

Entering into God's Sabbath Rest Some years ago, an international art competition was held in which a large prize was offered to the artist who, in the judges' opinions, best depicted the word "peace."

A large number of beautifully executed pictures were submitted. There were tranquil scenes from nature such as lovely lakes stretching into the distance, also babies sleeping peacefully in rose gardens, carefree children playing in the woods, and village people peacefully fellowshipping in a quiet street. But the judges awarded the prize to none of these.

There was one painting different from all the rest. It depicted a wild storm pounding on rocks by the sea shore. The clouds were black and heavy, the sea was roaring, the rain was beating down, and the lightning was flashing across the sky. It took little imagination to hear thunder rolling, and waves crashing on the rocks. It was indeed no peaceful scene. But nesting on a rock with a young one peeping out from under her wing there was seen a little seagull, unruffled and undisturbed by the raging storm. To this picture the price was afforded because it showed very impressively that real peace is an experience which does not depend on outward circumstances.

The picture on the cover is a contemporary artist's portrayal of the same idea. It is a fitting description of the Christian who rests in God's care in a world filled with turmoil and strife. As those birds quietly rest though the waves threaten to engulf the nest, so God's true children rest in the assurance that nothing can befall them except that for which the Almighty has made full provision, provided they have fully committed their lives to His care. Notwithstanding outward circumstances they may encounter, they will enter into an experience of inward rest in the power of the Almighty which is fittingly described as His Sabbath rest.

This limited edition is the forerunner for a completely new edition of this book. The light God sends us is constantly growing. When the book was revised (2001–2004) it was done according to the knowledge of the light at that time. We invite you to help us to improve it by sending your contributions and constructive criticism to: dtp@sabbath-rest-advent-church.org

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Contents

The Foundation

CHAPTER 1	THE ULTIMATE SOURCE	Page 19
	The Basis of Sabbath Rest	19
	The Pre-existence of God	20
	Infinite Capacity	20
	Constant Maintenance	24
	God the Plan Maker	27
	Christ's Demonstration	29
	Our Connection with the Source	30
	The Renewal of Life	32
	The Definition of Sin	33
	The Need for the Sabbath	34
CHAPTER 2	CHRIST—THE GREAT CONNECTOR	Page 36
	Christ the Transformer	37
	Christ the Ladder	38
	The Connector for Unfallen Beings	39
	Christ the Angel	41
	Jacob	42
	Gideon	42
	Manoah and his wife	43
	The Connector for Fallen Beings	44
	A Link in the Chain	46
CHAPTER 3	DEPENDENT RECEIVERS	Page 47
	Frail, Short-sighted and Limited	48
	Not Caught by Surprise	49
	Daily Leadership	50
	Human Plan Making	53
	Evidence of God's Plans	55
	Progressive Revelations of Light	57
	Christ's Submission	60

Lessons from the Life of Israel

Chapter 4	LABORING TO ENTER GOD'S REST	Page 65
	Paul's Understanding of Hebrews	65
	Christ as God and Man	67
	The Principles of Sabbath Rest	69
	Failure to Enter God's Rest	70
	God's Rest Still Remains	72
CHAPTER 5	KADESH BARNEA	PAGE 73
	Israel's Failure	73
	General and Specific Orders	74
	What went Wrong at Kadesh Barnea?	77
	Specific Orders From Whom?	79
	Why did God not Protest?	81
	Why not a Committee?	83
	In Summary	85
CHAPTER 6	FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD	PAGE 87
	Whose Works?	88
	The Only Possible Alternative	92
	More Human Works	96
	A Happy Contrast	100
	An Opportunity Lost	102
	A Lesson for Us	103
CHAPTER 7	An Education in God's Ways	PAGE 107
	Ample Evidence	107
	Deliverance from Egypt	108
	Daily Guidance	110
	The Building of the Sanctuary	112
	Moses' Education	115
	Another Lesson for Us	117
CHAPTER 8	Successes and Failures	Page 119
	The Next Generation	120
	The Results of Faith	123

CONTENTS 7

125

129

130

133

137

138

140

142

Victory at Jericho

Cause and Effect

Costly Reversions

Repeated Failure

Human Inclination

Our Commitment

Intermittent Success

The Lessons of History

Lessons	from the Lives of the Patri	archs
	HOW ABRAM AND SARAI BECAME	
Chapter 9	ABRAHAM AND SARAH	PAGE 147
	Misguided Zeal	147
	The Faith to Leave their Homeland	149
	A Test of Submission	151
	Abram's Mistake	152
	God's Way Unequivocal	155
	Two Symbols of Two Procedures	157
	Is Our Work Acceptable?	159
CHAPTER 10	CIRCUMCISION	PAGE 162
	The Introduction of the Rite	162
	Abraham's Reluctance	163
	Abraham's Submission	164
	The Symbol is Not the Contract	166
	Why not Earlier?	167
	The Change in Abraham's Faith	167
	The Lesson for Us Today	168
	Not an End in Itself	169
CHAPTER 11	THE BATTLE FOR THE BIRTHRIGHT	Page 171
	Isaac's Mistake	174
	Rebekah's Mistake	175
	Jacob's Victory	176
	Erroneous Thinking	178

Lessons from the Life of David

CHAPTER 12	DAVID'S LOSS OF FAITH	PAGE	183
	David's Dilemma at Gath		185
	David's Former Victory at Gath		185
	David's Mistake at Nob		188
	David's Next Mistake		191
	The Path to Success		194
CHAPTER 13	DAVID CHOOSES THE WAY OF SUCCESS	PAGE	197
	A Mixture of Procedures		197
	David's Victory at Keilah		199
	David's Success in the Cave of Enged	į	200
	David's Success in the Wilderness of Z	Ziph	203
CHAPTER 14	DAVID ENTANGLED	PAGE	207
	An Unjustified Reversion		208
	Another Flight to the Enemy		209
	Refuge with the Philistines		211
	David's Error of Judgment		213
	David Deceives Achish		214
	David's Dilemma		216
	God's Response		217
CHAPTER 15	DAVID'S DELIVERANCE	PAGE	219
	The Problem Given to God		219
	David's Repentance		220
	The Eleventh Hour		221
	Our Deliverance		223
CHAPTER 16	A DEEPER LESSON	PAGE	225
	David's Return to Ziklag		226
	The Key to Success		229
	Escaping Fate?		231
	David's Specific Orders		232
	David's Mistake with Bathsheba		233
	A Lesson for Us		235

Contents 9

Other Examples

CHAPTER 17	HOW IT ALL BEGAN	PAGE	239
	Eve Tempted		239
	Eve's Solution		241
	Adam Tempted		242
	Thou Shalt Not be Thine own Problem	Solver	244
	Are We Willing to Pay the Price?		245
CHAPTER 18	THE CONSEQUENCES OF GOD'S PLANS	PAGE	247
	Elijah Prophesies the Drought		248
	Elijah Waits on the Lord		549
	The Confrontation on Mount Carmel		250
	Elijah Flees		251
	Dire Consequences		243
	Daniel's Three Friends		254
CHAPTER 19	CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE	PAGE	255
	Imitating Christ		257
	Christ Affirmed		258
	The Impression Fades		260
	Christ's Condition Deteriorates		261
	Satan's Temptations		262
	A Lesson for Us		264
	Learning from Israel's Errors		265
	Continual Submission		267
CHAPTER 20	CHRIST SHOWS THE WAY	PAGE	269
	Gethsemane and Golgatha		270
	Eternally Obedient		271
	The Test Repeated		272
	Apparently Forsaken		273

God's Witnesses

CHAPTER 21	God's Witnesses	PAGE	279
	Why is Suffering Permitted?		279
	The Origin of Rebellion		280
	The Temptation of Eve		281
	Demonstrating God's Claims		283
	The Law of Self-sacrificing Service		284
	Unavoidable Suffering		284
	An Extreme View		285
	God's Sacrifice		286
	Who Can Witness?		287
	Our Witness		288
CHAPTER 22	THE LIFE OF JOB	PAGE	290
	The Real Accusation		291
	Could God Trust Job?		292
	Did the End Justify the Means?		293
	Job's "Comforters"		294
	Job's Understanding		295
	In Christ's Day		297
CHAPTER 23	JOHN THE BAPTIST	PAGE	298
	Satan's Temptations		298
	The Problem Solved		301
	Consecration Renewed		301
	A True Committal		302
	An Encouragement		303
	A Vital Distinction		306
CHAPTER 24	THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS	PAGE	307
	The Issues Involved		308
	Two Previous Resurrections		308
	The Specifications Required		309
	Did God Plan the Death of Lazarus?		310
	Why did Satan choose Lazarus?		312
	A Special Family		313

CONTENTS 11

	An Illustration	315
	Satan's Strategy	316
	Christ's Unexpected Reaction	317
	A Higher Level of Faith	317
	Lack of Faith	318
	God's Leading	319
CHAPTER 25	Opposing Principles of Operation	PAGE 321
	The Disciples Troubled	321
	Human Plan Making Exposed	323
	The Dilemma of the Disciples	324
	No Excuse	325
	Are we like the Disciples?	326
	The Disciples' Plans	327
	Early Church Organization	328
	Are we Walking in the Light?	330
	Overcoming Self	333
	In Practical Terms	
CHAPTER 26	THE LIVING CONNECTION	PAGE 337
	Two Illustrations	337
	Communion with the Father	338
	The Holy Spirit's Role	340
	Christ our Intercessor	341
	The Ministry of the Angels	342
	Sufficient Faith	343
	Are Perplexities Normal?	344
	The Final Resolution	345
CHAPTER 27	DIVINE GUIDANCE	PAGE 346
	How do we Receive Personal Instructi	on? 346
	1. Learning the Procedures	347
	2. Developing Faith in the Promises	347
	We are Sheep of His Pasture	348
	Christ is Still with Us Today	351

	Further Promises	351
	God is Never taken by Surprise	352
	3. Making a Definite Covenant	353
	4. Daily Consecration	354
CHAPTER 28	PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE PAGE	356
	How to Face Daily Temptations?	657
	The Patience of the Saints	359
	Refuse to relay on appearances	359
	Pray for patience	360
	Our Part	361
	When we have no active part	361
	When we have an active part to play	361
	When the Lord communicates His orders to us	362
	Beware of forcing the issue	363
	What is God's Will for Me?	364
	The first stage	364
	The second stage	367
	Distinguish two stages	367
	A Series of Uninterrupted Victories	368
CHAPTER 29	THE PLACE FOR OUR PLANS PAGE	369
	Humans are not Robots	369
	Successful Co-working	370
	Some Biblical Examples	371
	The conquest or Jericho	371
	The resurrection of Lazarus	372
	Israel at Kadesh	373
	From Principle to Practice	374
	The Writing of the Bible	375
	Our Own Plans	377
	Relinquishing our Plans	378
	First reason	379
	Second reason	379
	Third reason	380

CONTENTS 13

Chapter 30	OUR NEED FOR THE SABBATH	AGE	382
	Why the Seventh Day?		382
	Made for Man and not for God		383
	Unlimited Potential		385
	The Protection of the Law		387
	The Humility of God		388
	A Working Partnership		390
	God Forgotten		391
	A Safeguard		392
	A Delight		394
CHAPTER 31	THE SABBATH BLESSING I	AGE	395
	A Sense of Need		395
	The Purpose of the Sabbath		396
	Pressing into His Presence		397
	The Faith of Elijah		397
	Our Own Faith		398
	Not a Time for Inactivity		400
	The Learning Process		402
	Making the Most of our Opportunities		404
	Sabbath Keeping		405
	A Competent Teacher		406
	Communion with Nature		407
	Eternal Reward		409
Chapter 32		AGE	410
	The Promised Latter Rain		410
	The Usual Method of Missionary Work		412
	Philip's Missionary Experience		413
	On the Verge of the Kingdom		415
	The Wrong Method		416
	Christ's Method		417
	Personal Testimony		419
	Tools in the Master's Hand		420
	Waiting on the Lord		422
	Determining God's Purpose		422
	When Christ is Lifted Up		423
	True Missionary Work		424

Lessons from the Life of Paul

CHAPTER 33	DISPUTE RESOLUTION	PAGE	429
	Traditional Thinking		429
	The Dispute		431
	The Great Council		432
	The Holy Spirit's Revelation		433
	Two Different Strategies		434
	The first part		434
	The second part		434
	A Golden Opportunity		435
	Unification		436
CHAPTER 34	THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE PROBLEM	PAGE	438
	Paul's Return to Jerusalem		438
	Roots not Eradicated		439
	A Reversion		442
	The Mysteries of Iniquity versus God		443
	The End Cannot Justify the Means		444
	Force is Unacceptable		446
	The Two Mysteries at War		447
	Desire for Harmony		450
	A Last Appeal		450
	The Imposition of Human Solutions		452
	A Recurring Problem		452
CHAPTER 35	Paul's Mistake	PAGE	455
	Another Golden Opportunity		455
	The first option		456
	The other option		457
	Faulty Analysis		458
	The Consequences of Right-doing		460
	Paul's Decision		461
	Paul's Compromise		462
	The Consequences of Wrong-doing		464
	Paul's ministry abruptly ended		465
	The mystery of iniquity encouraged		465

Contents 15

466

468

469

The Spirit of the Antichrist

How the Papacy was Built

Evil Principles

	In Conclusion	
CHAPTER 36	THE JEWISH TRAGEDY PAGE	E 473
	Rejection—Why?	473
	An Assistant?	474
	Wrong Expectations	476
	Wrong Concepts	478
	The Sermon on the Mount	479
	The Feeding of the 5000	480
	Forcing the Issue	482
	An Illogical Stand?	483
	Separation from Christ	485
	From Faith to Unbelief	487
	Blind Determination	488
	Revenge	490
	Joining Forces Against the Common Threat	492
	Jewish Fallout	494
	The Ultimate Price for What?	495
	Our Opportunity	498
CHAPTER 37	A FINAL OPPORTUNITY PAGE	E 497
	An Illustration	497
	The Application	499
	God's Suffering	501
	Repeated Opportunities	502
	The Coming Conflict	508
	Victory at Last	510
	Are We That People?	511

The Foundation

CHAPTER 01

The Ultimate Source

Od is the Source of the ceaseless streams of light and life that sustain the universe and every living thing that He has created. Our acceptance of this relationship to our Creator is the basis of true rest in Him. The Bible teaches us that humans and all other created beings are constantly dependent upon a living connection with God in order to be sustained by His light and life. When we appreciate the preciousness of these principles from the word of God, we can see our dependency upon God on the one hand, and His ability to provide for our every need on the other. Our knowledge and experience of these truths is the basis of our faith, which leads us to rest in God.

The Basis of Sabbath Rest

The Originator and Sustainer for everything that exists is the everlasting God in heaven. He is the Source of all light and life. All living and non-living matter has its origin in Him. David made reference to this fact when he sang:

"For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." *Psalm* 36:9.

We know that God accomplished the work of creation through his Son (see *Hebrews* 1:2), but this does not diminish the fact that He Himself is the Source of all creation.

"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." *Colossians* 1:16.

The Pre-existence of God

God, this infinite Being, who is literally the Source of all things, existed before anything else was created. The human mind is accustomed to everything having a beginning, and for this reason it is difficult to understand how God could be eternally pre-existent. But our problem with comprehension does not disprove the fact. When Moses came face to face with the divine Presence, and asked Him His name, the answer was "I am." (See *Exodus* 3:14.) These words convey the thought of God's eternal Presence at all times throughout the eternity of the past, and the future.

While God Himself has no beginning, all the suns, planets, and moons do. The universe, now filled with heavenly bodies, was once a vast limitless void. In other words, when God began His creative work, He was faced with total emptiness and non-existence apart from Himself and the two other members of the Godhead. In that setting, He simply spoke—and worlds and solar systems sprang into existence.

"For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." *Psalm* 33:9.

"Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created." *Psalm* 148:5.

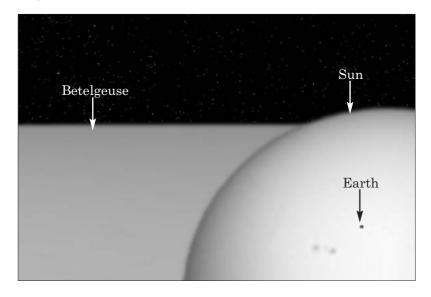
God's work of creation continued until the universe was studded with myriads of worlds, suns and moons.

Infinite Capacity

The truth that God is the Source of all things implies that He has infinite capacities. The finite human mind has great difficulty

in grasping this fact because to be infinite is to be totally limitless. It means that there is not a single thing which God's power could not accomplish, nor complex plan that His intelligence could not conceive. Such limitless ability is incomprehensible to us. In order to gain a faint idea of God's infinite capacity, let us consider some of His achievements in the universe.

The celestial body with which we are most familiar is our planet earth. Ours may seem like a huge planet, but it is, relatively speaking, a very small body in space. The sun—the center of our solar system—is considerably larger than planet earth, having a diameter of 1,391,986 kilometers (864,964 miles). It weighs $2.19 \times 10^{27} \text{ or } 2,190,000,000,000,000,000,000,000}$ tons, and is 333,400 times the earth's mass! But there are other stars in the universe, which are even larger than this. For example, both Betelgeuse and Antares are far bigger than our sun. Antares has a diameter 560 times that of the sun, while Betelgeuse is even greater, varying from 600 to 900 diameters. This means that the diameter of this huge star at its maximum size is 1,252,787,900 kilometers (778,467,600 miles). The radius therefore is 626,393,950 kilometers (389,233,800 miles). To help us appreciate the vast size of this star, let us imagine that Betelgeuse was positioned exactly where our sun is now. If so, then



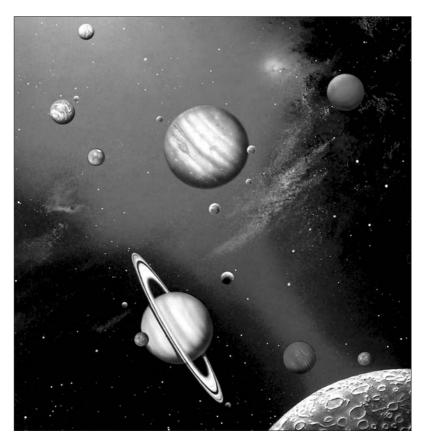
this earth would be buried 476,729,050 kilometers (296,233,800 miles) beneath its surface. And our God is so powerful that He merely spoke it into existence. Such is the infinite capacity of the Source of all things.

Yet Betelgeuse and Antares are relatively close stars. There are other solar systems in the universe, the size of which is so vast that the comparative smallness of our solar system becomes even more apparent. "An idea of the scale of the distances between stars was given in the early 19th century by the German astronomer Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel. He found that the nearby star 61 Cygni was at a distance of about 3 parsecs, or about 600,000 times the distance from the earth to the sun. In 1917 the American astronomer Harlow Shapley estimated that the earth's galaxy, the Milky Way, was about 100,000 parsecs in diameter, thus providing the first indication of the Milky Way's size ... The modern value for the size of the earth's visible galaxy is roughly 30,000 parsecs (100,000 light-years) in diameter. The Dutch astronomer Jan Hendrik Oort found that the sun takes approximately 250 million years to travel once around the center of our galaxy, and he thus was able to calculate that the mass of the Milky Way is roughly 100 billion times the mass of the sun." Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia, Infopedia 2.0. Article "Cosmology."

Such figures are beyond the grasp of our imagination, and yet our solar system is only a tiny speck in a universe filled with other galaxies, many of which are much larger than the Milky Way. These facts alone are enough to show how insignificantly small is our own planet earth.

"Galaxies are generally not isolated in space but are often members of small or moderate-sized groups, which in turn form large clusters of galaxies. The earth's galaxy is one of a small group of about 20 galaxies that astronomers call the Local Group. The earth's galaxy and the Andromeda galaxy are the two largest members, each with a million million stars. The Large, Small, and Mini Magellanic Clouds are nearby satellite galaxies, but each is small and faint, with about 100 million stars.

"The nearest cluster is the Virgo cluster; the Local Group is an outlying member of the cluster, which contains thousands of galaxies of many types....



"Overall, the distribution of clusters and super-clusters in the universe is not uniform. Instead, super-clusters of tens of thousands of galaxies are arranged in long, stringy, lacelike filaments, arranged around large voids. The Great Wall, a galactic filament discovered in 1989, stretches across more than half a billion light-years of space....

"The most distant galaxies known, near the edge of the observable universe, are faint blue objects called "blue fuzzies" because of their appearance on photographic plates. The images were obtained by aiming a telescope at apparently blank regions of the sky and using a solid-state charge-coupled detector to gather the very faint light, then processing the images by means of a computer." Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia, Infopedia 2.0, Article "Galaxy."

Beyond these immense distances, the universe stretches to infinitude, which means that everything astronomers have discovered so far is only a minute portion of the whole. Despite our limited vision, present knowledge of the universe is vast enough to provide us with some concept of God's infinite capacities. What a God is our God who spoke all these galaxies into existence by relying on His power alone, for there is no other source of energy apart from His. And yet, after expending so much power, God's capacity is not in the least diminished.

The contemplation of the wonders of the universe opens to our limited understanding a little of the tremendous ability of our Creator. The more we study such wonders, the greater will our concept of God's capacity become.

Another example of God's creative capacity can be seen in His calling various life forms into existence. Our world is filled with numerous kinds of animal and vegetable, and the higher the organism, the more complex its structure and design. The human body, for instance, has an estimated 75,000,000,000,000,000,000 cells, which can be categorized into more than 200 different types. Each cell is a micro-world, containing various elements that not only maintain homeostasis within the cell, but also respond to messages from neighboring and distant cells. Except in the case of certain diseases, these cells do not act independently, but maintain a living, working relationship with one another. In order to create such a complex organism, God did not set to work by systematically making each cell, and adding them one by one until the first human body was finished. Instead, the entire design was formed in His mind, where He saw every cell in its rightful place. When He spoke, that design was implemented into a perfect, complete, and visible existence. No mistakes were made. No deformities of any kind appeared to mar the perfection of God's creative handiwork. It was an incomparable achievement, far beyond the power of any other being.

Constant Maintenance

God is not only the Creator, but the Sustainer of all things. His power continually upholds all things in their order. Without this sustaining power being constantly exercised, the universe would fall into disarray and decay. God carries out His important work of sustaining the universe through Christ, as it is written:

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." *Hebrews* 1:3.

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." *Colossians* 1:17.

The Old Testament too reveals God as constantly working to uphold and sustain life:

"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." *Psalm* 145:15, 16.

Together with the Holy Spirit and His Son, God stands unequalled. He is unique, eternally pre-existent and self-existing; infinite in love, wisdom, mercy, and justice. The three Persons of the Godhead are the sum and fountain of all righteousness, virtue, and immortality. Radiant light, life, and love flow endlessly and abundantly from Them in a stream which radiates in all directions to reach every living creature in existence. This stream of life is beautifully described in the book of *Daniel*:

"A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." *Daniel* 7:10.

