images of heathen gods, before the monarch of the most powerful kingdom then in existence, stood the two representatives of the enslaved race, to repeat the command from God for Israel's release. The king demanded a miracle, in evidence of their divine commission. Moses and Aaron had been directed how to act in case such a demand should be made, and Aaron now took the rod and cast it down before Pharaoh. It became a serpent. The monarch sent for his 'wise men and the sorcerers,' who 'cast down every man his rod and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.' Then the king, more determined than before, declared his magicians equal in power with Moses and Aaron; he denounced the servants of the Lord as impostors, and felt himself secure in resisting their demands. Yet while he despised their message, he was restrained by divine power from doing them harm." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 263.

4. After the devastation of four plagues struck Egypt, how willing was Pharaoh to accept God's call and give freedom to His people? What consequences can a person expect if he refuses to give up his own will?

EXODUS 8:32 *And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.*

ROMANS 2:5 *But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

"Pharaoh desired to justify his stubbornness in resisting the divine command, and hence he was seeking some pretext for disregarding the miracles that God had wrought through Moses.... By the work that he wrought through the magicians he made it appear to the Egyptians that Moses and Aaron were only magicians and sorcerers, and

that the message they brought could not claim respect as coming from a superior being. Thus Satan's counterfeit accomplished its purpose of emboldening the Egyptians in their rebellion and causing Pharaoh to harden his heart against conviction." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 264; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 697.

"He [the human agent] may choose to be inspired and controlled by Satan, to withdraw himself from all righteous principles, as though he lived by his own invention. Nevertheless he will be judged as one who might have used all his capabilities in the service of God, but who refused to do this, and took his position under the black banner of the powers of darkness. His failure to do the good he might have done, had he been a partaker of the divine nature, will be recorded against him as a sign that he despised and neglected the great mercy and loving kindness of God, refusing to recognize God's claim to his service." *— Pamphlet—An Appeal for Missions*, p. 28.

STUBBORN REFUSAL TO GIVE IN

5. What was the king's attitude after the nation had been impacted by nine terrible plagues? What did his words to Moses show?

Exodus 10:28, 29 *And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die.* ²⁹*And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.*

"It is unsafe to cherish doubt in the heart even for a moment. The seeds of doubt which Pharaoh sowed when he rejected the first miracle were allowed to grow, and they produced such an abundant harvest that all subsequent miracles could not persuade him that his position was wrong. He continued to venture on in his own course, going from one degree of questioning to another, and his heart became more and more hardened until he was called to look upon the cold, dead faces of the first-born." *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 274.

6. What finally broke Pharaoh's iron will? What do you think kept the king from surrendering his ideas much earlier to avoid the plagues and devastation that came upon himself and his people?

Exodus 12:30-33 *And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.* ³¹*And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said.* ³²*Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.* ³³*And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men.*

"Throughout the vast realm of Egypt the pride of every household had been laid low. The shrieks and wails of the mourners filled the air. King and courtiers, with blanched faces and trembling limbs, stood aghast at the overmastering horror. Pharaoh remembered how he had once exclaimed, 'Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go.' Now, his heaven-daring pride humbled in the dust, he 'called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said.... And be gone; and bless me also.' The royal counselors also and the people entreated the Israelites to depart 'out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men.'" *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 279.

DELIGHTING TO DO GOD'S WILL

7. In contrast to the proud Egyptian monarch, what was the attitude of God's Son? What should we learn from the record of these remarkable events in the Bible?

PSALM 40:8 *I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

MATTHEW 26:42 *He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*

EPHESIANS 5:17 *Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*

PSALM 143:10 *Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

MATTHEW 7:21 *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

"The Lord Jesus declares, 'I have kept My Father's commandments.' How? As a man. 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.' To the accusations of the Jews He stood forth in His pure, virtuous, holy character and challenged them, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' ..." —*Christ Triumphant*, p. 25.

"Christ said of Himself, 'I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.' Psalm 40:8. 'I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.' John 5:30. And the Scripture says, 'He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.' 1 John 2:6.

"The word of God often comes in collision with man's hereditary and cultivated traits of character and his habits of life. But the good-ground hearer, in receiving the word, accepts all its conditions and requirements. His habits, customs, and practices are brought into submission to God's word. In his view the commands of finite, erring man sink into insignificance beside the word of the infinite God. With the whole heart, with undivided purpose, he is seeking the life eternal, and at the cost of loss, persecution, or death itself, he will obey the truth." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 60.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"Before the infliction of each plague, Moses was to describe its nature and effects, that the king might save himself from it if he chose. Every punishment rejected would be followed by one more severe, until his proud heart would be humbled, and he would acknowledge the Maker of heaven and earth as the true and living God. The Lord would give the Egyptians an opportunity to see how vain was the wisdom of their mighty men, how feeble the power of their gods, when opposed to the commands of Jehovah. He would punish the people of Egypt for their idolatry and silence their boasting of the blessings received from their senseless deities. God would glorify His own name, that other nations might hear of His power and tremble at His mighty acts, and that His people might be led to turn from their idolatry and render Him pure worship." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 263; *Signs of the Times*, March 11, 1880.

"The law of self is erected, human will is made supreme, and when the high and holy will of God is presented to be obeyed, respected, and honored, the human will wants its own way, to do its own promptings, and there is a controversy between the human agent and the Divine." —*Christ Triumphant*, p. 25.

* * *

Requesting Permission to Pass Through

“When the Lord brought His people a second time to the borders of Canaan, additional evidence of His power was granted to those heathen nations. They saw that God was with Israel in the victory gained over King Arad and the Canaanites, and in the miracle wrought to save those who were perishing from the sting of the serpents. Although the Israelites had been refused a passage through the land of Edom, thus being compelled to take the long and difficult route by the Red Sea, yet in all their journeyings and encampments, past the land of Edom, of Moab and Ammon, they had shown no hostility, and had done no injury to the people or their possessions.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 434, 435.

1. After the children of Israel stayed for many years in the area of Mount Seir, what command did the Lord give them?

DEUTERONOMY 2:1, LAST PART-3, 14, FIRST PART ... *The Lord spake unto me: and we compassed mount Seir many days. ²And the Lord spake unto me, saying, ³Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward.... ¹⁴And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years;...*

“For nearly forty years the children of Israel are lost to view in the obscurity of the desert. ‘The space,’ says Moses, ‘in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord swore unto them.’...

“The encampment of Israel at Kadesh was but a short distance from the borders of Edom, and both Moses and the people greatly desired to follow the route through this country to the Promised Land; accordingly they sent a message, as God had directed them, to the Edomite king.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 406, 422.

REQUEST TO THE KING OF EDMOM

2. What explanatory letter did Moses send to the king of the Edomites, who were descendants of Esau and therefore relatives?

NUMBERS 20:14-16 *And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: ¹⁵How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: ¹⁶And when we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border.*

“Had the people, when brought into trial, trusted in God, the Captain of the Lord’s host would have led them through Edom, and the fear of them would have rested upon the inhabitants of the land, so that, instead of manifesting hostility, they would have shown them favor. But the Israelites did not act promptly upon God’s word, and while they were complaining and murmuring, the golden opportunity passed. When they were at last ready to present their request to the king, it was refused. Ever since they left Egypt,

Satan had been steadily at work to throw hindrances and temptations in their way, that they might not inherit Canaan. And by their own unbelief they had repeatedly opened the door for him to resist the purpose of God." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 422, 423.

3. What permission did Moses ask them to grant?

NUMBERS 20:17 *Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.*

"The glad tidings of salvation are to be taken to those who have not yet heard them. Satan is determined to place God's people in a false light before the world. He is pleased when their lives reveal defects, when they cherish objectionable traits of character. These traits of character he uses in his service. He tries to keep God's people in a continual state of uncertainty by bringing in false theories and false science. He seeks to deceive them as he deceived Adam and Eve. He would lead them to depart from God, their true Counselor, and accept his spiritualistic sophistries. With these sophistries clothed in the garments of light, he seeks to deceive if possible the very elect." —*This Day with God*, p. 325.

REFUSAL AND A FURTHER DETAILED REQUEST

4. In refusing to grant the request, what did the Edomites threaten against Israel, their own brethren? How is it possible to imagine such a response?

NUMBERS 20:18 *And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.*

"To this courteous request a threatening refusal was returned: 'Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.'" —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 422.

"What lesson is God teaching us? Is He not trying to show us the need of closely examining ourselves, that we may see whether we be in the faith or not? Is He not trying to lead us to give more thought to the subject of the time in which we are living? The signs of the times fulfilling all around us show us that the end of all things is at hand. Intense earnestness should take possession of us. Our slumbering energies should be aroused by persevering effort. Consecrated workers should go forth into the field and move understandingly forward, clearing the King's highway, obtaining victories in new places." —(Letter 43, 1903) *The Publishing Ministry*, p. 175.

5. After the Israelites explained in detail that they would not cause any damage in the country, did the Edomites change their minds? What level of hostility did they demonstrate?

NUMBERS 20:19-21 *And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. ²⁰And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. ²¹Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.*

"Surprised at this repulse, the leaders of Israel sent a second appeal to the king, with the promise, 'We will go by the highway: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing anything else, go through on my feet.'

“‘Thou shalt not go through,’ was the answer. Armed bands of Edomites were already posted at the difficult passes, so that any peaceful advance in that direction was impossible, and the Hebrews were forbidden to resort to force. They must make the long journey around the land of Edom.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 422.

THE LORD’S DIRECTIONS

6. What directions did the Lord give the Israelites to avoid any possible conflict or irritation? What had He directed that they should pay for?

DEUTERONOMY 2:4-6 *And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: ⁵Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession. ⁶Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink.*

“The ancestors of Edom and Israel were brothers, and brotherly kindness and courtesy should exist between them. The Israelites were forbidden, either then or at any future time, to revenge the affront given them in the refusal of passage through the land. They must not expect to possess any part of the land of Edom. While the Israelites were the chosen and favored people of God, they must heed the restrictions which He placed upon them. God had promised them a goodly inheritance; but they were not to feel that they alone had any rights in the earth, and seek to crowd out all others. They were directed, in all their intercourse with the Edomites, to beware of doing them injustice. They were to trade with them, buying such supplies as were needed, and promptly paying for all they received.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 424.

7. With what special opportunity did this situation present Israel, now that they had reached inhabited areas, even when human generosity was completely refused? In whom were they to trust after being miraculously taken care of for forty years?

DEUTERONOMY 2:7, 8 *For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing. ⁸And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Eziongaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab.*

“As an encouragement to Israel to trust in God and obey His word they were reminded, ‘The Lord thy God hath blessed thee;... thou hast lacked nothing.’ Deuteronomy 2:7. They were not dependent upon the Edomites, for they had a God rich in resources. They must not by force or fraud seek to obtain anything pertaining to them; but in all their intercourse they should exemplify the principle of the divine law, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’

“Had they in this manner passed through Edom, as God had purposed, the passage would have proved a blessing, not only to themselves, but to the inhabitants of the land; for it would have given them an opportunity to become acquainted with God’s people and His worship and to witness how the God of Jacob prospered those who loved and feared Him. But all this the unbelief of Israel had prevented. God had given the people

water in answer to their clamors, but He permitted their unbelief to work out its punishment. Again they must traverse the desert and quench their thirst from the miraculous spring, which, had they but trusted in Him, they would no longer have needed.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 424.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“It is important to believe God’s word and act upon it promptly, while His angels are waiting to work for us. Evil angels are ready to contest every step of advance. And when God’s providence bids His children go forward, when He is ready to do great things for them, Satan tempts them to displease the Lord by hesitation and delay; he seeks to kindle a spirit of strife or to arouse murmuring or unbelief, and thus deprive them of the blessings that God desired to bestow. God’s servants should be minutemen, ever ready to move as fast as His providence opens the way. And delay on their part gives time for Satan to work to defeat them.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 423.

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Sabbath, February 3, 2018

Divine or Human Interest?

“The people of Moab were closely connected with the Midianites, both by the ties of nationality and religion. And Balak, the king of Moab, aroused the fears of the kindred people, and secured their cooperation in his designs against Israel by the message, ‘Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.’ Balaam, an inhabitant of Mesopotamia, was reported to possess supernatural powers, and his fame had reached to the land of Moab. It was determined to call him to their aid. Accordingly, messengers of ‘the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian,’ were sent to secure his divinations and enchantments against Israel.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 438.

1. Continuing their journey, what area did the children of Israel reach? What fears gripped the Moabites when they saw how numerous the Israelites were?

NUMBERS 22:1-3 *And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. ²And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.*

“Returning to the Jordan from the conquest of Bashan, the Israelites, in preparation for the immediate invasion of Canaan, encamped beside the river, above its entrance into the Dead Sea, and just opposite the plain of Jericho. They were upon the very borders of Moab, and the Moabites were filled with terror at the close proximity of the invaders.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 438.

“The Israelites moved forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab, on this side of Jordan, by Jericho. Balak, the king of the Moabites, saw that the Israelites were a powerful people, and as they learned that they had destroyed the Amorites, and had taken

possession of their land, they were exceedingly terrified. All Moab was in trouble.” –*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 319.

ATTEMPTS TO CURSE ISRAEL

2. Whom did Balak, king of the Moabites, seek out to curse Israel and counteract God’s work? Why did Balak seek this man’s aid?

NUMBERS 22:4-6 *And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. ⁵He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: ⁶Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*

2 PETER 2:15, LAST PART ... *Following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*

“The Moabites dared not risk an attack upon them; an appeal to arms was hopeless in face of the supernatural agencies that wrought in their behalf. But they determined, as Pharaoh had done, to enlist the power of sorcery to counteract the work of God. They would bring a curse upon Israel.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 438.

“Balaam had been a prophet of God, and a good man. But he apostatized, and gave himself up to covetousness, so that he loved the wages of unrighteousness. At the time Balak sent messengers for him, he was double-minded, pursuing a course to gain and retain the favor and honor of the enemies of the Lord, for the sake of rewards he received from them. At the same time he was professing to be a prophet of God. Idolatrous nations believed that curses might be uttered which would affect individuals, and even whole nations. As the messengers related their message to Balaam, he very well knew what answer to give them. But he asked them to tarry that night, and he would bring them word as the Lord should speak unto him. The presents in the hands of the men excited his covetous disposition.” –*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 320.

3. With money in hand, what did the Moabite messengers explain when they reached Balaam’s home in Pethor in Mesopotamia? What emotion do you think this temptation aroused in Balaam when he saw the costly gifts and heard the message sent by Balak?

NUMBERS 22:7, 8 *And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. ⁸And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.*

“Balaam, an inhabitant of Mesopotamia, was reported to possess supernatural powers, and his fame had reached to the land of Moab. It was determined to call him to their aid. Accordingly, messengers of ‘the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian,’ were sent to secure his divinations and enchantments against Israel....

“He [Balaam] was not ignorant of God’s work in behalf of Israel; and when the messengers announced their errand, he well knew that it was his duty to refuse the rewards

of Balak and to dismiss the ambassadors. But he ventured to dally with temptation, and urged the messengers to tarry with him that night, declaring that he could give no decided answer till he had asked counsel of the Lord. Balaam knew that his curse could not harm Israel. God was on their side, and so long as they were true to Him no adverse power of earth or hell could prevail against them. But his pride was flattered by the words of the ambassadors, 'He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.' The bribe of costly gifts and prospective exaltation excited his covetousness. He greedily accepted the offered treasures, and then, while professing strict obedience to the will of God, he tried to comply with the desires of Balak." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 438, 439.

A CLEAR, UNMISTAKABLE ANSWER

4. What clear instructions did the Lord give Balaam to keep him from making a huge mistake? What did He tell the prophet about the people whom Balak wished him to curse?

NUMBERS 22:9-14 *And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? ¹⁰And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, ¹¹Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. ¹²And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. ¹³And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you. ¹⁴And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.*

"In the night season the angel of God came to Balaam with the message, 'Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.'" —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439.

"[Numbers 10-12 quoted.] The angel tells Balaam that the children of Israel are conducted under the banner of the God of Heaven, and that no curse from man could retard their progress." —*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 320.

"In the morning Balaam reluctantly dismissed the messengers, but he did not tell them what the Lord had said. Angry that his visions of gain and honor had been suddenly dispelled, he petulantly exclaimed, 'Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you.'" —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439.

5. Was the Moabite king satisfied with the answer he received from Balaam? What did he insist on to accomplish his wicked purpose?

NUMBERS 22:15-17 *And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. ¹⁶And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: ¹⁷For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.*

"When the messengers reported to Balak the prophet's refusal to accompany them, they did not intimate that God had forbidden him. Supposing that Balaam's delay was merely to secure a richer reward, the king sent princes more in number and more honorable than the first, with promises of higher honors, and with authority to concede to any terms that Balaam might demand. Balak's urgent message to the prophet was, 'Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: for I will promote thee unto very

great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.'” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 440.

BALAAAM’S TEST

6. What can we learn from the second answer that Balaam gave to the emissaries of King Balak? If we were faced with the choice between wealth and obedience to the Lord’s commandments, what would we choose?

NUMBERS 22:18, 19 *And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. ¹⁹Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.*

“A second time Balaam was tested. In response to the solicitations of the ambassadors he professed great conscientiousness and integrity, assuring them that no amount of gold and silver could induce him to go contrary to the will of God. But he longed to comply with the king’s request; and although the will of God had already been definitely made known to him, he urged the messengers to tarry, that he might further inquire of God; as though the Infinite One were a man, to be persuaded.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 440.

“His fear of God’s power holds the ascendancy over his covetous disposition; yet his course of conduct shows that his love of honor and gain was striving hard for the mastery, and he did not subdue it. He would have gratified his covetousness, if he had dared to do it. After God had said that he should not go, he was anxious to be granted the privilege of going. He urged them to remain that night, that he might make inquiry again of God.” —*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 321.

7. What were the Lord’s instructions to Balaam this time? Even then, what directions did Balaam have to follow strictly?

NUMBERS 22:20, 21 *And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. ²¹And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.*

“The Lord suffered Balaam to follow his own inclinations, and try, if he chose so to do, to please both God and man.” —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 45.

“Balaam had received permission to go with the messengers from Moab if they came in the morning to call him. But, annoyed at his delay, and expecting another refusal, they set out on their homeward journey without further consultation with him. Every excuse for complying with the request of Balak had now been removed. But Balaam was determined to secure the reward; and, taking the beast upon which he was accustomed to ride, he set out on the journey. He feared that even now the divine permission might be withdrawn, and he pressed eagerly forward, impatient lest he should by some means fail to gain the coveted reward.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 440, 441.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“There are thousands at the present day who are pursuing a similar course. They would have no difficulty in understanding their duty if it were in harmony with their inclinations. It is plainly set before them in the Bible or is clearly indicated by circumstances and reason.

But because these evidences are contrary to their desires and inclinations they frequently set them aside and presume to go to God to learn their duty. With great apparent conscientiousness they pray long and earnestly for light. But God will not be trifled with. He often permits such persons to follow their own desires and to suffer the result. 'My people would not hearken to My voice.... So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.' Psalm 81:11, 12. When one clearly sees a duty, let him not presume to go to God with the prayer that he may be excused from performing it. He should rather, with a humble, submissive spirit, ask for divine strength and wisdom to meet its claims." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 440, 441.

Who were the Moabites who appear here as Israel's enemies? The Moabites and the Ammonites were distant relatives of Israel; they were the descendants of Lot through his two daughters, as is recorded in Deuteronomy 2:18, 19. "Lot's only posterity, the Moabites and Ammonites, were vile, idolatrous tribes, rebels against God and bitter enemies of His people." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 168.

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6

Sabbath, February 10, 2018

The Blessed Remain Blessed

"... Balaam said unto God, Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth. Come, now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them. Thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed.' The angel tells Balaam that the children of Israel are conducted under the banner of the God of Heaven, and that no curse from man could retard their progress." —*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 320.

1. Meeting King Balak after encountering the angel who resisted him with sword in hand, what did Balaam tell him?

NUMBERS 22:36-38 *And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast.³⁷ And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour? ³⁸And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.*

"The king of Moab, being informed of the approach of Balaam, went out with a large retinue to the borders of his kingdom, to receive him. When he expressed his astonishment at Balaam's delay, in view of the rich rewards awaiting him, the prophet's answer was, 'Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.' Balaam greatly regretted this restriction; he feared that his purpose could not be carried out, because the Lord's controlling power was upon him." — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 443.

2. After he had made the sacrifice, what did Balaam say in front of King Balak and the Moabite princes? What had the Lord told Balaam to tell the king?

NUMBERS 23:3-8 *And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the Lord will come to meet me: and whatsoever he showeth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place. ⁴And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram. ⁵And the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak. ⁶And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab. ⁷And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. ⁸How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?*

“With the nobles and princes of Moab the king stood beside the sacrifice, while around them gathered the eager multitude, watching for the return of the prophet. He came at last, and the people waited for the words that should paralyze forever that strange power exerted in behalf of the hated Israelites....

“Balaam confessed that he came with the purpose of cursing Israel, but the words he uttered were directly contrary to the sentiments of his heart. He was constrained to pronounce blessings, while his soul was filled with curses.

“As Balaam looked upon the encampment of Israel he beheld with astonishment the evidence of their prosperity. They had been represented to him as a rude, disorganized multitude, infesting the country in roving bands that were a pest and terror to the surrounding nations; but their appearance was the reverse of all this. He saw the vast extent and perfect arrangement of their camp, everything bearing the marks of thorough discipline and order. He was shown the favor with which God regarded Israel, and their distinctive character as His chosen people. They were not to stand upon a level with other nations, but to be exalted above them all. ‘The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.’ At the time when these words were spoken the Israelites had no permanent settlement, and their peculiar character, their manners and customs, were not familiar to Balaam. But how strikingly was this prophecy fulfilled in the after history of Israel! Through all the years of their captivity, through all the ages since they were dispersed among the nations, they have remained a distinct people. So the people of God—the true Israel—though scattered throughout all nations, are on earth but sojourners, whose citizenship is in heaven.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 444, 447.