God upholds the universe from His control center in heaven, with an outreach spanning billions of light years, simultaneously controlling, energizing, sustaining, and guiding every one of those countless suns, planets, moons, and other bodies and every living thing on them. A contemplation of the starry heavens will reveal something of the magnitude of our corner of the universe. Its extent and complexity is unfathomable to us, yet God has not imposed upon Himself a burdensome task in upholding it. So infinite and stupendous are His powers that to Him its maintenance is an easy task.

Has God purposefully reserved this unique position for Himself? Is there any other being who is capable of accomplishing this prodigious task? It is obvious that God's role as the Source cannot be changed, for He is the only being who is qualified for this position. Nor can He give His position and responsibility as

Sustainer to another, for there is no creature in existence with the capacity to sustain the entire universe. If the Almighty ever suspended or stopped His work, every living thing would immediately cease to exist, for nature is not self-sustaining.

Better than we do, we need to appreciate the constant exercise of God's sustaining power in order to realize our total dependence on Him. We can study this power both in God's word and in the natural world He has created.

"God is constantly employed in upholding and using as His servants the things that He has made. He works through the laws of nature, using them as His instruments. They are not self-acting. Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a Being who moves in all things according to His will....

"It is not by inherent power that year by year the earth yields its bounties and continues its march around the sun. The hand of the Infinite One is perpetually at work guiding this planet. It is God's power continually exercised that keeps the earth in position in its rotation. It is God who causes the sun to rise in the heavens. He opens the windows of heaven and gives rain.

"He giveth snow like wool: He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes."

"When He uttereth His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures." *Psalm* 147:16; *Jeremiah* 10:13.

"It is by His power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears, every flower blooms, every fruit develops.

"The mechanism of the human body cannot be fully understood; it presents mysteries that baffle the most intelligent. It is not as the result of a mechanism, which, once set in motion, continues its work, that the pulse beats and breath follows breath. In God we live and move and have our being. The beating heart, the throbbing pulse, every nerve and muscle in the living organism, is kept in order and activity by the power of an ever-present God.

"The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men." *The Ministry of Healing*, 416.1–417.2.

Even non-believers trust in the predictability of the laws of nature that God has ordained. Celestial bodies do not drift randomly through space, but follow a prescribed plan with unerring accuracy. When space shuttles are catapulted into outer space the courses of the planets are precisely calculated. They follow their settings with such exactness that any failure in the undertaking rests with the human factor and never with their adherence to the set course.

When we consider the numberless stars, rushing at high speed through the universe, we are amazed at their accident-free performance. Our God is such a perfect Plan Maker that there have never been any collisions on their course throughout history, apart from where sin has been introduced.

"Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." *Isaiah* 40:26.

"He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name." *Psalm* 147:4.

"In his right hand he held seven stars." Revelation 1:16.

The reliability of the position of the stars has been unquestioned to such an extent that for many centuries ships have navigated their routes by looking to the stars. Our clocks and watches are set to the precise movement of the starry heavens and Greenwich Mean Time is calculated with reference to the celestial bodies, Greenwich being the former site of the Royal Observatory.

In these and many other ways, God's position as Sustainer of the universe He has created is depended upon by everyone, whether they choose to believe it or not.

God the Plan Maker

The same Mind, infinite in wisdom, that has made perfect plans for whole galaxies, also has a plan for every one of us. In His word, this inestimable Source and Sustainer offers to be our Plan Maker, Burden Bearer, and Problem Solver. If we would only believe in His wisdom and trust in His love, we would be willing to follow His plans and reap the resulting blessings. But in general, we insist on proudly following our self-made plans, to our own disadvantage and eventual destruction. It was thoughts such as these that led the prophet Jeremiah to write:

"I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps." *Jeremiah* 10:23.

And there are many other scriptures, which urge us to let the omniscient Plan Maker direct our steps, because of His capacity to make perfect plans for us.

"Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this." *Psalm* 37:5.

"Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him." *Psalm* 25:12.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." *Psalm* 32:8.

"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it." *Isaiah* 30:21.

"I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths." *Proverbs* 4:11.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart ... in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." *Proverbs* 3:5, 6.

"He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." *Psalm* 23:3.

How we underestimate and dishonor God, while exalting ourselves, when we imagine we are better plan makers, burden bearers, and problem solvers, than He is. The wonders of this world, and those of the surrounding universe, reveal how insignificant we are in comparison with the infinite Source of light and life. As this realization dawns upon us we will not be so ready to trust in our own planning, for we will recognize that it is not in ourselves to direct our ways or to plan our own lives. There is only One who can successfully do this for us. When we come to the place where we make no plans for ourselves, but leave this work in God's capable hands where it rightly belongs,

our lives will follow the path that God has marked out for us. Then we shall know the victory and success that God has planned for each one of us. And we will experience that peace of Sabbath rest that comes from trusting Him fully to be our Plan Maker, Problem Solver and Burden Bearer.

Christ's Demonstration

God, the Source of all light and life, was also the Plan Maker, Problem Solver and Burden Bearer for Jesus, who demonstrated true Sabbath rest. In His earthly life there was no human planning, for He left it to God, His Father, to be His only Plan Maker. But was Christ a mere puppet in His Father's hands? Or did He have a part to play Himself? By studying Christ's life, we can see that His was an intelligent cooperation of the human and the divine. Although He was free to do things His own way if He so chose, He accepted the plans made for Him by his Father. So fully was Christ's life in harmony with the will of His Father that He is called the Word of God. And Jesus Himself clearly stated that He would in no way depart from the will of His Father:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." *John* 5:19.

"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." *John* 5:30.

"So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will." *The Desire of Ages*, 208.2.

As we study the life of Christ, we can see that He provides a perfect example of submission to God's planning. And the marvels of the created universe also demonstrate that God, the Source, is a totally competent Plan Maker, in contrast to the fallibility of humanity. Throughout the Scriptures it can be seen that whenever God's people let Him do the planning, their lives are a total success, but whenever they undertake this role themselves, it is a

miserable failure. Yet despite all these facts it is difficult to find anyone throughout history, apart from Christ, who consistently allowed God to direct all their ways. The prophet Daniel would be perhaps the next best example of a man who constantly trusted God to be His Plan Maker and who experienced Sabbath rest.

There were times when God's people left the planning to Him, but all too often, despite the success this brought them, they reverted to their own scheming, with its disastrous results. The lives of even great people are generally a mixture of both divine and human planning, with a continual tendency to drift away from God towards their own plans. This unfortunate proclivity has marred many lives, and brought ruin to movements and churches, which began so promisingly. If we learn from the mistakes of history, and, instead of repeating these we follow the perfect example of Jesus, like Him we will submit to the will of God, and enjoy the success that He did. We cannot experience Sabbath rest unless we are willing to submit to God's plans. But in order to do this we must learn how to be connected to our vital Source of light and life.

Our Connection with the Source

The most important single factor in our daily lives is our connection with the Source of all life. If we attempt to replace this Source with humanity, the eventual result is death, because any such substitution involves the rejection of the true Source. When we willingly accept God's plans for our lives, we show that we are connected with the Source of all light and life. But when we choose to construct and follow our own plans, we separate ourselves from that Source. In this way humanity becomes its own destroyer. The teaching that God destroys humanity, because of its transgression, is the complete opposite of these truths.

If only we could be aware of our constant need to establish and maintain a correct relationship with the infinite Source, we would stay connected to Him and our troubles would be resolved. But God never forces Himself on anyone. Even though He knows better than we ever could that it is impossible for humanity to survive once our connection with Him is completely broken, He will not compel anyone to receive life from Him. He allows each

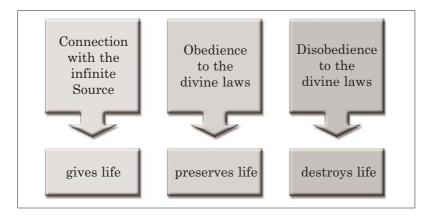
individual the freedom to apply His principles to their lives if they so choose. Because God wants to give us His light and life, He makes every possible provision for us to be trained thoroughly in His ways. Therefore, if we fail to learn or practice His principles, the fault lies entirely with us, and never with God.

When we break our connection with God, we destroy ourselves. So when we violate His law does that also destroy us? God's word tells us that "sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4, KJV) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Every time we break the divine law we rob ourselves of life. The more we continue in this direction, the more rapidly we age and the sooner we die. These facts could lead to the erroneous conclusion that if breaking the law takes away life, then keeping it will restore life. Consequently, some people devote their lives to keeping the law and teaching others that the solution to every problem is found in its strict observance. What they fail to understand is that the law can never give life. The apostle Paul stated this truth clearly: "If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." Galatians 3:21. But there is no law in existence "that could impart life."

To look to the law as the source of life, is an extreme position, which is untenable. But we must beware of rejecting this extreme only to accept another—the casting aside of the law altogether. This equally extreme position cannot be justified either, for while the law has no place as the life giver, it still has a vital place as the life preserver. To put it succinctly: connection with the infinite Source gives life; obedience to the divine laws preserves this life; and disobedience destroys it.

In the final analysis, it is separation from the Source that is the ultimate cause of death. This is proved by the fact that if Adam and Eve could have continued to eat from the tree of life after they had sinned, they would have lived forever as immortal sinners. That was why God denied them access to the tree after their transgression.

"And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." *Genesis* 3:22, 23.



"Had man after his fall been allowed free access to the tree of life, he would have lived forever, and thus sin would have been immortalized. But cherubim and a flaming sword kept 'the way of the tree of life,' (Genesis 3:24), and not one of the family of Adam has been permitted to pass that barrier and partake of the life-giving fruit. Therefore there is not an immortal sinner." The Great Controversy, 533.3.

The Renewal of Life

How could Adam and Eve break the law and yet live forever, when the wages of sin is death (see *Romans* 6:23)? It is true that breaking God's laws destroys the sinner, but if our first parents had continued partaking of the tree of life, their sinful lives would have been immortalized.

Regardless of how closely Adam was connected with the Life Giver, every sin he committed would exact its toll on his vital forces. But if he still had access to the tree of life, those losses could be replaced. As long as Adam made sure he came to the tree of life soon enough, his life forces would be replenished before his sins destroyed him completely. In this way it would have been possible for him to live forever as an immortal sinner.

Similarly today, there are pills and potions which promise full freedom to eat and drink as much as desired with no adverse after-effects. But God has never made provision for a system where we can sin with impunity.

Instead, God provides us with restoration of life if we are prepared to discontinue sinful practices and turn to Him. Although the wages of sin are death, and we cannot hide our sin, some of the life lost by sin can be regained through a connection with the Source of all life and health.

An excellent example of the renewal of life through connection with the Source is given in *Mark* 2:1–12 in the story of the man let down through the roof to Jesus' feet. It was the violation of God's law that had brought this man to the very brink of death. When he came to Jesus "there was no time to lose; already his wasted flesh was showing signs of decay." *The Desire of Ages*, 267.4.

This man's disease was the result of years of sin, and his sufferings were further embittered by remorse. Transgression had exacted a terrible toll until, as a direct consequence, he was literally at the point of death. Then he came into contact with the Life Giver through Jesus Christ, the Connector. A stream of life flowed from God into him, restoring all that sin had taken away. He immediately arose from his bed and walked out of the room in a far healthier state than those who stood around him. (See *Mark* 2:12.)

This is a clear example of the way in which life from God can counteract the effects of sin in those who repent and are prepared to forsake it and follow Him. This example also portrays what would happen if a sinner were allowed to partake of the tree of life.

The Definition of Sin

So what is the relationship between sin and death? Whereas disobedience to God's law is usually seen as the prime cause of disease and death, the underlying cause is separation from the Source of life. Whenever we violate God's law, to that extent we separate ourselves from the Source. This is not only because God's life is the very antithesis of sin, but because of the nature of sin itself.

So what exactly is sin?

The Bible says, "sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4, KJV). This is of course true, but another definition, which incorporates the deeper cause of sin, is: sin is a humanly devised solution

to a problem. This may seem like an unusual definition at first, but let us take a closer look at the reasons for sins such as lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery, Sabbath-breaking, and idol worship.

Why, for example, does one person kill another? In most cases the victim has become a problem to the killer (excluding cas-

es of outright psychopaths). In some way the victim is seen as either threatening, depriving, or frustrating to the killer to the point where the latter chooses a course of action to

DEFINITION OF SIN:

a humanly devised solution to a problem.

solve the problem by removing the cause completely. Similarly, people try to solve their problems through telling lies, stealing, and a myriad of other sinful ways. They can think of no better way to solve their problems.

The crux of the matter is that every human solution rejects God as the Problem Solver. This effectively puts us in God's place, while at the same time it actually cuts off our connection with Him. Therefore, we need to use every opportunity for prayer and study in order to gain the most powerful conviction of God's position as our Source, Plan Maker, Burden Bearer, and Problem Solver. As we learn to trust and rest in Him more and more, we will be preserved from the awful loss, wretchedness, and ultimate death that arises out of human self-sufficiency.

The Need for the Sabbath

Our real foe, self-sufficiency, disperses the more we realize the infinite capacity and love of our omnipotent eternal Father. He knows full well the disastrous consequences that will befall us if we forget that He is our Creator and only Source of sustenance, and if we then attempt to usurp His position. To save us from such a terrible mistake, He has provided every facility necessary to give us a true understanding of our position relative to His, and to keep this distinction clearly in our minds and hearts.

Day by day our heavenly Father provides for all our needs, often before we are even aware of them. He teaches us to trust in Him instead of ourselves and to place our confidence in His ability to continue to provide for us. Furthermore, He has ordained a special blessing for us on every seventh day. Each week, on this Sabbath day, God gives us an opportunity to stop our headlong rush of activity, with its inherent danger of self-sufficiency, and to remember that He is our one and only Source. The Sabbath allows us to draw our breath, take stock of our situation, and give up any tendency to self-sufficiency, by focusing on the infinite Source and Provider of all our needs. Every seventh day has been given to us as a reminder that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and the Sustainer of all created things.

In *Exodus* 20, where the Sabbath is the fourth commandment, teaching us how to love God, its observance is eternally linked with His creative work.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." *Exodus* 20:8–11.

When we keep the Sabbath in the way the LORD gave it to us, then we will receive the special blessing God intended for us. As it renews our vision of God's power, love, and wisdom from week to week, we will learn to trust in Him more fully and have less confidence in our own abilities to plan our lives, to provide for our needs and to solve our problems. By accepting God's gift of the Sabbath and keeping that day holy, we have access to a mighty Source of power. As our hearts are filled with trust in His perfect ability as our Plan Maker and Problem Solver, we will learn to leave our plans and problems more fully in His hands for the following week. The next Sabbath, we can then come to Him again for a renewal of our vision and a refreshing of our trust and rest in Him. In this way we will be reminded never to trust in our own wisdom, but instead to depend upon God for all our plan making, problem solving and burden bearing. We will experience that abiding peace that passes all understanding.

Chapter 02

Christ—The Great Connector

Although their roles are different, Christ's position and work in the divine order are just as critical to the continued existence of all creation as His Father's. Christ is the appointed Channel through whom all life flows from the almighty Source into every creature in the universe.

But why do we need such a Channel? Why cannot God's light and love flow directly into us?

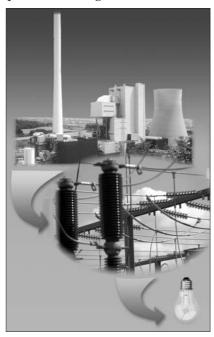
It is evident that once the entrance of sin forced the awful separation between God and humanity, a Connector became necessary to bridge the gulf. Our transgression prevents us from approaching God except through Christ. The Bible uses the term "Mediator" to emphasize this truth: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." *1 Timothy* 2:5.

But Adam and Eve were also in need of a Connector before they fell, since even sinless beings need a Connector between themselves and the Infinite One. This is because of the tremendous power residing in the Creator as opposed to the frailty of the creatures He has formed (see *Psalm* 103:14). It is, of course, impossible for us to grasp the fullness of God's almighty and infinite capacities, but a glimpse at His created works helps us to realize why sinless beings also need a Connector.

Christ the Transformer

God is the Powerhouse who supplies the entire universe with energy. Through Christ, He is still "sustaining all things by his powerful word." *Hebrews* 1:3. Those "things" include a billion times a billion suns at least, in addition to all the associated planets and creatures. Who could possibly compute the energy flow necessary to maintain such vast systems? In contrast to this infinite capacity, how minute are the abilities of even the greatest of God's creatures! Even the most powerful angel cannot come directly into God's presence without being consumed.

A practical illustration of this fact can be seen in the generating stations that provide the power supply for large cities such as San Francisco or London. The power output from these plants is enormous. If the outgoing current from such a power plant was connected directly to a household appliance, such as a refrigerator, it would be immediately destroyed. However, the output from the generators cannot be reduced to compensate for



this, because that would mean an insufficient supply of electricity for the whole city. The problem is therefore solved by installing a transformer between the generating plant and the appliance. This device is able to receive the full input of electricity from the power plant, and then deliver a lowered output to meet the capacity of individual appliances.

In the same way, Christ is the "Transformer" who channels God's power to the sinless as well as the sinful creatures at such reduced intensities that they can safely receive it in order to continue living. So that Christ can occupy this unique position in the divine order, it is necessary for Him to be both God and Creature simultaneously. Like the ladder Jacob saw in his dream, Christ must reach all the way up to the divine Source to have total access to God's unlimited resources and, at the same time, all the way down to creation, in order to channel these resources to the receivers. If He lacked equality with the Father on one side, or with creation on the other, He could not be an effective Connector. And should the universe ever be deprived of an effective connector, its continued existence would be utterly impossible.

To extend our illustration, should the power lines between the generating plant and consumer come short of reaching either side, the current could not flow and nothing would operate in the home. An adequate and complete connector is vital to the successful transfer of energy from the source to the receiver.

So too, in the spiritual realm, Christ is a Connector of such perfection that He completely spans the full distance between the infinite Source at the upper level, and the receiver on the lower level. None of God's blessings can reach us unless they come through Jesus Christ, the great and living Connector between divinity and humanity.

Christ the Ladder

This aspect of Christ's work was revealed to Jacob when God gave him the dream of the mystic ladder, which reached all the way from heaven to earth.

"He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." *Genesis* 28:12.

Christ applied this picture to Himself when he said to Nathanael: "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." *John* 1:51.

"Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, the base resting on the earth, and the topmost round reaching to the gate of heaven, to the very threshold of glory. If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through

taking His nature might overcome. Made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3), He lived a sinless life. Now by His divinity He lays hold upon the throne of heaven, while by His humanity He reaches us." The Desire of Ages, 311.5.

Christ's work as the Connector between the Infinite and the finite is beautifully pictured in this simple illustration. He is the perfect Connector who reaches all the way up to heaven, and also all the way down to earth, without coming short of either.

A fine example of this principle is given in the New Tes-



tament. When God in His wisdom and love desired to communicate to His people the truths now contained in the book of *Revelation*, He did not give them directly to the believers, or even to the apostle John. He passed them first to Jesus Christ who then delivered them through an angel to His servant John, as it is written:

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John." *Revelation* 1:1.

The Connector for Unfallen Beings

As soon as there was a created being, the need arose for a Connector. In other words, as soon as the angels were created there had to be a Connector between the almighty Source of life and these heavenly beings.

This arrangement was devised in the mind of Him who is the sum of all love, perfection, and manifold wisdom, in order to establish the closest communion and the most perfect fellowship between Himself and His creatures. This plan is the divine provision, guaranteeing life more abundantly to all who choose it. Because all the beauty, glory, power, and love in God's holy and righteous character are manifest in this design, the better it is understood, the more deeply the believer will love its divine Author. Originally, this plan was devised to weld all sinless intelligences into a growing intimate fellowship, infused with light and life from the heavenly Source.

So God needed to choose Someone to fill this role of Connector. Who would qualify for such a unique position? Only a Being who was both God and creature at the same time could link the two. We know that Christ was both divine and human when he was born in Bethlehem (see *Micah* 5:2; *Luke* 1:35), but what happened before He was begotten as a human being? How could He fulfill the role of Connector then?

Christ did not become God's only begotten Son when he was born in Bethlehem. He already held that position before He appeared on earth. Christ testified to this when He told Nicodemus that God gave His only begotten Son to save humanity from perishing. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." *John* 3:16 (NKJV).

God did not give Christ to fallen beings to become begotten but "He gave His [already] only begotten Son." If that is what God gave, then that is what the Saviour was when He was given—God's only begotten Son.

God has never revealed to us just how far back in the distant recesses of eternity Christ became His only begotten Son. Therefore, we can be assured that we do not need to know the date. We can rest in His will and make no futile attempts at speculation, but concentrate rather on learning those things which, in His infinite wisdom, He has seen fit to reveal to us.

In the Old Testament *Micah* testifies to the fact that Christ had a "going forth" before His birth in Bethlehem:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." *Micah* 5:2 (NKJV).

In the New Testament Jesus Himself witnesses to His beginning: "I proceeded forth and came from God." *John* 8:42 (KJV).

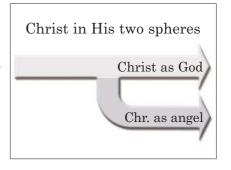
So, even before the creation of man, Jesus Christ was already the only begotten Son of God. This does not imply that He began to exist at this time, for He, like His Father, is the everlasting One, whose pre-existence has no beginning and whose life shall never know an ending.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." *Hebrews* 13:8.

For humans, to be begotten is to begin from nothing, but not so with Christ. It simply means that He entered into a new sphere. Until a certain date, far back in eternity, Christ was God, just as his Father is. Then there came the time when He was begotten into the form of an angel, thus connecting the created angels with the Source of all life. At a later date He repeated this incarnation when He became a human being like ourselves and was born as a babe in Bethlehem.*

Christ the Angel

Christ is presented as both God and Angel throughout the Old Testament. He is the Angel who appeared to Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, the parents of Samson, and many others. He is Michael the Archangel, and the Angel of the Covenant. Old Testament references are explicit about this fact.



^{* &}quot;The Scriptures declare that Christ is 'the only-begotten Son of God.' He is begotten, not created. As to when He was begotten, it is not for us to inquire, nor could our minds grasp it if we were told. The prophet Micah tells us all that we can know about it, in these words: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to

be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.' Micah 5:2, margin. There was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, from the bosom of the Father (John 8:42; 1:18), but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning." Christ and His Righteousness, 21, 22, by E. J. Waggoner.

Jacob

Jacob wrestled with the Angel Michael, or Christ, till the break of day, as *Hosea* confirms: "In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there." *Hosea* 12:3, 4.

Here the prophet equates struggling with the Angel as struggling with God, acknowledging that the Angel who wrestled with Jacob was, at the same time, God. Therefore the Angel could be none other than Christ, the Angel of the Covenant, because no other angel can be God and angel at the same time.

"It was Christ, 'the Angel of the covenant,' who had revealed Himself to Jacob." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 196.3.

Gideon

It was the same mighty Angel, Michael or Christ, who spoke the commission to Gideon. The record of their conversation is found in *Judges*, where the story is given.

"Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!' Gideon said to Him, 'O my LORD ...' Then the LORD turned to him and said ..." Judges 6:11–14 (NKJV).

Then Gideon, desiring to know for sure that this was the Angel of the covenant, brought Him a sacrifice, which no common angel would accept. The heavenly Visitant not only accepted the sacrifice but proved His divine power by bringing fire out of the rock (see verse 21). Gideon was afraid that the fact he had seen the Angel of the LORD would cost him his life, but his fears were calmed.

"When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!' But the Lord said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.' So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." Judges 6:22–24.

"Gideon desired some token that the one now addressing him was the Covenant Angel, who in time past had wrought for Isra-

el.... the sign which he had desired was given: with the staff in His hand, the Angel touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and a flame bursting from the rock consumed the sacrifice. Then the Angel vanished from his sight." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 547.2.

Manoah and his wife

It was the same Angel, Jesus Christ, who appeared to Samson's parents.

"The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, 'You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son." *Judges* 13:3.

As with Gideon, a communication began between the heavenly Visitor and the parents (see verses 9–14). Once again the same test was applied and accepted. When the Angel disappeared in the fire, Manoah and his wife knew for certain that it had been the Covenant Angel.

"The angel of the LORD replied, 'Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.' (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, 'What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?' He replied, 'Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.' Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD." Judges 13:16–21.

"Manoah and his wife knew not that the One thus addressing them was Jesus Christ," until the same fiery sign that had been given to Gideon was given to them. Then, "They knew that they had looked upon the Holy One, who, veiling His glory in the cloudy pillar, had been the Guide and Helper of Israel in the desert." S.D.A. Bible Commentary 2:1006.1. 3.

There are many more instances where Christ appeared to human beings as an Angel. This does not mean that Christ transformed Himself into an angel, for He was already both God and

Angel in one person. Those two natures were mysteriously blended in the one Being. When Christ was referred to as "the Angel," He really was an angel, just as He really was a man. He did not merely appear in the guise of an angel.

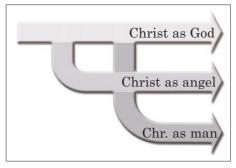
In this way the Scriptures clearly demonstrate that Christ's original begetting did not take place at His birth in Bethlehem. It took place either before or at the same time that the first creatures were created. The Almighty Trio knew the problem which the tremendous disparity of power between the Creator and the creature would produce. They knew that the only solution was for one of the all-powerful Three, through the process of being begotten, to take the nature and form of a creature. In this way a Connector could maintain that link with the Infinite which would enable the creatures to survive. Christ was the One who willingly took up this lowly position.

The Connector for Fallen Beings

The second occasion when Christ was begotten was when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. This event is the most familiar and best understood by God's earthbound children. In studying this wonderful event, we have the advantage that we too are begotten, and therefore know in our own experience the principles involved in such a process. We understand that two different lives, male and female, must combine to produce a third life, the child, who possesses the life of both parents. When Christ was begotten into the human family, the lives of God and human were combined. Christ was both God and Man at the same time. He came "to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace." *Ephesians* 2:15.

This fusing of divinity with humanity is a mystery indeed. When comparing the unbelievable capacities of the Creator to the extremely limited and finite nature of the human being, particularly after the entrance of sin, it is incomprehensible how divinity could be tabernacled in humanity. But the Lord has proved the reality of this, not only by the miracle of Christ's conception and birth, but also by His presence in both the burning bush and the wilderness tabernacle. And yet this truth cannot

be fully understood by human reasoning; it is known only by those to whom the Father has revealed it. For example, the Pharisees in Christ's day did not possess this enlightenment.



They recognized that Christ was an exceptional man, but they failed to see God in human flesh.

The sin problem on earth had caused a gulf between fallen humanity and God, and Christ came to bridge that gulf. But He did not begin His exis-

tence when He was born in Bethlehem. Rather, He extended His condescension by coming to live in sinful human flesh. It was not necessary to introduce a new, temporary provision to solve the problem sin had created. The same solution that already existed for the angels in heaven was also the means of reuniting sinners with God. It was the same mystery in both cases.

In applying this mystery to solve the sin problem, Christ clothed His divinity with humanity by becoming one of the human family. He who was originally and eternally God, took the form of those creatures that needed His ministry to bind them to God and to one another.

Satan works with unabated diligence to obscure this precious light, knowing that everyone who understands, receives, and lives this truth will not only be delivered from his power but will also become a threat to his cause. He knows that Christ took the nature of fallen man in order to be a Connector, and therefore he tries to hide this knowledge from us. He teaches that Christ came in a different, sinless, flesh and blood from those whom He came to deliver, but John clearly identifies this spirit as the antichrist. (See *1 John 4*:2, 3.) There is no need for us to be robbed of the truth on this matter, for in God's Word it is plainly written that Christ came into the human family with the same flesh and blood as the fallen, sinful, creatures He came to save.

"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the

likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man." *Romans* 8:3.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.... For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Hebrews 2:14, 16, 17 (KJV).

The Bible reveals Christ as the perfect Connector between the eternal Source and each dependent receiver, whether they are sinless and holy, or fallen and sinful.

A Link in the Chain

God is not only the supreme Ruler and Source of energy for every created being, but also the Source of all the light that comes to humanity. During Old Testament times He spoke to people through the prophets, but in the New Testament dispensation He communicated with humanity directly through His Son, Jesus Christ.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." *Hebrews* 1:1–2.

Throughout the Old Testament era, Christ was seldom the only link in the chain of communication between God and human beings. Some of these recorded occasions include His appearance and communication with Abraham just prior to the destruction of Sodom, His providing Joshua with specific instructions for Jericho's overthrow, and the instances already mentioned with Jacob, Samson's parents and Gideon.

On most occasions in the Old Testament, God used Christ as the initial connecting Link, and it was usually a prophet who provided the last link in the chain of communication. But when Christ walked as a Man on this earth He was in direct contact with the people. Although so many heard Him with gladness, they were slow to perceive who He really was—God and Man in one Person.

CHAPTER 3

Dependent Receivers

The Bible not only defines God as the almighty Source, and Christ as the essential connecting Link, but also shows the frailty, weakness, and helplessness of humanity as the receiver. In the beginning man was created from the dust of the earth, and this is where he returns.

"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." *Genesis* 2:7.

"Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." *Ecclesiastes* 3:19–20.

If we would keep this fact in mind, we would be less inclined towards pride. It was this realization that inspired David's prayer:

"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life." *Psalm* 39:4.

"For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." *Psalm* 103:14–16.

Frail, Short-sighted, and Limited

We are so frail and short-sighted that we do not possess enough wisdom to plan our own lives successfully. That is because we do not have the capacity to be safe and effective plan makers. It is not for us to shape our own future.

"I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps." *Jeremiah* 10:23.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." *Proverbs* 3:5.

"Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom." *Proverbs* 23:4 (KJV).

But fortunately for us, the Creator of the wonders of the universe, who continually guides the orbs on their course through space, is also the Source of all wisdom. There is no problem too great for God to solve and no burden too heavy for Him to carry.

"By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place." *Proverbs* 3:19.

"Who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever." *Psalm* 136:5.

"Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power." *Proverbs* 8:14.

Our Creator is also the perfect Plan Maker, ever ready to reveal His plans to His children. We are therefore counselled to get wisdom from this everlasting Source.

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." *Psalm* 16:11.

"Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him." *Psalm* 25:12.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." *Psalm* 32:8.

These principles are well summarized in the following paragraphs:

"Many are unable to make definite plans for the future. Their life is unsettled. They cannot discern the outcome of affairs, and this often fills them with anxiety and unrest. Let us remember that the life of God's children in this world is a pilgrim life. We have not wisdom to plan our own lives. It is not for us to shape our future. 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' Hebrews 11:8.

"Christ in His life on earth made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will. As we commit our ways to Him, He will direct our steps.

"Too many, in planning for a brilliant future, make an utter failure. Let God plan for you. As a little child, trust to the guidance of Him who will 'keep the feet of His saints.' 1 Samuel 2:9. God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose

to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him." *The Ministry of Healing*, 478.3–479.2

An illustration of our relationship to the Source is provided in the parable of the vine and the branches. Jesus used the vine to represent Himself. Separated from the vine, it is impossible for the cluster of grapes to ripen or even survive. "I am the vine;



you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." *John* 15:5. This dependent relationship is a very fitting illustration of our dependence on God.

Not Caught by Surprise

If we would renounce our pride and self-sufficient plans, and be willing to accept those plans for our lives which are already made in perfect wisdom by the divine Plan Maker, we would discover that He never makes a mistake. When we encounter problems, we are often puzzled or caught by surprise. But not so with God. He does not wait until an emergency arises or a problem appears before He thinks of a solution for it. Even prior to a problematic situation

beginning to develop, He has eternally foreseen every detail of it and has already devised perfect plans for coping with the problem. In His foreknowledge He waits to give us the ideal solution.

Daniel's experience is an excellent demonstration of this fact. As soon as he began to pray, the answer to his petition was already on its way to him. While he was still in prayer an angel came to him with the reply.

"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding." *Daniel* 9:20–22.

This infinite capacity of our great Problem Solver is well summed up in the following statements:

"Those who surrender their lives to His guidance and to His service will never be placed in a position for which He has not made provision." *The Ministry of Healing*, 248.2.

"In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet." *The Desire of Ages*, 330.1.

We can rest in the assurance that whenever a problem appears, God already has the solution to it. We do not need to be anxious, for we have only to cast all our cares upon the Lord and wait patiently for deliverance. In fact, the more complicated the problem, the more joyously we can anticipate a remarkable display of God's proficiency as Problem Solver. Such an attitude is sadly not natural for us, and therefore we must apply ourselves diligently to the task of acquiring this habit if we want "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding." *Philippians* 4:7.

Daily Leadership

There is a fundamental difference between the self-sufficient person who proudly shapes his or her own life, and the humble child of God who trustingly commits all to the heavenly Father. If we wish to control our own affairs, we have to gather as much information as possible in order to lay our plans accordingly. But this is not necessary if we trust God to lay His plans for us. Our divine Plan Maker will reveal just as much as we need to know on a daily basis. This is the rule the Saviour gave us in His beautiful sermon on the mount:

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." *Matthew* 6:34.

In the book of *James* we find some practical instruction as to how this rule can be applied in daily life.

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." *James* 4:13–16.

God works in the best possible ways for His children. He knows that their fragile faith is apt to crumble under the pressure of today's trials, without also heaping upon it the burdens of tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year. Therefore, by revealing no more than the duties of a single day, He has chosen that which is for the highest good of His children.

But we are not naturally inclined towards this divine plan. Our short-sighted wisdom declares that the only way to have peace is to know what lies ahead, in the distance as well as in the immediate future. This, in fact, produces the opposite effect—it fills the soul with anxiety and dread for what is coming. Furthermore, it loads onto our weak and trembling faith a burden we are not able to bear. (See the story of King Saul's visit to a medium in *1 Samuel* 28.)

Jesus was aware of this human tendency, so He gave us the following counsel:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap

or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." *Matthew* 6:25–34.

A clear explanation of this principle is given in the following paragraphs:

"If you have given yourself to God, to do His work, you have no need to be anxious for tomorrow. He whose servant you are, knows the end from the beginning. The events of tomorrow, which are hidden from your view, are open to the eyes of Him who is omnipotent.

"When we take into our hands the management of things with which we have to do, and depend upon our own wisdom for success, we are taking a burden which God has not given us, and are trying to bear it without His aid. We are taking upon ourselves the responsibility that belongs to God, and thus are really putting ourselves in His place. We may well have anxiety and anticipate danger and loss, for it is certain to befall us. But when we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God.

"Christ has given us no promise of help in bearing today the burdens of tomorrow. He has said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee' (2 Corinthians 12:9); but, like the manna given in the wilderness, His grace is bestowed daily, for the day's need. Like the hosts of Israel in their pilgrim life, we may find morning by morning the bread of heaven for the day's supply.

"One day alone is ours, and during this day we are to live for God. For this one day we are to place in the hand of Christ, in solemn service, all our purposes and plans, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.' 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' *Jeremiah* 29:11: *Isaiah* 30:15.

"If you will seek the Lord and be converted every day; if you will of your own spiritual choice be free and joyous in God; if with gladsome consent of heart to His gracious call you come wearing the yoke of Christ,—the yoke of obedience and service,—all your murmurings will be stilled, all your difficulties will be removed, all the perplexing problems that now confront you will be solved." *The Mount of Blessing*, 100.1–101.3.

It is God's way to give us but one day at a time. If we contentedly accept our daily ration from the great Plan Maker, we will receive true blessings, develop according to God's plan, and finally inherit eternal life. But if we attempt to deviate from this principle, it will result in the loss of these blessings. For there is no other way to achieve such results.

Human Plan Making

A fitting example of the consequences of violating the principle of letting God be our Plan Maker every day, is found in the story of the twelve spies sent into Canaan to make a definite plan for the attack. (See *Numbers* 13 and 14.) At Kadesh, Israel was not prepared to follow the rule that "each day has enough trouble of its own." They demonstrated that they were not prepared to accept God's way of progressive revelation. Their desire to spy out the land was prompted by the perverse human disposition which demands a complete picture of what lies ahead before there is any willingness to obey. Because they wanted to be their own plan makers, they needed as much information as they could obtain about the land and its inhabitants. But what a fearful price was paid for abandoning God's plan for their own. That cost was not imposed by God. It was

one which always attends human efforts to usurp God's role of Plan Maker.

The spies were instructed to investigate much further than one day's travel or warfare could take them. They were directed to make a comprehensive survey of the entire country. They were to bring back detailed and accurate assessments of the population density and distribution, the extent of military strength and preparation for war, the level of morale, the number and fortifications of the cities, and how formidable would be the task of subduing the whole country. All this directly violated the divine principle of leaving tomorrow and its responsibilities in God's capable hands. It was a formula guaranteed to break their faith, turn them away from God to self-sufficiency, and lead them to disaster. And so it turned out to be.

When those twelve spies returned, they initially gave an accurate report of what they had seen on their perilous journey. But then ten of them related, in dismaying detail, all that lay before them. By so doing they loaded upon themselves a burden the Lord had not given them, and which they were incapable of bearing. Had they known and confined themselves to God's perfect ways, He would have revealed what lay before them on a day-by-day basis. This they could have borne.

There is a great difference between being faced with the power of a single city and with the combined resources of a confederation of cities. Their faith could have borne the confrontation of the cities one by one, but not the whole of Canaan simultaneously. It is for this reason that when they entered the land according to God's ways, about forty years later, they were progressively brought face to face with their enemies. Thus, when they saw Jericho's fortifications and soldiery, they were not overawed by a view of all the other powers within the land. These they were to meet one at a time. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. Because they permitted God to assign them their work on a daily basis, their faith was not shattered the second time around, and the work went forward successfully. How different their history would have been had they followed this divinely revealed method when they first came to Kadesh!

For God, the possession of complete foreknowledge is no danger, because He does not have our problem of a weak faith. Je-

hovah has the capacity to know all that is to transpire, both good and bad, without risk to Himself. But we are not in this position. We cannot bear the complete revelation of our future. Therefore, God, in His wisdom, love, and mercy has ordered our ways in accordance with our limitations. If we deviate from this divine organization, we will inevitably bring disaster upon ourselves.

It was not only because the Israelites made themselves plan makers in God's place, that their faith failed at Kadesh. They also wanted a full survey of the land before they would move forward. These two sins go together. Once we determine to undertake the role of plan maker, we must obtain as much information as possible to formulate what we hope will be a successful scheme or solution. Therefore once the Israelites had committed the first sin of making themselves plan makers in God's place, the next logical step was to accumulate as much data as possible about what lay before them.

Evidence of God's Plans

Prior to their arrival at Kadesh, Israel had been given ample evidence of God's ways as their Plan Maker. When they departed from Egypt, God did not supply them with a detailed briefing on the route to be followed, or the perils to be encountered on the way. When they awoke each morning, they did not know what course they would follow, how far they would travel, or when they would break camp. All they could do was to watch the cloud for instructions on a daily basis. If it lifted, they prepared to march on. If it did not, they remained where they were for the time being.

"Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the

morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses." *Numbers* 9:17–23.

It was a matter of submissive, trusting obedience to Him who makes no mistakes. They had no need to be concerned about the future. They were safe in the hands of the One who knows the end from the beginning and who loves His children far too dearly to lead them otherwise than they themselves would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning.

Never was this lesson more beautifully taught than at the Red Sea crossing. In bringing the Israelites down to the water's edge, God did not inform them of the Egyptians' change of heart and impending pursuit. They would learn that soon enough. There was no value in knowing this before they needed to, for it would generate only unnecessary worry. Neither did God explain to them just how He would deal with their seemingly insoluble problem. He simply said to them "go forward." *Exodus* 14:15 (*NKJV*).

When God issued this command, there was no safe pathway through the sea, nor any visible evidence that there would be. But such a path would not be needed until they arrived at the water's edge. The Israelites' part was simply to march down to the sea and leave the future with God. Once they arrived at the water's edge their next step would be made plain. They did as they were directed, not asking for comprehensive revelations of the future. As a result, God was able to provide much more than salvation from their enemies. He was able to teach them, through a powerful demonstration, the principles of co-working with Him. Even though they quickly forgot the lesson, they did the right thing that day, with correspondingly wonderful results.

The behavior of Israel at the Red Sea is a valuable blueprint for us, if we learn from it.

"The great lesson here taught is for all time. Often the Christian life is beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, 'Go forward.'

We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Those who defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty disappears and there remains no risk of failure or defeat, will never obey at all. Unbelief whispers, 'Let us wait till the obstructions are removed, and we can see our way clearly;' but faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 290.2.

We need to remember that it is not God's way to reveal the whole future to His children at any given point of time. Those who insist, as did the Israelites at Kadesh, on knowing what the future holds before they are prepared to move forward, demonstrate a lack of faith in God's ways. The only possible outcome is a greater mistrust in and separation from God. That, in turn, spells failure and unrest which further deprives them of God's peace—that abiding peace which passes understanding.

It is not natural for human beings to rest the unknown in God's able care. It requires enlightened faith to achieve this. But those who are laboring to enter into His rest will learn these principles from the Master Teacher and practice them faithfully day by day.

Progressive Revelations of Light

Every time God unfolds new testing truth to His people, the same problem arises again. It is not God's way to disclose every detail of new light in a single revelation, but what teacher does? The first day a student enters school, the tutors do not try to explain all the problems which attend a subject. They lay down the basic principles and the student has to grasp these first before proceeding to more advanced studies. The student is expected to trust the teacher's judgment by studying each day's assignments, leaving unresolved questions and new subject areas in the teacher's hands.

God teaches us in a similar way. Consequently, His children need faith in Him as their Teacher. Then they will trust Him to decide *what* they shall learn and *when* they shall learn it. Their curriculum should be the Lord's decision, not theirs. The Master wishes to instruct the members of His body as a coordinated whole, not as scattered, individual units. He does not want them moving in various independent directions. For this reason, when the time comes to communicate certain truths to them, He calls a messenger to convey these treasures. He then expects His people to learn the lessons He has sent them.

At the same time, the Lord provides abundant evidence to show that the message is from Him, so that the student can confidently place his trust in the Omniscient Educator and the channels He has elected to use. This does not mean that we are to accept everything we hear from the messenger without carefully comparing it with the Scriptures. On the contrary, we should dig deeply for the hidden treasure until the message becomes our own. If we do this, the light will advance from one level of brilliance to another, as it is written: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." *Proverbs* 4:18 (*KJV*).

The time will never come when created beings will have infinite knowledge. Eternity itself will not exhaust the treasures of truth ever unfolding before eager, questing minds. The need to exercise faith will remain, for there will always be more that is unknown about God than is known. It will still be necessary to advance under the master Teacher's guidance, while trustingly leaving undisclosed things till such time as Christ judges is best to reveal them.

But while sin shall last, there will always be those minds which do not understand and accept these principles. They do not realize that God's truths come only by revelation, and not by searching. In fact, it is impossible for us to find out God by searching.

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" *Job* 11:7.

When the divinely appointed time comes, God sends messengers with His current light. Excellent examples are the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, Christ Himself, and the reformers. Then, in the 1800's, William Miller, Ellen White, E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones. None of these people delivered messages they had searched out for themselves. They did not work at

finding a message from the Scriptures in order to appoint themselves as preachers or messengers. Instead, as they studied the Scriptures, they did so under God's guidance and in active cooperation with Him. They were learners at the master Teacher's feet. What He taught them, they passed on to others. God's commission to the prophet Jeremiah clearly defines this principle of operation:

"But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." *Jeremiah* 1:7.

Just as with all the other messengers of God, when Jeremiah stood before the people, he did not initially have all the answers on any given subject, nor did he speak about many subjects which later came to be revealed. But there was enough evidence given by God to show that the message being presented was the truth. The Lord expected the hearers to turn to the Scriptures and thoroughly study, under His tutelage, the light that He had revealed, without concerning themselves with what had not yet been given.

This principle is set forth in *Deuteronomy* 29:29 where it is written:

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

The Revealer of truth knows what He is doing. Therefore, when, in His infinite wisdom, He elects to reveal certain truths at a given time, it is not necessary or even safe for His people to worry about what He has not yet seen fit to reveal. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." *Matthew* 6:34.

"Do not fret, it only causes harm." Psalm 37:8 (NKJV).

Those who refuse to believe until every question is answered, every objection met, and with no difficulty remaining, will never come to see and obey the truth. Instead, we need to remember the lesson of Israel at the Red Sea and obey, despite the fear of cold waves around our feet, when "the voice of God speaks clearly, 'Go forward. "' Patriarchs and Prophets, 290.2.

Let us, therefore, resolve to be students taught of God. Laboring to enter into God's rest involves more than observing His

Sabbath day. It includes understanding and accepting that God reveals only what is for our best good at the right time. We also need to recognize and accept the channels through whom God is shedding His light and learn from these appointed messengers of the Lord. The attention should be focused on the lessons as they are being unfolded, no matter how many unresolved questions may arise. We must leave those difficulties with the master Educator. He is fully aware of them and has already planned to deal with them at the right time. This is the only safe course to pursue. History shows that those who concentrate on understanding what God has already revealed will be ready for the next lesson when He gives it.

Christ's Submission

During His earthly mission, Christ was a model Follower of God's ways. He was quite content to have His Father reveal each day's responsibilities as that day arrived. He was not troubled because His future was not opened to His immediate view. As a result, He was not burdened with a restless spirit, which knowledge of the future would have brought. He walked safely in God's ways, step by step, without demanding that the future be revealed to Him before moving forward.