3. How did the king react when he heard what Balaam said?

NUMBERS 23:11, 12 *And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. ¹²And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?*

“If Balaam had had a disposition to accept the light that God had given, he would now have made true his words; he would at once have severed all connection with Moab. He would no longer have presumed upon the mercy of God, but would have returned to Him with deep repentance. But Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, and these he was determined to secure.

“Balak had confidently expected a curse that would fall like a withering blight upon Israel; and at the words of the prophet he passionately exclaimed, ‘What hast thou done

unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether.' Balaam, seeking to make a virtue of necessity, professed to have spoken from a conscientious regard for the will of God the words that had been forced from his lips by divine power. His answer was, 'Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?' —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 448.

THE SECOND ATTEMPT

4. How did the Lord speak through Balaam when King Balak took him to the top of Mount Pisgah to curse Israel again?

NUMBERS 23:18-21 *And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: ¹⁹God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? ²⁰Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. ²¹He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.*

"Awed by these revelations, Balaam exclaimed, 'Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.' The great magician had tried his power of enchantment, in accordance with the desire of the Moabites; but concerning this very occasion it should be said of Israel, 'What hath God wrought!' While they were under the divine protection, no people or nation, though aided by all the power of Satan, should be able to prevail against them." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 449.

5. When he saw that he did not get what he wanted, what did Balak say to Balaam? What was the reply?

NUMBERS 23:25, 26 *And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. ²⁶But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do?*

"The king of Moab, disheartened and distressed, exclaimed, 'Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.' Yet a faint hope still lingered in his heart, and he determined to make another trial." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 449.

THE LAST ATTEMPT

6. After Balaam had twice pronounced blessings from God upon Israel, what did Balak do, perhaps thinking that God was like himself and would change His mind? What did the Lord reveal in the third oracle?

NUMBERS 23:27; 24:5-9 *And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.... ^{24:5}How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! ⁶As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. ⁷He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. ⁸God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. ⁹He couched, he lay down as a lion, and*

as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

“All the world should wonder at the marvelous work of God in behalf of His people—that a man determined to pursue a sinful course should be so controlled by divine power as to utter, instead of imprecations, the richest and most precious promises, in the language of sublime and impassioned poetry. And the favor of God at this time manifested toward Israel was to be an assurance of His protecting care for His obedient, faithful children in all ages. When Satan should inspire evil men to misrepresent, harass, and destroy God’s people, this very occurrence would be brought to their remembrance, and would strengthen their courage and their faith in God.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 449.

7. What did King Balak do when he saw that all his plans had gone up in smoke and the people of Israel had been blessed? What great promise is for all whom the Lord blesses?

NUMBERS 24:10 *And Balak’s anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.*

NEHEMIAH 13:2 *Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.*

ROMANS 8:31-34 *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ³²He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. ³⁴Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

“Let us remember that our great High Priest is pleading before the mercy seat in behalf of His ransomed people. He ever liveth to make intercession for us....

“He will not forget His church in the world of temptation. He looks upon His tried and suffering people, and prays for them.... Yes, He beholds His people in this world, which is a persecuting world, and all seared and marred with the curse, and knows that they need all the divine resources of His sympathy and His love. Our Forerunner hath for us entered within the veil, and yet by the golden chain of love and truth, He is linked with His people in closest sympathy.” —*Review and Herald*, August 15, 1893.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Balaam was once a good man and a prophet of God; but he had apostatized, and had given himself up to covetousness; yet he still professed to be a servant of the Most High. He was not ignorant of God’s work in behalf of Israel; and when the messengers announced their errand, he well knew that it was his duty to refuse the rewards of Balak and to dismiss the ambassadors. But he ventured to dally with temptation, and urged the messengers to tarry with him that night, declaring that he could give no decided answer till he had asked counsel of the Lord. Balaam knew that his curse could not harm Israel. God was on their side, and so long as they were true to Him no adverse power of earth or hell could prevail against them. But his pride was flattered by the words of the ambassadors, ‘He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.’ The bribe of costly gifts and prospective exaltation excited his covetousness. He greedily accepted the offered treasures, and then, while

professing strict obedience to the will of God, he tried to comply with the desires of Balak.”
–*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439.

“Everyone who will break from the slavery and service of Satan, and will stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel will be kept by Christ’s intercessions. Christ, as our Mediator, at the right hand of the Father, ever keeps us in view, for it is as necessary that He should keep us by His intercessions as that He should redeem us with His blood. If He lets go His hold of us for one moment, Satan stands ready to destroy. Those purchased by His blood, He now keeps by His intercession....” –(Manuscript 73, 1893) *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15, p. 104.

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7

Sabbath, February 17, 2018

Temptation, Fall, and Consequences

“The fate of Balaam was similar to that of Judas, and their characters bear a marked resemblance to each other. Both these men tried to unite the service of God and mammon, and met with signal failure. Balaam acknowledged the true God, and professed to serve Him; Judas believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and united with His followers. But Balaam hoped to make the service of Jehovah the steppingstone to the acquirement of riches and worldly honor; and failing in this he stumbled and fell and was broken. Judas expected by his connection with Christ to secure wealth and promotion in that worldly kingdom which, as he believed, the Messiah was about to set up. The failure of his hopes drove him to apostasy and ruin. Both Balaam and Judas had received great light and enjoyed special privileges, but a single cherished sin poisoned the entire character and caused their destruction.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 452.

1. After the experiences with the Moabite king, where did Balaam go? Did he accept what had happened?

NUMBERS 24:25 *And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.*

“Disappointed in his hopes of wealth and promotion, in disfavor with the king, and conscious that he had incurred the displeasure of God, Balaam returned from his self-chosen mission. After he had reached his home the controlling power of the Spirit of God left him, and his covetousness, which had been merely held in check, prevailed. He was ready to resort to any means to gain the reward promised by Balak. Balaam knew that the prosperity of Israel depended upon their obedience to God, and that there was no way to cause their overthrow but by seducing them into sin. He now decided to secure Balak’s favor by advising the Moabites of the course to be pursued to bring a curse upon Israel.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 451.

SETTING UP TEMPTATION

2. Although not reported in the book of Numbers, what does a verse in Revelation record about the diabolical advice that Balaam gave to King Balak?

REVELATION 2:14 ...*The doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

“He immediately returned to the land of Moab and laid his plans before the king. The Moabites themselves were convinced that so long as Israel remained true to God, He would be their shield. The plan proposed by Balaam was to separate them from God by enticing them into idolatry. If they could be led to engage in the licentious worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, their omnipotent Protector would become their enemy, and they would soon fall a prey to the fierce, warlike nations around them. This plan was readily accepted by the king, and Balaam himself remained to assist in carrying it into effect.” *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 451.

3. Carrying out the advice that Balaam gave to Balak, what did the Moabites do? Who fell into this horrible trap?

NUMBERS 25:1, 2 *And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. ²And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.*

“At Balaam’s suggestion, a grand festival in honor of their gods was appointed by the king of Moab, and it was secretly arranged that Balaam should induce the Israelites to attend. He was regarded by them as a prophet of God, and hence had little difficulty in accomplishing his purpose. Great numbers of the people joined him in witnessing the festivities. They ventured upon the forbidden ground, and were entangled in the snare of Satan. Beguiled with music and dancing, and allured by the beauty of heathen vestals, they cast off their fealty to Jehovah. As they united in mirth and feasting, indulgence in wine beclouded their senses and broke down the barriers of self-control. Passion had full sway; and having defiled their consciences by lewdness, they were persuaded to bow down to idols. They offered sacrifice upon heathen altars and participated in the most degrading rites.” *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 454.

THE TERRIBLE RESULTS

4. Turning their backs on their holy principles and duty, what did many people among Israel do? What were the consequences of their double sin of idolatry and fornication?

NUMBERS 25:3 *And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.*

“It was not long before the poison had spread, like a deadly infection, through the camp of Israel. Those who would have conquered their enemies in battle were overcome by the wiles of heathen women. The people seemed to be infatuated. The rulers and the leading men were among the first to transgress, and so many of the people were guilty that the apostasy became national. ‘Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor.’ When Moses was aroused to perceive the evil, the plots of their enemies had been so successful that not only were the Israelites participating in the licentious worship at Mount Peor, but the heathen rites were coming to be observed in the camp of Israel. The aged leader was filled with indignation, and the wrath of God was kindled.” *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 454, 455.

5. What broke out among the people of God as the result of this terrible apostasy? How many victims fell in the plague?

NUMBERS 25:9 *And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.*

“Their iniquitous practices did that for Israel which all the enchantments of Balaam could not do—they separated them from God. By swift-coming judgments the people were awakened to the enormity of their sin. A terrible pestilence broke out in the camp, to which tens of thousands speedily fell a prey. God commanded that the leaders in this apostasy be put to death by the magistrates. This order was promptly obeyed. The offenders were slain, then their bodies were hung up in sight of all Israel that the congregation, seeing the leaders so severely dealt with, might have a deep sense of God’s abhorrence of their sin and the terror of His wrath against them.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 455.

BALAAM’S WAGES

6. What did Balaam love more than God and His will? Having precipitated the fall and death of many in Israel, what was the consequence of the wages that this false prophet loved?

2 PETER 2:15 *Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*

PROVERBS 26:27 *Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.*

NUMBERS 31:8 *And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.*

“Balaam ‘loved the wages of unrighteousness.’ 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their over-conscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous. They will do and dare most terrible things when once they have given themselves to the control of avarice and a desire for power. Many flatter themselves that they can depart from strict integrity for a time, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and that having gained their object, they can change their course when they please. Such are entangling themselves in the snare of Satan, and it is seldom that they escape.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 439, 440.

A SERIOUS LESSON FOR US

7. Why are such experiences recorded in the Holy Scriptures? What should we constantly keep in mind, since the situations in which we live today are often more dangerous than those that we are studying about?

1 CORINTHIANS 10:11, 12 *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. ¹²Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

ROMANS 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

“Yet we have a work to do to resist temptation. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest. ‘Girding up the loins of your mind,’ says the apostle Peter, ‘Be sober,... not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in ... your ignorance: but like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living.’ 1 Peter 1:13-15, R.V. Says Paul, ‘Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.’ Philippians 4:8. This will require earnest prayer and unceasing watchfulness. We must be aided by the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which will attract the mind upward, and habituate it to dwell on pure and holy things. And we must give diligent study to the word of God. ‘Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word.’ ‘Thy word,’ says the psalmist, ‘have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ Psalm 119:9, 11.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“The blood of Jesus is pleading with power and efficacy for those who are backslidden, for those who are rebellious, for those who sin against great light and love. Satan stands at our right hand to accuse us, and our Advocate stands at God’s right hand to plead for us. He has never lost a case that has been committed to Him. We may trust in our Advocate; for He pleads His own merits in our behalf. Hear His prayer before His betrayal and trial. Listen to His prayer for us; for He had us in remembrance.” —*Review and Herald*, August 15, 1893.

“It was by associating with idolaters and joining in their festivities that the Hebrews were led to transgress God’s law and bring His judgments upon the nation. So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean.’ 2 Corinthians 6:17. God requires of His people now as great a distinction from the world, in customs, habits, and principles, as He required of Israel anciently. If they faithfully follow the teachings of His word, this distinction will exist; it cannot be otherwise. The warnings given to the Hebrews against assimilating with the heathen were not more direct or explicit than are those forbidding Christians to conform to the spirit and customs of the ungodly. Christ speaks to us, ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’ 1 John 2:15. ‘The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.’ James 4:4. The followers of Christ are to separate themselves from sinners, choosing their society only when there is opportunity to do them good. We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God. While we pray, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ we are to shun temptation, so far as possible.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 458.

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8

Sabbath, February 24, 2018

Surrounded by Enemies

“So angels protected ... Elisha in the little mountain city. When the encircling hills were filled with the horses and chariots of the king of Syria, and the great host of his armed men, Elisha beheld the nearer hill slopes covered with the armies of God—horses and chariots of fire round about the servant of the Lord.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 240.

“Called to the prophetic office while Ahab was still reigning, Elisha had lived to see many changes take place in the kingdom of Israel. Judgment upon judgment had befallen the Israelites during the reign of Hazael the Syrian, who had been anointed to be the scourge of the apostate nation.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 254.

PLANNING WITHOUT GOD

1. Who regularly received information when the king of Syria was planning to mobilize his forces? To whom was the information forwarded?

2 KINGS 6:8-10 *Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. ⁹And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. ¹⁰And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.*

“And God never forsook His chosen messenger. On one occasion, during a Syrian invasion, the king of Syria sought to destroy Elisha because of his activity in apprising the king of Israel of the plans of the enemy. The Syrian king had taken counsel with his servants, saying, ‘In such and such a place shall be my camp.’ This plan was revealed by the Lord to Elisha, who ‘sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.’ —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 255, 256.

GOD REVEALS THE ENEMY’S PLANS

2. Why was the king of Syria particularly puzzled? Who was regularly informing the king of Israel about the plans of the Syrian king?

2 KINGS 6:11, 12 *Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? ¹²And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.*

"If the eyes of Joshua had been opened as were the eyes of the servant of Elisha at Dothan, and he could have endured the sight, he would have seen the angels of the Lord encamped about the children of Israel; for the trained army of heaven had come to fight for the people of God, and the Captain of the Lord's host was there to command. When Jericho fell, no human hand touched the walls of the city, for the angels of the Lord overthrew the fortifications, and entered the fortress of the enemy. It was not Israel, but the Captain of the Lord's host that took Jericho. But Israel had their part to act to show their faith in the Captain of their salvation." —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 117.

3. What did the king of Syria do when he found out where the prophet lived?

2 KINGS 6:13, 14 *And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. ¹⁴Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.*

"Determined to make away with the prophet, the Syrian king commanded, 'Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.' The prophet was in Dothan; and, learning this, the king sent thither 'horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots.'" —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 256.

A HUGE ARMY SENT TO CAPTURE ONE PERSON

4. What terrible scene did Elisha's servant see? How did the man of God calm and reassure him?

2 KINGS 6:15-17 *And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? ¹⁶And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*

PSALM 34:7 *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

"In terror Elisha's servant sought him with the tidings. 'Alas, my master!' he said, 'how shall we do?'

"[2 Kings 6:15-17 quoted.] Between the servant of God and the hosts of armed foemen was an encircling band of heavenly angels. They had come down in mighty power, not to destroy, not to exact homage, but to encamp round about and minister to the Lord's weak and helpless ones." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 256, 257.

CLOSING THE EYES OF THE ENEMIES

5. What did Elisha do when the Syrian army advanced? Where did he lead them after the Lord blinded them at the prophet's request?

2 KINGS 6:18, 19 *And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. ¹⁹And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither*

is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

“When the people of God are brought into strait places, and apparently there is no escape for them, the Lord alone must be their dependence.

“As the company of Syrian soldiers boldly advanced, ignorant of the unseen hosts of heaven, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray Thee, with blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 257.

6. When were the eyes of the soldiers opened? What did the king of Israel ask the prophet after the enemy’s army was led to him?

2 KINGS 6:20, 21 *And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. ²¹And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?*

KIND ACTIONS AND THE GOOD RESULT

7. What did God’s prophet reply? What resulted from this hospitable treatment of the Syrian army?

2 KINGS 6:22, 23 *And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. ²³And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.*

“Satan seduced Israel into licentiousness before leading them to idolatry. Those who will dishonor God’s image and defile His temple in their own persons will not scruple at any dishonor to God that will gratify the desire of their depraved hearts. Sensual indulgence weakens the mind and debases the soul. The moral and intellectual powers are benumbed and paralyzed by the gratification of the animal propensities; and it is impossible for the slave of passion to realize the sacred obligation of the law of God, to appreciate the atonement, or to place a right value upon the soul. Goodness, purity, and truth, reverence for God, and love for sacred things—all those holy affections and noble desires that link men with the heavenly world—are consumed in the fires of lust. The soul becomes a blackened and desolate waste, the habitation of the evil spirits, and the ‘cage of every unclean and hateful bird.’ Beings formed in the image of God are dragged down to a level with the brutes.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 458.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“So, in all ages, angels have been near to Christ’s faithful followers. The vast confederacy of evil is arrayed against all who would overcome; but Christ would have us look to the things which are not seen, to the armies of heaven encamped about all who love God, to deliver them. From what dangers, seen and unseen, we have been preserved through the interposition of the angels, we shall never know, until in the light of eternity we see the providences of God. Then we shall know that the whole family of heaven was interested in the family here below, and that messengers from the throne of God attended our steps from day to day.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 240.

“There is in our world a spirit of belief and also a spirit of unbelief. In the latter days some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We expect that those who refuse to harmonize with Christ will develop into a warring element; but we should not think that this will do us harm. We must remember that they that are for us are more than they that can be against us. This is my hope and strength and power. I believe in God. I know in whom I believe. I believe the messages that God has given to His remnant church. From childhood I have had many, many experiences that have strengthened my faith in the work that God has given me to do.” –*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 37.

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MISSIONARY REPORT

from the Peruvian Union Health Department

To be read on Sabbath, February 24, 2018

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, March 3, 2018*

*“But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.”
John 11:22.*

Peru currently has a population of 31,800,000, and the country’s health system is unable to supply the needs of such a large population because of a lack of vision and proper resources. Meanwhile, natural medicine is well accepted, which is why many natural-healing clinics charge high prices for their services. Unfortunately, many such clinics lean toward spiritualism while using ineffective treatments.

On June 6, 1863, the Lord revealed the health message to His people and instructed them about the urgent need for sanitariums, where people can learn how to live according to the laws of health. This caused us in Peru to seriously consider expanding God’s work; and since health reform is the right arm of the third angel’s message, we studied how it might be possible to develop rehabilitation centers (sanitariums) in different parts of our country.

Such a large population requires a project that can meet the existing needs. In recent years, we have worked hard to carry out such a project. Just eighty minutes from the capital city is an area of 10,000 square meters dedicated to the construction of a facility in Huaral-Lima—the “Kozel” sanitarium, a secluded place away from the city where visitors can enjoy a peaceful stay and recovery. The treatments to be offered include hydrotherapy, geotherapy (healing clay), phytotherapy, heliotherapy, physical therapy, etc. All these services will be provided by specialists following established parameters, and we already have a staff of health professionals in the church, including naturopaths, nutritionists, biologists, doctors, nurses, and others.

Construction of the sanitarium is already underway. The plans are complete, and the permits have been obtained. Now what is needed is investment for completion of the first phase, after which we will provide all the services listed above.

There are eleven phases for the complete sanitarium: Artificial lagoons, a swimming pool, botanical gardens and landscaping, green areas, sauna, hospital rooms, organic orchards, vegetarian restaurant, stores, etc.

For the architectural, engineering, and first construction phases, we invite and appeal to all who desire to participate in this great work to give from a willing, generous heart and thus reap an abundance of souls for God’s kingdom, according to His promise.

We live in the final days of this world's history, and the Lord is about to come. Looking forward to this, we desire our sanitariums to shine as lights everywhere in the world, offering Heaven's message and restoring lives. Your contribution will help to make this project a reality, for God's glory.

*—Luis Mestanza
President of the Peruvian Union*

**SPECIAL SABBATH SCHOOL OFFERING FOR THE
PERUVIAN UNION HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

*Let your offerings reflect the abundant love
you have received from Heaven!*

9

Sabbath, March 3, 2018

Escaping a Syrian Attack

“Courage, fortitude, faith, and implicit trust in God’s power to save, do not come in a moment. These heavenly graces are acquired by the experience of years. By a life of holy endeavor and firm adherence to the right, the children of God were sealing their destiny. Beset with temptations without number, they knew they must resist firmly or be conquered.” –*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* (1922), p. 188.

SAMARIA UNDER SIEGE

1. What terrible siege occurred under the Syrian King Benhadad between B.C. 854 and 842?

2 KINGS 6:24, 25, FIRST PART *And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. ²⁵And there was a great famine in Samaria:...*

2. As a result of the siege, what became scarcer by the day? How severe did the conditions become?

2 KINGS 6:26-30 *And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. ²⁷And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress? ²⁸And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. ²⁹So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. ³⁰And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.*

“Will the Lord forget His people in this trying hour? Did He forget faithful Noah when judgments were visited upon the antediluvian world? Did He forget Lot when the fire came down from heaven to consume the cities of the plain?... Did He forget Elijah when the oath of Jezebel threatened him with the fate of the prophets of Baal? Did He forget Jeremiah in the dark and dismal pit of his prison house? Did He forget the three worthies in the fiery furnace? or Daniel in the den of lions?...” –*Conflict and Courage*, p. 369.

PROPHECY OF THE FAMINE'S END

- 3. In this seemingly impossible situation, what did a minister of the king say? While many were in complete despair, what divine revelation did the prophet Elisha give the king and people?**

2 KINGS 6:33; 7:1, 2 *And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?...⁷⁻¹Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. ²Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.*

“For a time after this, Israel was free from the attacks of the Syrians. But later, under the energetic direction of a determined king, Hazael, the Syrian hosts surrounded Samaria and besieged it. Never had Israel been brought into so great a strait as during this siege. The sins of the fathers were indeed being visited upon the children and the children’s children. The horrors of prolonged famine were driving the king of Israel to desperate measures, when Elisha predicted deliverance the following day.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 258.

- 4. What did four starving lepers decide to do?**

2 KINGS 7:3, 4 *And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? ⁴If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.*

“But those who doubt God’s promises and distrust the assurance of His grace are dishonoring Him; and their influence, instead of drawing others to Christ, tends to repel them from Him. They are unproductive trees, that spread their dark branches far and wide, shutting away the sunlight from other plants, and causing them to droop and die under the chilling shadow. The lifework of these persons will appear as a never-ceasing witness against them. They are sowing seeds of doubt and skepticism that will yield an unending harvest.

“There is but one course for those to pursue who honestly desire to be freed from doubts. Instead of questioning and caviling concerning that which they do not understand, let them give heed to the light which already shines upon them, and they will receive greater light. Let them do every duty which has been made plain to their understanding, and they will be enabled to understand and perform those of which they are now in doubt.” —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 527, 528.