While He was a man, Christ was limited by the same restrictions as we are. During the final days before His crucifixion Christ knew from the Scriptures that He would rise again, and He repeatedly told this to His disciples. (See *Mark* 8:31; *Luke* 18:33.) But in His desperate struggle at Gethsemane and Calvary, when all appearances witnessed to the contrary, He was not able to look through the portals of the grave. At that time, His prayer was: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." *Matthew* 26:39.

"Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him his coming forth from the grave a triumphant conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of his sacrifice. All He could realize during this time of amazing darkness was the heinousness of sin that was laid upon Him, and the horror of its penalty, death. He feared that sin was so offensive in the sight of his Father that their separation was eternal. The temptation that his own Father had forever left Him, caused that fearful cry from the cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Bible Echo and Signs of the Times, September 15, 1892, paragraph 2.

It is true that, before He left heaven, Christ saw every step He would take on earth, together with the actions of every force which would be arrayed against Him. But when He laid aside His Deity and came to earth as Man, He accepted the limitations of those whom He came to save, and no longer possessed that intimate knowledge of His future. He became as dependent upon His Father as is any child of Adam.

It is necessary in this connection to see the distinction between general revelations of the future as given in prophecy, and a personal, detailed survey of a specific individual's imminent future. Christ, for instance, knew from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament that He would be betrayed and crucified, just as God's people today know about the coming events in the world. To be informed about these impending events is important, but for excellent reasons, God knows better than to acquaint each of us with the knowledge of where we will be and what will befall us when that time arrives. While it is God's way to give us general views of the future, He does not provide specific information of our responsibilities or burdens until that time comes.

Because Christ is our example, we can expect to be led in the same way that He was led by the heavenly Father on a daily basis. If we have the faith of Jesus (see *Revelation* 14:12) we will be inspired to trust God implicitly. Such trust will keep us from self-confidently leaving our place, and instead will help us to retain a humble view of our position as dependent receivers. This will enable our divine Plan Maker to lead us according to His perfect plans.

Lessons from the Life of Israel

CHAPTER 4

Laboring to Enter God's Rest

Paul's Understanding of Hebrews

Paul was an apostle with an uncommonly broad and deep understanding of heavenly matters. Consequently, he was a most effective teacher of the truth, and a successful winner of souls. His influence did not terminate with his death, for his writings live on as glorious illuminations to inspire, uplift, and save men, women, and children till the close of time. Upon whatever subject Paul wrote or taught, a light was cast which opened up the glory and power resident in that truth. This gives us a foretaste of the heavenly experience when, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, the redeemed shall explore the most profound mysteries in the universe.

It is in the first chapters of *Hebrews*, that Paul's insights about entering God's rest are explored. Through Paul's words, the real significance of God's Sabbath rest is opened to the spiritually receptive mind. The message on the true nature of the Sabbath is so developed, that not only are we introduced to what Sabbath-keeping really is, but we are also shown its critical role in concluding the great controversy and the reasons for the long delay in so doing. These views of the Sabbath will lead

the truly consecrated to abandon their own works totally in preference for God's ways and procedures. When God has a people who are unswervingly dedicated to these principles, He will be able to bring the work to a speedy conclusion. Until then, the sad struggle will be prolonged to provide further opportunities for the essential lessons to be learned and applied.

It was with the deepest concern for the church's future that Paul wrote the instruction and appeals contained in the first chapters of *Hebrews*. He was acutely aware of the danger which threatened God's people, but he knew how they could be preserved from it. Only if they abandoned the procedures which had ruined the church so many times previously, and accepted God's ways instead, could they be safe. Paul understood that it was not natural for believers to do this and so he climaxed his appeal with these words, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." *Hebrews* 4:11.

The full import of this exhortation cannot be appreciated unless Paul's instruction and argument, beginning in the first chapter and proceeding through till the fourth, is thoroughly understood. Paul has a distinctive style in which he lays down basic principles and then draws conclusions from them, prefaced with the word "therefore," or "wherefore" (KJV). The placement of either of these words indicates that we must refer to the preceding words in order to understand what follows. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 all begin with one of these words, by which we know that the contents of each succeeding chapter cannot be truly understood unless study is given to the previous one. Consequently, the line of argument begins back in chapter 1, and continues in an orderly and powerful progression through chapter 4.

What then is the message of these successive chapters?

Initially we are introduced to the relative positions of God the Father, Christ the Connector, and the creatures—angels and humans. Paul makes it quite clear that God is the limitless Source of everything, Christ is the Connector or Messenger through whom every blessing and ray of light flows, while angels and human beings are the dependant receivers. These truths are so basic, unchangeable, and vital, that they cannot be disregarded with impunity. Upon the recognition, understanding, and acceptance of

them depends the well-being of every individual. They guarantee prosperity and success, and the ultimate triumph of God's cause against sin. We cannot be true Sabbath-keepers unless we know these great absolutes and operate in harmony with them.

Christ as God and Man

In the first three verses of the first chapter of *Hebrews*, Christ is introduced as the One through whom the almighty Source created the worlds and upholds them to this present point of time. He is also identified as the mighty Connector through whom light is channelled to all dependant creatures.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he [God] made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." *Hebrews* 1:1–3.

From verse 4 onwards, various reasons are given to explain why Christ's position is higher than the angels. From the beginning, the great controversy has centered on Christ's role as the living Connector between the Source and the receiver. Therefore, Paul found it necessary to spell out in considerable detail Christ's unique position and work in God's perfect and eternal organization. There is very good reason for this. Many to whom Paul's writings were directly sent, had actually seen Christ as a Man, had heard Him teach, and had witnessed His wonderful miracles. But while they had no difficulty in recognizing Christ as an extraordinary man, they failed to perceive that at the same time, He was also the Creator. This is a common failing with humanity. Consequently, both for the people of his time and all succeeding generations, Paul found it necessary to explain Christ's oneness and equality with the everlasting and almighty Father.*

^{*} For further study refer to *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, by A. T. Jones.

It was by inheritance that Christ had obtained this more excellent name than the angels. Even when He was but a babe in Bethlehem, the angels were directed to worship Him. It is a principle founded in God's kingdom that creatures never worship other creatures, as this is reserved for the Godhead alone. When, for example, John was about to worship the exalted and beautiful angel who brought the message recorded by him in *Revelation*, the angel quickly frustrated his intention with these words:

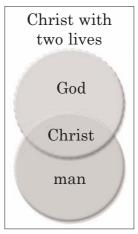
"Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." *Revelation* 19:10.

A short while after that, a similar situation happened and again the angel admonished him.

"But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" *Revelation* 22:9.

Therefore, the fact that God said of Christ, "... let all God's angels worship him" (*Hebrews* 1:6), is clear proof that He recognized Christ as more than a creature, either Angel or Man. Christ is God in the creature. It is proper to worship Him whose throne is forever and ever, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity.

The study of *Hebrews* chapter 2 reveals Christ's relationship to us. Just as the first chapter declares His complete oneness with God, chapter 2 sets forth the completeness of His identification with sinful, fallen humanity. Paul explains and emphasizes the point that Christ did not come in sinless flesh, but in the same fallen, sinful flesh that you and I are born with. He says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same." (*Hebrews* 2:14, NKJV) He stresses the fact that Christ's flesh was no different from



any of Adam and Eve's descendants since the fall. Only in this way could Christ totally identify with us and be tested as one of us. As a result of His complete victory in sinful flesh, He can strengthen us to likewise resist temptation and overcome sin.

Christ is therefore a unique being in that He possesses two lives at the same time. This gives Him the capacity, possessed by no other being in existence, to stand as the great Connector between the Creator and His creatures, both angels and humans.

The Principles of Sabbath Rest

Once Paul established these truths about the relationship of the almighty Source, the unique Connector, and the dependent receivers, the foundation was laid for developing the principles involved in God's Sabbath rest. This foundation is necessary because the true understanding and practice of these principles depends on a clear knowledge of the relationship between Creator and creatures. The more thoroughly the first two chapters of *Hebrews* are understood, the better will the succeeding arguments be appreciated.

So extensive, beautiful, and powerful are the truths contained in these chapters, that they will engage the attention of the redeemed through all eternity without exhausting their depths. Obviously then, we have touched only the surface here, but this will be sufficient to establish the foundation necessary for correctly understanding the Sabbath rest principles.

Each of us has a future which is directly determined by the way we view our relationship as creatures to our Creator. Because there is such depth in His relationship to us, it is called the mystery of God. It is a wonderful soul-saving, life-sustaining mystery and our acceptance of it in both heart and mind assures us of success in this life and the future. On the other hand, misunderstanding, indifference or rejection will produce only failure for us.

If these Sabbath rest principles are assimilated till they irradiate our entire lives, they will produce in us characters of exquisite beauty and wondrous power until we "... will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to right-eousness, like the stars for ever and ever." *Daniel* 12:3.

On the other hand, rejection of these principles will eventually produce the opposite result. These will be men and women to be wondered at, not for the beauty of righteousness, but for the extent to which wickedness will finally reign in them.

Unfortunately, it is all too difficult to find examples in the Scriptures of those who, with unfailing consistency, exemplified the divine principles of Sabbath rest. The cases of those who did not follow God's ways are much more numerous. But, regardless of numbers, we need to study both classes in order to understand what is to be emulated and what should be shunned. Thus we are provided with the opportunity of making an enlightened and responsible choice in which way to go.

It is tragic when individuals give lip service to these guiding fundamentals while denying them by their works. They can assume they are serving the Lord when in reality they are assisting the devil. It is for this reason that down through the ages great religious organizations have believed they are rendering God service long after He has utterly ceased to lead them. There can be no tragedy of greater proportions. Imagine the consternation and crushing disappointment of those who in the end, after having sacrificed a lifetime of possessions and opportunities, find that they have not really served the Lord at all and that He has no place in heaven for them.

To be on the right side requires more than strong faith, vital as that is. Great faith in the Almighty has all too often been followed by utter failure, deep discouragement, and eventual separation from God. Faith without God's works or procedures is dead (see *James* 2:20–26). So faith and works must be combined in their correct relationship if the professed children of God are to become "more than conquerors." *Romans* 8:37. This balance between true faith and correct procedures is revealed in the principles of Sabbath rest.

Failure to Enter God's Rest

Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 are concerned with contrasting those who experienced Sabbath rest and those who did not. After Paul chose Christ and Moses as examples of faithful and successful service (see Hebrews 3:1–6), he examined ancient Israel's inexcusable and tragic substitution of human devising in the place of divine direction.

From the outset, the promise to Israel was that the Lord would give them rest:

"The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." *Exodus* 33:14.

God's desire was to give them spiritual rest as well as the physical rest necessary for their lifework. But this promise was obviously not fulfilled to the first generation who died in the wilderness.

Picture that saddened host trudging across hot, burning plains through clouds of fine choking dust. See them setting up camp each night, only to tear it all down again the next morning and tramp on through another wearisome day. There was no rest in that. They were going nowhere, accomplishing nothing; just filling in time until they died. What a tragic contrast to what they could have been doing—dwelling on verdant farmlands rich with maturing harvests, in comfortable homes, settled and serene. That would have been physical rest, and God intended that they should have that.

The following generation achieved physical rest to some degree. After Joshua brought them into the promised land it is written:

"The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them." *Joshua* 21:44.

"... a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them ..." *Joshua* 23:1.

"For David had said, 'Since the LORD, the God of Israel, has granted rest to his people and has come to dwell in Jerusalem forever ..." 1 Chronicles 23:25.

But God wanted to give them much more than mere physical rest. He purposed that they should experience an inner peace that would distinguish them from every other religionist and make it evident that they were children of the all-wise Plan Maker. Such spiritual rest even this later generation did not obtain. Paul states this quite definitely in *Hebrews*:

"It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, ... For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." *Hebrews* 4:6–8.

"So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." *Hebrews* 3:19.

Sadly, God's purpose for Israel was not fulfilled. They did not enter into the spiritual rest which He had provided for them.

God's Rest Still Remains

Paul goes on to argue that this precious opportunity is still open to us. We can still enter into the experience of Sabbath rest where the Israelites of old failed. As we study chapters 3 and 4 of *Hebrews*, these thoughts become clear. Paul draws the following conclusions:

- God rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath (*Hebrews* 4:4).
- He invited Israel to enter into His Sabbath rest:
- but those who departed from Egypt did not (Hebrews 3:16, 17),
- neither did the following generation who later entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua (*Hebrews* 4:8).
- The reasons ancient Israel failed to enter into God's rest included:
 - · unbelief (*Hebrews* 3:19; 4:2),
 - · disobedience (*Hebrews* 3:18; 4:6, 11),
 - · hardness of heart through the deceitfulness of sin (*Hebrews* 3:13).
- The offer of entering into the Sabbath rest experience remains open to us (*Hebrews* 4:6, 9).
- The time of opportunity for accepting this offer is "Today" (*Hebrews* 4:7).
- We should be afraid lest we repeat Israel's mistake (*Hebrews* 4:1).
- When we fulfil the conditions—faith and obedience—we can enter into this rest (*Hebrews* 4:3, 11).
- Sabbath rest consists in resting from our "own works" (*Hebrews* 4:10).

Because Paul uses ancient Israel to illustrate his conclusions about Sabbath rest principles, we will now consider some examples in their history, beginning with their experience at Kadesh Barnea.

Chapter 5

Kadesh Barnea

Israel's Failure

Algorant example in Israel's history, which shows very clearly why they never entered as a people into God's Sabbath rest, is their failure at Kadesh Barnea. This is a valuable illustration, in that it plainly demonstrates how a church can depart from God's ways while still believing that they are fulfilling His purposes. Although the lives of Moses and Christ portray the correct relationship to be sustained between Source and receiver, the Israelites show how easily this can be discarded in favor of ways which bring only failure and loss.

When the Israelites arrived at Kadesh Barnea, the promised land lay before them to the north. Through Moses, God gave them the general order to go in and possess the territory of the Canaanites.

"Then, as the LORD our God commanded us, we set out from Horeb and went toward the hill country of the Amorites through all that vast and dreadful desert that you have seen, and so we reached Kadesh Barnea. Then I said to you, 'You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. See, the LORD your God has given you the

land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." *Deuteronomy* 1:19–21.

General and Specific Orders

At this point it would be helpful to distinguish between two different categories of directives coming from God; namely, His general orders and His specific orders. This differentiation is a vital key to understanding and following God's ways. His general orders are to be found throughout the Bible. We call them "general" orders because they do not contain specific directions to any given individual.

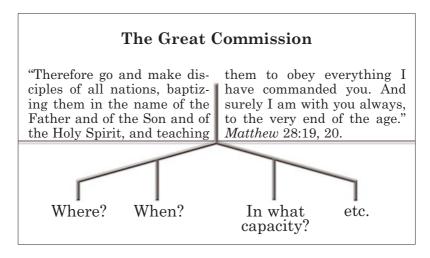
A good example of a general order is the great missionary commission given by Christ to His people just before His ascension. This command is of equal authority to every child of God in every age till the end of time. Christ said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." *Matthew* 28:19, 20.

This command is general in nature because it leaves unanswered the specific details of where, when, and in what capacity each of us is to carry out our part of the great commission. Once we have accepted God's general order, we then need specific instructions directing us to our specific place. Will we serve in India, the United States, Africa, Australia, or some other part of the world? Will we labor as preachers, teachers, medical missionaries, helpers, or administrators? Will we go there now or next year, and how long will we stay?

Obviously, someone must make these decisions and issue the appropriate commands if the church is to function harmoniously and effectively. General orders are inadequate on their own without God's specific directives to support them.

Another example would be the question about the appropriate day of physical rest for God's children. The special importance of this day was initially announced in the second chapter of the Bible: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because

Kadesh Barnea 75

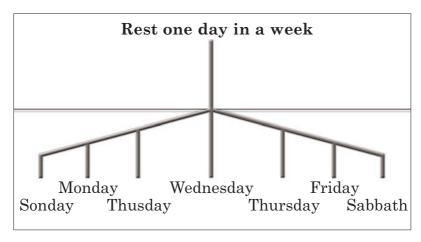


on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." *Genesis* 2:3.

The Roman Catholic church declares her willingness to accept and follow God's general order to worship Jehovah on one day in seven, but then usurps His right to designate which day it will be. So bold has she become in her confident assumption that God is pleased with her actions, that her representative writers have actually stated that although the church accepts God's general orders she has changed the details.

"It is to be noted that the Church did not change the divine law obliging men to worship, but merely changed the day on which such public worship was to be offered." *The Faith of Millions*, 543, by John A. O'Brien, London, W. H. Allen, 1962.

Whereas God has designated the seventh day as the day of worship, the Roman Catholic church has instead selected Sunday, the first day of the week. Accordingly she professes to follow God's general orders, but in fact usurps His authority and responsibility. Satan is exceedingly pleased with this arrangement and prefers it far above one in which people openly reject both God's general and specific orders. There are millions in this category of rejecters, but they are not the ones whom the enemy uses most effectively, for he is intent on building a counterfeit of God's kingdom in which he will be the plan maker in place of the true Head. To do this, he must persuade those who serve him



that they are in reality serving God. Through their professed acceptance of general orders they assume they are loyal to God, whereas, by leading them to formulate their own details, Satan ensures that they are not.

There are many other orders that are not given to every child of God in every age, but nonetheless can be defined as "general" in that they do not contain specific orders to any specific individual or group. Such general orders include for example the one given to Israel to enter Canaan. This order was given to all of Israel as explained by Moses when he quoted the Lord's words: "See I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord promised to your fathers...." Deuteronomy 1:8 margin. Moses was referring to the general promise given to Abram when he first left Ur (see Genesis 12:1, 5, 7). But the specific orders had yet to be given to a generation who were not even born during the lifetime of Abraham.

As we saw, God provides us with general plans about the future, such as His order to enter the heavenly Canaan, just as He gave Israel His plan for them to enter the earthly Canaan in the days of Moses. At that time He did not give them the specific instructions as to how they would enter it. In His wisdom He did not burden them with the worries of tomorrow. They had enough specific orders to obey in following the cloud, gathering manna and so on. Then when the appropriate moment arrived, as they came to Kadesh Barnea, He planned to reveal the best way for

Kadesh Barnea 77

them to make their actual entrance into the promised land, but they failed to ask Him. In the report of the way the Israelites behaved at Kadesh Barnea we have an example of how they accepted God's general orders willingly, but then attempted to carry them out by making their own specific orders. In so doing they doomed themselves to disaster.

What went Wrong at Kadesh Barnea?

God's people fully accepted His promise and expected to come into immediate possession of their inheritance. There was no spirit of rebellion manifest among them and they promptly went about carrying out God's general directions.

Any observer not thoroughly educated in God's ways, would have detected nothing at this point to suggest that things were going drastically wrong. God, through Moses, had commanded the Israelites to possess the land; they had enthusiastically accepted these directions, and quickly set about carrying them out. Twelve spies were selected and sent off on their mission. During the forty days of their absence, the spirit in the camp was excellent. There was good fellowship and busy preparation for the entry into the promised land. It appeared as if Israel was in harmony with God. Why should there be anything wrong in this procedure?

1. Reason:

Firstly, the exercise was a total waste of time. Six valuable weeks were spent trying to work out a plan which God had already arranged. From eternity, God had foreseen this situation and had prepared perfect procedures for the Israelites to follow. If they had trusted Him to reveal His plan, they would not have failed. Their march into Canaan would have been triumphant.

2. Reason:

Secondly, no matter how wise, well-trained, or experienced the people might be, they could not possibly work out a plan to compare with God's marvellous design. To match His work, they would have had to possess His wisdom, His total knowledge of the enemy's positions, strengths, strategies, and thinking, and also His perfect foreknowledge of what would happen in the future. This was impossible for them as human beings.

3. Reason:

Thirdly, the most serious fault was that they transferred their confidence in the Almighty to themselves. As a consequence they took over responsibilities belonging to God alone. That was the real evil. As a result, they made their own specific orders, instead of asking God for His. By so doing, they did not make use of the only Director who could successfully lead them, and in this way brought upon themselves incalculable loss. Had they not made these mistakes, they would have retained the services of the Plan Maker and Problem Solver who never makes an error and who is never caught by surprise.

If we understand divine ways in the light of the mystery of God, we would recognize that this enterprise was doomed to failure. God, who had been Israel's Plan Maker and Problem Solver up until then, was set aside and the people appointed themselves to this role. They called for twelve spies to go into the land and form a plan of action for the people to follow.

In doing this, they thought they were working for God and were thereby earning His divine approbation. This unfortunate misconception encouraged them to follow ardently their own way to ruin, whereas, if they could have correctly evaluated the true nature of their course and foreseen its evil consequences, they would have been quick to flee back to God and His ways.

The problem was not so much their spying out of the land. This was also done later before attacking Jericho (See *Joshua* 2:1) and was not sinful in itself. We have to do our part even when God is our perfect Plan-maker as will be demonstrated later in this book. What was wrong was that they shifted their trust in divine plan-making to human plan-making! This evil root could not but lead to a decrease of faith with the attending evil consequences.

How many times since then have God's people confidently entered on a course of their own planning assured that they were doing God's will, when in fact they were but carrying out their own! Sadly, it seems that we seldom learn from God's word, our Kadesh Barnea 79

own mistakes, or the failures demonstrated in history. The way in which, from generation to generation, the same patterns of unsuccessful behavior are repeated with predictable regularity, is most discouraging. Not until we learn to turn to God in trust for both His general and His specific orders, will God have an enlightened people to follow His ways at last.

Specific Orders From Whom?

Let us consider the precise course the Israelites should have adopted when God directed them to go in and possess the land.

Had they known God's ways, His people would have come to Him humbly asking for specific directions for the invasion, and would then have waited till these were supplied before making any moves. God had already prepared detailed and perfect plans for the campaign, such as where to begin, how to attack, etc. These He was ready and willing to communicate to them, but their immediate responsibility was to ask for and trustingly receive this instruction and then obey it to the letter. If they had done this, they would probably have had to spy out some details as they did in Jericho, but their entry into the promised inheritance would not have been a failure but imminent, and the subjugation of the Canaanites totally successful.

After all the wonderful experiences with which they had been blessed since their departure from Egypt, the Israelites ought to have entertained no thought of any other course. God had demonstrated His ability to lead them with faultless certainty from one victory to another. Their confidence and trust should have been in Him, not in themselves. There was no excuse for turning aside from God's flawless leadership to any other plan maker or problem solver.

Yet this is what Israel did. Trusting in self, they decided that human plan makers would take the place of the divine. Without realizing what they were doing or the consequences that would follow, they determined to replace the mystery of God with the mystery of iniquity. They called for the appointment of a representative committee which would be commissioned to survey the land and, from the accumulated information, devise

a plan of attack by their own wisdom. It was a clear case of men replacing God with themselves by devising their own specific orders.

"Then all of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to." *Deuteronomy* 1:22.

This idea originated with the people who brought it to Moses. He, on their behalf, took the plan before the Lord. Because the Lord will never force the will of any of His children, He granted them permission to do what they wished.