CAUSE OF THE SYRIANS' FLIGHT

- 5. What miraculous means had the Lord used, without violence and bloodshed, to push back the Syrians and end the famine?**

2 KINGS 7:5-7 *And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no*

man there. ⁶For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. ⁷Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.

“As the next morning was about to dawn, the Lord ‘made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host;’ and they, seized with fear, ‘arose and fled in the twilight,’ leaving ‘their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was,’ with rich stores of food. They ‘fled for their life,’ not tarrying until after the Jordan had been crossed.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 258.

6. Did the lepers think only of themselves when they found the abundant spoils? To whom did they carry the wonderful news?

2 KINGS 7:8-11 *And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. ⁹Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. ¹⁰So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. ¹¹And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within.*

“During the night of the flight, four leprous men at the gate of the city, made desperate by hunger, had proposed to visit the Syrian camp and throw themselves upon the mercy of the besiegers, hoping thereby to arouse sympathy and obtain food. What was their astonishment when, entering the camp, they found ‘no man there.’ With none to molest or forbid, ‘they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.’ Quickly they returned to the city with the glad news.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 258, 259.

FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY

7. Who were thus blessed by everything that the Syrians left behind? If we had been in the lepers' position, would we have doubted or believed the Lord's promise?

2 KINGS 7:16 *And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.*

“Great was the spoil; so abundant were the supplies that on that day ‘a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel,’ as had been foretold by Elisha the day before. Once more the name of God was exalted before the heathen ‘according to the word of the Lord’ through His prophet in Israel. See 2 Kings 7:5-16.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 259.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Thus the man of God continued to labor from year to year, drawing close to the people in faithful ministry, and in times of crisis standing by the side of kings as a wise counselor. The long years of idolatrous backsliding on the part of rulers and people had wrought their baleful work; the dark shadow of apostasy was still everywhere apparent, yet here and there were those who had steadfastly refused to bow the knee to Baal. As Elisha continued his work of reform, many were reclaimed from heathenism, and these learned to rejoice in the service of the true God. The prophet was cheered by these miracles of divine grace, and he was inspired with a great longing to reach all who were honest in heart. Wherever he was, he endeavored to be a teacher of righteousness.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 259.

“If we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we cling to any known sin, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the penitent, contrite soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are righted, we may believe that God will answer our petitions. Our own merit will never commend us to the favor of God; it is the worthiness of Jesus that will save us, His blood that will cleanse us; yet we have a work to do in complying with the conditions of acceptance.

“Another element of prevailing prayer is faith. ‘He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ Hebrews 11:6. Jesus said to His disciples, ‘What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.’ Mark 11:24. Do we take Him at His word?” —*Steps to Christ*, pp. 95, 96.

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10

Sabbath, March 10, 2018

Warnings Unheeded

“In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be revealed to the nations of earth. Not all who were carried captive were impenitent. Among them were some who had remained true to God, and others who had humbled themselves before Him. Through these, ‘the sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10), He would bring multitudes in the Assyrian realm to a knowledge of the attributes of His character and the beneficence of His law.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.

PROPHECIES AGAINST APOSTATE ISRAEL

1. As a result of the continual apostasy in the northern kingdom (the ten tribes with their capital in Samaria), what did the prophets warn?

AMOS 7:17, LAST PART*Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.*

HOSEA 9:1, 3 *Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor....³They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean things in Assyria.*

“The words spoken against the apostate tribes were literally fulfilled; yet the destruction of the kingdom came gradually. In judgment the Lord remembered mercy...”
—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 287.

2. Who come against the country when Menahem reigned over Israel? How was the impending bloodshed and destruction avoided?

2 KINGS 15:19, 20 *And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. ²⁰And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land.*

“... At first, when ‘Pul the king of Assyria came against the land,’ Menahem, then king of Israel, was not taken captive, but was permitted to remain on the throne as a vassal of the Assyrian realm... The Assyrians, having humbled the ten tribes, returned for a season to their own land.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 287.

MORE ASSYRIAN ASSAULTS

3. Because of Israel’s persistent unfaithfulness, what Assyrian invasion did God stir up?

1 CHRONICLES 5:25, 26 *And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them. ²⁶And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpileser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day.*

2 KINGS 15:29 *In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.*

“Menahem, far from repenting of the evil that had wrought ruin in his kingdom, continued in ‘the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.’ Pekahiah and Pekah, his successors, also ‘did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.’ Verses 18, 24, 28. ‘In the days of Pekah,’ who reigned twenty years, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, invaded Israel and carried away with him a multitude of captives from among the tribes living in Galilee and east of the Jordan. ‘The Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh,’ with others of the inhabitants of ‘Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali’ (1 Chronicles 5:26; 2 Kings 15:29), were scattered among the heathen in lands far removed from Palestine.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 287.

4. What else happened under the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, as a result of the terrible apostasy?

2 KINGS 17:2-4 *And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. ³Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. ⁴And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.*

“From this terrible blow the northern kingdom never recovered. The feeble remnant continued the forms of government, though no longer possessed of power. Only one more ruler, Hoshea, was to follow Pekah. Soon the kingdom was to be swept away forever.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 287, 288.

THE FINAL BLOW

5. With the apostasy in Israel continuing without any evidence of repentance and reformation, what happened to the northern kingdom in B.C. 722?

2 KINGS 17:5, 6 *Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. ⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.*

“About two years later, Samaria was invested by the hosts of Assyria under Shalmaneser; and in the siege that followed, multitudes perished miserably of hunger and disease as well as by the sword. The city and nation fell, and the broken remnant of the ten tribes were carried away captive and scattered in the provinces of the Assyrian realm.

“The destruction that befell the northern kingdom was a direct judgment from Heaven. The Assyrians were merely the instruments that God used to carry out His purpose. Through Isaiah, who began to prophesy shortly before the fall of Samaria, the Lord referred to the Assyrian hosts as ‘the rod of Mine anger.’ ‘The staff in their hand,’ He said, ‘is Mine indignation.’ Isaiah 10:5.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 291.

6. What causes are listed in the Scriptures for the tragic experiences of the ten tribes?

2 KINGS 17:7-9, 18 *For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, ⁸And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. ⁹And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.... ¹⁸Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.*

“Grievously had the children of Israel ‘sinned against the Lord their God,... and wrought wicked things.’ ‘They would not hear, but ... rejected His statutes, and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He testified against them.’ It was because they had ‘left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal,’ and refused steadfastly to repent, that the Lord ‘afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight,’ in harmony with the plain warnings He had sent them ‘by all His servants the prophets.’

“‘So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria,’ ‘because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded.’ 2 Kings 17:7, 11, 14-16, 20, 23; 18:12.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 291, 292.

THE BEST PREVENTION

7. What would have characterized the history of Israel if with living faith they had listened to the messages of the prophets and followed the divine principles that the Lord gave them?

DEUTERONOMY 32:29; 5:29 *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!...^{5:29}O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!*

PSALM 119:165 *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

“Had Israel heeded the messages of the prophets, they would have been spared the humiliation that followed. It was because they had persisted in turning aside from His law that God was compelled to let them go into captivity. ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,’ was His message to them through Hosea. ‘Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee:... seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God.’ Hosea 4:6...

“In the last days of this earth’s history, God’s covenant with His commandment-keeping people is to be renewed. ‘In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 299.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“The Israelites had been specially charged not to lose sight of the commandments of God, in obedience to which they would find strength and blessing. ‘Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently,’ had been the word of the Lord to them through Moses, ‘lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.’ Deuteronomy 4:9. The awe-inspiring scenes connected with the giving of the law at Sinai were never to be forgotten. Plain and decided were the warnings that had been given Israel against the idolatrous customs prevailing among the neighboring nations. ‘Take ye ... good heed unto yourselves,’ was the counsel given; ‘lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure,’ ‘and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.’ ‘Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which He made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of anything, which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee.’ Deuteronomy 4:15, 16, 19, 23....

“The apostasy of Israel had developed gradually. From generation to generation, Satan had made repeated attempts to cause the chosen nation to forget ‘the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments’ that they had promised to keep forever. Deuteronomy 6:1. He knew that if he could only lead Israel to forget God, and to ‘walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them,’ they would ‘surely perish.’ Deuteronomy 8:19.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 294-296.

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Miraculous Deliverance

“Nothing more quickly inspires faith than the exercise of faith. The king of Judah had prepared for the coming storm; and now, confident that the prophecy against the Assyrians would be fulfilled, he stayed his soul upon God. ‘And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah.’ 2 Chronicles 32:8. What though the armies of Assyria, fresh from the conquest of the greatest nations of earth, and triumphant over Samaria in Israel, should now turn their forces against Judah? What though they should boast, ‘As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?’ Isaiah 10:10, 11. Judah had nothing to fear; for their trust was in Jehovah....

“With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 351, 352, 364.

ASSYRIAN ATTACKS AGAINST JUDAH

1. What military campaign did the Assyrian King Sennacherib undertake in B.C. 701 against the kingdom of Judah? What threat did his general Rabshakeh make?

2 KINGS 18:13, 29-31 *Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them....* ²⁹*Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: ³⁰Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. ³¹Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern.*

“The long-expected crisis finally came. The forces of Assyria, advancing from triumph to triumph, appeared in Judea. Confident of victory, the leaders divided their forces into two armies, one of which was to meet the Egyptian army to the southward, while the other was to besiege Jerusalem.

“Judah’s only hope was now in God. All possible help from Egypt had been cut off, and no other nations were near to lend a friendly hand.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 352.

2. Did the intimidating speech of Rabshakeh plant seeds of doubt against only King Hezekiah, or did it go far beyond that?

2 KINGS 18:34, 35 *Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? ³⁵Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?*

“The Assyrian officers, sure of the strength of their disciplined forces, arranged for a conference with the chief men of Judah, during which they insolently demanded the surrender of the city. This demand was accompanied by blasphemous revilings against the God of the Hebrews. Because of the weakness and apostasy of Israel and Judah, the name of God was no longer feared among the nations, but had become a subject for continual reproach. See Isaiah 52:5.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 352.

EFFECTS ON THE KING AND THE PEOPLE

3. Did the Jewish people try to argue with the Assyrian general when they heard his horrible threats? How were King Hezekiah’s officers affected?

2 KINGS 18:36, 37 *But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not. ³⁷Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.*

“To these taunts the children of Judah ‘answered him not a word.’ The conference was at an end. The Jewish representatives returned to Hezekiah ‘with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.’ Verses 21, 22. The king, upon learning of the blasphemous challenge, ‘rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.’ 2 Kings 19:1.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 354.

4. How did King Hezekiah feel about these terrible threats against his people? Nevertheless, what wise decision did he make?

2 KINGS 19:1-4 *And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. ²And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. ³And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. ⁴It may be the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left.*

“A messenger was dispatched to Isaiah to inform him of the outcome of the conference. ‘This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy,’ was the word the king sent....

“‘For this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to Heaven.’ 2 Chronicles 32:20.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 354.

5. What immediate, comforting answer did the prophet send to King Hezekiah through the messengers? However, what further blasphemy against God was spoken by the cruel, menacing enemies?

2 KINGS 19:5-7, 10-13 *So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. ⁶And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.... ¹⁰Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest*

deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. ¹¹Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? ¹²Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? ¹³Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?

SECOND APPEAL TO GOD

6. Where did King Hezekiah again seek for help? What clear answer did the Lord give His servant regarding the proud Assyrians?

2 KINGS 19:14, 15, 20-22 *And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵And 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.... ²⁰Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. ²¹This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. ²²Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.*

“When the king of Judah received the taunting letter, he took it into the temple and ‘spread it before the Lord’ and prayed with strong faith for help from heaven, that the nations of earth might know that the God of the Hebrews still lived and reigned. Verse 14. The honor of Jehovah was at stake; He alone could bring deliverance.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 355.

7. What prevailed—the force of Assyrian arms, or the word of God that they had blasphemed? How did the terrible crisis end? What great encouragement can God’s people today find in this experience?

2 KINGS 19:32-37 *Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. ³³By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. ³⁴For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake. ³⁵And 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. ³⁶So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. ³⁷And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia.*

“The land of Judah had been laid waste by the army of occupation, but God had promised to provide miraculously for the needs of the people....

“Tidings of this terrible judgment upon the army that had been sent to take Jerusalem, soon reached Sennacherib, who was still guarding the approach to Judea from Egypt. Stricken with fear, the Assyrian king hastened to depart and ‘returned with shame of

face to his own land.' Verse 21. But he had not long to reign. In harmony with the prophecy that had been uttered concerning his sudden end, he was assassinated by those of his own home, 'and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.' Isaiah 37:38.

"The God of the Hebrews had prevailed over the proud Assyrian. The honor of Jehovah was vindicated in the eyes of the surrounding nations. In Jerusalem the hearts of the people were filled with holy joy. Their earnest entreaties for deliverance had been mingled with confession of sin and with many tears. In their great need they had trusted wholly in the power of God to save, and He had not failed them. Now the temple courts resounded with songs of solemn praise." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 360-362.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

2 Kings, chapters 18, 19

2 Chronicles, chapter 32

Isaiah, chapters 36, 37

Prophets and Kings, Chapter 30 ("Deliverance from Assyria"), pp. 349-366.

"... The rulers of Assyria, instead of using their unusual blessings for the benefit of mankind, became the scourge of many lands. Merciless, with no thought of God or their fellow men, they pursued the fixed policy of causing all nations to acknowledge the supremacy of the gods of Nineveh, whom they exalted above the Most High. God had sent Jonah to them with a message of warning, and for a season they humbled themselves before the Lord of hosts and sought forgiveness. But soon they turned again to idol worship and to the conquest of the world....

"The pride of Assyria and its fall are to serve as an object lesson to the end of time. Of the nations of earth today who in arrogance and pride array themselves against Him, God inquires, 'To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth.' Verse 18." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 363, 366.

* * *

Fall of Judah

“The Lord bears long with men, and when they manifest a determination to follow their own judgments, the Lord allows them to do so. I have been made to see the weakness and ignorance of fallen man, even in his best estate. As man goes deeper and deeper in his studies, improving in learning the will and ways of the Lord, he sees more of his own ignorance, thus revealing that he has made decided progress from the beginning.” —*This Day with God*, p. 16.

TRANSGRESSIONS AND ABUSES IN JUDAH

- 1. In the time of Jeremiah the prophet, what transgressions were committed in the kingdom of Judah? What serious warning did the Lord send to the leaders and people?**

JEREMIAH 17:21-23, 27 *Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; ²²Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. ²³But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.... ²⁷But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.*

“The Lord desires everyone to work for his own spiritual and eternal good. This can only be done as we obey the lessons Christ has given. If we gain the eternal reward, we must follow the example of Christ, our Pattern, who did good and only good with the Lord’s entrusted talents. He cheerfully gave up His life to ransom a wicked, apostate race. But today selfishness, worldliness, pride, and self-indulgence are constantly consuming the means entrusted to those who claim to be Christians. They are misappropriating the money that the Lord requires them to use to bring many sons and daughters to Him.” —*The Upward Look*, p. 234.

“Thus it was that ‘in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem’ the message of Jeremiah to Judah was, ‘Hear ye the words of this covenant,’—the plain precepts of Jehovah as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures—and do them.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 414.

- 2. What other sins and irregularities were committed, despite the people’s solemn covenant with the Lord?**

JEREMIAH 25:6, 7; 34:8-11, 17, 18 *And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. ⁷Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the Lord; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.... ^{34:8}This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; ⁹That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess,*

go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. ¹⁰Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. ¹¹But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.... ¹⁷Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof.

“Before you is the path that leads to certain ruin. Will you turn while you can? Will you seek the Lord while Mercy’s sweet voice is appealing to you, or will you still have your own way? The Lord pities you. The Lord invites you. Will you come?”

“May the Lord help you to choose to be wholly the Lord’s.” –(Letter 51, 1889) *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 44.

THE KING’S RESPONSIBILITY

3. What do the Scriptures report concerning Zedekiah, the last king of Judah?

2 CHRONICLES 36:11-13 *Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹²And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. ¹³And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel.*

“Through Daniel and others of the Hebrew captives, the Babylonian monarch had been made acquainted with the power and supreme authority of the true God; and when Zedekiah once more solemnly promised to remain loyal, Nebuchadnezzar required him to swear to this promise in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Had Zedekiah respected this renewal of his covenant oath, his loyalty would have had a profound influence on the minds of many who were watching the conduct of those who claimed to reverence the name and to cherish the honor of the God of the Hebrews.

“But Judah’s king lost sight of his high privilege of bringing honor to the name of the living God.” –*Prophets and Kings*, p. 447.

APOSTASY ALSO AMONG THE PRIESTS

4. What particularly deplorable condition had arisen among the chief priests and the majority of the people?

2 CHRONICLES 36:14-16 *Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. ¹⁵And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: ¹⁶But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.*

“The children of the world are called the children of darkness. They are blinded by the god of this world, and are led by the spirit of the prince of darkness. They cannot enjoy heavenly things. The children of light have their affections set on things above. They leave behind them the things of this world. They fulfill the command: Come out from among them, and be ye separate.’ Here is the conditional promise: ‘I will receive you.’ From the beginning, Christ has chosen His people out of the world and required them to be separate, having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. If they love God and keep His commandments, they will be far from having the friendship, and loving the pleasures, of the world. There is no concord between Christ and Belial.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 279.

“The Jewish nation is before us as an example of the termination of God’s long forbearance. In the destruction of Jerusalem the destruction of the world is typified. The lips of Him who ever pronounced blessings upon the penitent, and spoke encouragement to the poor and suffering, and brought gladness to the humble, pronounced a curse upon those to whom He had presented light, who would not appreciate or accept light. Those who thought to evade the clear, distinct Word of God, and cherish man-made traditions, He declared would be found guilty of all the blood of the prophets which had been slain from the foundation of the world.” – Undated Manuscript 145.

“Because of the sins of Israel, the calamity which God said should come upon the temple, if His people departed from Him, was fulfilled some hundreds of years after the temple was built. God promised Solomon, if he would remain faithful, and His people would obey all His commandments, that that glorious temple should stand forever in all its splendor, as an evidence of the prosperity and exalted blessings resting upon Israel for their obedience.

“Because of Israel’s transgression of the commandments of God, and their wicked acts, God suffered them to go into captivity to humble and punish them. Before the temple was destroyed, God made known to a few of His faithful servants the fate of the temple, which was the pride of Israel, and which they regarded with idolatry, while they were sinning against God. He also revealed to them the captivity of Israel.” –*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, pp. 114, 115.

JERUSALEM UNDER SIEGE BY THE BABYLONIANS

5. According to prophecy, who came against Jerusalem? What difficult situation developed after many months of siege?

2 KINGS 25:1-4 *And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it: and they built forts against it round about. ²And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. ³And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. ⁴And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king’s garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain.*

“God made Zion His holy habitation, the joy of the whole earth. But notwithstanding His goodness to His chosen people, they forgot Him, and wandered into idolatry. Before their dispersion, repeated warnings came to them; but ‘they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in His Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.’

“If men refuse to receive the admonitions of the Lord, if they persist in walking contrary to His instruction, He cannot deliver them from the sure consequences of their own course. If they place themselves in opposition to His purposes, and forsake the principles of heaven, He permits their enemies to humble them.” —*The Youth’s Instructor*, May 14, 1903.

THE FALL OF THE KINGDOM

6. Since there were no spiritual revival and reformation, what happened to the kingdom of Judah and the temple in B.C. 587/586?

2 CHRONICLES 36:17-20 *Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. ²⁰And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia.*

“The weakness of Zedekiah was a sin for which he paid a fearful penalty. The enemy swept down like a resistless avalanche and devastated the city. The Hebrew armies were beaten back in confusion. The nation was conquered. Zedekiah was taken prisoner, and his sons were slain before his eyes. The king was led away from Jerusalem a captive, his eyes were put out, and after arriving in Babylon he perished miserably. The beautiful temple that for more than four centuries had crowned the summit of Mount Zion was not spared by the Chaldeans...’

“At the time of the final overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, many had escaped the horrors of the long siege, only to perish by the sword. Of those who still remained, some, notably the chief of the priests and officers and the princes of the realm, were taken to Babylon and there executed as traitors. Others were carried captive, to live in servitude to Nebuchadnezzar and to his sons ‘until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah.’ Verses 20, 21.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 458-460.

PROMISE OF RESTORATION

7. How long was the land of Judah to remain desolate and the people subservient to the king of Babylon? What would happen after seventy years of Babylonian captivity?

2 CHRONICLES 36:21 *To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

JEREMIAH 7:23; 29:10; 33:11 *Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.... ^{29:10}For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.... ^{33:11}The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the*

Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord.

“... Israel had been chosen to preserve the knowledge of God in the earth, they had been, from their first existence as a nation, the special objects of Satan’s enmity, and he had determined to cause their destruction. He could do them no harm while they were obedient to God; therefore he had bent all his power and cunning to enticing them into sin. Ensnared by his temptations, they had transgressed the law of God and thus separated from the Source of their strength, and had been left to become the prey of their heathen enemies. They were carried into captivity to Babylon, and there remained for many years. Yet they were not forsaken of the Lord. His prophets were sent to them with reproofs and warnings. The people were awakened to see their guilt, they humbled themselves before God, and returned to Him with true repentance. Then the Lord sent them messages of encouragement, declaring that He would deliver them from their captivity and restore them to His favor.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 467.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

2 Kings, chapter 25

2 Chronicles 36:11-21

Jeremiah, chapters 34, 39

“The nearer the Christian lives to God, the more he advances in divine illumination of mind. He has more distinct sense of his own littleness, discerns his defects of character, and sees his duty in the light in which God presents it. The more closely he draws to Jesus, the more he has a near and clear sense of his own defects which had before escaped his notice, and he sees the necessity of humbling himself under the mighty hand of God. If lifted up it will not be because he lifts and exalts himself, but because the Lord exalts him. Having his eye fixed upon the purity and perfection of Christ Jesus, and acknowledging and obeying God in all his ways, he is not blinded to his own failures and imperfections. When his deportment in the eyes of men is unblamable and irreprovable, God reads the intents and purposes of the heart.

“Christian humility is a wonderful grace—the very antidote to the apostasy of Satan, which has unholy ambition and every delusion that he can frame. The grace of humility through Christ Jesus will make an imperfect man discern his imperfections and make him meet for the inheritance of the saints, where God is all and in all...” –*This Day with God*, p. 16.

* * *

Seeking Information and an Explanation

“Soon after Daniel and his companions entered the service of the king of Babylon, events occurred that revealed to an idolatrous nation the power and faithfulness of the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had a remarkable dream, by which ‘his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.’ But although the king’s mind was deeply impressed, he found it impossible, when he awoke, to recall the particulars.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 491.

1. What happened to King Nebuchadnezzar in the second year of his reign—close to the beginning of his career? How was he affected by what he had seen?

DANIEL 2:1-3 *And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. ²Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. ³And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.*

“While King Nebuchadnezzar was looking forward with anxious forebodings to the future, he had a remarkable dream, by which he was greatly troubled, ‘and his sleep brake from him.’ Daniel 2:1. But although this vision of the night made a deep impression on his mind, he found it impossible to recall the particulars. He applied to his astrologers and magicians, and with promises of great wealth and honor commanded them to tell him his dream and its interpretation.” —*The Sanctified Life*, p. 34.

SEEKING HELP FROM UNQUALIFIED PEOPLE

2. Were the magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers able to tell the king what he had dreamed and what it meant?

DANIEL 2:4-6 *Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation. ⁵The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. ⁶But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof.*

“The king knew that if they could really tell the interpretation, they could tell the dream as well. The Lord had in His providence given Nebuchadnezzar this dream, and had caused the particulars to be forgotten, while the fearful impression was left upon his mind, in order to expose the pretensions of the wise men of Babylon. The monarch was very angry, and threatened that they should all be slain if, in a given time, the dream was not made known.” —*The Sanctified Life*, pp. 34, 35.

3. After further discussion with the king, what conclusion did the Babylonian wise men have to come to? What were the consequences of this? In addition to theirs, whose lives were at stake?

DANIEL 2:10-13 *The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. ¹¹And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. ¹²For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.*

“Nebuchadnezzar demanded not only the interpretation of the dream, but the relation of the dream itself....

“They [the Chaldeans] declared that the request of the king was something unreasonable, and the test beyond that which had ever been required of any man. The king became furious, and acted like all men who have great power and uncontrollable passions. He decided that every one of them should be put to death, and as Daniel and his fellows were numbered with the wise men, they also were to share this fate....” –*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 216.

LOOKING TO GOD FOR THE ANSWER

4. What did Daniel do in the face of this danger? What did he do with his companions in faith as soon as he returned home? What would we have done in such a situation?

DANIEL 2:14-18 *Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: ¹⁵He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. ¹⁶Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation. ¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: ¹⁸That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

“Our God is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Daniel sought the Lord when the decree went forth to slay all the wise men of the kingdom of Babylon because they could not relate or interpret a dream which had gone from the king's mind....

“Daniel came before the king, and pleaded for time to bring this matter before the supreme court of the universe, from whose decision there could be no appeal. When his request was granted, Daniel laid the whole matter before his companions, who were united with him in worshiping the true God. The matter was fully considered, and on their bended knees they pleaded that God would give them the power and wisdom that would alone avail them in their great necessity....” –*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 216.

“Together they sought for wisdom from the Source of light and knowledge. Their faith was strong in the consciousness that God had placed them where they were, that they were doing His work and meeting the demands of duty. In times of perplexity and danger they had always turned to Him for guidance and protection, and He had proved

an ever-present help. Now with contrition of heart they submitted themselves anew to the Judge of the earth, pleading that He would grant them deliverance in this their time of special need. And they did not plead in vain. The God whom they had honored, now honored them. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon them, and to Daniel, 'in a night vision,' was revealed the king's dream and its meaning." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 493, 494.

5. How did the Lord answer the petitions of His faithful children? What did Daniel do without wasting time?

DANIEL 2:19, 20, 24, 25 *Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. ²⁰Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:... ²⁴Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation. ²⁵Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.*

"Daniel was imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and he pleaded that the wise men of Babylon should not be destroyed. The followers of Christ do not possess the attributes of Satan, which make it a pleasure to grieve and afflict the creatures of God. They have the spirit of their Master who said, 'I am come to seek and to save that which was lost. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' Had Daniel possessed the same quality of religious zeal which is so quickly inflamed today in the churches, and men are led by it to afflict and oppress and destroy those who do not serve God after their prescribed plan, he would have said to Arioch, 'These men who claim to be wise men, are deceiving the king. They have not the knowledge they claim to have, and should be destroyed. They dishonor the God of heaven, they serve idols, and their lives in no way do honor to God; let them die; but bring me in before the king and I will show unto the king the interpretation.'" —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 251.

ALL HONOR TO GOD ALONE

6. Standing before the king, what did Daniel make clear in regard to the knowledge of secret things? How important was it for him to deflect the attention from himself and direct all credit and glory to God alone?

DANIEL 2:26-28 *The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? ²⁷Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; ²⁸But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these.*

"Behold the Jewish captive, calm and self-possessed, in the presence of the monarch of the world's most powerful empire. In his first words he disclaimed honor for himself and exalted God as the source of all wisdom. Daniel 2:26-28 quoted." —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 250.

7. Whom did the king glorify as the One who knows and reveals secrets? What happened to Daniel after he presented the dream and its interpretation?

DANIEL 2:46-49 Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. ⁴⁷The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. ⁴⁸Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

“Men of promise in business lines should develop and perfect their talents by most thorough study and training. They should be encouraged to place themselves where, as students, they can rapidly gain a knowledge of right business principles and methods. Not one business man now connected with the cause needs to be a novice. If men in any line of work ought to improve their opportunities to become wise and efficient, it is those who are using their ability in the work of building up the kingdom of God in our world. In view of the fact that we are living so near the close of this earth’s history, there should be greater thoroughness in labor, more vigilant waiting, watching, praying, and working. The human agent should strive to attain perfection, that he may be an ideal Christian, complete in Christ Jesus.

“... Those who labor in business lines should take every precaution against falling into error through wrong principles or methods. Their record may be like that of Daniel in the courts of Babylon. When all his business transactions were subjected to the closest scrutiny, not one faulty item could be found. The record of his business life, incomplete though it is, contains lessons worthy of study. It reveals the fact that a businessman is not necessarily a scheming, policy man. He may be a man instructed of God at every step.”
—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 248.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Daniel was a man of prayer, and God gave him wisdom and firmness to resist every influence that conspired to draw him into the snare of intemperance. Even in his youth he was a moral giant in the strength of the Mighty One...” —*My Life Today*, p. 20.

“In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 499, 500.

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Companions Severely Tested

“From age to age the heroes of faith have been marked by their fidelity to God, and they have been brought conspicuously before the world that their light might shine to those in darkness. Daniel and his three companions are illustrious examples of Christian heroism.... From their experience in the court of Babylon we may learn what God will do for those who serve Him with full purpose of heart.” —*My Life Today*, p. 68.

A REPRESENTATION OF HUMAN PRIDE

1. **After achieving victories and greatness, what did King Nebuchadnezzar order to be constructed and set up on the plain of Dura? Whom did he invite to the dedication?**

DANIEL 3:1, 2 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ²Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.*

“In the place of God’s laws are elevated the laws of the man of sin—laws that are to be received and regarded as the wonderful golden image of Nebuchadnezzar was by the Babylonians. Forming this great image, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that it should receive universal homage from all, both great and small, high and low, rich and poor.” — (Manuscript 24, 1891) *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 243.

“From his rich store of treasure, Nebuchadnezzar caused to be made a great golden image, similar in its general features to that which had been seen in vision, save in the one particular of the material of which it was composed. Accustomed as they were to magnificent representations of their heathen deities, the Chaldeans had never before produced anything so imposing and majestic as this resplendent statue, threescore cubits in height and six cubits in breadth. And it is not surprising that in a land where idol worship was of universal prevalence, the beautiful and priceless image in the plain of Dura, representing the glory of Babylon and its magnificence and power, should be consecrated as an object of worship. This was accordingly provided for, and a decree went forth that on the day of the dedication all should show their supreme loyalty to the Babylonian power by bowing before the image.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 505, 506.

2. **What did the king’s command require of everyone present? Accordingly, what did the representatives of the nations do when the music began to play?**

DANIEL 3:4-7 *Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, ⁵That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: ⁶And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall*

the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ⁷Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

“A severe test came to ... these youth when Nebuchadnezzar issued a proclamation, calling upon all the officers of the kingdom to assemble at the dedication of the great image, and at the sound of the musical instruments, to bow down and worship it. Should any fail of doing this, they were immediately to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. The worship of this image had been brought about by the wise men of Babylon in order to make the Hebrew youth join in their idolatrous worship. They were beautiful singers, and the Chaldeans wanted them to forget their God and accept the worship of the Babylonian idols.” —*My Life Today*, p. 68.

FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE TO GOD

3. Of all the representatives and dignitaries present, who alone did not bow and worship the gold image? What accusation did some officials immediately make against the three faithful young Hebrews?

DANIEL 3:8-12 *Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. ⁹They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. ¹⁰Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: ¹¹And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

“The appointed day came, and at the sound of the music, the vast company that had assembled at the king’s command ‘fell down and worshiped the golden image.’ But these faithful young men would not bow down....” —*My Life Today*, p. 68.

“On that eventful day the powers of darkness seemed to be gaining a signal triumph; the worship of the golden image bade fair to become connected permanently with the established forms of idolatry recognized as the state religion of the land. Satan hoped thereby to defeat God’s purpose of making the presence of captive Israel in Babylon a means of blessing to all the nations of heathendom.

“But God decreed otherwise. Not all had bowed the knee to the idolatrous symbol of human power. In the midst of the worshipping multitude there were three men who were firmly resolved not thus to dishonor the God of heaven. Their God was King of kings and Lord of lords; they would bow to none other.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 506.

4. How did the king react? Summoned to appear before the furious sovereign, what did the Hebrew young men answer him?

DANIEL 3:13, 14, 16-18 *Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?... ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver*

us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

“As the three Hebrews stood before the king, he was convinced that they possessed something the other wise men of his kingdom did not have. They had been faithful in the performance of every duty. He would give them another trial. If only they would signify their willingness to unite with the multitude in worshipping the image, all would be well with them; ‘but if ye worship not,’ he added, ‘ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.’ Then with his hand stretched upward in defiance, he demanded, ‘Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?’...

“From the history of their fathers they had learned that disobedience to God results in dishonor, disaster, and death; and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the foundation of all true prosperity.... Their faith strengthened as they declared that God would be glorified by delivering them, and with triumphant assurance born of implicit trust in God, they added, ‘But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 507, 508.

5. Furious with rage, what order did the ruler give? What happened to the three faithful men?

DANIEL 3:19-22 *Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. ²⁰And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²²Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.*

“When the king saw that his will was not received as the will of God, he was ‘full of fury,’ and the form of his visage was changed against these men. Satanic attributes made his countenance appear as the countenance of a demon; and with all the force he could command, he ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than its wont, and commanded the most mighty men to bind the youth, and cast them into the furnace. He felt that it required more than ordinary power to deal with these noble men. His mind was strongly impressed that something unusual would interpose in their behalf, and his strongest men were ordered to deal with them.” —*Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1897.

MIRACULOUSLY PROTECTED AND DEFENDED

6. What did the astonished King Nebuchadnezzar see happen right in front of him?

DANIEL 3:23-27 *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²⁴Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. ²⁵He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. ²⁶Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither.*

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. ²⁷And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

"These faithful Hebrews possessed great natural ability and intellectual culture, and they occupied a high position of honor; but all these advantages did not lead them to forget God. All their powers were yielded to the sanctifying influence of divine grace. By their godly example, their steadfast integrity, they showed forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. In their wonderful deliverance was displayed, before that vast assembly, the power and majesty of God. Jesus placed Himself by their side in the fiery furnace, and by the glory of His presence convinced the proud king of Babylon that it could be no other than the Son of God. The light of heaven had been shining forth from Daniel and his companions, until all their associates understood the faith which ennobled their lives and beautified their characters." *—(Review and Herald, February 1, 1881) My Life Today, p. 256.*

7. How was the three companions' loyalty rewarded? In this experience, who was honored? What similar experiences can and do we make?

DANIEL 3:28-30 *Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon.*

"In their wonderful deliverance were displayed, before that vast assembly, the power and majesty of God. Jesus placed Himself by their side in the fiery furnace, and by the glory of His presence convinced the proud king of Babylon that it could be no other than the Son of God. The light of Heaven had been shining forth from Daniel and his companions, until all their associates understood the faith which ennobled their lives and beautified their characters. By the deliverance of His faithful servants, the Lord declares that He will take His stand with the oppressed and overthrow all earthly powers that would trample upon the authority of the God of heaven." *—Reflecting Christ, p. 88.*

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"What a lesson is here given to the fainthearted, the vacillating, the cowardly in the cause of God! What encouragement to those who will not be turned aside from duty by threats or peril! These faithful, steadfast characters exemplify sanctification, while they have no thought of claiming the high honor. The amount of good which may be accomplished by comparatively obscure but devoted Christians cannot be estimated until the life records shall be made known, when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened.

"Christ identifies His interest with this class; He is not ashamed to call them brethren. There should be hundreds where there is now one among us, so closely allied to God, their lives in such close conformity to His will, that they would be bright and shining lights, sanctified wholly, in soul, body, and spirit." *—Reflecting Christ, p. 88.*

* * *

Handwriting on the Wall

“How were those punished who in olden time made light of what God had chosen as sacred to Himself? Belshazzar and his thousand lords profaned the golden vessels of Jehovah and praised the idols of Babylon. But the God whom they defied was a witness of the unholy scene. In the midst of their sacrilegious mirth a bloodless hand was seen tracing mysterious characters upon the palace wall. Filled with terror, king and courtiers heard their doom pronounced by the servant of the Most High.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 244.

SACRILEGIOUS REVELRY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- 1. What great event did Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, organize? What was honored and worshipped when he and the people drank wine from the sacred vessels of God’s temple?**

DANIEL 5:1-4 *Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. ²Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. ³Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. ⁴They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.*

“God ascribes the wickedness of Babylon to her gluttony and drunkenness.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 162.

“I cannot now consider this history further, but I ask you in every city, in every town, in every household, I ask every individual, to study the lesson of this scripture, bearing in mind the words of inspiration, ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.’ Here is presented the only election that is brought to view in the word of God. It is those who take heed lest they fall that will be accepted at last. There can be no presumption more fatal than that which leads men to venture upon a course of self-pleasing. In view of this solemn warning from God, should not fathers and mothers take heed? Should they not faithfully point out to the youth the dangers that are constantly arising to lead them away from God? Many allow the youth to attend parties of pleasure, thinking that amusement is essential for health and happiness; but what dangers are in that path! The more the desire for pleasure is gratified, the more it is cultivated and the stronger it becomes. The life experience is largely made up of self-gratification in amusement. God bids us to beware. ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.’” —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 103.

- 2. What suddenly appeared on the wall of the banquet hall? How did the king and his lords react to this?**

DANIEL 5:5-9 *In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace: and the king saw the*

part of the hand that wrote. ⁶Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. ⁷The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. ⁸Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. ⁹Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

"A Watcher, who was unrecognized, but whose presence was a power of condemnation, looked on this scene of profanation. Soon the unseen and uninvited Guest made His presence felt. At the moment when the sacrilegious revelry was at its height, a bloodless hand came forth, and wrote words of doom on the wall of the banqueting hall. Burning words followed the movements of the hand. 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,' was written in letters of flame. Few were the characters traced by that hand on the wall facing the king, but they showed that the power of God was there.

"Belshazzar was afraid. His conscience was awakened. The fear and suspicion that always follow the course of the guilty seized him. When God makes men fear, they cannot hide the intensity of their terror. Alarm seized the great men of the kingdom. Their blasphemous disrespect of sacred things was changed in a moment. A frantic terror overcame all self-control....

"In vain the king tried to read the burning letters. He had found a power too strong for him. He could not read the writing." —*The Youth's Instructor*, May 19, 1898.

WISE COUNSEL FROM THE QUEEN

3. Whom did the queen suggest should be called when the Babylonian magicians and counselors were unable to read the burning letters? What beautiful testimony did she give of Daniel?

DANIEL 5:10-12 *Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: ¹¹There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; ¹²Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.*

"Daniel loved, feared, and obeyed God. Yet he did not flee away from the world to avoid its corrupting influence. In the providence of God he was to be in the world yet not of the world. With all the temptations and fascinations of court life surrounding him, he stood in the integrity of his soul, firm as a rock in his adherence to principle. He made God his strength and was not forsaken of Him in his time of greatest need." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 569, 570.

4. Before that great assembly, what did King Belshazzar say to Daniel? What promise did the king make to the prophet if he would read the mysterious writing and explain its meaning?

DANIEL 5:13-16 *Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? ¹⁴I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. ¹⁵And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing: ¹⁶And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

“Those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour have the privilege of being educated and trained in a higher school than that of men, and of being tutored under higher wisdom than that of finite beings. They may come under the tutorship of the greatest Teacher the world ever knew, and partake of the same knowledge that He gave to Daniel. Those who are humble in heart, those who feel their need of higher wisdom and do not rely upon their own finite judgment, but search earnestly to know the will of God, may draw from the Source of all knowledge, and obtain grace, prudence, discretion, and judgment. They will realize the fulfillment of the assurance of God’s Word: ‘The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.’ Psalm 119:130.” —*That I May Know Him*, p. 126.

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE PAST

5. Was Daniel impressed by the king’s promises and proposed gifts? Referring to King Nebuchadnezzar, of what did Daniel remind the king? Who rules in the kingdoms of men?

DANIEL 5:17-21 *Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. ¹⁸O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: ¹⁹And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. ²⁰But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: ²¹And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.*

“Before that terror-stricken throng, Daniel, unmoved by the promises of the king, stood in the quiet dignity of a servant of the Most High, not to speak words of flattery, but to interpret a message of doom. [Daniel 5:15 quoted.]

“The prophet first reminded Belshazzar of matters with which he was familiar, but which had not taught him the lesson of humility that might have saved him. He spoke of Nebuchadnezzar’s sin and fall, and of the Lord’s dealings with him—the dominion and glory bestowed upon him, the divine judgment for his pride, and his subsequent acknowledgment of the power and mercy of the God of Israel; and then in bold and emphatic words he rebuked Belshazzar for his great wickedness. He held the king’s sin up before him, showing him the lessons he might have learned but did not. Belshazzar had not read aright the ex-

perience of his grandfather, nor heeded the warning of events so significant to himself. The opportunity of knowing and obeying the true God had been given him, but had not been taken to heart, and he was about to reap the consequence of his rebellion.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 529.

6. Had Belshazzar learned anything from the lessons the Lord had given to his grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar? What was the purpose of the handwriting on the wall?

DANIEL 5:22-24 *And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; ²³But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: ²⁴Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.*

“I have been shown what man is without a knowledge of the will of God. Crimes and iniquity fill up the measure of his life. But when the Spirit of God reveals to him the full meaning of the law, what a change takes place in his heart! Like Belshazzar, he reads intelligently the handwriting of the Almighty, and conviction takes possession of his soul. The thunders of God’s word startle him from his lethargy, and he calls for mercy in the name of Jesus. And to that humble plea God always listens with a willing ear. He never turns the penitent away comfortless.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 14.

CONCLUSION OF THE BANQUET AND THE KING’S LIFE

7. What made it possible for Daniel to read and interpret the mysterious handwriting? How would we feel if we saw the Lord announce and execute a similar judgment on a friend or relative?

DANIEL 5:25-31 *And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. ²⁶This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. ²⁷TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. ²⁸PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. ²⁹Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. ³¹And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.*

“While still in the festal hall, surrounded by those whose doom has been sealed, the king is informed by a messenger that ‘his city is taken’ by the enemy against whose devices he had felt so secure; ‘that the passages are stopped,... and the men of war are affrighted.’ Verses 31, 32. Even while he and his nobles were drinking from the sacred vessels of Jehovah, and praising their gods of silver and of gold, the Medes and the Persians, having turned the Euphrates out of its channel, were marching into the heart of the unguarded city. The army of Cyrus now stood under the walls of the palace; the city was filled with the soldiers of the enemy, ‘as with caterpillars’ (verse 14); and their triumphant shouts could be heard above the despairing cries of the astonished revelers.

“‘In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain,’ and an alien monarch sat upon the throne.

“Clearly had the Hebrew prophets spoken concerning the manner in which Babylon should fall. As in vision God had revealed to them the events of the future, they had exclaimed: ‘How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an astonishment among the nations!’ ‘How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!’ ‘At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations.’” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 531, 532.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“The church cannot measure herself by the world nor by the opinion of men nor by what she once was. Her faith and her position in the world as they now are must be compared with what they would have been if her course had been continually onward and upward. The church will be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. If her moral character and spiritual state do not correspond with the benefits and blessings God has conferred upon her, she will be found wanting. The light has been shining clear and definite upon her pathway, and the light of 1882 [date of writing] calls her to an account. If her talents are unimproved, if her fruit is not perfect before God, if her light has become darkness, she is indeed found wanting. The knowledge of our state as God views it, seems to be hidden from us. We see, but perceive not; we hear, but do not understand; and we rest as unconcerned as if the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, rested upon our sanctuary. We profess to know God, and to believe the truth, but in works deny Him. Our deeds are directly adverse to the principles of truth and righteousness, by which we profess to be governed.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 83, 84.

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16

Sabbath, April 21, 2018

A Severe Test

“Of Daniel we learn that in all his business transactions, when subjected to the closest scrutiny, not one fault or error could be found. He was a sample of what every businessman may be. His history shows what may be accomplished by one who consecrates the strength of brain and bone and muscle, of heart and life, to the service of God.” —*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 350.

1. What prominent position was Daniel given in the Persian government? How was this considered by the other presidents and princes in the kingdom?