"Eleven days after leaving Mount Horeb the Hebrew host encamped at Kadesh, in the wilderness of Paran, which was not far from the borders of the Promised Land. Here it was proposed by the people that spies be sent up to survey the country. The matter was presented before the Lord by Moses, and permission was granted, with the direction that one of the rulers of each tribe should be selected for this purpose. The men were chosen as had been directed, and Moses bade them go and see the country, what it was, its situation and natural advantages; and the people that dwelt therein, whether they were strong or weak, few or many; also to observe the nature of the soil and its productiveness and to bring of the fruit of the land." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 387.1.

Note that Moses did not seek the Lord's will, but merely His approval of the people's plan. But because they were willing to accept some advice from Him, God gave them counsel outlining the best way to do what they had chosen. He gave them advice on how to choose the best men from among the people so that the resulting frustration would be reduced as much as possible. Here is God's answer to the desire of the people that Moses presented to Him:

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.' So at the LORD'S command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites." *Numbers* 13:1–3.

The saddest thing was that the Israelites did not fully understand what they were doing. They were convinced they were eagerly doing God's work, when in reality they were furthering the objectives of the arch-apostate. Kadesh Barnea was a place

KADESH BARNEA 81

where Satan accomplished his objectives. The people were quite willing to accept the general order to go in and possess the land, but they did not trust God to supply the specific orders of how to go about it. Instead, they confidently proceeded to work these out themselves by commissioning twelve spies to search out the land, devise a plan of attack, and bring it back for them to follow.

God's people saw no reason to suspect that they had fallen into serious error. Was not their commissioning of the spies a witness to their faith? Was it not adding works to their confident faith in God's word that the land would be theirs? What else could they do to obey the Lord more perfectly? How could anything be wrong with such a procedure? They imagined that God would surely be pleased with their faith, enthusiasm, and good works!

How terribly mistaken they were. They did not understand that both general and specific orders must come from God. If not, He cannot produce a good outcome. Of those people in that situation, the Holy Spirit sadly declared, "they have not known my ways.' So, ... 'They shall never enter my rest," and they did not. *Hebrews* 3:10, 11.

Here the Lord plainly tells us that if we accept His general orders but make our own specifics, we do not know His ways and will not enter into His rest. That means we are not true co-workers with God and cannot participate in the final victory over the powers of darkness, nor walk the streets of gold.

"Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." *Hebrews* 4:11.

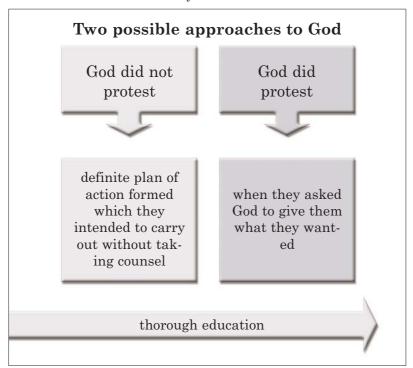
Why did God not Protest?

When Moses brought the people's plan to God, the Almighty neither voiced disapproval nor made any attempt to point out their error. He had done this earlier when they asked for flesh foods (see *Numbers* 11), and He did later when they asked for the institution of the monarchy (see *1 Samuel* 8). Some argue that the absence of disapproval indicates Jehovah's approval of the scheme, especially when Moses declared that the people's proposition pleased him well (see *Deuteronomy* 1:23). Such reasoning

indicates a misunderstanding of God's ways. There is good reason why God said nothing at Kadesh. The people were turning from His ways to their own because they trusted themselves more than Him.

Primarily, God sets out to educate His people in the divine principles by giving them repeated evidences of the way He operates. Eventually they are brought to a situation which tests them to see what they have learned. If they then elect to follow a wrong course, He does not immediately protest. Further examples of this are when Abram and Sarai planned the birth of the promised child through Hagar (see *Genesis* 16), and when, on the shores of the Red Sea, the Israelites plundered the Egyptians of their weapons. In neither case did God immediately utter disapproval, but this did not mean that He approved of either course of action.

Sometimes God speaks out, and sometimes He does not. Does this indicate an inconsistency in His behavior?



KADESH BARNEA 83

God Himself asserts that He is not inconsistent. Rather, His behavior is based on consistent and unchanging principles. "I the LORD do not change." *Malachi* 3:6. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." *Hebrews* 13:8. Therefore, there must be a difference between these apparently inconsistent situations. When this difference is understood, God's behavior will be readily seen as consistent.

We need to understand the following difference. In some situations the people formed a definite plan of action which they intended to carry out themselves, in the face of a thorough education to the contrary. In other cases they were simply presenting their request to God for Him to give them what they wanted.

Note the difference in these two approaches:

At Kadesh the Israelites brought their already formulated plan before God and were not willing to hear His plan. They declared: "We will send men before us." *Deuteronomy* 1:22 (KJV).

Whereas in Samuel's time they asked God Himself to fulfil their wishes: "[You] give us a king to lead us." *1 Samuel* 8:6.

Therefore, God's lack of protest against the people's decision to send spies into Canaan, does not in any sense indicate that He approved of their plan. If they had come requesting that He send the spies, then He would have objected, but not when they came announcing their own intention to execute a plan they had already devised. Under those circumstances, it is God's way to accept their choice, remain silent and let the people carry out their own plans in which they have placed their trust.

Why not a Committee?

Some might argue that the plan at Kadesh Barnea was simply following precedence. Management committees had been formed previously when Jethro advised Moses on camp organization (see *Exodus* 18:13–27). Because such a committee was right in that instance, was it not also correct to choose a committee of twelve people to survey the land of Canaan?

It is not God's way to issue general orders and then leave the formulation of the specific details to church committees, boards of directors, or individuals themselves. Careful study of Jethro's counsel will show that it was nothing more than advice to Moses to distribute the workload, by delegating existing responsibilities. None of the chosen ones had the authority or added responsibility of formulating plans.

Later, another committee of men was given to Israel. God gave further directions that seventy elders be elected to share with Moses the responsibility of leadership.

"The LORD said to Moses: 'Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone." *Numbers* 11:16, 17.

This was an accommodation on God's part to meet inexcusable unbelief and murmuring from Moses.

"Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, 'Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, "Give us meat to eat!" I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin." Numbers 11:10–15.

"The Lord permitted Moses to choose for himself the most faithful and efficient men to share the responsibility with him. Their influence would assist in holding in check the violence of the people, and quelling insurrection; yet serious evils would eventually result from their promotion. They would never have been chosen had Moses manifested faith corresponding to the evidences he had witnessed of God's power and goodness. But he had magnified his own burdens and services, almost losing sight of the fact that he was only the instrument by which God had wrought. He was not excusable in indulging, in the slight-

Kadesh Barnea 85

est degree, the spirit of murmuring that was the curse of Israel. Had he relied fully upon God, the Lord would have guided him continually and would have given him strength for every emergency." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 380.2.

God had never intended that the seventy elders be appointed. Because it was not according to His plan, it developed into serious evil. This will always be the case when men make their own specific orders. Out of this committee developed the Sanhedrin which later put our Lord to death.

What happened at Kadesh Barnea was quite different from the appointment of the magistrates and the election of the seventy elders, and demonstrated the utter impossibility of men taking God's place as Plan Maker and Problem Solver. The twelve selected spies were to make definite plans of their own according to what they would observe, depending on their own wisdom. They were to "... spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to." *Deuteronomy* 1:22. In this way we can see that the spies became the plan makers appointed by the people to formulate plans for the conquest, which only God could have successfully made.

We have to understand that the mistake was not the planmaking in itself. Often we have to make definite plans as we cowork with God. The real issue was that they had lost their trust in God's power and ability and tried to occupy His role by supplying specific orders through human wisdom.

In Summary

The lesson provided in this story is both clear and impressive. Up until Kadesh Barnea, Israel had left the planning of their journey to their all-wise Plan Maker. But with their arrival at Kadesh, a new order of things was introduced. Although they had accepted God's general orders to go into the promised land, they did not trust Him to provide specific orders. Instead, they trusted themselves and selected a committee to replace God as their plan maker. Ten of the spies, when they returned, were so intimidated by what they had seen, that the only plan they could

suggest was to abandon the entire project. The people were quick to respond to this negative attitude. Their high anticipation turned to unbelief, rendering them incapable of successfully possessing the promised inheritance.

God did not arbitrarily exclude them from it. His judgment was simply the recognition that it had become impossible to lead them in, for they no longer trusted Him as their Guide. By usurping God's position, they had destroyed all hope of entry and brought upon themselves the terrible fate of a forty-year death march. None, except the faithful Joshua and Caleb, ever saw the goodly country in which they might have found true rest.

Whereas previous rebellions had been among only a segment of the congregation, this time the whole people were contaminated. At this point, Israel's situation changed completely. Success and victory were exchanged for failure and defeat. This story powerfully teaches the relationship between God's way and success, compared with our way and failure. Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea clearly demonstrates the cost we pay when we usurp God's position as our plan maker. The price is simply not worth it.

CHAPTER 6

Faith Without Works is Dead

The Scriptures teach, "faith without works is dead." James 2:20 (NKJV).

Therefore we would conclude that faith with works is alive. But the experience of Israel at Kadesh Barnea appears to contradict this reasoning. They came there with a faith so strong that they had no doubts about taking possession of the promised land. They were completely confident that they would soon be in Canaan. As a witness to their faith, the people enthusiastically added to it extensive and diligent works with the sure expectation that this combination would obtain the promised inheritance for them.

We would imagine, then, that their faith would live and not die, but this was not the case. When the spies returned with their negative report, Israel's faith turned to wicked unbelief (see *Numbers* 14:1–4). The confidence of the wilderness wanderers that the desert would soon be exchanged for the land flowing with milk and honey, was replaced by gloomy certainty that it would not. In their case, faith with works turned out to be dead.

Another such example is found in the story of the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples of Christ and the people who witnessed the miracle had faith enough to make Christ king at that very moment (see John 6:15), thereby adding works to their

belief. But only a few hours later their faith died away and the greater portion of those people left Christ forever (see *John* 6:66). This experience of the disciples and the multitude again demonstrates that faith with works can be dead.

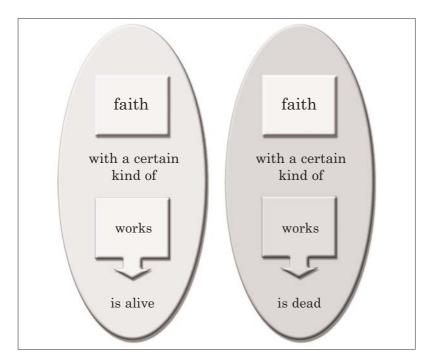
There are of course countless scriptural examples where faith with works was very much alive, such as the departure of Israel from Egypt in the depths of night and their crossing the Red Sea. But while on the one hand we have the statement that faith without works is dead, on the other we have clear examples where faith with works is dead. This presents us with a seemingly insoluble contradiction. God is the author of the text in *James* 2:20, therefore it is the truth. What then is the solution to this seeming contradiction?

Whose Works?

The problem is readily resolved when we realize that it is faith with a certain kind of works which is not dead, and faith with another kind of works which is dead. So if we combine faith with the wrong kind of works, the only outcome will be death to our faith. This explains why God's children have often come to Him in strong faith and yet found the outcome so frustrating, defeating, and disappointing that their faith was severely damaged. It is true that they came to God with living faith, but they joined it to the wrong kind of works. When God's people learn the true meaning of the words, "faith without works is dead", they will have an altogether different experience. Theirs will then become a life of uninterrupted victories and they will understand why.

Faith alone is not enough. The right kind of works must accompany it, or faith will die. Our ability to maintain and develop a living, working faith depends on our doing the works to which God is specifically referring in *James* 2:20. Therefore, we must understand the differences between those works which build faith and those which destroy it. This will require careful, earnest study, but the results will be well worth the effort.

The statement "faith without works is dead" is true under all circumstances where the works originate from God and not from



ourselves. If we look to God as our Plan Maker, then our faith will live; but if we make our own plans to try to fulfil His purposes, then our faith will die. In God's terms, the presence of human planning means the absence of the divine. Therefore, even though there may be a great deal of human activity aimed at achieving what God has promised, in His eyes this does not count as acceptable works at all.

In order to understand this principle more clearly, let us look again at the events when Israel first tried to enter the promised land.

The people reached the border of Canaan with a strong faith in God's promise to give them the goodly land. Their enthusiasm was high as they looked forward to receiving their promised possession.

As we have seen, they demonstrated their confidence in God's promise by immediately calling for a committee of men to inspect the land and bring back a plan for its conquest. Israel waited in eager expectancy. When the spies returned after an

absence of forty days, the people, who were cherishing high hopes, rushed out to hear their report and the plans they had formulated. The news of the spies' return was carried from tribe to tribe, and was hailed with rejoicing. All this indicated faith, not unbelief.

The spies brought samples of the fruit, showing the fertility of the soil. It was the time of ripe grapes, and they brought a cluster so large that it had to be carried between two men. They also brought figs and pomegranates which grew there in abundance (see *Numbers* 13:23).

As the report was given to the people, the fertility and goodness of the land were described, in response to which their faith and happiness knew no bounds. "We went into the land to which you sent us," the spies began, "and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit." *Numbers* 13:27.

"The people rejoiced that they were to come into possession of so goodly a land, and they listened intently as the report was brought to Moses, that not a word should escape them. . . . The people were enthusiastic; they would eagerly obey the voice of the Lord, and go up at once to possess the land." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 387.3.

Thus far in the story, faith with their own works was still very much alive. But, at this point, what was true of the people had ceased to be true of ten of the spies and would soon cease to be true of the people as well. Unbelief reigned in the hearts of ten of those spies and as they communicated what they had seen, the same wicked unbelief developed in the people. After describing the beauty and fertility of the land, all but two of the spies enlarged upon the difficulties and dangers that lay before them.

"But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. ... the men ... said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." *Numbers* 13:28–29, 31.

The change in the people from faith to disbelief was as incredible as it was swift. One moment they were filled with confident expectations; the next they were giving expression to that dismay and disappointment which is the offspring and evidence of

dark unbelief. They were so desperate in their disappointment and despair that they let out a wail of agony mingled with the confused murmur of voices. In their stirred emotions they even went so far as to suggest the appointment of a leader to take them back to the land of slavery.

"That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." *Numbers* 14:1–4.

A fitting description of those reactions is given in the following paragraphs:

"Hope and courage gave place to cowardly despair, as the spies uttered the sentiments of their unbelieving hearts, which were filled with discouragement prompted by Satan. Their unbelief cast a gloomy shadow over the congregation, and the mighty power of God, so often manifested in behalf of the chosen nation, was forgotten. The people did not wait to reflect; they did not reason that He who had brought them thus far would certainly give them the land; they did not call to mind how wonderfully God had delivered them from their oppressors, cutting a path through the sea and destroying the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. They left God out of the question, and acted as though they must depend solely on the power of arms.

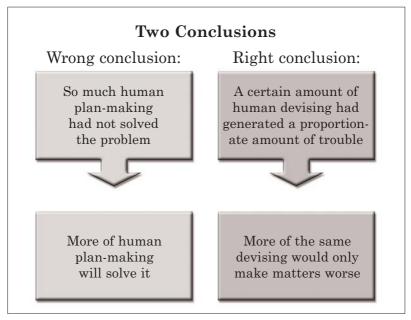
"In their unbelief they limited the power of God and distrusted the hand that had hitherto safely guided them. And they repeated their former error of murmuring against Moses and Aaron. 'This, then, is the end of our high hopes,' they said. 'This is the land we have traveled all the way from Egypt to possess.' They accused their leaders of deceiving the people and bringing trouble upon Israel." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 388.1–388.2.

Such were the reactions of the people of Israel when their faith died as a result of joining it to their own works. By electing themselves as the plan makers, they transferred their faith in God to faith in themselves. They no longer trusted God as their Plan Maker, but instead trusted in their own plans.

From the moment they called for the twelve spies and thus rejected God as their Plan Maker, to the very last act in the drama, the Israelites were blind to the real cause of all their troubles. They had no concept of the critical relationship between God's general and specific orders. They did not know the difference between God's works and their own, nor did they understand that faith without God's works is dead and therefore totally ineffective.

The Only Possible Alternative

In no sense did God deprive Israel of their inheritance, for the sentence handed down to them was not His arbitrary decree. It was simply the best He could do for them under the circumstances. By their lack of faith in Him as their Plan Maker and their refusal to learn His ways, they had rendered themselves incapable of entering the promised land. Blindly ignorant of God's ways and determined to follow their own, they could not work in cooperation with Him. Therefore, God knew that to direct them to



Canaan, once their faith had died, was to deliver them to slaughter. God loved them far too much to allow that.

Israel's faithless response to the spies' report only compounded an already difficult situation. Their problems were growing like cancers, which, if not rapidly cured, would result in their utter ruin. God alone could effect the desired solution, but they followed the usual fallacy of believing that if so much human plan making had not solved the problem, then more of it would. The real fact was that if a certain amount of human devising had generated a proportionate amount of trouble, then more of the same devising would only make matters worse.

In their blind unbelief, the Israelites decided that they could not enter Canaan and it was equally evident that they could not survive forever in the barren place where they were then camped. As they were now trusting themselves instead of God to make their plans, they felt they had to solve the problem in their own way. They would not trust this to Moses or Aaron, for they had come to regard them as sadistic devils who had deliberately led them into such a miserable trap.

The only other place with which they were acquainted was Egypt, where they could at least be sure of food and shelter. The freedom which had been gained through God's mighty power no longer seemed important to them, and, in direct opposition to God's planning, they determined to return to the land of bondage where they knew they would be welcomed back as slaves.

But the people also knew that this solution would be doomed to failure while Moses and Aaron were still in command, with the faithful spies Caleb and Joshua supporting them. To remove this obstruction to their plan, the people determined to murder Joshua and Caleb by stoning, after which they would no doubt have done away with Moses and Aaron. They were advancing on God's faithful servants when the Lord intervened by manifesting His presence in the sanctuary.

"And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel." *Numbers* 14:10 (NKJV).

"The unfaithful spies were loud in denunciation of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry was raised to stone them. The insane mob seized missiles with which to slay those faithful men. They rushed forward with yells of madness, when suddenly the stones dropped from their hands, a hush fell upon them, and they shook with fear. God had interposed to check their murderous design. The glory of His presence, like a flaming light, illuminated the tabernacle. All the people beheld the signal of the Lord. A mightier one than they had revealed Himself, and none dared continue their resistance. The spies who brought the evil report crouched terror-stricken, and with bated breath sought their tents." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 390.2.

The Israelites had now been reduced to desperate straits. Their plight was brought about by the direct outworking of the course they had followed. This account provides convincing proof that when people institute themselves as plan makers in God's place, the worst is bound to happen. How different the story would have been if they had trusted God in His rightful position as their Leader and Plan Maker!

At this point, the people faced well-deserved annihilation, but Moses, manifesting a spirit of love unmerited by the multitude, entered the tabernacle and pleaded on their behalf. It was one of the greatest intercessory prayers of history and its effect was telling (see *Numbers* 14:13–20). It did not change the character or disposition of God, but it did wield a force which enabled Him to continue His protection instead of abandoning them to Satan's malice and certain destruction which would have followed.

The people's plan to select a captain to lead them back to Egypt, after they had removed all opposition by murdering God's appointed leaders, was devised by them to solve problems caused by previous plans devised by them. In no way could this improve their situation. Instead, it considerably worsened matters. Their move compelled God to surround His faithful servants with a wall of protection. The unfaithful spies were deprived of God's personal protection and swiftly fell prey to the destructive forces around them (see *Numbers* 14:36–37). Those spies who died there probably included the newly chosen leader who was to have led them back to Egypt. The people beheld in this event the collapse of another of their schemes. This reduced their position to one in which they could not enter the promised land, or return to Egypt, or even stay where they were. A serious problem had turned into a crisis.

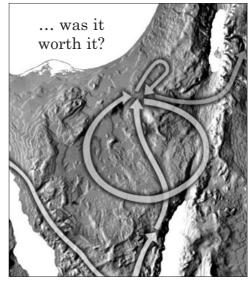
Israel had degenerated from the grim situation of having faith without God's works, to a worse one where they had neither faith nor God's works. Because of God's accurate assessment of their condition of unbelief and stubborn refusal to repent of their basic problem, He knew that they had no hope of entering the promised land. As we have seen, God loved them too much to attempt to lead them in under these circumstances, for He would not commit them to inevitable slaughter.

The Lord sadly communicated through Moses the only solution left to them. They must turn back into the wilderness for forty years, the time required for death to cleanse from the camp every one of those incurably rebellious people. This would free the next generation to exercise faith and proper procedures where their parents had failed. When we consider the awful price paid by those people for trusting themselves as plan makers in God's place, we can recognize that under no circumstances was such a price worth it. The people had lost all and gained nothing, apart from the doubtful prestige of being in command of God's work.

The best the Israelites could do at this point was to acknowledge that their course had brought them nothing but sorrow and loss, and in true repentance and humble confession, accept the sad judgment. They should have been grateful that, even after

all their rebellious mistakes, the Lord was still prepared to do the best He could for them.

At first they truly seemed to repent of their wrong course of action (see *Numbers* 14:39). To the casual observer, their subdued spirit and deep mourning would appear to indicate genuine displays of true repentance. But the people still failed to permit the Holy Spirit to open their eyes



enough to see the root of the problem. They did not confess that they had brought all their woes on themselves by making their own specific orders for the execution of God's general orders. Not unless they came to the place where they saw and confessed this problem, while looking to God as their Plan Maker and Problem Solver, could they be trusted to go forward. Faith without God's works is dead. Therefore, to repent as they did was insufficient to prepare them for the promised land.

There is a repentance which is acceptable to God and there is one which is not. For instance, the repentance shown by Balaam and by Judas was very real, but was not the type which could free them from their problem. Likewise, the superficial sorrow felt by the Israelites did not give God the opportunity to change the decree sentencing them to death in the wilderness.

More Human Works

When their so-called repentance did not change God's decree, the people refused to accept the divine solution and once more began to form alternative solutions of their own. This proved that there was no real change of heart. They showed that they would follow God's general orders only if He accepted their specific ones. In direct contradiction to His merciful solution, they determined to invade Canaan (see *Deuteronomy* 1:41–43). Their plan contained nothing that originated in God the Source. Therefore, it had no prospect of success. Yet, despite the powerful lessons their immediate past experiences should have taught them, they were utterly confident that their plan would work this time.

Insight into these principles is given in the following paragraph:

"When they found that the Lord did not relent in His decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness. In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, God tested their apparent submission and proved that it was not real. They knew that they had deeply sinned in allowing their rash feelings to control them and in seeking to slay the spies who had urged them to obey God; but

they were only terrified to find that they had made a fearful mistake, the consequences of which would prove disastrous to themselves. Their hearts were unchanged, and they only needed an excuse to occasion a similar outbreak. This presented itself when Moses, by the authority of God, commanded them to go back into the wilderness." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 391.4.