DANIEL 6:1-4 *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; ²And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. ³Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. ⁴Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.*

“Men of promise in business lines should develop and perfect their talents by most thorough study and training. They should be encouraged to place themselves where, as students, they can rapidly gain a knowledge of right business principles and methods. Not one businessman now connected with the cause needs to be a novice. If men in any line of work ought to improve their opportunities to become wise and efficient, it is those who are using their ability in the work of building up the kingdom of God in our world. In view of the fact that we are living so near the close of this earth’s history, there should be greater thoroughness in labor, more vigilant waiting, watching, praying, and working. The human agent should strive to attain perfection, that he may be an ideal Christian, complete in Christ Jesus.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 248.

PLANNING A TRAP

2. What did the officers look for to try to pull Daniel down from his high position? What proposal did they come up with and present to King Darius?

DANIEL 6:5-8 *Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. ⁶Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. ⁹All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.*

“The transforming grace of God was made manifest in His servant, and he pleaded most earnestly for the lives of the very men who afterwards, in a secret, underhanded manner made plans by which they thought to put an end to the life of Daniel. These men became jealous of Daniel because he found favor with kings and nobles, and was honored as the greatest man in Babylon.” –*Conflict and Courage*, p. 251.

FAITHFUL DESPITE THE DECREE

3. What did the men proceed to do as soon as the king signed their proposed decree? In addition to obtaining approval of the law, what else did they do to make sure of Daniel’s death?

DANIEL 6:9-13 *Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. ¹⁰Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. ¹¹Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. ¹²Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king’s decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. ¹³Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.*

“But before you can expect this help, you must do what you can on your part. Watch and pray. Let your prayers be fervent. Let this be the language of your heart, ‘I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.’ Have a set time, a special season for prayer at least three times a day. Morning, noon, and at night Daniel prayed to his God, notwithstanding the king’s decree, and the fearful den of lions. He was not ashamed or afraid to pray, but with his windows opened he prayed three times a day. Did God forget His faithful servant when he was cast into the lions’ den? O, No. He was with him there all night. He closed the mouths of these hungry lions, and they could not hurt the praying man of God.”—(*The Youth’s Instructor*, October 1, 1855) *Lift Him Up*, p. 368.

4. Learning of the men’s motives and also fully aware of Daniel’s innocence, how did the king try to deliver the prophet from death? What wonderful words of faith did the monarch express to Daniel in view of what was going to happen?

DANIEL 6:14-17 *Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. ¹⁵Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. ¹⁶Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. ¹⁷And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.*

“Those who closely connect with God may not be prosperous in the things of this life; they may often be sorely tried and afflicted. Joseph was maligned and persecuted because he preserved his virtue and integrity. David, that chosen messenger of God, was hunted like a beast of prey by his wicked enemies. Daniel was cast into a den of lions because he was true and unyielding in his allegiance to God. Job was deprived of his worldly possessions and so afflicted in body that he was abhorred by his relatives and friends, yet he preserved his integrity and faithfulness to God. Jeremiah would speak the words which God had put into his mouth, and his plain testimony so enraged the king and princes that he was cast into a loathsome pit. Stephen was stoned because he would preach Christ and Him crucified. Paul was imprisoned, beaten with rods, stoned, and finally put to death because he was a faithful messenger to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. The beloved John was banished to the Isle of Patmos ‘for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.’” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 525.

THE REWARD OF HOPE AND FAITH

5. After spending a sleepless night with a heavy heart and fasting, where did King Darius go very early in the morning? What did he cry to Daniel?

DANIEL 6:18-20 *Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him. ¹⁹Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. ²⁰And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?*

“But did Daniel cease to pray because this decree was to go into force? No, that was just the time when he needed to pray.... Daniel did not seek to hide his loyalty to God. He

did not pray in his heart, but with his voice, aloud, with his window open toward Jerusalem, he offered up his petition to heaven. Then his enemies made their complaint to the king, and Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. But the Son of God was there.... [Daniel 6:19-22 quoted in part.]” *Our High Calling*, p. 357.

6. How did the king react when he heard Daniel’s voice? What order did he give immediately?

DANIEL 6:21-24 *Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. ²²My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. ²³Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. ²⁴And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.*

“Those who love God will not choose the enemies of God to be their friends. The question was asked, ‘Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them which hate the Lord?’ Will you prefer the association of the irreligious and disloyal, to that of those who are obeying the commandments of God? Will you choose to separate yourself from those who love God, and place yourself as far as possible from the channel of light? You want to keep in an atmosphere of purity and faith, and bring into your character principles that will be as solid timbers. Christians will not choose and cultivate the society of non-Christians. If the Lord gives you a special position in the world, as He did Joseph and Daniel, then he will sustain and keep you in the midst of temptation. But you will never be where you will find too much light, in our world. Then how perilous it is to choose the association of those who love darkness rather than light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d.” —(*Review and Herald*, January 16, 1894) *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 295, 296.

7. What decree did King Darius issue after experiencing this great miracle? Instead of his life and influence being destroyed, what happened to Daniel during the reigns of Darius and Cyrus?

DANIEL 6:25-28 *Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

“The case of Daniel was presented before me. Although he was a man of like passions with ourselves, the pen of inspiration presents him as a faultless character. His life is given us as a bright example of what man may become, even in this life, if he will make God his strength and wisely improve the opportunities and privileges within his reach. Daniel was an intellectual giant; yet he was continually seeking for greater knowledge, for higher attainments. Other young men had the same advantages; but they did not, like him, bend all their energies to seek wisdom—the knowledge of God as revealed in His word and in His works. Although Daniel was one of the world’s great men, he was not proud

nor self-sufficient. He felt the need of refreshing his soul with prayer, and each day found him in earnest supplication before God. He would not be deprived of this privilege even when a den of lions was opened to receive him if he continued to pray." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 569.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- ***What can you say about the life, loyalty, and purpose of Daniel?***
- ***What great inspiration do you find in his life?***

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"Daniel was true, noble, and generous. While he was anxious to be at peace with all men, he would not permit any power to turn him aside from the path of duty. He was willing to obey those who had rule over him, as far as he could do so consistently with truth and righteousness; but kings and decrees could not make him swerve from his allegiance to the King of kings. Daniel was but eighteen years old when brought into a heathen court in service to the king of Babylon, and because of his youth, his noble resistance of wrong and his steadfast adherence to the right are the more admirable. His noble example should bring strength to the tried and tempted, even at the present day." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 570.

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***Please read the Missionary Report from
Northeastern Africa on page 77***

17

Sabbath, April 28, 2018

Haman against Mordecai

"The great majority of the Israelites had chosen to remain in the land of their exile rather than undergo the hardships of the return journey and the re-establishment of their desolated cities and homes.

"A score or more of years passed by, when a second decree, quite as favorable as the first, was issued by Darius Hystaspes, the monarch then ruling. Thus did God in mercy provide another opportunity for the Jews in the Medo-Persian realm to return to the land of their fathers. The Lord foresaw the troublous times that were to follow during the reign of Xerxes—the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther—and He not only wrought a change of feeling in the hearts of men in authority, but also inspired Zechariah to plead with the exiles to return." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 598, 599.

JEWS LIVING IN PERSIA

- 1. Who lived in Shushan, the Persian city renowned as the royal residence, around B.C. 474?**

ESTHER 2:5, 6 *Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; ⁶Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.*

Mordecai was a faithful Jew living in Shushan. He was the son of Jair, of the tribe of Benjamin, and a cousin of Hadassah, called Esther, an orphan girl whom he adopted. Esther 2:7. He was born in Canaan and was taken into captivity at the time of Jeconiah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He appears as one of the principal players in the Book of Esther. After the difficult experiences told about in this book, he gained King Ahasuerus' confidence and became an influential official in his service. Esther 8:15; 9:4.

2. What did Mordecai find out and warn the king about? What does such action reveal?

ESTHER 2:21, 22 *In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. ²²And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name.*

ECCLESIASTES 11:6 *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

"This secret conspiracy against the king's life probably arose out of revenge for the divorce of Vashti, in whose interest, and at whose instigation, these eunuchs may have acted. Through the vigilance of Mordecai, whose fidelity, however, passed unnoticed, the design was frustrated, while the conspirators were condemned to be executed; and as the matter was recorded in the court annals, it became the occasion afterwards of Mordecai's preferment to the place of power and influence for which, in furtherance of the national interests of the Jews, divine providence intended him." —*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Comments on Esther 2:21.

"From Daniel and his companions in Babylon, and from Mordecai in Persia, bright beams of light shone out amid the darkness of the kingly courts." —*In Heavenly Places*, p. 316.

3. What made Haman, a high official of King Ahasuerus, dislike Mordecai intensely? How far did his hatred go?

ESTHER 5:9, 13, 14 *Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.... ¹³Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. ¹⁴Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.*

"Through Haman the Agagite, an unscrupulous man high in authority in Medo-Persia, Satan worked at this time to counterwork the purposes of God. Haman cherished bitter malice against Mordecai, a Jew. Mordecai had done Haman no harm, but had simply refused to show him worshipful reverence." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 600.

"Let no one exalt himself, talking of himself, extolling his abilities, displaying his knowledge, and cultivating self-conceit. Let no one seek to tear down the work of others

who do not labor according to his standard. The heavenly Teacher gives us the invitation, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' Matthew 11:28-30. Christ was never self-confident, bigoted, or self-conceited. He declared, 'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.' John 5:19....

"No one has the least cause for boasting. No one has any reason to glorify or exalt self, even when one does his very best." —*This Day with God*, p. 132.

GOD'S PROTECTION AND PROVIDENCE

4. By divine providence, what happened to the king one night? What was the result of his inquiry regarding Mordecai?

ESTHER 6:1-3 *On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. ²And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. ³And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.*

HEBREWS 6:10 *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

"In Eastern courts, there are scribes or officers whose duty it is to keep a journal of every occurrence worthy of notice. A book of this kind, abounding with anecdotes, is full of interest. It has been a custom with Eastern kings, in all ages, frequently to cause the annals of the kingdom to be read to them. It is resorted to, not merely as a pastime to while away the tedium of an hour, but as a source of instruction to the monarch, by reviewing the important incidents of his own life, as well as those of his ancestors. There was, therefore, nothing uncommon in this Persian monarch calling for the court journal. But, in his being unable to sleep at that particular juncture, in his ordering the book then to be read to him, and in his attention having been specially directed to the important and as yet unrewarded services of Mordecai, the immediate interposition of Providence is distinctly visible." —*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Comments on Esther 2:1.

"God speaks to us through His providential workings, and through the influence of His Spirit upon the heart. In our circumstances and surroundings, in the changes daily taking place around us, we may find precious lessons if our hearts are but open to discern them. The psalmist, tracing the work of God's providence, says, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.' 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.' Psalm 33:5; 107:43." —*Christian Education*, p. 56.

5. When Haman happened to come into his presence that very night for the purpose of asking for permission to put Mordecai to death, what did the king ask him? What was Haman's reply, thinking that the honor the king was proposing was for himself?

ESTHER 6:4-9 *And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. ⁵And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. ⁶So Haman came in. And the*

king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? ⁷And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, ⁸Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: ⁹And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

“There is no position so lofty that God cannot cut down those occupying it. There is no humiliation so great that God cannot raise up humble men to enjoy the richest blessings. The Lord works to humble human pride in whomever it is found, that men may learn to develop a spirit of true submission to His will. He cannot work with men who counteract His purposes. Those who use their perceptive powers to create an order of things which turns aside God’s purposes will lose the powers, which if exercised aright would have increased and strengthened. God honors those who seek Him in sincerity, humbling self and exalting Him. But when men will not consent to walk in the counsel of God, their wisdom is removed from them. They become incapable of knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.” –(Letter 35, 1900) *The Publishing Ministry*, p. 134.

6. After listening to his proposal, what did King Ahasuerus command Haman to do?

ESTHER 6:10, 11 *Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. ¹¹Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*

“God’s love for us is proved daily; yet we are thoughtless of His favors and indifferent to His entreaties. He seeks to impress us with His Spirit of tenderness, His love and forbearance; but we scarcely recognize the marks of His kindness and have little sense of the lesson of love He desires us to learn. Some, like Haman, forget all God’s favors, because Mordecai is before them and is not disgraced; because their hearts are filled with enmity and hatred rather than love, the spirit of our dear Redeemer, who gave His precious life for His enemies. We profess to have the same Father, to be bound for the same immortal home, to enjoy the same solemn faith, and to believe the same testing message; and yet many are at strife with one another like quarrelsome children. Some who are engaged in the same branch of the work are at variance with one another and therefore at variance with the Spirit of Christ.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 222, 223.

7. What effect did this episode have on Haman? However, what very interesting thing did Haman’s wife say after Haman told her what happened?

ESTHER 6:12, 13 *And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered. ¹³And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.*

“It is no degradation for man to bow down before his Maker and confess his sins, and plead for forgiveness through the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. It is noble to ac-

knowledge your wrong before Him whom you have wounded by transgression and rebellion. It lifts you up before men and angels; for 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' But he who kneels before fallen man and opens in confession the secret thoughts and imaginations of his heart is dishonoring himself by debasing his manhood and degrading every noble instinct of his soul. In unfolding the sins of his life to a priest corrupted with wine and licentiousness, his standard of character is lowered, and he is defiled in consequence. God is degraded in his thought to the likeness of sinful humanity, for the priest stands as a representative of God. It is this degrading confession of man to fallen man that accounts for much of the increasing evil which is defiling the world and fitting it for final destruction." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 638, 639.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- ***On what do you think the comment of Haman's wife—that if Mordecai was a Jew, Haman would not be able to prevail against him—was based?***
- ***What does this teach us?***
- ***Are the wicked able to do what they wish against God's people?***
- ***Of what should those who are faithful to the Lord be convinced, regardless of the destructive plans of the enemy?***

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"In all ages the 'Spirit of Christ which was in them' (1 Peter 1:11) has made God's true children the light of the people of their generation. Joseph was a light bearer in Egypt. In his purity and benevolence and filial love he represented Christ in the midst of a nation of idolaters. While the Israelites were on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, the true-hearted among them were a light to the surrounding nations. Through them God was revealed to the world. From Daniel and his companions in Babylon, and from Mordecai in Persia, bright beams of light shone out amid the darkness of the kingly courts. In like manner the disciples of Christ are set as light bearers on the way to heaven; through them the Father's mercy and goodness are made manifest to a world enshrouded in the darkness of misapprehension of God. By seeing their good works, others are led to glorify the Father who is above; for it is made manifest that there is a God on the throne of the universe whose character is worthy of praise and imitation. The divine love glowing in the heart, the Christlike harmony manifested in the life, are as a glimpse of heaven granted to men of the world, that they may appreciate its excellence." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 41.

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MISSIONARY REPORT

from Northeastern Africa—"The Horn of Africa"

To be read on Sabbath, April 28, 2018

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, May 5, 2018*

"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." Isaiah 62:1-3.

The African continent encompasses a very large territory with many countries. The Reformation message has reached 38 of them, and more are waiting to hear the message. The special Sabbath School Offering for next week is for Northeastern Africa, which includes the countries of Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea—a part of Africa known as the "Horn of Africa"—as well as North Sudan and Egypt.

By God's abundant mercies, the missionary work in Africa is advancing to new territories. The door into these areas opens from time to time, and we are responsible to take advantage of the God-given opportunities. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the General Conference leadership who laid plans to enter new countries in this continent. We have seen that every good plan has always been attended by God's blessings as a sign of His approval.

Immediately after the General Conference resolved to focus more attention on entering more countries of Africa, some new believers came into the church. They rejoice in the Reformation message and offered to return to their native countries to spread it. In Djibouti, new souls were baptized in June 2017; some were from Somalia, and others came from Eritrea, while the rest were from Djibouti. Shortly after their baptism, some of them volunteered to return to their native countries (Somalia and Eritrea) to begin the work there. A special project was organized to bring them to Berea Adventist Missionary Institute (BAMI) in Nairobi, Kenya, for additional training and preparation as missionaries. A special intensive course of three months was created just for them. The General Conference funded their travel and education, and they are at BAMI as this report is being written. Following is some information about the countries to be included in next week's Special Sabbath School Offering.

DJIBOUTI: This small country is located north of Somalia. The population is about 912,000, and the land area is 23,200 square kilometers (8,958 square miles). The country's religious profile includes 95% Muslim adherents and 1% in other re-

ligions, while traditional religions also continue to be practiced. One unique aspect of this country is that although it is a Muslim-dominated country, Christianity and other religions are permitted and protected by law.

Missionary work in Djibouti began more than a year ago, and souls have already been baptized, while others are preparing to take this important step. Elder Dereje Gudeta, from Ethiopia, is a pioneer missionary in this small country, which contains very fertile ground for winning souls.

Special needs include (1) a **naturopathic clinic**. In Djibouti, we are registered under the International Health Organization, and we must have a health clinic to be able to operate. Preparation has already been made for a person to establish this project. Funds are needed for equipment and personnel. It is expected that this project will be self-supporting. (2) **School**. There is a great demand for a school offering elementary and secondary education in English. Djibouti is a French-speaking country, and there is no English school. The demand for such a school will help push the missionary outreach forward. (3) **Financial support** for the services and house rent of the foreign missionary.

SOMALIA: This is a large country with a land area of 627,337 square kilometers (242,215 square miles) and a population of about 16.5 million people, of which 99.9% are Muslim, while all other religions, including Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Baha'i, etc., share the remaining 0.1%. For many years, Somalia has suffered very much under the radical Muslim activities of organizations like Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab. Islam is the state religion, and it is against the law to belong to or teach any other religion. This is a very dangerous place to practice the Christian faith.

Primary needs are (1) **financial support** for the services and house rent of the missionary worker, (2) a **place of worship** for the new believers, and (3) a **health project** to provide an opening for missionary outreach.

ERITREA: The land area of this country is 117,600 square kilometers (45,406 square miles), and the population is about 5.4 million, of which 50% are Christian—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—while 48% are Muslim and 2% adhere to other beliefs. Unfortunately there is very little religious freedom in this country, because the government has a communist background and suppresses freedom of worship. As with the other countries of northeastern Africa, Eritrea needs (1) **financial support** for the worker's services and house rent, (2) a **place of worship** where the believers can meet, and (3) a **health/naturopathic clinic** to provide an opening wedge for missionary activities.

SUDAN: Also known as North Sudan, the country's land area is 1,886,068 square kilometers (728,215 square miles). The population is 42.5 million, of which 95.3% are Muslim (mostly Sunni); 3.2%, Christian; and the rest, animist or believers of indigenous religions. Although Islam is dominant, the Christian faith is tolerated in this country, even though it is not officially recognized.

By God's grace, through the country's previous connection with South Sudan, we already have contacts with whom we can start the missionary efforts. Our fel-

low believers in South Sudan are taking the initiative to advance the message into Sudan. Similar to the other countries described here, the primary needs are (1) **financial support** for the missionary's services and house rent, (2) a **place of worship** for the new believers, and (3) a **health/naturopathic clinic** for opening the door to missionary work.

EGYPT: This country's land area is 995,450 square kilometers (390,100 square miles), with a population of about 94.6 million. This is a Muslim country with 88% of the population being Muslim and 10.9% being Christian, mostly Coptic Orthodox. The history of Christianity in Egypt dates back to the First Century. Early Christians established a very good foundation here. Besides that, the Bible contains very rich historical information about Egypt. We desire the Reformation message to be established in Egypt soon. Several attempts have been made to open work in this country, and we are planning to make a sustained follow-up of that work. We already have potential contacts with whom this work can begin.

The basic needs are (1) **financial support** for the missionary worker's services and house rent, (2) a **place of worship** to rent for the new believers, and (3) a **health project** to help open the door for missionary work.

An urgent appeal

Advancing the Reformation message into all of these countries is considered a high priority, and the labor has already begun. However, financial constraints require everything to be done slowly and on a small scale. Opening the work in Muslim countries is especially challenging and complex, because we cannot officially register a church; so we enter these countries under the umbrella of the International Health Organization. That is why health clinics have to be set up quickly to meet the various governments' requirements. We then use this means to evangelize.

We want very much to send missionary teams into these new fields as quickly as possible. Therefore, we appeal for your generous gifts this coming Sabbath in support of these projects. As we unite our human efforts with divine power, we know that the heavenly intelligences will do the major part of the work, for Heaven recognizes every heartfelt gift given for this purpose. God bless you richly as you show your love for His cause and donate your gifts for His work. Jesus promised in John 12:26: "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour."

May our good Lord give each of us a cheerful, willing heart as we join hands to advance the gospel message into the dark places of this planet. Be blessed.

*—Parmenas N. Shirima
African Division Leader*

**SPECIAL SABBATH SCHOOL OFFERING FOR
NORTHEASTERN AFRICA—"THE HORN OF AFRICA"**

*God bless your generous offerings
coming from a devoted, loving heart!*

18

Sabbath, May 5, 2018

The Queen's Supplication

"... Conditions in the Medo-Persian realm were rapidly changing. Darius Hystaspes, under whose reign the Jews had been shown marked favor, was succeeded by Xerxes the Great. It was during his reign that those of the Jews who had failed of heeding the message to flee were called upon to face a terrible crisis. Having refused to take advantage of the way of escape God had provided, now they were brought face to face with death." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 600.

MALICE AGAINST AN ENTIRE PEOPLE

- 1. How far did the unjustified hatred of Haman against Mordecai go? Could the Jewish people imagine that such hostile feelings against them were being advanced?**

ESTHER 3:6 *And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.*

"Through Haman the Agagite, an unscrupulous man high in authority in Medo-Persia, Satan worked at this time to counterwork the purposes of God. Haman cherished bitter malice against Mordecai, a Jew. Mordecai had done Haman no harm, but had simply refused to show him worshipful reverence. Scorning to 'lay hands on Mordecai alone,' Haman plotted 'to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.' Esther 3:6." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 600.

- 2. What deadly decree did he advance with the approval of the king?**

ESTHER 3:7-10 *In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar. ⁸And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. ⁹If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. ¹⁰And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy.*

“Misled by the false statements of Haman, Xerxes was induced to issue a decree providing for the massacre of all the Jews ‘scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces’ of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Verse 8. A certain day was appointed on which the Jews were to be destroyed and their property confiscated. Little did the king realize the far-reaching results that would have accompanied the complete carrying out of this decree. Satan himself, the hidden instigator of the scheme, was trying to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 600, 601.

3. Can we imagine what effect such an edict would have on the people of Israel who had not returned to Canaan? Did they only mourn and weep, or did they earnestly seek help from the Lord?

ESTHER 4:1-3 *When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; ²And came even before the king’s gate: for none might enter into the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth. ³And in every province, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

“‘In every province, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.’ Esther 4:3. The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently there was no hope; all the Israelites were doomed to destruction....

“The crisis that Esther faced demanded earnest, quick action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, all their own feeble efforts would be unavailing.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 601; *Review and Herald*, January 23, 1908.

SEEKING THE LORD WITH FASTING AND PRAYER

4. What great sacrifice was Queen Esther ready to make for the sake of her people? What message did she send to Mordecai for all the Jews living in Shushan?

ESTHER 4:15-17 *Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, ¹⁶Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. ¹⁷So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.*

“But the plots of the enemy were defeated by a Power that reigns among the children of men. In the providence of God, Esther, a Jewess who feared the Most High, had been made queen of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Mordecai was a near relative of hers. In their extremity, they decided to appeal to Xerxes in behalf of their people. Esther was to venture into his presence as an intercessor. ‘Who knoweth,’ said Mordecai, ‘whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ Verse 14.

“... So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength [Esther 4:16, 17 quoted.]” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 601.

“So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength, and the One in whose hand is the heart of every earthly ruler, to turn it whithersoever He will, as He turneth the rivers of water.” —*Review and Herald*, January 23, 1908.

5. With what moving message did Esther address the king after two invitations and dinners with Haman? How did King Ahasuerus feel when he heard such terrible news?

ESTHER 7:3-6 *Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: ⁴For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. ⁵Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? ⁶And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.*

"If the love of life causes earnest pleadings with those that can only kill the body, how fervent should our prayers be to Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell! How should we pray for the salvation of our relatives, friends, and all around us! When we petition great men, we must be cautious not to give them offence; even just complaints must often be kept back. But when we approach the King of kings with reverence, we cannot ask or expect too much. Though nothing but wrath be our due, God is able and willing to do exceeding abundantly, even beyond all we can ask or think." —*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, Comments on Esther 7:1-6.

THE DEATH DECREE CHALLENGED

6. What was Esther's petition in behalf of her people? What permission did King Ahasuerus grant to Mordecai to counteract the effects of the previous decree and save the Jews from death?

ESTHER 8:5, 6, 8 *And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: ⁶For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?... ⁸Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.*

"It was time to be earnest, when the church of God was at stake. Esther, though safe herself, fell down and begged for the deliverance of her people. We read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but although she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. According to the constitution of the Persian government, no law or decree could be repealed or recalled. This is so far from speaking to the wisdom and honour of the Medes and Persians, that it clearly shows their pride and folly. This savors of that old presumption which ruined all, We will be as gods! It is God's prerogative not to repent, or to say what can never be altered or unsaid. Yet a way was found, by another decree,..." —*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, Comments on Esther 8:3, 14.

FROM MOURNING TO JOY AND GRATITUDE

7. With the king's permission and authority, what did Mordecai immediately do? What did the Jews do on the day that was originally going to be one of terror and annihilation?

ESTHER 8:9, 10, 14, 16, 17 *Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. ¹⁰And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries:... ¹⁴So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.... ¹⁶The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. ¹⁷And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.*

"God wrought marvelously for His penitent people; and a counter decree issued by the king, allowing them to fight for their lives, was rapidly communicated to every part of the realm by mounted couriers, who were 'hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment.' 'And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.' Esther 8:14, 17." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 602.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- ***Was Haman clear and well reasoned in his speech to King Ahasuerus?***
- ***How great is our responsibility when we participate in human plans that affect the interests and lives of others?***
- ***What should characterize the Christian's conversation and behavior?***

"Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan; and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one. Yet it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth. We cannot speak the truth unless we know the truth; and how often preconceived opinions, mental bias, imperfect knowledge, errors of judgment, prevent a right understanding of matters with which we have to do! We cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 68.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"The decree which is to go forth against the people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews in the time of Esther. The Persian edict sprang from the malice of Haman toward Mordecai. Not that Mordecai had done him harm, but he had refused to show him reverence which belongs only to God. The king's decision against the Jews was secured under false pretenses through misrepresentation of that peculiar people. Satan instigated the scheme in order to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God. But his plots were defeated by a counterpower that reigns among the children of men. Angels that excel in strength were commissioned to protect the people of God, and the plots of their adversaries returned upon their own heads. The Protestant world today see in the little company keeping the Sabbath a Mordecai in the gate. His character and conduct,

expressing reverence for the law of God, are a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling upon His Sabbath; the unwelcome intruder must by some means be put out of the way.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 450.

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19

Sabbath, May 12, 2018

Decree for Restoration

“About seventy years after the return of the first company of exiles under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Artaxerxes Longimanus came to the throne of Medo-Persia. The name of this king is connected with sacred history by a series of remarkable providences. It was during his reign that Ezra and Nehemiah lived and labored. He is the one who in 457 B.C. issued the third and final decree for the restoration of Jerusalem. His reign saw the return of a company of Jews under Ezra, the completion of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and his associates, the reorganization of the temple services, and the great religious reformations instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah. During his long rule he often showed favor to God’s people, and in his trusted and well-beloved Jewish friends, Ezra and Nehemiah, he recognized men of God’s appointment, raised up for a special work.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 607.

1. Who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes? What had been this scribe’s greatest wish, even in the country of his captivity?

EZRA 7:6-10 *This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. ⁷And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. ⁸And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. ¹⁰For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

“The experience of Ezra while living among the Jews who remained in Babylon was so unusual that it attracted the favorable notice of King Artaxerxes, with whom he talked freely regarding the power of the God of heaven, and the divine purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem.

“Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he ‘prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.’ Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God’s people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 607, 608.

2. What decree did King Artaxerxes issue in the seventh year of his reign? According to his command, what was the first thing Ezra needed to take care of as soon as he returned to Judea?

EZRA 7:11-14 *Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel. ¹²Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. ¹³I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. ¹⁴Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand.*

“Ezra’s faith that God would do a mighty work for His people, led him to tell Artaxerxes of his desire to return to Jerusalem to revive an interest in the study of God’s word and to assist his brethren in restoring the Holy City. As Ezra declared his perfect trust in the God of Israel as one abundantly able to protect and care for His people, the king was deeply impressed. He well understood that the Israelites were returning to Jerusalem that they might serve Jehovah; yet so great was the king’s confidence in the integrity of Ezra that he showed him marked favor, granting his request and bestowing on him rich gifts for the temple service. He made him a special representative of the Medo-Persian kingdom and conferred on him extensive powers for the carrying out of the purposes that were in his heart.”
—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 609, 610.

3. What did the king and his advisers offer to the God of Israel? How do we know that the decree included provisions for sacrifices and offerings for the Lord?

EZRA 7:15-20 *And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: ¹⁷That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. ¹⁸And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. ¹⁹The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. ²⁰And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king’s treasure house.*

“The decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus for the restoring and building of Jerusalem, the third issued since the close of the seventy years’ captivity, is remarkable for its expressions regarding the God of heaven, for its recognition of the attainments of Ezra, and for the liberality of the grants made to the remnant people of God. Artaxerxes refers to Ezra as ‘the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel;’ ‘a scribe of the law of the God of heaven.’ The king united with his counselors in offering freely ‘unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem;’ and in addition he made provision for meeting many heavy expenses by ordering that they be paid ‘out of the king’s treasure house.’ Verses 11, 12, 15, 20.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 610.

4. What were the governors beyond the Euphrates River commanded to provide to Ezra? How earnest was the king in his desire for the matters relating to the God of heaven?

EZRA 7:21-23 *And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, ²²Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. ²³Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?*

“Thus, ‘according to the good hand of his God upon him,’ Ezra had persuaded the king to make abundant provision for the return of all the people of Israel and of the priests and Levites in the Medo-Persian realm, who were minded ‘of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem.’ Verses 9, 13. Thus again the children of the dispersion were given opportunity to return to the land with the possession of which were linked the promises to the house of Israel.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 611.

PRIESTS AND LEVITES EXEMPT FROM TAXES

5. What exemptions and provisions were included in his decree in favor of God’s people?

EZRA 7:24-26 *Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. ²⁵And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. ²⁶And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.*

“In giving permission to the Israelites to return, Artaxerxes arranged for the restoration of the members of the priesthood to their ancient rites and privileges. ‘We certify you,’ he declared, ‘that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.’ He also arranged for the appointment of civil officers to govern the people justly in accordance with the Jewish code of laws. [Ezra 7:24-27 quoted.]” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 611.

GENEROSITY OF THE KING’S HEART

6. When Ezra and the people devoted themselves to seeking the Lord, what things did they find both the king and his counselors ready to give generously?

EZRA 7:27, 28 *Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: ²⁸And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.*

“This decree brought great rejoicing to those who had been uniting with Ezra in a study of God’s purposes concerning His people.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 611.

7. What did the returning exiles do before beginning their long journey? How did the Lord respond as they sought for Him with all their hearts?

EZRA 8:15, 21, 23 *And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days:... ²¹Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.... ²³So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.*

“In the issuing of this decree by Artaxerxes, God’s providence was manifest. Some discerned this and gladly took advantage of the privilege of returning under circumstances so favorable.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 612.

“Before setting out on the journey, he assembled his companions—men, women, and little children—at the river of Ahava, where a solemn fast was proclaimed, prayer offered to God for His blessing upon the undertaking.... And in recording the events that followed he adds: ‘So we fasted, and besought our God for this, and He was entreated of us.’ ‘Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month to go unto Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem.’

“Ezra and his companions had determined to fear and obey God, and to put their trust wholly in Him. They would not form a connection with the world in order to secure the help or friendship of the enemies of God. Whether they were with the many or the few, they knew that success could come from God only.” —*Review and Herald*, January 8, 1884.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

Prophets and Kings, chapter 50, “Ezra, the Priest and Scribe,” pp. 607-617

“But with the passing of the years after the close of the captivity, conditions changed, and many new responsibilities rested upon the leaders in Israel. The temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt and dedicated, and more priests were needed to carry on its services. There was pressing need of men of God to act as teachers of the people. And besides, the Jews remaining in Babylon were in danger of having their religious liberty restricted. Through the prophet Zechariah, as well as by their recent experience during the troublous times of Esther and Mordecai, the Jews in Medo-Persia had been plainly warned to return to their own land. The time had come when it was perilous for them to dwell longer in the midst of heathen influences. In view of these changed conditions, the priests in Babylon should have been quick to discern in the issuance of the decree a special call to them to return to Jerusalem.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 613, 614.

* * *

Nehemiah's Longing

"Nehemiah, after gaining so great an influence over the [Persian] monarch in whose court he lived, and over his people in Jerusalem, instead of ascribing praise to his own excellent traits of character, his remarkable aptness and energy, stated the manner just as it was. He declared that his success was due to the good hand of God that was upon him. He cherished the truth that God was his safeguard in every position of influence. For every trait of character by which he obtained favor, he praised the working power of God.... And God gave him wisdom, because he did not exalt himself. The Lord taught him how to use the gifts entrusted to him to the very best advantage, and under the supervision of God, these talents gained other talents...." —*The Upward Look*, p. 243.

- 1. What was Nehemiah's keen interest when he learned that one of his brothers had come from Judea? How was he affected when he heard the news about his country?**

NEHEMIAH 1:2-4 *That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. ³And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. ⁴And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*

"By messengers from Judea the Hebrew patriot learned that days of trial had come to Jerusalem, the chosen city. The returned exiles were suffering affliction and reproach. The temple and portions of the city had been rebuilt; but the work of restoration was hindered, the temple services were disturbed, and the people kept in constant alarm by the fact that the walls of the city were still largely in ruins." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 628, 629.

THE KING NOTICES NEHEMIAH'S GRIEF

- 2. Around B.C. 445, what did King Artaxerxes come to notice about Nehemiah? What did the king ask him? Seizing the opportunity to seek for support, what did God's servant reply?**

NEHEMIAH 2:1-3 *And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. ²Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, ³And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?*

“Nehemiah had often poured out his soul in behalf of his people. But now as he prayed a holy purpose formed in his mind. He resolved that if he could obtain the consent of the king, and the necessary aid in procuring implements and material, he would himself undertake the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring Israel’s national strength. And he asked the Lord to grant him favor in the sight of the king, that this plan might be carried out....

“Four months Nehemiah waited for a favorable opportunity to present his request to the king. During this time, though his heart was heavy with grief, he endeavored to bear himself with cheerfulness in the royal presence. In those halls of luxury and splendor all must appear light-hearted and happy. Distress must not cast its shadow over the countenance of any attendant of royalty. But in Nehemiah’s seasons of retirement, concealed from human sight, many were the prayers, the confessions, the tears, heard and witnessed by God and angels.” *—Prophets and Kings*, pp. 629, 630.

3. Was the king willing to grant Nehemiah’s request? What question did he ask?

NEHEMIAH 2:4-6 *Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it. ⁶And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.*

“... I desire to urge our brethren and sisters to study anew the experience of this man of prayer and faith and sound judgment, who made bold to ask his friend, King Artaxerxes, for help with which to advance the interests of God’s cause. Let all understand that in presenting the needs of our work, believers can reflect light to others, only as they, like Nehemiah of old, draw nigh to God, and live in close connection with the Giver of all light. Our own souls must be firmly grounded in a knowledge of the truth, if we would win others from error to truth.” *—(Manuscript 2, 1914) Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 191.

4. What documents did Nehemiah request so he could receive help from the authorities beyond the river? What did he do when he reached his country?

NEHEMIAH 2:7-9 *Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; ⁸And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me. ⁹Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.*

“His request to the king had been so favorably received that Nehemiah was encouraged to ask for still further assistance.... He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king’s forest in the mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed. That there might be no occasion for complaint that he had exceeded his commission, Nehemiah was careful to have the authority and privileges accorded him, clearly defined.” *—Prophets and Kings*, p. 633.

ANALYZING THE SITUATION

5. What was his first concern when he arrived in the city? What did he seek to find out by surveying the city at night with just a few men?

NEHEMIAH 2:11-15 *So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. ¹²And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. ¹³And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. ¹⁴Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. ¹⁵Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.*

“With sorrow-stricken heart, the visitor from afar gazed upon the ruined defenses of his loved Jerusalem. And is it not thus that angels of heaven survey the condition of the church of Christ? Like the dwellers at Jerusalem, we become accustomed to existing evils, and often are content while making no effort to remedy them. But how are these evils regarded by beings divinely illuminated? Do not they, like Nehemiah, look with sorrow-burdened heart upon ruined walls, and gates burned with fire?

“Are not everywhere visible the shameful tokens of backsliding from God and conformity with a sin-loving and truth-hating world? In these days of darkness and peril, who is able to stand in defense of Zion and show her any good?” —*The Southern Watchman*, March 22, 1904.

6. What call did he address to the rulers, priests, and nobles as soon as he determined the exact condition of the city walls and gates?

NEHEMIAH 2:16-18 *And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. ¹⁷Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. ¹⁸Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.*

“There is need of Nehemiahs in the church today—not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced with firm and eager purpose. The course pursued by this Hebrew patriot in the accomplishment of his plans is one that should still be adopted by ministers and leading men. When they have laid their plans, they should present them to the church in such a manner as to win their interest and cooperation. Let the people understand the plans and share in the work, and they will have a personal interest in its prosperity. The success attending Nehemiah’s efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish. Living faith will prompt to energetic action. The spirit manifested by the leader will be, to a great extent, reflected by the people.” —(*The Southern Watchman*, March 29, 1904) *Christian Service*, p. 177.

CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION

7. While Nehemiah was heavily involved in the restoration of the holy city, what did the leaders of neighboring areas do? Despite their criticism and objections, what was Nehemiah's firm belief?

NEHEMIAH 2:10, 19, 20; 6:2, 3 *When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel....¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?²⁰Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem....^{6:2}That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.³And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*

"In every religious movement there are some who, while they cannot deny that the cause is God's, still hold themselves aloof, refusing to make any effort to help. It were well for such ones to remember the record kept on high—that book in which there are no omissions, no mistakes, and out of which they will be judged. There every neglected opportunity to do service for God is recorded; and there, too, every deed of faith and love is held in everlasting remembrance." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 638, 639.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

"We need Nehemiahs in this age of the world, who shall arouse the people to see how far from God they are because of the transgression of His law. Nehemiah was a reformer, a great man raised up for an important time. As he came in contact with evil and every kind of opposition, fresh courage and zeal were aroused. His energy and determination inspired the people of Jerusalem; and strength and courage took the place of feebleness and discouragement. His holy purpose, his high hope, his cheerful consecration to the work, were contagious. The people caught the enthusiasm of their leader, and in his sphere each man became a Nehemiah, and helped to make stronger the hand and heart of his neighbor. Here is a lesson for ministers of the present day. If they are listless, inactive, destitute of godly zeal, what can be expected of the people to whom they minister?" —*The Southern Watchman*, June 28, 1904.

* * *

Disturbed by Good News

“The Commander of heaven was assailed by the tempter.... From the time that He was a helpless babe in Bethlehem, when the agencies of hell sought to destroy Him in His infancy through the jealousy of Herod, until He came to Calvary’s cross, He was continually assailed by the evil one.... Satan knew that he must either conquer or himself be conquered. Success or failure involved too much for him to leave the work with any one of his agents of evil. The prince of evil himself must personally conduct the warfare....” —*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 162.

THE KING AND HIS REACTIONS

1. Who was ruling in Judea at the time of Jesus’ birth? What amazing news did wise men from the east bring to Jerusalem?

MATTHEW 2:1, 2 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ²Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

“These men were not Jews; but they had been waiting for the predicted Messiah. They had studied prophecy, and knew the time was at hand when Christ would come; and they were anxiously watching for some sign of this great event, that they might be among the first to welcome the infant heavenly King, and worship Him.” —*Lift Him Up*, p. 30.

2. What effect did this good news have on King Herod? What did these thoughts reveal about him?

MATTHEW 2:3, 7, 8 *When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.... ⁷Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

“The arrival of the magi was quickly noised throughout Jerusalem. Their strange errand created an excitement among the people, which penetrated to the palace of King Herod....

“The wily Edomite was aroused at the intimation of a possible rival. Countless murders had stained his pathway to the throne. Being of alien blood, he was hated by the people over whom he ruled. His only security was the favor of Rome. But this new Prince had a higher claim. He was born to the kingdom....

“Herod now invited the magi to a private interview. A tempest of wrath and fear was raging in his heart, but he preserved a calm exterior, and received the strangers courteously. He inquired at what time the star had appeared, and professed to hail with joy the intimation of the birth of Christ. He bade his visitors, ‘Search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.’ So saying, he dismissed them to go on their way to Bethlehem.” —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 61, 62.

DIVINE GUIDANCE

- 3. What guidance did the Lord provide for these special visitors, including after they left Jerusalem to go to Bethlehem? How did they feel about that guidance? What great reverence did they manifest when they saw the newborn “King of the Jews”?**

MATTHEW 2:9-11 *When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. ¹¹And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

“The Wise Men are surprised to see no unusual interest upon the subject of the coming of the Messiah.... The Wise Men plainly stated their errand. They were in search of Jesus, the King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east and had come to worship Him....” —*Lift Him Up*, p. 30.

“Angels of God, in the appearance of a star, conducted the Wise Men on their mission in search of Jesus. They came with gifts and costly offerings of frankincense and myrrh, to pay their oblation to the infant King foretold in prophecy. They followed the brilliant messengers with assurance and great joy.” —*Reflecting Christ*, p. 373.

“The wise men departed alone from Jerusalem. The shadows of night were falling as they left the gates, but to their great joy they again saw the star, and were directed to Bethlehem. They had received no such intimation of the lowly estate of Jesus as was given to the shepherds. After the long journey they had been disappointed by the indifference of the Jewish leaders, and had left Jerusalem less confident than when they entered the city.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 63.

- 4. Instead of going back to tell Herod about finding the Child, what warning did the wise men receive and heed? What type of people were these men?**

MATTHEW 2:12 *And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

“These Wise Men were philosophers, and had studied the works of God in nature. In the wonders of the heavens, in the glories of the sun, moon, and stars, they traced the finger of God. They were not idolaters. They lived up to the dim light which shone upon them.... These Wise Men had seen the heavens illuminated with light, which enshrouded the heavenly host who heralded the advent of Christ to the humble shepherds. And after the angels returned to heaven, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the heavens.” —*Lift Him Up*, p. 30.

A CRUEL KING WITH CRUEL METHODS

- 5. What horrible plan did King Herod devise after he heard that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem? What instructions did the Lord give Joseph to save the Child’s life? What enormous difference in attitude can be seen between the pagan wise men and King Herod?**

MATTHEW 2:13, 14 *And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. ¹⁴When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.*

“In like manner Joseph received warning to flee into Egypt with Mary and the child. And the angel said, ‘Be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.’ Joseph obeyed without delay, setting out on the journey by night for greater security.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 64.

“But against his plans, Satan sees a higher power at work. Angels of God protected the life of the infant Redeemer. Joseph was warned in a dream to flee into Egypt, that in a heathen land he might find an asylum for the world’s Redeemer. Satan followed Him from infancy to childhood and from childhood to manhood, inventing means and ways to allure Him from His allegiance to God, and overcome Him with his subtle temptations. The unsullied purity of the childhood, youth, and manhood of Christ, which Satan could not taint, annoyed him exceedingly. All his darts and arrows of temptation fell harmless before the Son of God. And when he found that all his temptations prevailed nothing in moving Christ from the steadfast integrity, or in marring the spotless purity of the youthful Galilean, he was perplexed and enraged. He looked upon this youth as an enemy that he must dread and fear.” —*Confrontation*, p. 28.

A huge difference in attitude can be seen between the wise men and King Herod. The Gentiles brought gifts to the infant Saviour and worshipped Him (Matthew 2:11), while Herod, who should have been His protector, hated Him and attempted to kill Him!

6. What cruel act did the king carry out when he realized that the wise men had departed without informing him where the Child was?