As their alternative plans failed and they heard the divine sentence condemning them to death in the desert, they regretted the consequences of their refusal to obey God, without repenting of the sin which had caused those consequences. Their steadfast refusal to learn God's ways is reflected in their erroneous reasoning that, if they were to embark on a crusade against the enemy, they would redeem their failure.

"We have sinned against the LORD," they cried. "We will go up and fight, as the LORD our God commanded us." *Deuteronomy* 1:41.

They probably thought that the command to return to the wilderness was a threat designed to enforce their obedience, just as parents threaten their children with woes they never intend to inflict. But this was to misjudge God, for He had not spoken from such motives. A return to the desert had become the only available solution. Their unbelief and wrong procedures had made it impossible to lead them into Canaan, and it was pointless to take them back to Egypt. The desert in between was the only alternative. The command to enter the promised land had been superseded by another, as a result of their disobedience.

Yet, so thoroughly self-deceived had they become that they believed they were obeying Jehovah by invading the land, when He was expressly bidding them to do something else. In planning the overthrow of the Canaanites, they were still following the same procedure which had denied them possession. They were seeking by their own devisings to carry forward God's commands. Therefore, their enterprise had no hope of success.

Without the divine presence symbolized in the ark and without their visible leader Moses in their midst, they went forward (see *Numbers* 14:42–44). Their enemies were ready for them, having entrenched themselves in a natural mountain fortress from which they exacted a fearful toll on the miserable Israelites. "The Amorites who lived in those hills came out against

you; they chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Hormah." *Deuteronomy* 1:44.

An accurate description of their situation is given in the following quotation:

"Regardless of the divine sentence, the Israelites prepared to undertake the conquest of Canaan. Equipped with armor and weapons of war, they were, in their own estimation, fully prepared for conflict; but they were sadly deficient in the sight of God and His sorrowful servants. When, nearly forty years later, the Lord directed Israel to go up and take Jericho, He promised to go with them. The ark containing His law was borne before their armies. His appointed leaders were to direct their movements, under the divine supervision. With such guidance, no harm could come to them. But now, contrary to the command of God and the solemn prohibition of their leaders, without the ark, and without Moses, they went out to meet the armies of the enemy.

"The trumpet sounded an alarm, and Moses hastened after them with the warning, 'Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword.' [Numbers 14:41–42.]

"The Canaanites had heard of the mysterious power that seemed to be guarding this people and of the wonders wrought in their behalf, and they now summoned a strong force to repel the invaders. The attacking army had no leader. No prayer was offered that God would give them the victory. They set forth with the desperate purpose to reverse their fate or to die in battle. Though untrained in war, they were a vast multitude of armed men, and they hoped by a sudden and fierce assault to bear down all opposition. They presumptuously challenged the foe that had not dared to attack them.

"The Canaanites had stationed themselves upon a rocky tableland reached only by difficult passes and a steep and dangerous ascent. The immense numbers of the Hebrews could only render their defeat more terrible. They slowly threaded the mountain paths, exposed to the deadly missiles of their enemies above. Massive rocks came thundering down, marking their

path with the blood of the slain. Those who reached the summit, exhausted with their ascent, were fiercely repulsed, and driven back with great loss. The field of carnage was strewn with the bodies of the dead. The army of Israel was utterly defeated. Destruction and death was the result of that rebellious experiment.

"Forced to submission at last, the survivors 'returned, and wept before the Lord;' but 'the Lord would not hearken' to their voice. Deuteronomy 1:45. By their signal victory the enemies of Israel, who had before awaited with trembling the approach of that mighty host, were inspired with confidence to resist them. All the reports they had heard concerning the marvelous things that God had wrought for His people, they now regarded as false, and they felt that there was no cause for fear. That first defeat of Israel, by inspiring the Canaanites with courage and resolution, had greatly increased the difficulties of the conquest. Nothing remained for Israel but to fall back from the face of their victorious foes, into the wilderness, knowing that here must be the grave of a whole generation." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 393.2–394.3.

This is the tragic story of a people who did not enter into God's rest because they did not know His ways, even though there was so much about them which would lead an observer to believe that they were very familiar with Jehovah and His procedures. He had called them to be the light of the world, had led them from Egypt to Kadesh Barnea, provided them with abundant protection from their enemies, given them the beautiful gospel symbols of the sanctuary and its sacrificial system, and promised them a marvelous inheritance. On their part, they seemed to love the cause of God and manifested a desire to see it prosper. In many ways they had obeyed Jehovah implicitly as they journeyed to Kadesh Barnea.

But it required more than this for them to be classified as a people who knew God's ways sufficiently to enter into His rest. Within them was the persistent disposition to assume the position of plan maker—a position the Lord had never given them. This led from one failed plan to another and destroyed their faith. They needed to cease planning God's work for Him and instead learn to trust in His plans and carry them out in His way. It is no wonder the True Witness sadly declared of that

generation, "they have not known my ways.' So ... 'They shall never enter my rest." *Hebrews* 3:10, 11.

A Happy Contrast

A happy contrast to this dark picture of unbelief was to be found in two of the spies. Despite the influence of the unfaithful ten, Joshua and Caleb lifted their voice in courageous expectancy and boldly spoke in favor of God's ability to keep His promise.

"Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." *Numbers* 13:30.

In distress Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes "and said to the entire Israelite assembly, 'The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." *Numbers* 14:7–9.

Although these two men did not contradict what had already been said, they did not measure the might of the Canaanites against the strength of Israel, but against the unconquerable power of God. They knew and believed the truth, but their testimony was rejected by those who did not believe.

How was it that Caleb and Joshua maintained a strong and abiding faith in this crisis? It appears that they were just as much involved in the specific works program as the other ten spies and the people generally, yet the "works" which killed the faith of the others, did not destroy theirs. Was their case an exception to the principle, found in *James* 2:20, that faith without works is dead? This cannot be so, for the principle is sound and admits no exceptions.

There is another possibility – that Caleb and Joshua were not involved in a human works program. Even though their being members of the group sent to spy out the land, suggests that they were engaged in their own works, there are many similar instances when things are not what they seem to be.

An excellent example of this is when David marched with the Philistine host against Saul and his army (see *1 Samuel* 29:2). Every appearance indicated that David would fight with the Philistines against his own people. The Philistine king certainly believed this, and could not be convinced otherwise. But, although David advanced with the Philistines, he had no intention of supporting them.

Likewise, it would be a mistake to suppose that just because Caleb and Joshua were a part of the selected band sent to spy out the land, they were necessarily just as involved in the works program as the others. This does not mean, however, that they were trying to hide their thoughts or motives as David was.

A far more reliable method of evaluating the situation would be on the basis of the principles involved. Regardless of contrary appearances, the death of faith in the ten spies and the rest of the people shows that their faith was mingled with human works instead of God's works. In contrast was the living trust manifested by the two loyal men in the hour of crisis. This proves that they were not involved in their own works. God has not seen fit to reveal exactly how they avoided this trap into which the others fell, but it is obvious that they did avoid it. Dutifully, they performed the task appointed to them, without partaking of the spirit which prompted the plan. Caleb and Joshua continued to trust in God and did not place their confidence in self as the other ten spies did.

It was not until the testing hour arrived that the difference between the two groups was revealed. When people turn to their own works, their faith sometimes fails immediately, while on other occasions, the unbelief is not manifested until later. An example of faith failing immediately is when Elijah slept by the gates of Jezreel where Jezebel's threat was communicated to him. He failed to direct his gaze to the almighty power of God but looked at his perilous situation instead. By so doing, he turned to his own works and his faith died instantly (see 1 Kings 19:2–4).

The Israelites at Kadesh did not experience their failure of faith until later. Their unbelief was not manifest until almost six weeks after they had turned to their own works in calling for the spies. But whether the result appears immediately or later, the outworking is the same and demonstrates the truth that faith without God's works is dead.

The voice of Caleb supported by Joshua, Moses, and Aaron, was a minority expression of faith at this point, and his speech failed to carry the minds of the majority back to the root of the problem. Caleb did not outline before them the change in procedure that they had initiated when they chose the spies. But, until the basic problem was rectified, there was no possibility of success. Forty years and a generation were to pass before the matter was set straight. But the moment it was rectified, they successfully achieved possession of the land.

Another beautiful contrast to the dark picture of unbelief is provided in the spirit and attitude of Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua when these men were called upon to suffer with the rest of the people. Despite their disappointment, these four men bore the divine judgment without a murmur, even though they were innocent of the unbelief and rebellion which had caused the sentence to be imposed. While the others refused to accept the judgment pronounced until they had deprived themselves of any alternatives, the faithful four humbly accepted the divine solutions from the first.

"The decree that Israel was not to enter Canaan for forty years was a bitter disappointment to Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua; yet without a murmur they accepted the divine decision." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 392.1.

An Opportunity Lost

The Israelites could have entered into rest at Kadesh Barnea if they had recognized in their rising unbelief and riotous spirit a revelation that wrong procedures existed and corrective measures were necessary. Initially, they would not have known exactly what the problem was, nor could they have determined this through their own resources, for only God was capable of showing them where the difficulties lay. Meanwhile, they should have realized that they had generated a serious problem which required an immediate solution.

It was their responsibility to recognize their helpless insufficiency, and, by giving God the problem, commit to Him the work of showing them where they had erred. Had they done this, the Lord would have clearly explained the nature of their transgression. If realization of their sin had been followed by sincere confession, they would have rejected those wrong procedures which had barred them from entering Canaan, and adopted the right ones. Then they would have been able to enter God's rest even if they had to bear the consequences of their wrong course and accept an alternative plan from God. Had they looked to God for specific orders, He would have communicated these at the right time through Moses.

This is what they should have done. Instead, their attention was so fixed on blaming their self-inflicted troubles on an innocent God, that they had no thought of examining their own wrong course. Consequently, they simply went from one evil condition to a worse one.

Had any humility remained, they would have at least sensed that something was wrong and asked themselves why they were in this rebellious state and where was the glowing faith they had experienced just a short time before? This is what Joshua did some forty years later when their children suffered the surprise defeat at Ai. He recognized that their humiliating defeat indicated that some mistake had been made. He did not spend a moment accusing God, but humbly looked to the Lord for answers to the problem. God gladly revealed these and then supplied him with the plan which, faithfully followed, worked to perfection. What He did for Israel forty years later, He would have done just as quickly and effectively at Kadesh Barnea. But the people in their stubborn self-sufficiency and pride had no mind to give Him such an opportunity.

A Lesson for Us

It was because Israel did not follow God's ways that they could not enter into His rest. Thus the Scriptures stress the great truth that faith must be combined with correct procedures in order to bring success. This is the message Paul urges so strongly and which is embodied in the Sabbath of God. Only when faith is linked with God's ways will the people of God,

either individually or collectively, experience true spiritual rest. They will let God make their plans for them and consequently they will know no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat.

"The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper." The Desire of Ages, 490.5.

Sadly, as with Israel, this is not usually the case. Because God's people are full of zeal, self-sacrifice, and faith to do His work, they feel certain that He is pleased with the efforts they are putting forth on His behalf. They begin to make their own plans, thus unwittingly exalting themselves to God's place. When their plans fail, they intensify their efforts, in the illogical assumption that if this much planning has failed to effect the desired result, then more of the same planning will achieve it. This course has been adopted too often in the past, even though the clear lesson of history shows that it does not work. Instead, it builds Satan's kingdom. By falling into this snare, God's children become Satan's most able allies.

If His people give expression to their faith by forming their own specific orders, they will inevitably experience faith-shattering failure. They will be puzzled because they cannot understand why the outcome has been the opposite of their expectations. According to their concepts, everything has been done correctly. They are thus led to question God's character and doubt His word, with the result that they become even more prone to turn to their own works in the future.

God's children need to be grounded in the knowledge that there is certainly nothing wrong with His beautiful character. God is neither capricious, cruel, nor unreliable. Leading us to doubt Him is Satan's clever device to divert our attention away from the only area which we should doubt—the area of human procedures. If God's professed children would closely

examine themselves in the light of His ways, they would soon learn the cause of their failures and the long delay in finishing God's work.

As we learn more of God's procedures, it would be well worthwhile to review the experiences of our own past in order to understand why our great faith has not produced results commensurate with the promises on which our confidence has rested. We have studied, believed the promises, and gone forth expecting the Almighty to do great things for and through us. But instead of wonderful blessings, only a paltry return has been realized. This has lead many to conclude that the Lord does not really mean what He says. One writer gave expression to this in these words:

"There is one critical question which is perpetually haunting the minds of many who are seeking to serve Christ in His Church today. It is a question we often suppress, because it makes us uneasy; but it is too fundamental to be ignored. If all the Bible says is true, why is our religion not accomplishing more? Why is it not effecting a more radical transformation of the human scene? Why are our own lives not being delivered more thoroughly from compromise and defeat? Why is there not created a Church aflame with faith, free from the scandal of division, and inspired in all its members with a consuming passion to bear witness to Christ?

"... Why is there such a difference between the promise and the actuality as we know it in our lives and see it in the Church and in the world around?" *A Faith to Proclaim*, 137, by James S. Stewart.

This man is echoing the cry which has ascended from countless despairing souls. The tragedy is that so few have found the answer. It is in understanding God's ways that rest from defeat is found, and instead a new life which will be like that of our divine Pattern, "a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter." *The Desire of Ages*, 679.2.

Not for one moment is it God's intention that His children shall stumble and fall throughout their lives. Glorious and continual triumph is His program for His followers. But this heritage is available only to those who know and follow His ways. Centuries have passed since Kadesh Barnea. Once more God's people are close to the promised land—this time the heavenly Canaan. Many times in the intervening years they could have crossed over, but although they had great faith and zeal for the cause of God, they could not enter into that rest because they did not learn His ways. He was not recognized as being the great and only Plan Maker, Burden Bearer, and Problem Solver. Instead, generation after generation have repeated the mistake of making their own plans in an attempt to fulfil God's purposes. To avoid making this mistake is the lesson which God's people have to learn before they can finish the work and rest in the heavenly mansions.

Many promising starts have been made during which God's people have looked to Him alone for directions, but all too soon, the time has inevitably come when they have substituted their own plan making. They lost sight of the truth that Jeremiah expressed in these words:

"I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps." *Jeremiah* 10:23.

God's children have not yet entered the promised land, nor will they, until a people are raised who have learned this vital lesson and who become immovably established on the principle that God is their only Plan Maker and Problem Solver. Every generation has tried to do things their own way. Is it not time for us to trust God to do it His way? As Paul says, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." Hebrews 4:9–11.

Chapter 7

An Education in God's Ways

Ample Evidence

The Israelites had no excuse for not knowing, trusting and following God's ways, for these had been successfully demonstrated to them every step of the way from Egypt to Kadesh Barnea. It is only necessary to recount these various episodes to see how amply God had revealed to them the infallibility of His ways. Therefore they were left without any valid reason for resorting to their own devising.

God knew that in the very nature of things, He alone could successfully occupy the position of Plan Maker and Problem Solver for His people. The success of their journey and subsequent occupation of Canaan depended on their acknowledging this fact.

If, instead, they chose to modify the divine arrangements, then to that extent delay and disaster would attend their pathway. The only safe way was for them to place their trust in God's procedures, so that their minds would become deeply imbued with these principles. This would secure them against the temptation of turning to their own works. Even before the Israelites started on their journey to Canaan, God used every opportunity

to demonstrate His merciful ways. They could not have been given clearer, more convincing evidence of His love and care for them. This should have been sufficient to teach them to trust in His ways, and to protect them from self-confidence, from turning to their own plans and finding their own solutions to their problems.

Deliverance from Egypt

Furthermore, Israel also had abundant evidence of the disasters that befell them when they mistrusted God's leading and put their faith in themselves instead.

As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites were oppressed under a fearful problem of their own creation. Had they looked to God alone as their Guide, they would never have been in such a predicament. So powerful were the Egyptians in contrast to them, that they recognized they had no hope of delivering themselves. Their only option was to leave their problem entirely in God's hands. This gave the Lord an excellent opportunity to demonstrate His ways.

When God had schooled Moses in His ways for forty years in Midian, He sent him back to Egypt under His divine command. God was allowed to take complete control of the operations there, since the Israelites were not physically able to take charge, and Moses possessed no disposition to do so. Moses was so utterly submitted to God's will that he was no longer prepared to take the initiative in any action.

Therefore, the events that transpired in Egypt are an excellent example of God's procedures. Because the people were in no position to interfere, Jehovah was able to demonstrate His procedures and how He expects His people to co-operate with Him. He showed that it is not His way to give the plan making and problem solving to a committee of apparently wise, leading men. This is never God's way. Whenever such a procedure is introduced, we may be sure that it did not originate with the Lord.

There was no human devising in the escape plan from Egypt formulated in Jehovah's mind when, from eternity, He had foreseen the problem and its solution. Without asking any human counsel, He informed Israel through Moses just what they were to do and He expected them to do it. Their successful departure

depended on their obeying the divine counsels with faithful exactitude. God had only to communicate the specific details to the people through Moses, with the requirement that they unquestioningly obey them.

In His desire to save the powerful pharaoh of Egypt and through him the whole nation, God sent Moses and Aaron with a message to him. If the pharaoh would obey and open his heart to the divine light, God could have rescued the Egyptians from the dark pit of ruin into which they were rapidly heading. But the proud monarch refused the only light that could have changed the fate of this nation entangled in idol worship. Each refusal separated Egypt further from God's protection. He could not save them from the results of their own choosing, and one plague followed another. (See *Exodus* chapters 7 to 12.)

By contrast, through faith and obedience, Israel remained under God's protection and did not suffer the devastating effects of the plagues which fell on Egypt. Any Egyptian who chose to join Israel was likewise protected.

In order to avoid the death-dealing stroke of the last plague, the Israelites were called to show their faith in their Creator to protect them. The plan devised by the heavenly Problem Solver was explained in simple steps. Firstly, every male had to be circumcised. Then a lamb was to be selected, slain, and the blood sprinkled on the two side posts and the lintel of their doors. On the night specified, the whole roasted lamb was to be eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread while the Israelites stood girt for travel. During this time, the plague was taking the lives of Egypt's firstborn.

There is no record of any Israelite who did not join in the plan exactly as God gave it. This was just as well, for to have introduced any human options would have frustrated the divine effort and caused a major setback. Instead, the result was a masterpiece of deliverance. Not one Israelite was injured or killed. The Egyptians offered no resistance to their departure, but rather, heaped gifts of high value on them (see *Exodus* 11 and 12). What a contrast this is to other great liberations in history where men have been the plan makers. Those involved usually struggled for years with great loss of life and property on both sides.

If the Lord had left the responsibility to a committee of elders for planning the exodus, they would undoubtedly have thought in terms of a military undertaking, just as Moses had originally. But such a scheme could not have worked. The Egyptians had made certain that the Israelites had no access to metals with which to fashion weapons. The only time they could have trained would have been in the dead of night when they were too exhausted from their day's labor to expend further energy. Under these handicaps, they could never have developed an army to match the Egyptians who at that time were the undisputed military leaders of the world. Even if by some miracle Israel had been able to overpower its enemies, that would have been at fearful cost to human life. Only a remnant of a decimated host would have survived to leave their land of bondage for the promised land.

Daily Guidance

Some might tend to argue that since the Israelites' situation in Egypt was so desperate, the Lord was obliged to do everything for them at that time, but that once they had been set free, a different order of things could be introduced. However, deliverance from their taskmasters brought no change in God's procedures at all. He still did not tell Moses to appoint a committee for the day-by-day determination of what route to follow and the distance they would travel. Instead, He placed the pillar of cloud before them for daylight guidance and the pillar of fire by night, thus intimating that He alone, without any input from them, would decide which way and how far they would trek. All the people had to do was watch the cloud and follow it. In the early morning hours, when it lifted, they knew it was time to prepare for their onward march. If the cloud stayed down, then they knew that they would rest there for the time being. (See Numbers 9:17–23.)

Had the responsibility of daily travel been invested in a committee, they certainly would not have taken the direction the Lord did. He led them south instead of to the east and north. When we travel from one place to another, we usually select a route which will take us to our destination by the shortest distance. But Jehovah directed their steps away from their goal,



His course taking them to the west side of the Red Sea, thus placing a seemingly impassable barrier between them and their objective. To the marching Israelites, God's actions must have seemed quite il-

logical, tempting many to believe that He had actually deceived them. But God offered no explanation and required them only to follow Him with unquestioning faith.

What the Israelites could not know was that the Egyptians whom they had last seen cowed and beaten, would recover from their fears and pursue them. Had the Israelites gone the way that they would have chosen, their enraged enemies would have come upon them in the open country where there were no natural defenses. The outcome would have been terrible.

But, on the western shores of the sea was a natural fortress formed between the Red Sea and the rugged mountains to the south. It was a simple matter for the Lord to interpose a protective cloud so that the Egyptians could not reach His people. By His mighty power, God opened the waters of the sea for them to pass through, and when the foolish Egyptians tried to follow without the Lord's protection, they were engulfed.

Once again the Israelites were provided with a convincing demonstration of the way in which God works, how they were expected to co-operate with Him, and the infallible success which attends such a partnership. There was no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat.

Although Moses was the divinely chosen spokesman to deliver the Lord's plans to Israel, God did not require Moses to carry all the workload himself. As we saw in chapter 5, through his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses was instructed to share the burden of his work with other carefully selected men. Again, this was not

a committee approach, but simply the delegation of the work God had given in a team effort.

"The Lord had greatly honored Moses, and had wrought wonders by his hand; but the fact that he had been chosen to instruct others did not lead him to conclude that he himself needed no instruction. The chosen leader of Israel listened gladly to the suggestions of the godly priest of Midian, and adopted his plan as a wise arrangement." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 301.1

Moses did not see himself as beyond counsel. In his willing acceptance of counsel he demonstrated the wisdom of Solomon: "Where no counsel [is], the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors [there is] safety.... The way of a fool [is] right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel [is] wise.... Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." *Proverbs* 11:14, 12:5, 15:22.

The Building of the Sanctuary

With Pharaoh's power totally broken, the Israelites' journey to Canaan was resumed with the Egyptian threat permanently removed. Even though they were now apparently safe, God still did not hand over the responsibility of plan making to Israel. He continued to retain this role Himself. Again, contrary to what they might have expected and certainly would have planned for themselves, God did not lead them northwards in a direct march to the Promised Land. He directed them southeast to Mt. Sinai. Unperceived by them, there was yet a great work of preparation needed before they would be ready to invade Canaan. They underestimated the prerequisites for such an invasion, and if they had been the plan makers themselves, they would have undertaken the assault of the Canaanites while still hopelessly unprepared for the struggle.