MATTHEW 2:16-18 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, ¹⁸In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*

JEREMIAH 31:15 *Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*

“Herod in Jerusalem impatiently awaited the return of the wise men. As time passed, and they did not appear, his suspicions were roused.... He was maddened at the thought. Craft had failed, but there was left the resort to force. He would make an example of this child-king. Those haughty Jews should see what they might expect in their attempts to place a monarch on the throne.

“Soldiers were at once sent to Bethlehem, with orders to put to death all the children of two years and under. The quiet homes of the city of David witnessed those scenes of horror that, six hundred years before, had been opened to the prophet: ‘In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.’” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 65.

PARENTAL CARE AND PROTECTION

7. How long did Joseph, Mary, and Jesus remain in Egypt? What prophecy alludes to a connection between Israel and Egypt?

MATTHEW 2:15 *And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

HOSEA 11:1 *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

“Egypt had been a house of bondage to Israel, and particularly cruel to the infants of Israel; yet it is to be a place of refuge to the holy Child Jesus. God, when He pleases, can make the worst of places serve the best of purposes. This was a trial of the faith of Joseph and Mary. But their faith, being tried, was found firm. If we and our infants are at any time in trouble, let us remember the straits in which Christ was when an infant.... How early did persecution against Christ and His kingdom begin! Herod now thought that he had baffled the Old Testament prophecies, and the efforts of the wise men in finding Christ; but whatever crafty, cruel devices are in men’s hearts, the counsel of the Lord shall stand.” –*Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary*, Comments on Matthew 2:13-15.

8. What judgment fell upon the cruel King Herod not long after the slaughter of the innocents? What did an angel tell Joseph to do after that? What spiritual lessons can we learn from these experiences?

MATTHEW 2:19-21 *But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. ²¹And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.*

“This act of cruelty was one of the last that darkened the reign of Herod. Soon after the slaughter of the innocents, he was himself compelled to yield to that doom which none can turn aside. He died a fearful death.

“Joseph, who was still in Egypt, was now bidden by an angel of God to return to the land of Israel. Regarding Jesus as the heir of David’s throne, Joseph desired to make his home in Bethlehem; but learning that Archelaus reigned in Judea in his father’s stead, he feared that the father’s designs against Christ might be carried out by the son. Of all the sons of Herod, Archelaus most resembled him in character. Already his succession to the government had been marked by a tumult in Jerusalem, and the slaughter of thousands of Jews by the Roman guards.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 66.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“From the moment that Christ entered the world, the whole confederacy of Satanic agencies was set at work to deceive and overthrow Him as Adam had been deceived and overthrown....” –*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 162.

Outlining some aspects of Herod’s life, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* reports: “Despite his affection for [his wife] Mariamne, he was prone to violent attacks of jealousy; his sister Salome (not to be confused with her grand niece, Herodias’ daughter Salome) made good use of his natural suspicions and poisoned his mind against his wife in order to wreck the union. In the end Herod murdered Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother....”

“He altered his will three times and finally disinherited and killed his firstborn, Antipater. The slaying, shortly before his death, of the infants of Bethlehem was wholly consistent with the disarray into which he had fallen. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Herod died.” —*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Online Edition, article “Herod, King of Judaea.”

According to Flavius Josephus, King Herod suffered burning fever, ulcerated colon, foul discharges, convulsions, and stench.

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22

Sabbath, June 2, 2018

Not Permitted

“To many minds a deep mystery surrounds the fate of John the Baptist. They question why he should have been left to languish and die in prison. The mystery of this dark providence our human vision cannot penetrate; but it can never shake our confidence in God when we remember that John was but a sharer in the sufferings of Christ. All who follow Christ will wear the crown of sacrifice. They will surely be misunderstood by selfish men, and will be made a mark for the fierce assaults of Satan. It is this principle of self-sacrifice that his kingdom is established to destroy, and he will war against it wherever manifested.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 223.

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S ENCOUNTER WITH HEROD THE TETRARCH

1. Who was in power in Galilee during the ministry of Jesus and of His predecessor, John Baptist?

LUKE 3:1 *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene.*

“Herod Antipas (born B.C. 21; died A.D. 39), son of Herod I the Great, who became tetrarch of Galilee and ruled throughout Jesus of Nazareth’s ministry. In The Gospel According to Luke (13:32), Jesus is reported as having referred to him with contempt as ‘that fox.’” —*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Online Edition, article “Herod Antipas, Ruler of Galilee.”

2. What did this king do, regardless of divine warnings? With the same holy motives he had used with others, how did John the Baptist admonish the king?

MARK 6:17, FIRST PART, 18 ... *Herodias...*, his brother Philip’s wife: for he had married her. ¹⁸*For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.*

“Herod was affected as he listened to the powerful, pointed testimonies of John, and with deep interest he inquired what he must do to become his disciple. John was acquainted with the fact that he was about to marry his brother’s wife, while her husband was yet living, and faithfully told Herod that this was not lawful. Herod was unwilling to make any sacrifice. He married his brother’s wife, and through her influence, seized John and put him in prison, intending however to release him.” —*Early Writings*, p. 154.

3. Was Herod ready to acknowledge his sin and depart from it?

MATTHEW 14: 3, 4 *For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. ⁴For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.*

LUKE 3:19, 20 *But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.*

“John the Baptist had been first in heralding Christ’s kingdom, and he was first also in suffering. From the free air of the wilderness and the vast throngs that had hung upon his words, he was now shut in by the walls of a dungeon cell. He had become a prisoner in the fortress of Herod Antipas. In the territory east of Jordan, which was under the dominion of Antipas, much of John’s ministry had been spent. Herod himself had listened to the preaching of the Baptist...

“Through the vast throngs that had listened to John’s preaching, his fame had spread throughout the land. A deep interest was felt as to the result of his imprisonment. Yet his blameless life, and the strong public sentiment in his favor, led to the belief that no violent measures would be taken against him.” –*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 214, 220.

HEARING THE LORD’S MESSENGER

4. Nevertheless, what was Herod’s opinion of John the Baptist? After he put the prophet in prison, what did Herod do occasionally? How did his wife Herodias feel about the Lord’s messenger?

MARK 6:20, 19 *For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly....¹⁹Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not.*

“[Mark 6:19 quoted.] John dealt with him faithfully, denouncing his iniquitous alliance with Herodias, his brother’s wife. For a time Herod feebly sought to break the chain of lust that bound him; but Herodias fastened him the more firmly in her toils, and found revenge upon the Baptist by inducing Herod to cast him into prison.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 214.

5. What happened on the birthday of Herod the tetrarch, ruler of Galilee? What unthinking, extravagant promise did he make to his wife’s daughter Salome following her entrancing dance?

MARK 6:21-23 *And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; ²²And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. ²³And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.*

“When the great day arrived, and the king with his lords was feasting and drinking, Herodias sent her daughter into the banqueting hall to dance for the entertainment of the guests. Salome was in the first flush of womanhood, and her voluptuous beauty captivated the senses of the lordly revelers. It was not customary for the ladies of the court to appear at these festivities, and a flattering compliment was paid to Herod when this daughter of Israel’s priests and princes danced for the amusement of his guests.

“The king was dazed with wine. Passion held sway, and reason was dethroned. He saw only the hall of pleasure, with its reveling guests, the banquet table, the sparkling wine and the flashing lights, and the young girl dancing before him. In the recklessness of the moment, he desired to make some display that would exalt him before the great men of his realm. With an oath he promised to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she might ask, even to the half of his kingdom.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 221.

6. What was her terrible request, perpetrated by her mother Herodias, who hated John the Baptist?

MARK 6:24, 25 *And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. ²⁵And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.*

“Salome hastened to her mother, to know what she should ask. The answer was ready—the head of John the Baptist. Salome knew not of the thirst for revenge in her mother’s heart, and she shrank from presenting the request; but the determination of Herodias prevailed. The girl returned with the terrible petition, ‘I will that thou forthwith give me in a charger the head of John the Baptist.’ Mark 6:25, R.V.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 221.

THE WARNING VOICE SILENCED FOREVER

7. Although he was shocked and saddened by the girl’s unbelievable request, what horrible order did Herod give? What satanic activities and atmosphere contributed to this great prophet’s death?

MARK 6:26-29 *And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. ²⁷And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. ²⁹And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.*

“Herod was astonished and confounded. The riotous mirth ceased, and an ominous silence settled down upon the scene of revelry. The king was horror-stricken at the thought of taking the life of John. Yet his word was pledged, and he was unwilling to appear fickle or rash. The oath had been made in honor of his guests, and if one of them had offered a word against the fulfillment of his promise, he would gladly have spared the prophet. He gave them opportunity to speak in the prisoner’s behalf. They had traveled long distances in order to hear the preaching of John, and they knew him to be a man without crime, and a servant of God. But though shocked at the girl’s demand, they were too besotted to interpose a remonstrance. No voice was raised to save the life of Heaven’s messenger. These men occupied high positions of trust in the nation, and upon them rested grave responsibilities; yet they had given themselves up to feasting and drunkenness until the senses were benumbed. Their heads were turned with the giddy scene of music and dancing, and conscience lay dormant. By their silence they pronounced the sentence of death upon the prophet of God to satisfy the revenge of an abandoned woman....

“Jesus did not interpose to deliver His servant. He knew that John would bear the test. Gladly would the Saviour have come to John, to brighten the dungeon gloom with His own presence. But He was not to place Himself in the hands of enemies and imperil His own mission. Gladly would He have delivered His faithful servant. But for the sake

of thousands who in after years must pass from prison to death, John was to drink the cup of martyrdom. As the followers of Jesus should languish in lonely cells, or perish by the sword, the rack, or the fagot, apparently forsaken by God and man, what a stay to their hearts would be the thought that John the Baptist, to whose faithfulness Christ Himself had borne witness, had passed through a similar experience!" —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 221, 222, 224.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- ***What nefarious personal quality of Herod did this crime reveal?***
- ***What can one say about the testimony John the Baptist gave to Herod?***
- ***If John had been one to compromise the truth easily, would he have given such a rebuke to Herod?***
- ***What important lesson is there for us in the death of a faithful minister like John?***

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Herod waited in vain to be released from his oath; then he reluctantly commanded the execution of the prophet. Soon the head of John was brought in before the king and his guests. Forever sealed were those lips that had faithfully warned Herod to turn from his life of sin. Never more would that voice be heard calling men to repentance. The revels of one night had cost the life of one of the greatest of the prophets....

“Oh, how often has the life of the innocent been sacrificed through the intemperance of those who should have been guardians of justice! He who puts the intoxicating cup to his lips makes himself responsible for all the injustice he may commit under its besotting power. By numbing his senses he makes it impossible for him to judge calmly or to have a clear perception of right and wrong. He opens the way for Satan to work through him in oppressing and destroying the innocent. ‘Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.’ Proverbs 20:1. Thus it is that ‘judgment is turned away backward,... and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.’ Isaiah 59:14, 15. Those who have jurisdiction over the lives of their fellow men should be held guilty of a crime when they yield to intemperance. All who execute the laws should be lawkeepers. They should be men of self-control. They need to have full command of their physical, mental, and moral powers, that they may possess vigor of intellect, and a high sense of justice.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 222.

* * *

Silent Chains

“Herod’s heart had grown still harder; and when he heard that Christ had risen, he was not much troubled. He took the life of James, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he took Peter also, intending to put him to death. But God had a work for Peter to do, and sent His angel to deliver him. Herod was visited with the judgments of God. While exalting himself in the presence of a great multitude, he was smitten by the angel of the Lord, and died a most horrible death.” —*Early Writings*, pp. 185, 186.

PERSECUTION AGAINST THE CHURCH FOR POLITICAL GAIN

1. What persecution against the early Christian church was carried out by Herod Agrippa I, nephew of Herod the Great and King of Judea? What did he do to the apostle James, John’s brother?

ACTS 12:1, 2 *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. ²And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*

“The government of Judea was then in the hands of Herod Agrippa, subject to Claudius, the Roman emperor. Herod also held the position of tetrarch of Galilee. He was professedly a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and apparently very zealous in carrying out the ceremonies of the Jewish law. Desirous of obtaining the favor of the Jews, hoping thus to make secure his offices and honors, he proceeded to carry out their desires by persecuting the church of Christ, spoiling the houses and goods of the believers, and imprisoning the leading members of the church. He cast James, the brother of John, into prison, and sent an executioner to kill him with the sword, as another Herod had caused the prophet John to be beheaded.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 143.

2. Whom did this king put in prison next, placing a heavy guard around him as he awaited execution? What did the church do without ceasing while the apostle was in prison?

ACTS 12:3-5 *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread). ⁴And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. ⁵Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

“Seeing that the Jews were well pleased with these efforts, he imprisoned Peter also.

“It was during the Passover that these cruelties were practiced. While the Jews were celebrating their deliverance from Egypt and pretending great zeal for the law of God, they were at the same time transgressing every principle of that law by persecuting and murdering the believers in Christ.

“The death of James caused great grief and consternation among the believers. When Peter also was imprisoned, the entire church engaged in fasting and prayer....

“While, upon various pretexts, the execution of Peter was being delayed until after the Passover, the members of the church had time for deep searching of heart and earnest prayer. They prayed without ceasing for Peter, for they felt that he could not be spared from the cause. They realized that they had reached a place where, without the special help of God, the church of Christ would be destroyed.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 143-145.

EVIL MEN’S PLANS OPPOSED BY AN ANGEL

3. What happened the night before the apostle was supposed to be executed in a public spectacle at Herod’s command? How difficult was it for the angel to free the apostle from his chains?

ACTS 12:6-8 *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. ⁷And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. ⁸And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.*

“The day of Peter’s execution was at last appointed, but still the prayers of the believers ascended to heaven; and while all their energies and sympathies were called out in fervent appeals for help, angels of God were watching over the imprisoned apostle....

“It is the last night before the proposed execution. A mighty angel is sent from heaven to rescue Peter. The strong gates that shut in the saint of God open without the aid of human hands. The angel of the Most High passes through, and the gates close noiselessly behind him. He enters the cell, and there lies Peter, sleeping the peaceful sleep of perfect trust.

“The light that surrounds the angel fills the cell, but does not rouse the apostle. Not until he feels the touch of the angel’s hand and hears a voice saying, ‘Arise up quickly,’ does he awaken sufficiently to see his cell illuminated by the light of heaven, and an angel of great glory standing before him. Mechanically he obeys the word spoken to him, and as in rising he lifts his hands he is dimly conscious that the chains have fallen from his wrists.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 145-147.

4. How far did the angel lead Peter? Where was he when the angel left him? What had the Lord released him from, besides prison?

ACTS 12:9-12 *And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. ¹⁰When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. ¹¹And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. ¹²And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.*

“The heavenly light faded away, and Peter felt himself to be in profound darkness; but as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, it gradually seemed to lessen, and he found himself alone in the silent street, with the cool night air blowing upon his brow.

He now realized that he was free, in a familiar part of the city; he recognized the place as one that he had often frequented and had expected to pass on the morrow for the last time.

“He tried to recall the events of the past few moments. He remembered falling asleep, bound between two soldiers, with his sandals and outer garments removed. He examined his person and found himself fully dressed and girded. His wrists, swollen from wearing the cruel irons, were free from the manacles. He realized that his freedom was no delusion, no dream or vision, but a blessed reality. On the morrow he was to have been led forth to die; but, lo, an angel had delivered him from prison and from death.”
—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 147, 148.

- 5. Although the entire church was praying for Peter’s deliverance, what was their first reaction to the apostle’s miraculous deliverance? What could the believers truly understand when they saw that their prayers had been literally answered and the apostle was free?**

ACTS 12:13-17 *And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hear, named Rhoda. ¹⁴And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.*

“The apostle made his way at once to the house where his brethren were assembled and where they were at that moment engaged in earnest prayer for him.... Joy and praise filled the hearts of the believers, because God had heard and answered their prayers and had delivered Peter from the hands of Herod.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 148.

“We are just so. We do not realize the thousand dangers that our heavenly Father has kept us from. We do not realize the great blessing that He has bestowed upon us in giving us food and raiment, in preserving our lives by sending the guardian angels to watch over us. Every day we should be thankful for this. We ought to have gratitude stirring in our hearts and come to God with a gratitude offering every day. We ought to gather around the family altar every day and praise Him for His watchcare over us. The children of Israel had lost sight that God was protecting them from the venomous beasts. But when He withdrew His hand, their sting was upon them.” —*Faith and Works*, p. 69.

HEROD’S UNREASONING CRUELTY AND HORRIBLE END

- 6. What did the soldiers face the next morning when Herod commanded that Peter be brought for the execution? Did Herod acknowledge God’s hand in the deliverance of the prisoner? Not being able to do anything to Peter, on whom did the king vent his rage?**

ACTS 12:18, 19 *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. ¹⁹And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death.*

“In the morning a large concourse of people gathered to witness the execution of the apostle. Herod sent officers to the prison for Peter, who was to be brought with a great

display of arms and guards in order not only to ensure against his escape, but to intimidate all sympathizers and to show the power of the king.

“When the keepers before the door found that Peter had escaped, they were seized with terror. It had been expressly stated that their lives would be required for the life of their charge, and because of this they had been especially vigilant. When the officers came for Peter, the soldiers were still at the door of the prison, the bolts and bars were still fast, the chains were still secured to the wrists of the two soldiers; but the prisoner was gone.

“When the report of Peter’s escape was brought to Herod, he was exasperated and enraged. Charging the prison guard with unfaithfulness, he ordered them to be put to death. Herod knew that no human power had rescued Peter, but he was determined not to acknowledge that a divine power had frustrated his design, and he set himself in bold defiance against God.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 149.

7. What final circumstance halted this king’s selfish, boundless ambition and defiance against God? How did his life end, having indulged his lust for glory instead of carrying out the will of God and honoring Him?

ACTS 12:21-23 *And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. ²²And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. ²³And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

“... Wild with enthusiasm they [the people] showered adulation upon him, declaring that no mortal could present such an appearance or command such startling eloquence. They further declared that while they had ever respected him as a ruler, henceforth they should worship him as a god...”

“Herod knew that he deserved none of the praise and homage offered him, yet he accepted the idolatry of the people as his due. His heart bounded with triumph, and a glow of gratified pride overspread his countenance as he heard the shout ascend, ‘It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.’

“But suddenly a terrible change came over him. His face became pallid as death and distorted with agony. Great drops of sweat started from his pores. He stood for a moment as if transfixed with pain and terror; then turning his blanched and livid face to his horror-stricken friends, he cried in hollow, despairing tones, He whom you have exalted as a god is stricken with death.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 150, 151.

Thus he who was sentenced to death, lived; and he who thought to live, died. “Who-so diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.” Proverbs 26:27.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“This demonstration of divine justice had a powerful influence upon the people. The tidings that the apostle of Christ had been miraculously delivered from prison and death, while his persecutor had been stricken down by the curse of God, were borne to all lands and became the means of leading many to a belief in Christ.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 152.

“It was Herod Antipas who took part in the trial of Christ, and Herod Agrippa I who put James to death. Agrippa was nephew and brother-in-law of Antipas. Through intrigue he secured the throne of Antipas for himself, and on coming to power pursued the same course toward the Christians that Antipas had followed. In the Herodian dynasty there were six persons who bore the name of Herod. It thus served in a measure as a general title, the individuals

being designated by other names, as Antipas, Philip, Agrippa, etc. So we might say czar Nicholas, czar Alexander, etc. In the present instance this use of the term becomes more natural and appropriate inasmuch as Agrippa, when he put James to death, occupied the throne of Antipas, who a little before had been concerned in the trial of Christ; and he manifested the same character. It was the same Herodian spirit, only in another personality, as 'the dragon' of Revelation 12:17 is the same as the dragon of verse 3, the real inspiring power in each being the dragon of verse 9. In the one case he works through pagan Rome; in the other, through our own government." —*Early Writings*, p. 185 (editors' note).

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24

Sabbath, June 16, 2018

“When I Have Opportunity ...”

“A ray of light from heaven had been permitted to shine upon Felix, when Paul reasoned with him concerning righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come. That was his heaven-sent opportunity to see and to forsake his sins. But he said to the messenger of God, ‘Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’ He had slighted his last offer of mercy. Never was he to receive another call from God.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 427.

1. After the apostle Paul was miraculously saved from violent turmoil in Jerusalem, where was he taken to be judged? What was the governor’s first question?

ACTS 23:33-35 *Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. ³⁴And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; ³⁵I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall.*

“Lysias at once decided to transfer Paul from his jurisdiction to that of Felix the procurator. As a people, the Jews were in a state of excitement and irritation, and tumults were of frequent occurrence. The continued presence of the apostle in Jerusalem might lead to consequences dangerous to the city and even to the commandant himself. He therefore ‘called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.’

“No time was to be lost in sending Paul away. ‘The soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.’ From that place the horsemen went on with the prisoner to Caesarea, while the four hundred soldiers returned to Jerusalem.

“The officer in charge of the detachment delivered his prisoner to Felix, also presenting a letter with which he had been entrusted by the chief captain:...” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 415.

2. What accusations were made against Paul? How did the Jews attempt to support their charges, even as their hatred of the prisoner was obvious?

ACTS 24:5-9 *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 'Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. 'But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 'Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. 'And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.*

"In his speech, Tertullus charged Paul with crimes which, if proved, would have resulted in his conviction for high treason against the government. 'We have found this man a pestilent fellow,' declared the orator, 'and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple.' Tertullus then stated that Lysias, the commandant of the garrison at Jerusalem, had violently taken Paul from the Jews when they were about to judge him by their ecclesiastical law, and had thus forced them to bring the matter before Felix. These statements were made with the design of inducing the procurator to deliver Paul over to the Jewish court. All the charges were vehemently supported by the Jews present, who made no effort to conceal their hatred of the prisoner." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 420.

THE APOSTLE'S PERSONAL DEFENSE

3. How did the servant of the Lord systematically refute the charges as completely false? Could his accusers prove that he was inciting rebellion in the temple or anywhere else?

ACTS 24:10-13 *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: '11Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. '12And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: '13Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.*

"Paul wasted no words in compliments, but simply stated that he could the more cheerfully defend himself before Felix, since the latter had been so long a procurator, and therefore had so good an understanding of the laws and customs of the Jews. Referring to the charges brought against him, he plainly showed that not one of them was true. He declared that he had caused no disturbance in any part of Jerusalem, nor had he profaned the sanctuary. [Acts 24:12 quoted.]" —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 420, 421.

4. How did he describe his faith in God and the holy Scriptures? According to his firm conviction, what would happen in the future to both the just and the unjust? In his everyday life, what principle did the apostle adhere to?

ACTS 24:14-16 *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: '15And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. '16And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

“While confessing that ‘after the way which they call heresy’ he had worshiped the God of his fathers, he asserted that he had always believed ‘all things which are written in the law and in the prophets;’ and that in harmony with the plain teaching of the Scriptures, he held the faith of the resurrection of the dead. And he further declared that the ruling purpose of his life was to ‘have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.’” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 421.

5. Did the Jews from Asia appear before the governor to give their testimony? Could anybody prove that he had profaned the temple, taught heresy, or stirred up disorder?

ACTS 24:17-21 *Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. ¹⁸Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. ¹⁹Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. ²⁰Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, ²¹Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.*

“In a candid, straightforward manner he stated the object of his visit to Jerusalem, and the circumstances of his arrest and trial: ‘Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.’... The apostle spoke with earnestness and evident sincerity, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 421.

FELIX’ WEAKNESS BECAUSE OF POLITICS

6. After hearing both the prosecution and apostle’s defense, what did the governor decide? Although Paul remained under arrest, what freedom was he given?

ACTS 4:22, 23 *And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. ²³And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.*

“Claudius Lysias, in his letter to Felix, had borne a similar testimony in regard to Paul’s conduct. Moreover, Felix himself had a better knowledge of the Jewish religion than many supposed. Paul’s plain statement of the facts in the case enabled Felix to understand still more clearly the motives by which the Jews were governed in attempting to convict the apostle of sedition and treasonable conduct. The governor would not gratify them by unjustly condemning a Roman citizen, neither would he give him up to them to be put to death without a fair trial. Yet Felix knew no higher motive than self-interest, and he was controlled by love of praise and a desire for promotion. Fear of offending the Jews held him back from doing full justice to a man whom he knew to be innocent. He therefore decided to suspend the trial until Lysias should be present, saying, ‘When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.’” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 421, 422.

7. What did Paul present to Felix when he was called to testify a few days later? Although greatly convicted of the truths declared by the apostle, what did he answer? Did this governor ever seek or receive another opportunity to hear the message of salvation?

ACTS 24:24-27 *And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. ²⁶He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. ²⁷But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

“Thus Paul, the prisoner, urged the claims of the divine law upon Jew and Gentile, and presented Jesus, the despised Nazarene, as the Son of God, the world’s Redeemer...”

“Felix had never before listened to the truth, and as the Spirit of God sent conviction to his soul, he became deeply agitated. Conscience, now aroused, made her voice heard, and Felix felt that Paul’s words were true. Memory went back over the guilty past. With terrible distinctness there came up before him the secrets of his early life of profligacy and bloodshed, and the black record of his later years. He saw himself licentious, cruel, rapacious. Never before had the truth been thus brought home to his heart. Never before had his soul been so filled with terror. The thought that all the secrets of his career of crime were open before the eye of God, and that he must be judged according to his deeds, caused him to tremble with dread.

“But instead of permitting his convictions to lead him to repentance, he sought to dismiss these unwelcome reflections. The interview with Paul was cut short. ‘Go thy way for this time,’ he said; ‘when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’... Never was he to receive another call from God.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 425, 426.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Paul endeavored to direct the minds of his hearers to the one great Sacrifice for sin. He pointed to the sacrifices that were shadows of good things to come, and then presented Christ as the antitype of all those ceremonies—the object to which they pointed as the only source of life and hope for fallen man. Holy men of old were saved by faith in the blood of Christ. As they saw the dying agonies of the sacrificial victims they looked across the gulf of ages to the Lamb of God that was to take away the sin of the world.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 424, 425.

“When the Lord presents evidence upon evidence and gives light upon light, why is it that souls hesitate to walk in the light?... By every hesitation and delay, we place ourselves where it is more and more difficult for us to accept the light of heaven, and at last it seems impossible to be impressed by admonitions and warnings. The sinner says, more and more easily, ‘Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’ Acts 24:25....” —*That I May Know Him*, p. 244.

* * *

“He Could Have Been Freed”

“The Lord Jesus demands our acknowledgment of the rights of every man. Men’s social rights, and their rights as Christians, are to be taken into consideration. All are to be treated with refinement and delicacy, as the sons and daughters of God.

“Christianity will make a man a gentleman. Christ was courteous, even to His persecutors; and His true followers will manifest the same spirit. Look at Paul when brought before rulers. His speech before Agrippa is an illustration of true courtesy as well as persuasive eloquence. The gospel does not encourage the formal politeness current with the world, but the courtesy that springs from real kindness of heart.” —*Gospel Workers*, p. 123.

1. With what evil plan in mind did the Jews request Festus to bring Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem for trial? Did Festus consent to this?

ACTS 25:1-5 *Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, ³And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. ⁴But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. ⁵Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.*

“This was not what the Jews wanted. They had not forgotten their former defeat at Caesarea. In contrast with the calm bearing and forcible arguments of the apostle, their own malignant spirit and baseless accusations would appear in the worst possible light. Again they urged that Paul be brought to Jerusalem for trial, but Festus held firmly to his purpose of giving Paul a fair trial at Caesarea. God in His providence controlled the decision of Festus, that the life of the apostle might be lengthened.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 429.

PAUL’S DEFENSE BEFORE FESTUS AND OTHERS

2. What did the apostle Paul say when the Jews appeared in Caesarea to accuse him and ask for him to be put to death? What did Festus state after hearing the apostle’s defense?

ACTS 25:10-12 *Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. ¹¹For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. ¹²Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

“Once more, because of hatred born of bigotry and self-righteousness, a servant of God was driven to turn for protection to the heathen.... Among many of the professing followers of Christ there is the same pride, formalism, and selfishness, the same spirit

of oppression, that held so large a place in the Jewish heart.... In the great crisis through which they are soon to pass, the faithful servants of God will encounter the same hardness of heart, the same cruel determination, the same unyielding hatred." —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 354.

3. Later, what did Festus tell King Agrippa and Bernice when they visited him in Caesarea? In contrast to the Jews, what was his view of Paul and his case?

ACTS 25:13, 14, 25-27 *And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. ¹⁴And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:... ²⁵But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. ²⁶Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. ²⁷For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

"And now Paul, still manacled, stood before the assembled company. What a contrast was here presented! Agrippa and Bernice possessed power and position, and because of this they were favored by the world. But they were destitute of the traits of character that God esteems. They were transgressors of His law, corrupt in heart and life. Their course of action was abhorred by heaven.

"The aged prisoner, chained to his soldier guard, had in his appearance nothing that would lead the world to pay him homage. Yet in this man, apparently without friends or wealth or position, and held a prisoner for his faith in the Son of God, all heaven was interested. Angels were his attendants. Had the glory of one of those shining messengers flashed forth, the pomp and pride of royalty would have paled; king and courtiers would have been stricken to the earth, as were the Roman guards at the sepulcher of Christ....

"Festus discerned that the question in dispute related wholly to Jewish doctrines, and that, rightly understood, there was nothing in the charges against Paul, could they be proved, that would render him subject to sentence of death, or even to imprisonment." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 434, 435, 429.

4. What did King Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, allow the apostle to do when he appeared before him? Were the apostle's words only a personal defense, or were they actually an inspired message to the hearers?

ACTS 26:1, 6, 9, 19, 21, 22 *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:... ⁶And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:... ⁹I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth... ¹⁹Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:... ²¹For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. ²²Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.*

"Paul related the story of his conversion from stubborn unbelief to faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the world's Redeemer. He described the heavenly vision that at first had filled him with unspeakable terror, but afterward proved to be a source of the greatest consolation—a revelation of divine glory, in the midst of which sat enthroned He whom

he had despised and hated, whose followers he was even then seeking to destroy. From that hour Paul had been a new man, a sincere and fervent believer in Jesus, made such by transforming mercy.

“With clearness and power Paul outlined before Agrippa the leading events connected with the life of Christ on earth. He testified that the Messiah of prophecy had already appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He showed how the Old Testament Scriptures had declared that the Messiah was to appear as a man among men, and how in the life of Jesus had been fulfilled every specification outlined by Moses and the prophets. For the purpose of redeeming a lost world, the divine Son of God had endured the cross, despising the shame, and had ascended to heaven triumphant over death and the grave.”
—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 436.

5. What did Festus say after hearing the wonderful defense of God’s servant? To whom of those present did Paul appeal to prove the truthfulness of his testimony?

ACTS 26:24-27 *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. ²⁵But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. ²⁶For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.*

“The whole company had listened spellbound to Paul’s account of his wonderful experiences. The apostle was dwelling upon his favorite theme. None who heard him could doubt his sincerity. But in the full tide of his persuasive eloquence he was interrupted by Festus, who cried out, ‘Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.’” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 437.

KING HEROD AGRIPPA’S CONVICTION

6. Unlike Festus, how did King Agrippa answer Paul’s direct question?

ACTS 26:28, 29 *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. ²⁹And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

“Deeply affected, Agrippa for the moment lost sight of his surroundings and the dignity of his position. Conscious only of the truths which he had heard, seeing only the humble prisoner standing before him as God’s ambassador, he answered involuntarily, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

“Kings and governors were charmed by his reasoning, and as with zeal and the power of the Holy Spirit he preached Jesus and related the interesting events of his experience, conviction fastened upon them that Jesus was the Son of God. While some wondered with amazement as they listened to Paul, one cried out, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’ Yet the most of those who heard thought that at some future time they would consider what they had heard. Satan took advantage of the delay, and, as they neglected the opportunity when their hearts were softened, it was forever lost. Their hearts became hardened.” —*Early Writings*, pp. 207, 208.

7. What was the final decision of the court after hearing Paul’s experience of conversion and the gospel message? How was it possible for the Jews to assert that Paul was worthy of death when the court determined that he might have been set free?

ACTS 26:30-32 *And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: ³¹And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. ³²Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

“Though Agrippa was a Jew, he did not share the bigoted zeal and blind prejudice of the Pharisees. ‘This man,’ he said to Festus, ‘might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.’ But the case had been referred to that higher tribunal, and it was now beyond the jurisdiction of either Festus or Agrippa.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

“Yet, two years afterward, the result of that day’s proceedings saved the life so precious to the cause of God. Festus, finding that his own judgment of the case, on grounds of Roman justice, was sustained from a Jewish standpoint by the protector of the temple, sent a letter to the emperor, stating that no legal charge could be found against the prisoner. And Nero, cruel and unscrupulous as he was, dared not put to death a man whom Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa pronounced guiltless, and whom even the Sanhedrin could not condemn.” –*Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 260.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“Hear him in the court of Festus, when King Agrippa, convicted of the truth of the gospel, exclaims, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’ With what gentle courtesy does Paul, pointing to his own chains, make answer, ‘I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.’ Acts 26:28, 29.” –*Education*, p. 67.

“All should have something to say for the Lord, for by so doing they will be blessed. A book of remembrance is written of those who do not forsake the assembling of themselves together, but speak often one to another. The remnant are to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.... We should not come together to remain silent; those only are remembered of the Lord who assemble to speak of His honor and glory and tell of His power; upon such the blessing of God will rest, and they will be refreshed.

“We should improve every opportunity of placing ourselves in the channel of blessing.... The convocations of the church, as in camp meetings, the assemblies of the home church, and all occasions where there is personal labor for souls, are God’s appointed opportunities for giving the early and the latter rain.” –*The Faith I Live By*, p. 246.

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**Please read the Missionary Report for
Establishing Headquarters on page 117**

26

Sabbath, June 30, 2018

Believers and the Authorities

“... It is our duty in every case to obey the laws of our land, unless they conflict with the higher law which God spoke with an audible voice from Sinai, and afterward engraved on stone with His own finger. ‘I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.’ He who has God’s law written in the heart will obey God rather than men, and will sooner disobey all men than deviate in the least from the commandment of God. God’s people, taught by the inspiration of truth, and led by a good conscience to live by every word of God, will take His law, written in their hearts, as the only authority which they can acknowledge or consent to obey. The wisdom and authority of the divine law are supreme.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 361.

AN INSTITUTION OF DIVINE ORIGIN AND ITS PURPOSE

1. In principle, who established government as an institution? Therefore, what is our responsibility to it?

ROMANS 13:1 *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.*

TITUS 3:1 *Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.*

“The original apostasy began in a disbelief and denial of the truth. We are to fix the eye of faith steadfastly upon Jesus. When the days come, as they surely will, in which the law of God is made void, the zeal of the true and loyal should rise with the emergency, and should be the more warm and decided, and their testimony should be the more positive and unflinching. But we are to do nothing in a defiant spirit, and we shall not if our hearts are fully surrendered to God. [Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1 quoted.]” —*Special Testimony for Our Ministers* (A01a) (1892), pp. 10, 11.

“Many laws will be enacted for the government of nations, calculated to oppress; and old laws that have practically become of none effect, will be resurrected. We need to move forward in our work understandingly and in faith, under the wise generalship of Jesus Christ. A great work is to be done for the Master in proclaiming the last message of mercy to our world, and we are dependent upon authorities and powers to find passage from one end of the world to another, and as long as we are dependent upon the powers that be, we must not divorce ourselves from them, for this is a worldwide message.” —*This Day with God*, p. 250.

2. For what purpose is all government established? What is its function?

ROMANS 13:3, 4 *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:*

4For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

“Rulers are God’s servants, and they are to serve their time as His apprentices. It is for their good that they faithfully follow the plain ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ keeping the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment. They are to exercise their powers without partiality and without hypocrisy, refusing to be bought or sold, scorning all bribes, and standing in moral independence and dignity before God. They are not to connive at one act of dishonesty or injustice. They are not to do a base, unjust action themselves, nor to sustain others in acts of oppression. Wise rulers will not permit the people to be oppressed because of the envy and jealousy of those who disregard the law of God... All need to keep eternity in view, and not to act in such a way that God cannot ratify their judgment in the courts of heaven.” –*Review and Herald*, October 1, 1895.

THE CHRISTIAN’S RESPONSIBILITY

3. In addition to obedience and submission, what responsibility do Christians have to the government? Who should they include in their prayers so they may live in peace and quiet?

ROMANS 13:7 *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

1 PETER 2:17 *Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

1 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2 *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

“We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ’s name, advocating the truths committed to us.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

4. According to the teaching of Jesus, what should we give to the authorities—what they ask or what belongs to them? How should we behave in the event that they ask for what belongs to God?

MATTHEW 22:20, 21 *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.*

“David’s power had been given him by God, but to be exercised only in harmony with the divine law. When he commanded that which was contrary to God’s law, it became sin to obey. ‘The powers that be are ordained of God’ (Romans 13:1), but we are not to obey them contrary to God’s law. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, sets forth the principle by which we should be governed. He says, ‘Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.’ 1 Corinthians 11:1.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 719.

“We do not know how soon we shall be singled out as not being law-abiding citizens, because the prince of the power of the air is getting possession of the minds of men. We can choose between obeying the powers that be, and dishonoring God, or disobeying the

powers that be, and honoring God. If we obey God, His Holy Spirit is resting upon us, and we are not fighting with our own assertions, but with 'It is written.' All we have to do is to go back to the fourth commandment. Read the testimony of Jesus Christ that not even a little dot was to be altered, but it is just as written by the finger of God on the tables of stone. We should love the truth because it is truth. It makes every difference whether we are on God's side of the question or not. You may be summoned to the courts, and in these emergencies think on the Saviour's promise: 'I am there.' We cannot stand on sliding sand, but we can on Christ Jesus. And we can stand there though the whole world may be arrayed against us....

"God has covenanted, and He will be with His people." —(Manuscript 11, March 28, 1893) *The Upward Look*, p. 101.

EXAMPLES OF FAITHFULNESS

- 5. How did the three Hebrews respond when the Babylonian king asked them to give to a statue what belongs to God alone—worship? What did Daniel do when the law of Medo-Persia forbade him to pray to God and commanded him to pray to the human king?**

DANIEL 3:14-18; 6:10 *Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? ¹⁵Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.... ^{6:10}Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

"If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'" —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

"The principalities and powers of earth are in bitter revolt against the God of heaven. They are filled with hatred against all who serve Him, and soon, very soon, is to be fought the last great battle between good and evil. The earth is to be the battlefield—the scene of the final contest and the final victory. Here, where for so long Satan has led men against God, rebellion is to be forever suppressed." —*This Day with God*, p. 308.

- 6. In the time of Israel, were the bodyguards obedient to the impious order of King Saul when he commanded them to kill the priests? Was it the duty of the Roman soldiers to obey the Jewish council when Paul was at risk of being killed?**

1 SAMUEL 22:17 *And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew*

when he fled, and did not show it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

ACTS 23:10, 11 *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. ¹¹And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

“But Doeg was a slanderer, and Saul had such a spirit of envy and hatred and murder, that he desired the report to be true. The partial and exaggerated statement of the chief of the herdsmen, was suited for the use of the adversary of God and man. It was presented to the mind of Saul in such a light that the king lost all control of himself, and acted like a madman. If he had but calmly waited until he could have heard the whole story, and had exercised his reasoning faculties, how different would have been the terrible record of that day’s doings!... Like savage beasts who have tasted of blood, so were Saul and Doeg.” —*Signs of the Times*, September 21, 1888.

“One of the most deplorable things upon the earth is the fact that there are passionate governors and unjust judges. They forget that they are under the authority of the great Governor, the all-wise God, and that He is above every ruler, prince, governor, or king.” —*Review and Herald*, October 1, 1895.

IMPORTANT GUIDANCE FOR US

7. What principle was shown in the answer given by the apostles to the Jewish authorities who forbade them to speak in Jesus’ name? How will the Christian act when the government commands him to do something that is contrary to God’s law?

ACTS 4:18-20; 5:27-29 *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. ²⁰For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.... ^{5:27}And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, ²⁸Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. ²⁹Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

“But what has been the course of God’s servants in ages past? When the disciples preached Christ and Him crucified, after His resurrection, the authorities commanded them not to speak any more nor to teach in the name of Jesus. ‘But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’ They continued to preach the good news of salvation through Christ, and the power of God witnessed to the message. The sick were healed, and thousands were added to the church. ‘Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.’” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 713.

“[Matthew 23:34, 35, 29 quoted.] ‘The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a

Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.”
—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 72.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

“We are to go forward quietly, and when our way is apparently blocked in one direction we are to make no condemnation of the powers that be, for in thus doing we are teaching other powers how to work to hedge up our way. We are not to stir up opposing elements or provoke retaliation or revenge. The climax will come soon enough. It is already stealing on as a thief in the night. And we can speak Bible truth which will not set opposing influences at work.” —(Manuscript 90, August 29, 1893) *This Day with God*, p. 250.

“There is a prospect before us of a continued struggle, at the risk of imprisonment, loss of property, and even of life itself, to defend the law of God, which is made void by the laws of men. In this situation worldly policy will urge an outward compliance with the laws of the land, for the sake of peace and harmony. And there are some who will even urge such a course from the Scripture: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.... The powers that be are ordained of God.’” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 712.

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MISSIONARY REPORT for Establishing Headquarters

To be read on Sabbath, June 30, 2018

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, July 7, 2018*

In Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth

We read in Mark 16:15: “And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” This commission was carried out with great intensity only after the apostle Paul was called into the Master’s service. As a result, by the middle of the second century A.D., the Christian church was predominantly Gentile.

Following the tradition of the early church, in the last ten years, with the support of the believers all around the world, the church has reached approximately 130 countries with the solemn Reformation message. According to the reports of the United Nations, there are 195 sovereign nations in the world, of which 193 are registered as members of the U.N. Following the footsteps of Paul, we also need to work aggressively to proclaim the message of Jesus throughout the world.

The Special Sabbath School Offering to be collected next Sabbath is dedicated to numerous projects to establish, repair, and operate headquarters worldwide. “But 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.

This offering is to be used for the urgent need for the General Conference to purchase or to assist unions and fields in obtaining headquarters facilities. In addition, the offering will be used to replenish those Special Sabbath School Offerings funds that were overspent to acquire such headquarters facilities. This special situation arises primarily in new countries when their governments require religious organizations to own property before they can register and operate. Despite the fact that in some countries we do not yet have such property, God has blessed the work with many baptisms.

In addition, sometimes established headquarters buildings are damaged in disasters and require essential repairs or restoration. There are also certain fields and unions that have headquarters facilities that were acquired with donations in the past but now are required to register them in the name of the church to secure them for the future. This costs money, and these fields and unions have been waiting, because they are unable to raise the money for the legal procedures. “What blessings would be meted out to the churches that help in this way, and what love on the part

of the poorer churches, as they realized that they were watched over for good! And with this help freely and cheerfully rendered would come enlarged views of Christian helpfulness and duty." *—Review and Herald, July 21, 1891.*

When King Solomon appealed to the people of Israel for financial support, their response was unbelievable. God's chosen people on earth showed their gratitude to Him in their great generosity. "God Himself originates the plans for the advancement of His work, and He has provided His people with a surplus of means, that when He calls for help, they may cheerfully respond. If they will be faithful in bringing to His treasury the means lent them, His work will make rapid advancement. Many souls will be won to the truth, and the day of Christ's coming will be hastened." *—Review and Herald, July 14, 1904.*

The first two chapters of the book of Haggai describe the Israelites' preparations for the rebuilding of the temple. God blessed those who helped His cause on earth with a willing heart. And in the wilderness, when it was time for the tabernacle to be built, God told Moses: "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering." Exodus 25:2.

"Our people are not to wait for more appeals, but are to lay right hold of the work, making those things which appear impossibilities, possibilities. Let each one ask himself, Has not the Lord entrusted me with means for the advancement of His cause?" *—Review and Herald, July 14, 1904.*

*—Douglas Francis
General Conference Treasurer*