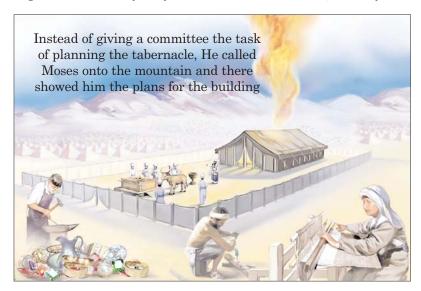
More than anything else, the Israelites needed three things:

- the knowledge of God's character as expressed in His law
- the gospel as revealed in the wilderness sanctuary and its services,
- and faith in their great Plan Maker.

Instead of giving Moses the job of building the sanctuary, God endowed some of the other men with great ability in art and craftsmanship for the task. He did not hand over to them the role of plan makers, but continued to organize things exactly as He had done up to that point. Rather than give a committee the task of planning the tabernacle, He called Moses into the mountain and there showed him the plans for the building. Then he was instructed, "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." *Exodus* 25:40.

In the planning of that marvelous building, there was not one thread of human devising. This plan, which was received from God alone, resulted in the work being wonderfully successful. The sanctuary portrayed in simple but adequate terms the details of salvation's plan for the ancient Israelites and for God's people ever since. Any failure to see the message so clearly pictured in the sanctuary was not the fault of the typical service provided, but a result of the fearful spiritual blindness the people permitted to come upon themselves. By the time Jesus came to the earth, Israel had lost the understanding of the gospel, and consequently of entering into God's rest. They could no longer see the spiritual meaning behind the sanctuary and its services, for spiritual things must be "spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

If God had called upon a committee of men to plan the building of the sanctuary they could never have done it, for they had



only the dimmest understanding of the gospel at that time. It was no more in them to plan that building than it is in us to plan our lives or to conceive a way of deliverance from the bondage of sin and death.

When God directed the encampment at Sinai to be finally broken up and the journey resumed, it required only eleven days to travel from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea. Despite the intrusion of various rebellions which had brought upon them disastrous consequences, the Israelites' journey from bondage to the southern borders of the promised land had been marvelously successful. Again and again, they had been given clear demonstrations of the distinctive way in which God worked, and of the infallible success which attended it. As long as they followed the plans made by the One infinite in wisdom, they knew nothing of failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat. It is an inspiring record.

The Israelites had had ample opportunity to meditate on the way they would have tackled the problems themselves and the very different outcome which would have resulted. The system which had been in force until that time had worked faultlessly, so they had no excuse for changing the procedure of trusting in God alone for the plan making and problem solving. In not a single instance had God's directives, when followed exactly, brought them anything but success and blessing. If God had proved to be a faulty Plan Maker and Problem Solver, they might have had just cause to seek another way, but they had not the slightest justification to turn to their own works.

It is one thing to see God's Sabbath rest principles demonstrated, but quite another to adopt them as an inbuilt way of life. Although demonstrated over and over again, these lessons of history were sadly not learned by the children of Israel. God could only comment: "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'They do always err in their heart; and they have not known My ways.' So I sware in My wrath, 'They shall not enter into My rest." *Hebrews* 3:10, 11 (KJV).

Despite all the evidence of God's trustworthiness, Israel preferred to trust in themselves. "In their unbelief they limited the power of God and distrusted the hand that had hitherto safely guided them." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 388.2.

Moses' Education

Moses, the divinely appointed leader of the people of Israel, had also been in desperate need of a most thorough education in order to lead God's people successfully and become a good role model for them. This was possible only if he understood God's ways and was cured of any disposition to take matters into his own hands. When we review the history of Moses, we find that this was exactly the education which the divine Teacher gave him.

Through a miracle, the life of Moses had been preserved when he was a tiny infant and while still a boy he had been adopted into the royal family. (See *Exodus* 2:1–10 and *Acts* 7:20–22.) There he was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians which included his education in the use of weaponry.

"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." *Acts* 7:22.

But Moses' training in the Egyptian court was not a schooling in divine procedure. It was an education in man's way of doing things. So it is no wonder that Moses developed his own ideas for the exodus. He mistakenly saw in his military training a divinely ordained preparation for the coming departure of Israel to the promised land.

"He, supposing that they were to obtain their freedom by force of arms, expected to lead the Hebrew host against the armies of Egypt, and having this in view, he guarded his affections, lest in his attachment to his foster mother or to Pharaoh he would not be free to do the will of God." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 245.2.

Even though Moses expected the problem to be solved by military action, it is to his credit that he did not sit down and carefully work out a strategy. He waited patiently for the Lord to open the way. So, when he saw the Egyptian smiting one of his Hebrew brethren, he misinterpreted this to be the providence commanding him to initiate the campaign. Accordingly, he murdered the oppressor, expecting that this incident would inspire his brethren, under God's personal blessing and direction, to rise and break their bondage. But because God was not behind the plan, Moses' expectations were disappointed.

"He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.

Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not." *Acts* 7:24, 25.

"In slaying the Egyptian, Moses had fallen into the same error so often committed by his fathers, of taking into their own hands the work that God had promised to do. It was not God's will to deliver His people by warfare, as Moses thought, but by His own mighty power" Patriarchs and Prophets, 247.3.

Although he did not realize it, when Moses killed the Egyptian he was not yet ready to lead the Israelites out of bondage. He had made the typical Babylonian mistake of doing the work God had promised to do, with far too much confidence in himself and too little in Jehovah. If the people had joined Moses without battle training, weaponry, and sufficient faith, the slaughter would have been of such magnitude as to decimate Israel. Nothing could have suited Satan more.

When Moses fled from Egypt, he had not been subjected to heavenly influences as much as he had been surrounded by the glories of human achievements. Therefore, at that time, he was in no way fitted for his divinely appointed mission of leading Israel from bondage to freedom. Instead he needed to be re-educated in order to learn God's ways and unlearn his own. Accordingly, God turned Moses' failure to good account by permitting him to be driven out of Egypt. After fleeing to Midian, he underwent forty years of re-education to eradicate the pride and self-sufficiency which had been cultivated in Egypt, and to fill him instead with a true sense of human insufficiency and unworthiness, and trust in God rather than self (see *Exodus* 2:11–22 and *Acts* 7:29, 30).

There, as he led Jethro's flocks among the hills of Midian, many years were devoted to developing in Moses such humility and such faith in his divine Plan Maker that any inclination to trust in his own works was eliminated. The luxurious life in Egypt's court where nothing was visible other than human works, was exchanged for the rugged wilderness life where God's almighty works and personal presence continually surrounded him. As his eyes were opened, his trust in human ability faded, while his awareness of his dependency on God's power steadily increased.

"Moses was not prepared for his great work. He had yet to learn the same lesson of faith that Abraham and Jacob had been taught,—not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises. And there were other lessons that, amid the solitude of the mountains, Moses was to receive. In the school of self-denial and hardship he was to learn patience, to temper his passions. Before he could govern wisely, he must be trained to obey." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 247.3.

Moses' training in obedience had to be deep and thorough in order to prepare him for a work in which God, knowing the requirements for success, intended that no thread of human devising be introduced. If Moses had not learned that both general and specific orders come from God and must be obeyed without question or modification, he certainly could not have led the people in God's ways.

The Lord considered Moses ready for his lifework after forty years in Midian. What a different man he had become! He no longer possessed any confidence in himself. He realized how weak and frail the human agent is and he shrank from the task before him. So insignificant did he appear in his own eyes that he could not at first accept that God was calling him, of all people, to so tremendous a responsibility.

Another Lesson for Us

Most of us hold a superficial view of what obedience to God involves. Many who confidently believe that they are faithfully observing God's commandments, are continually making their own plans for the advancement of His work. They do not realize that by so doing they are putting themselves as gods in Jehovah's place and thus, by breaking the first commandment, they have in fact broken them all.

This sin is the result of self-sufficiency. Whenever we commit it, it is because of our meager views of God's might and majesty, and exalted ideas of our own abilities. The certain cure is to have this sense of values reversed by being brought into close contact with the Infinite. It was for this reason that God directed Moses to spend those forty years among the mountains of Midian.

"Shut in by the bulwarks of the mountains, Moses was alone with God. The magnificent temples of Egypt no longer impressed his mind with their superstition and falsehood. In the solemn grandeur of the everlasting hills he beheld the majesty of the Most High, and in contrast realized how powerless and insignificant were the gods of Egypt. Everywhere the Creator's name was written. Moses seemed to stand in His presence and to be over-shadowed by His power. Here his pride and self-sufficiency were swept away." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 248.3.

The most effective cure for human self-sufficiency is an everenlarging vision of God's infinite capacities. The more we see of God, the more diminished our self-confidence becomes, and the more securely will our soul's fortifications against evil be established. Such views of God's majesty and might can be obtained only through constant communion with nature and nature's Creator. The more we see his love, power and wisdom, the more will we place our confidence and trust in Him instead of self.

In Egypt Moses had been surrounded by influences that had left impressions upon his mind and character that to the human eye may have seemed indelible. But God knew that these could be replaced by His divine influences. Only "Time, change of sur-

roundings, and communion with God could remove these impressions." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 248.1. We too can be cured of self-sufficiency if we are willing to have these divine solutions applied.

To summarize, we have seen that entry into God's rest involves more than simply choosing His way. Great and permanent



changes must be effected within the individual. Pride and self-sufficiency must be replaced by an abiding confidence in God and a deep distrust of self. This can be brought about only by a life of communion with the almighty Creator. Every person who works effectively under God's directions, has first sat at the Master's feet and learned these lessons.

CHAPTER 8

Successes and Failures

When the responsibility of plan making is left solely to God, then His work is a total success. The study of Israel's experiences establishes this truth that only when He is the Maker of both the general and specific orders, can His work be successfully accomplished. When His people take over that role of planning either their general or specific orders to any degree, then to that extent God's work ceases to advance and loss—often severe—is experienced. These truths, therefore, warn us to take the utmost care not to usurp His position. If we abstain from planning our own lives or God's cause and instead leave this to the great Master alone, we can experience a peace of mind not thought possible before. Furthermore, success will attend all our ways.

Despite the convincing clarity of many witnesses, some tend to view this proposition with concern. They argue that God has given them the ability to plan, organize, manage, and solve problems. They contend that if they do not exercise these talents, they will cease to be full human beings and become mere automatons in the Almighty's hands. They fear that they will be denied the proper exercise of their abilities to organize, plan, and execute—an arrangement which they are sure will not only infringe on their rights, but will shrink them to puppet-like beings. They see this as the end of all real development, stunting mental and spiritual growth.

Such worries tend to lead people to reject the message before they have investigated it thoroughly. They imagine that there is something dangerous residing in those Sabbath rest principles, so in their blindness they brace themselves to resist it. Such fears are entirely groundless. The opposite result will in fact be experienced, for, far from narrowing and limiting human capacity and achievement, God's ways offer opportunities for unlimited development and fullness of joy.

Others assume they are cooperating with God's plans when in fact they are carrying out their own plans and building their own kingdoms. It is only by open, honest counsel with others and trust in God and others more than self, that such misconceptions can be recognized and overcome. (See *Philippians* 2:3.)

There is indeed a place for human organization in the work of God, but it is not in making our own general or specific plans for carrying out God's will. Our Creator has a purpose in endowing us with the ability to order, organize and manage, but before considering the role of the human agent in detail, it is necessary to study further examples of how God operates as Plan Maker. We will therefore consider the eventual successful conquest of the enemies who were occupying Israel's promised inheritance.

The Next Generation

Israel failed at Kadesh Barnea for one reason—they did not practice God's ways. It was left to the next generation to enjoy the success their parents had hoped to achieve. Those who eventually entered Canaan, did so because they knew, trusted and followed God's procedures. Jehovah and His law had not changed in the interim, and neither had the conditions of entry.

The experiences of the almost forty years of travel, occupy only a small portion in holy writ. Therefore we find the account of the second attempt to invade Canaan, by the next generation, only a few chapters further on, where its coming again to Kadesh is recorded.

"In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried." *Numbers* 20:1. As the sojourners once more drew near to Canaan, the situation looked far from promising. Before they could proceed, God provided them with a test, to ascertain the extent to which living faith was present. But they failed this test miserably, leading Moses to the conclusion that the children were no better than their parents. When the same unthankful spirit revealed itself, Moses concluded that even this generation had not learned from its parents' mistake.

"Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, 'If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!" *Numbers* 20:2–5.

"Before God permitted them to enter Canaan, they must show that they believed His promise. The water ceased before they had reached Edom. Here was an opportunity for them, for a little time, to walk by faith instead of sight. But the first trial developed the same turbulent, unthankful spirit that had been manifested by their fathers. No sooner was the cry for water heard in the encampment than they forgot the hand that had for so many years supplied their wants, and instead of turning to God for help, they murmured against Him, in their desperation exclaiming, 'Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!' (Numbers 20:1–13); that is, they wished they had been of the number who were destroyed in the rebellion of Korah." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 414.1.

Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb viewed this development with the deepest concern, for it offered them the frightening prospect of further delay to their entrance into the promised land. They had patiently endured the punishment unjustly imposed on them by the people, ever buoyed by the hope that when the forty years were ended, they would then enter in. But, to their dismay, they saw the children exhibiting the same unbelief and rebellious, complaining spirit which had kept their fathers out of Canaan. Every visible evidence proclaimed that there was no more hope of this generation entering than the one before.

Angry and impatient with the people, Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as the Lord had specifically directed. (See *Numbers* 20:7–12.)

Moses' fears were not realized. God sees differently from human sight. If the situation had been as serious as it appeared, God would have returned them to the desert to die as had the previous generation. The Lord foresaw that, despite this serious lapse of confidence in Him, they would yet attain the standard of faith and follow the correct procedures necessary to qualify them to advance against the Canaanites.

However, the state of unbelief exhibited when the water failed, did cause a delay, and imposed on the Israelites a further detour. While they were expressing their enraged feelings over the loss of their water supply, Satan was agitating the hearts of the Edomites. When Israel at last applied for permission to cross the land of Edom, their application was refused. Had Israel acted promptly when God called for advance, instead of murmuring when the water stopped, they would have been admitted through Edom and thus been spared the tiresome desert journey. (See *Numbers* 20:14–21.) Unable to pass through the land, the twelve tribes were now diverted southwards around Edom, then northwards on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. They finally entered Canaan by crossing the Jordan River from a different entrance point.

"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 on 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*, 422.6.

Shortly after they began this detour, the old spirit of murmuring, born of evil unbelief, broke out again, exposing them to the vicious attacks of the serpents. (See *Numbers* 21:4–9.) This ex-

perience took place when their wilderness wandering with all its trials and tribulations was behind them and they ought to have shown evidence of having learned from what they had already passed through. Instead, their responses were most discouraging to their leader. It is no wonder that Moses was disheartened by what he witnessed.

While this event further indicated their unreadiness to overcome their enemies, the Lord was able to bring about two valuable objectives through their failure. Firstly, those locked in unbelief were weeded out as they refused to look upon the brazen symbol of their Saviour. And secondly, the survivors were taught an important lesson in faith.

The Results of Faith

As a result of this strengthening of faith, a change began to assert itself. Two great battles were fought, the first against Sihon, king of the strong and warlike Amorites, and the second against Og, the giant king of Bashan. (See *Numbers* 21:21–35; *Deuteronomy* 3:1–11.) Word was sent to the Amorites requesting a peaceful passage through their land but they refused, as had the Edomites. (See *Numbers* 21:21–23; *Deuteronomy* 2:26–30.) This was backed up by the deployment of the Amorite army, the numbers and strength of which "struck terror to the Israelites, who were poorly prepared for an encounter with well-armed and well-disciplined forces. So far as skill in warfare was concerned, their enemies had the advantage. To all human appearance, a speedy end would be made of Israel." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 433.2.

But the inequality of military power and preparedness was not for Israel to worry about. Even though the detour was made necessary because of their unbelief, they had been under divine leadership when confronted by this threat. It was their privilege to rest in the assurance that the Lord was not caught by surprise when faced with this emergency. He had a correct assessment of the enemy's forces and of Israel's inability to meet them, and had devised a perfect solution before the problem even appeared. They had only to put their complete trust in Him, wait for His specific orders, and follow them exactly.

Everything depended on their carefully following this procedure. Under no circumstances must they make plans of their own to meet the crisis. Surprising as it may seem after all their deviant ways, on this occasion they followed the Lord's instructions precisely, in simple faith. The factor which established them in God's ways was Moses' positive leadership. He kept his eye on the pillar of cloud and encouraged Israel with the evidences of Jehovah's continued presence and leadership. This effectively stabilized their faith and safeguarded them from self-sufficiency, thus leaving God free to communicate His specific orders to them. God directed them:

"Set out now and cross the Arnon Gorge. See, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his country. Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle." *Deuteronomy* 2:24.

His instruction to advance over the Arnon River was unquestioningly obeyed by everyone, without any attempt to devise a plan of their own. The outcome was total victory for the Israelites. (See *Deuteronomy* 2:31–36.)

"But Moses kept his gaze fixed upon the cloudy pillar, and encouraged the people with the thought that the token of God's presence was still with them. At the same time he directed them to do all that human power could do in preparing for war. Their enemies were eager for battle, and confident that they would blot out the unprepared Israelites from the land. But from the Possessor of all lands the mandate had gone forth to the leader of Israel: 'Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon....

"The Israelites crossed the river Arnon and advanced upon the foe. An engagement took place, in which the armies of Israel were victorious; and, following up the advantage gained, they were soon in possession of the country of the Amorites. It was the Captain of the Lord's host who vanquished the enemies of His people; and He would have done the same thirty-eight years before, had Israel trusted in Him." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 434.1, 435.1.

Fortunately, this encouraging experience served to increase the faith of the Israelites in their divine Plan Maker, instead of their self-sufficiency. Despite the fact that the hearts of many in Israel quaked with fear at the sight of that giant of giants towering above the soldiers of his army, they were able to advance against Og, King of Bashan, under God's leading in the same way that had brought them victory over the Amorites. (See *Deuteronomy* 3:1–11) As their trust in God's leading grew, they faithfully followed the pillar of cloud into battle. In this way they moved only according to God's plans.

"The calm faith of their leader inspired the people with confidence in God. They trusted all to His omnipotent arm, and He did not fail them. Not mighty giants nor walled cities, armed hosts nor rocky fortresses, could stand before the Captain of the Lord's host. The Lord led the army; the Lord discomfited the enemy; the Lord conquered in behalf of Israel. The giant king and his army were destroyed, and the Israelites soon took possession of the whole country. Thus was blotted from the earth that strange people who had given themselves up to iniquity and abominable idolatry." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 436.2.

With these wonderful experiences behind them, Israel pressed on with courage and confidence, fully believing that they would soon be given their promised inheritance. Yet Satan was still successful in seducing them into terrible apostasy at the Jordan River on the far shores of which lay the land of hope. Fearful judgments further cleansed the camp of the unbelieving, leaving the remainder sorely chastened. (See *Numbers* 25:9.)

Victory at Jericho

Israel's next trial of faith took place when they came to cross the Jordan. "At this time of the year—in the spring season—the melting snows of the mountains had so raised the Jordan that the river overflowed its banks, making it impossible to cross at the usual fording places." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 483.3.

The Israelites resisted the temptation to make plans of their own for crossing this barrier, leaving God free to give them His specific orders of how to accomplish it. These directives, made by the heavenly Plan Maker, were carried out to the letter with the result that the objective was achieved exactly as planned (see *Joshua* 3 and 4). The successful crossing of the river was

another demonstration of God's capacity as Problem Solver and was thus conveyed to the invaders. This victory in turn prepared them for the next obstacle—the conquest of Jericho.

"A few miles beyond the river, just opposite the place where the Israelites were encamped, was the large and strongly fortified city of Jericho. This city was virtually the key to the whole country, and it would present a formidable obstacle to the success of Israel." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 482.4.

Their God-fearing leader had sent two young men as spies to visit this city.

"Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho." *Joshua* 2:1 (NKJV).

This time no committee of men had been sent out to survey the land and work out plans for the attack as they had done formerly. The difference was not in the number of the men sent, but in the intention of their mission. On this occasion, because the men involved had not formulated their own plans, the Lord had been left free to implement His plan.

Despite the formidable opposition ahead, the two spies had returned in safety with the tidings, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." *Joshua* 2:24.

Some of the inhabitants of Jericho had declared to the spies, "We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." *Joshua* 2:10–11.

So instead of destroying Israel's faith with reports of the immense fortifications and vast numbers of the enemy, this mission had strengthened their faith. They were thus encouraged to cross the flooded river trusting in the God of their fathers and advance towards the city with increased faith in their heavenly Leader.

The forces pitted against Israel were among the most powerful in the world at that time, and the enemies had ensconced themselves in fortresses built of massive stone. From the human

point of view, the Israelites faced an impossible task. But instead of looking to outward circumstances. Joshua looked to God alone for the plan of how to begin the conquest. He withdrew to a place where he could be alone, in order to secure the specific orders for the battle. He first of all sought assurance of divine guidance, which was granted him. The following scripture describes his attitude of prayer:

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, ..." Joshua 5:13 (NKJV).

In this way Joshua left the full responsibility for the invasion plan with God. Neither he nor his men made any attempt to work out a solution to the problem. Given the opportunity to demonstrate His methods of working, the Lord showed that He had not changed in the least since the multitude had been delivered from Egypt. Just as He had not instructed Moses to assemble the elders and tell them to form the escape plan, so He did not say to Joshua, "Return to the camp and assemble a committee of the elders. Have them pray most earnestly for divine guidance and then work out a plan of attack. Once this is done, present it to Me for My blessing."

Not once in the history of their journeying from Egypt until this moment had the Lord worked that way, because it is never His way. His role is not that of a helper to human plan makers and problem solvers—He alone is to be the Plan Maker and Problem Solver in order for the mission to be successful.

God accomplished the fall of Jericho exactly as He had done in their escape from Egypt. Without consulting human agents, He simply gave the Israelites a plan and required them to follow it implicitly. They were to assemble at a given time each day and in utter silence march around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they were to multiply this silent circuit by seven, at the conclusion of which the priests were to blow their trumpets followed by a mighty shout from the whole army. (See Joshua 6).*

* When He commanded them to march the days were working days and the seven days around the city, God's seventh day was the seventh working day, which would have been the eighth

instruction would not have involved their breaking the Sabbath law. Six of day since the marching began.

To the human mind, these specific orders were illogical and foolish. Since then, throughout history, no general has ever accepted or implemented such a plan, despite the successful operation of it at Jericho. Certainly, if the elders of Israel in committee had devised the strategy, they would never have thought of such a scheme. If one of them had proposed it, the others would have laughed him to scorn, just as the antediluvians ridiculed Noah while he was building God's ark.

Yet, that which no human mind would ever have formulated, was conceived by the Almighty as the most effective means of overthrowing Jericho's fortifications. There was not one single thread of human devising in that arrangement. Joshua and all Israel were required to exercise unquestioning faith in God's wisdom and power in order to accept and execute such instructions. When we consider the unusual and seemingly senseless nature of those directives, we can better appreciate the degree of faith required to carry them out. There would also have been a strong tendency for the Israelites to feel rather foolish as they thought of the Canaanites looking down upon their silent marches from the ramparts above. But despite all this, they took God at His word and carried out His commands precisely as He gave them through their leader. They asked no questions, but simply obeyed in faith. This is a good example of how true faith and God's works are needed in combination, in order to strengthen and maintain that faith and to guarantee unqualified success.

What made the test of faith even more severe for Israel was the fact that God did not communicate the plan directly to the people, nor did they even see or hear Joshua receiving it. Therefore, the faith required to bring down the walls had to include complete confidence that Joshua was the man of God's appointment and that he was actually telling them exactly what the Lord had given him. It was by faith in gospel order that the walls of Jericho fell.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell" Hebrews 11:30.

"The Captain of the Lord's host communicated only with Joshua; He did not reveal Himself to all the congregation, and it rested with them to believe or doubt the words of Joshua, to obey the commands given by him in the name of the Lord, or to deny his

authority. They could not see the host of angels who attended them under the leadership of the Son of God. They might have reasoned: 'What unmeaning movements are these, and how ridiculous the performance of marching daily around the walls of the city, blowing trumpets of rams' horns. This can have no effect upon those towering fortifications.' But the very plan of continuing this ceremony through so long a time prior to the final overthrow of the walls afforded opportunity for the development of faith among the Israelites. It was to be impressed upon their minds that their strength was not in the wisdom of man, nor in his might, but only in the God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine Leader." Patriarchs and Prophets, 493.1.

At this critical moment in their history, just at the beginning of their assault on Canaan, Israel needed this lesson in gospel order to strengthen their faith in God as their Leader. The plan for the overthrow of Jericho was a golden opportunity for God to reveal His plans in such a way as to develop faith in Him and in the human leader of His choosing. At this time the primary need of Israel was not to learn to counsel and consult together, but rather to obey a "thus saith the Lord" implicitly. Just as at the crossing of the Jordan, God was once more giving Israel a striking demonstration of His ability to be their Plan Maker and Problem Solver, reminiscent of the way He delivered their parents from Egypt and across the Red Sea.

Cause and Effect

By comparing the total failure at Kadesh with the complete success at Jericho, we can learn some valuable lessons. At Kadesh the plan maker was fallible humanity, but at Jericho this role was left entirely to God. The message is inescapably clear and it is true for all time. When we search through the Scriptures, we find that whenever human beings are the plan makers and problem solvers, the Lord's work suffers constant loss and defeat. Yet when these responsibilities are left with God, His people know "no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat." *The Desire of Ages*, 490.5.

There is no record of any Israelite losing his life in the attack on Jericho. On the other hand, the entire Canaanite population, except for Rahab and her household, was exterminated (see Joshua 6:21–25). The Israelites could not have gained a more convincing victory. They had lost neither lives nor property, and instead gained complete possession of the city and its wealth. Their success was the outworking of faith combined with God's works.

Faith and obedience are the keys to success in this life and in God's cause. Only with both can the work be finished. The reason for the long delay in Christ's return is because God's people have never come to understand what God's works are, where they come from, and how implicitly they must be obeyed in simple, submissive, unquestioning faith. The time has come when the prerequisites for God's Sabbath rest need to be understood and practiced so that His work can be finished at last.

It is no exaggeration to say that the walls of Jericho came down as a result of obeying God's orders. The destruction of those massive walls was not the outworking of any natural cause. The faith and obedience displayed by the Israelites in this instance gave God the opportunity to work marvellously for them.

"There must be continual faith and trust in the Captain of our salvation. We must obey His orders." S.D.A. Bible Commentary 2:996.1.

Intermittent Success

Throughout the passing of the centuries, God's followers have experienced victory and success only intermittently. Therefore, we have come to regard as normal, a life in which there are many failures, losses, impossibilities and defeats. But this is not Christian living as God intends it to be and certainly not as it will be when God's sons and daughters learn to recognize Him as their only Source and therefore as their Problem Solver, Plan Maker, and Burden Bearer.

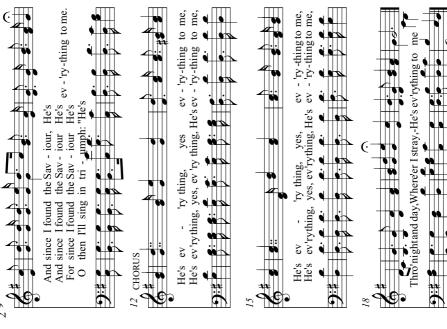
The beautiful hymn, "He's everything to me", needs to be sung as an expression of living reality from the Christian's own experience.

He's Everything To Me









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The following paragraph provides a deep insight into the connection between cause and effect.

"God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 493.2.

The recurring human tragedy is that while there are sporadic occasions when plans are followed and problems solved in God's way, more frequently, the only reason for giving a conundrum to God is that we find ourselves at a total loss to think of any solution which will work. In our desperation, we turn to the Lord, who, in His great love and mercy, beautifully and adequately solves the problem. But when further difficulties present themselves, the tendency is to revert to human devising and delegate God to the role of Helper, as a last resort. Despite this, our heavenly Father never fails to untangle the mess once the problem has been committed to Him. But how much better it would be for us if God was made the first and only recourse.

The experience of the disciples during that fierce storm on the lake is an excellent example of standard human practice. When the tempest burst upon them, even though Christ was physically there, they gave no thought to turning the matter into His care. Instead, they waited until their vessel was about to sink. "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped." *Mark* 4:37.

The disciples first exhausted every resource at their command until they were at the point of destruction. Only then, as a last desperate measure, did they turn to the Saviour. The moment the need was given to Him, He calmly and effectively set matters right. (See *Mark* 4:39.)

God makes Himself available as the Problem Solver not only of great and desperate problems, but for everything. He is therefore not the last, but the first resort to whom the Christian should turn. God does not leave His children to solve the seemingly easy situations while He takes care of the apparently more difficult ones.

Inevitably, in life's learning processes, we sometimes make the mistake of relying on ourselves instead of making God our Source. When we learn from our mistakes this need not become a chronic problem. What is regrettable is the persistent tendency of continuing to cling to human ways. God's desire is that we will, upon seeing the marvelous and complete way in which He handles our difficulties, become unswervingly dedicated to His ways forever. We can learn this either from the Scriptures or by being forced through circumstances to surrender our problems to God.

Unfortunately for us, our usual response is not to surrender. Once we have experienced deliverance by clinging to the right procedure, the very next time we find ourselves in trouble, we usually revert to the formula for failure. It is illogical and incredible, but it is a fact of history. Success tends to breed self-trust, so that when the next problem presents, we confidently assume we have the power to deal with it ourselves, instead of remembering our previous success is due to our heavenly Plan Maker and Problem Solver alone.

But someday, God will cure a goodly remnant of this persistent tendency. When He does, He will at last be able to execute, through them, His long formulated but never executed plan to finish the work. What joy that will be to the Infinite Mind when His church finally establishes itself into a true co-working relationship with Him by entering into His Sabbath rest.

Costly Reversions

Great, experienced, and godly a man as Joshua was, sadly he succumbed more than once to such a course of reversion after entering Canaan. For a man of such advanced spiritual and intellectual maturity who had been blessed with large revelations of God and His ways, it hardly seems possible, but nonetheless it happened. After the great success at Jericho, it seems that Joshua allowed his self-confidence to lead him to trust in self rather than God for the next conquest. The record of this is a timely warning to us not to become complacent or self-confident.

Joshua had repeatedly witnessed the infallible results achieved when God was the Leader. He had seen Him at work in Israel's departure from Egypt, the Red Sea crossing, the giving of the law, and in the design and erection of the sanctuary. He had experienced the perfection exhibited in the leadership of Christ in the cloud by day and fire by night. He was present during the final days of successful marching which brought them to Kadesh, where he saw how quickly success turned to failure when the people dismissed God from His role as Plan Maker and instituted themselves in His place.

During Israel's forty long years in the desert, Joshua had opportunity to reflect on the reason for their continued confinement to the wilderness. The result of faith without God's works would surely have become apparent to him there. Then he witnessed God's ways being employed in the conquests of the Amorites, Og, and finally, of Jericho after the miraculous Jordan crossing. In these struggles and their totally successful outcomes, God alone had been the Plan Maker.

After Joshua had observed so much of God's wonderful ways, we might imagine that never again would this man follow any but the divinely appointed formula for success. But unfortunately this was not the case. While the memory of the victory at Jericho was still fresh in his mind, Joshua dealt with the problem of conquering Ai in a very different way. His success buoyed up his self-confidence until he began to forget God in his self-reliance.

"The great victory that God had gained for them had made the Israelites self-confident. Because He had promised them the land of Canaan they felt secure, and failed to realize that divine help alone could give them success. Even Joshua laid his plans for the conquest of Ai without seeking counsel from God." Patriarchs and Prophets, 493.4.

This time Joshua did not turn to his heavenly Problem Solver. He did not ask his divine Commander for orders. Instead, he devised a plan which involved sending two spies to examine the city of Ai and bring back a strategy for the forthcoming attack on it.

"Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, 'Go up and spy out the region.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, 'Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." *Joshua* 7:2–3.

There was no difference between the course adopted by Joshua before the attack on Ai and the action of Israel in sending ten spies from Kadesh Barnea. In both cases the men were selected and sent out with the commission to investigate the situation and devise a plan based on those observations. At Ai, as at Kadesh, it was the introduction of a new order in which men again usurped God's position as Plan Maker. It naturally resulted in a similar outcome. Compare these situations with Jericho where Joshua asked God for His plan.

In contrast to those spies returning to Kadesh with a discouraging report, those who came back from Ai were very self-confident. Accepting their plan, the people advanced against the fortress, following a strategy in which divine Leadership was absent. Believing that they were carrying out God's orders, the Israelites were quite satisfied that they were doing His work and that He was pleased with them. They felt assured of a speedy conquest when, in reality, they should have known that they could not possibly succeed. For Joshua and the people, it was an inexcusable reversion to the wrong way—a formula for guaranteed failure.

The outcome was not surprising. The sortie was a disaster, with the enthusiastic and confident Israelites being put to flight and losing thirty-six fine warriors. Those who went out to give the returning army a hero's welcome met battalions of shocked and disheartened men. "... and they fled before the men of Ai." Joshua 7:4. They had experienced the only possible outcome—failure, loss, impossibility and defeat.

Not seeing the true reasons for this tragic outcome, the Israelites would have been tempted to feel that God was capriciously playing with them, but this would have been to misjudge Him. The fault lay entirely with them, not with Him.

From this point, the story could have developed exactly as it did at Kadesh, but Joshua had learnt from this failure caused by human planning and did not turn to still more of his own works. He did not trust in the mistaken assumption that if so much effort had not produced success, then he would have to work even harder along the same lines to achieve it. He did not fall for such false, but seemingly logical, reasoning. It would have been a natural

and human thing for Joshua to say, "Well, it is obvious that we made a mistake in sending out only three thousand men. We have underestimated the strength, readiness, and determination of our enemies. So this time we will devise another plan involving the entire army. It will certainly succeed where the other failed."

Fortunately, Joshua did not do this. He recognized that the outcome was not what it should have been, so something was obviously wrong. What the problem was, he could not see at that point of time, but the Lord knew and would reveal it to Joshua if he asked in repentance and faith.

"Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" Joshua 7:6–9.

It might sound as if Joshua was accusing God of unfaithfulness, but this was not so. There was a cause for their failure and this root had to be discerned and eradicated if the Israelites were to make straight paths for their feet. Joshua took the only wise and safe course to be followed in a situation like this. Well would it have been if the multitude who perished in the wilderness had followed the same procedure forty years before.

It may be argued that the reason for the defeat at Ai was the presence of the sinner, Achan, in the camp, and not because they made their own plans for the assault on the city. (See Joshua 7.) But the camp's cleansing would have been the initial part of God's plan for the campaign anyway. Had Joshua gone to God for instruction for the attack on Ai, as he had done before the siege of Jericho, the first specific order would have directed him to seek out and eliminate Achan's sin. This would have been followed by God's specifications for the advance on the enemy's camp. This is, in fact, exactly what the Lord did instruct, after a chastened Joshua finally laid the problem in His hands. We

must ever remember that until we have handed the problem completely over to Him, God cannot even begin to provide the solution to it, even though He is ready and waiting to do so.

The plan which came from God did not coincide with that made by the two spies which Joshua and the people had accepted. God's plan called not for three thousand troops, but the entire army. It involved an ambush set behind the city while the main force drew out the inhabitants, thus leaving the fortress vulnerable to attack. This time, by believing in God's power and by following a plan in which there was not one thread of human devising, Israel was entirely successful. (See *Joshua* 8:1–29.)

Repeated Failure

Once more, Joshua was given a telling lesson on the formula for success or failure. We might therefore expect from that time onward, he would be secure from any further reversions. Amazingly, this was not so. Only a very short time was to elapse before the next incident in which Israel once more depended on its own wisdom for guidance and consequently again suffered miserable failure.

Soon after the fall of Ai, the Gibeonites arrived with the false account of their origin. They tendered worn-out clothing and moldy bread as evidence of the distance they had traveled in order to enter into league with Israel. (See *Joshua* 9.)

At this request, Joshua and the elders found themselves faced with another problem that needed solving: Was the Gibeonites' account true or was it a lie?

The correct procedure would have been to give the matter into the great Problem Solver's hands and await His answer. After all the experiences through which Israel had passed and the consequent lessons they should have learned, we would expect them to have carefully avoided any displacement of God as their Problem Solver. But it was as if they had learned nothing from the past. They promptly reverted to human ways again as the scriptures tell us:

"The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD." Joshua 9:14.

The league with the Gibeonites was not a total disaster, but neither was it God's arrangement either. As a result, Israel suffered with problems and difficulties arising from this contract for a long time afterwards.

The Lessons of History

Joshua's life story contains lessons of great importance to those living at the present time. It is not a matter of judging or criticizing that great and godly man, but of rightly evaluating the outcome of the moves he made. It was for the edification and guidance of His people in all ages that God ensured the record was preserved. Joshua himself would have had it no other way.

As we study Joshua's life, the lessons within it should sweep away all sense of our self-sufficiency and self-confidence that we are secure in God's rest, and instead instill a "fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it." *Hebrews* 4:1 (NKJV).

Joshua was a mighty man spiritually, who had personally met Christ in the form of a man of war (see *Joshua* 5:13), seen marvelous workings of divine power over a long period, witnessed the evil effects of human planning, and seen the counter-results of leaving God to be the Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer. If a man of such spiritual caliber could revert to his own ways as Joshua did, are we not in even greater danger of doing the same thing? We have every cause to fear that we shall come short of the promise. With intense earnestness we need to study such stories repeatedly until this lesson has been burned into our deepest spiritual consciousness by the Holy Spirit, and we truly know and follow God's ways.

Every experience we have studied so far confirms the fact that when God's people accept His general orders and then proceed to make their own specific plans, the result is failure, loss, impossibility, and defeat. Instead of the work going forward in power to destroy the kingdom of darkness and evil, the forces of iniquity triumph and God's cause is set back by decades. Throughout history, its ultimate triumph has now been delayed by millenniums. By contrast, on every occasion when God's general and spe-

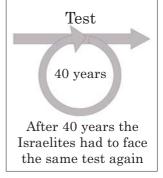
cific orders have been accepted and followed, there has resulted only unqualified success.

Furthermore, these lessons of history show us that each time we fail to follow God's ways, we not only delay God's work, but we make it harder for ourselves the next time round. God always brings us back to the testing point, just as He brought Israel back time and again. When they eventually succeeded, through trusting God instead of themselves in their battles against the warlike Sihon and the giant king Og, their tests were much more difficult than the ones they had previously failed.

"In their contest with Og and Sihon the people were brought to the same test beneath which their fathers had so signally failed. But the trial was now far more severe than when God had commanded Israel to go forward. The difficulties in their way had greatly increased since they refused to advance when bidden to do so in the name of the Lord. It is thus that God still tests His people. And if they fail to endure the trial, He brings them again

to the same point, and the second time the trial will come closer, and be more severe than the preceding. This is continued until they bear the test, or, if they are still rebellious, God withdraws His light from them and leaves them in darkness." Patriarchs and Prophets, 437.1.

What is true of the past is also true of the present, for God's ways have never changed. We have no excuse for



not knowing those ways, because they are repeatedly spelled out in the Scriptures. There we see God revealed as the Source, Christ the Connector, and ourselves as dependent receivers.

We do not have the wisdom to plan our own lives, for it is not in us to direct our steps successfully. (See *Jeremiah* 10:23.) Therefore, the role of plan maker, problem solver, and burden bearer is not ours. That is God's prerogative and only He is qualified to occupy those positions satisfactorily. When we confidently take that work upon ourselves, we are usurping God's place. This is a direct violation of the first commandment and severs our vital connection with the Almighty, exposing us to danger

and even destruction. (See *Exodus* 20:3.) No one can adopt a more foolish course, for no abiding peace or rest is to be found in it. Therefore those who follow this pattern cannot experience God's blessed Sabbath rest.

Human Inclination

When Joshua came to the end of his life's journey, the work of eradicating every evil nation from the land had not been fully accomplished. God's instructions to the people were that they must not rest until they had totally cleansed the country. But the Israelites did not see the wisdom of God's way. They did not accept the fact that although the plans God gave them were, in their view, quite illogical or unnecessarily urgent, they had to be obeyed without question, in the conscious and intelligent faith that they were the only plans which would bring the desired results. There was no safety in trusting any other procedure.

Those who survived Joshua, did not have that faith to fulfill God's plans. After all they had been through, they still had not learned the lessons. God's instructions, which involved their being engaged in long hard struggles with the enemy, while their farms, orchards, vineyards, animals, and families were being neglected, were unpleasant and unwelcome. They looked at their own strength compared with the weakness of the enemy and confidently decided that there was no urgency to eradicate these tribes.

Human inclination dictated a course contrary to God's orders. They judged it would be much wiser and more profitable to remain at home, develop their properties, enjoy the love and companionship of their wives and children, and imagined that, by these means, they would enter into God's rest. Those, who had gained the land by faithful adherence to God's general and specific orders, now thought they could retain it by preferring their own devisings to God's. This was another reversion. They, not God, had become the plan makers!

At first their plans appeared to work very well. They were relieved of the hardships of war, they enjoyed building up their possessions, they were able to fellowship with their families, and the bordering tribes gave them no trouble. This was the rest they expected, understood and loved.

But the inexorable law of heaven which no one can successfully ignore or defy, declares that those who do not know God's ways will not enter into His abiding rest. The only way that the people who outlived Joshua could have retained the rest which was the blessed fruit of previous obedience, was to continue living by the Sabbath rest principles. When they failed to do this, the outcome was the speedy loss of that rest.

It did not take long for the tribes surrounding Israel to build up their strength and invade the land. God's people were driven from their possessions, their harvests were gathered by foreigners, their homes were occupied by worshipers of Baal, the sanctuary service was discontinued, and they were forced to find miserable refuge in mountain caves and retreats.

Was this rest? Did these people who faithfully observed every seventh day as the Sabbath, experience true Sabbath rest?

They certainly did not, for only those who know and follow God's ways are true Sabbath keepers. God's Sabbath rest involves much more than merely observing the seventh day as the period of cessation from earthly toil.

Forced into a position of sheer desperation, with no capacity to save themselves, the Israelites did commit their problem to the infinite Source of life and salvation. This set God free to work for them, for He could do nothing until the problem had been actually given into His hands. As soon as it was, He set in motion forces to restore their freedom.

God raised up a series of champions, the first of whom was Othniel. Others who followed between the death of Joshua and the call of Samuel were Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jepthah, Samson, and a few other minor prophets.

No matter how evil God's chosen people became, nor how many times they reverted to their own ways, the Lord forgave them and solved their problems as soon as they turned them over to Him. But after each deliverance, it was never long before the Israelites became self-confident, reverted once more, passed under the power of their enemies, lost their peace and rest, and needed to be delivered again. Throughout these vicissitudes, God appears as a wonderful Forgiver and Restorer, while His people demonstrate a persistent inability to learn and follow His ways.

Our Commitment

With hindsight, we can view the history of Israel as an incredible story of lack of spiritual perception. But is this disposition peculiar to the Israelites? If we look honestly, we can see in

their history a mirror of our own. And to the extent that we follow the same pattern, are we not guiltier than they? We have lessons from history which were only being written in their time, that are counsels to bless us if we heed them, but condemn us if we do not.

Despite Israel's repeated reversions, their heavenly Father bore long with them in divine patience. They were illogical,



senseless, and ungrateful, yet without becoming discouraged He unfailingly restored their peace every time they gave the work of deliverance into His hands.

Rightly understood, these stories are a powerful indication of the correct course to be followed by those who hope to be God's instruments in ending the reign of sin. These records reveal consistent relationships between God's way and success, and between human ways and failure. These outworkings are so reliable that if we know the procedures used at a particular point of time, we can predict with infallible accuracy whether success or failure was the outcome.

Such results are not arbitrary, nor manipulated by God to establish His authority and leadership. They are the simple outworking of law. He alone has the capacity to plan and solve. Therefore, He alone can enjoy success as supreme Plan Maker. When we usurp His position and undertake that work ourselves, we prove by our consequent failures the simple truth that we do not possess the ability to handle such responsibility.

At this stage there are still many unanswered questions. We might wonder how we can positively know what are God's plans for us, and what effect this system will have on our character and personality. We also need to know how to cowork with Him, and what is our part in the carrying out of God's plans.

These are extremely important questions, but there is no need to wait until they are all answered before making a commitment to labor to enter into that rest which can be found only when we cease from trying to do the Lord's work in our own wisdom. God has already given us more than sufficient evidence with which to make a definite decision. Those who defer obedience until every shadow of uncertainty fully disappears, and there remains no risk of failure, will never obey at all.

"Often the Christian life is beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, "Go forward." We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Those who defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty disappears and there remains no risk of failure or defeat, will never obey at all. Unbelief whispers, "Let us wait till the obstructions are removed, and we can see our way clearly;" but faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things." Patriarchs and Prophets, 290.2.

Like the Israelites of old at the Red Sea, we need to step out in faith, trusting all to our heavenly Guide. If we wish to follow Christ, we need to learn that we have a positive responsibility to make a total commitment and submit entirely to God's ways. The alternative is to leave the Lord's service altogether and join the world. There is no middle way. We cannot march in Christ's army on our own terms. That is not possible—we would always be out of step. If we do not wish to know and follow God's ways, then we will not be comfortable within His church. He has outlined the only formula for success and those who wish to be coworkers with Him need to trust and follow that way. The very fact that a person has joined the body of Christ is in reality a

consecration to learn and to follow God's ways, no matter what the personal cost might be.

The one thing above all others which has marred the history of God's church is its members' insistence on establishing their ways in the place of Jehovah's, while still clinging to membership in His visible church. This is the way in which Babylon is built. In this way the papacy is established. Thus the work of God is retarded and denied its glorious consummation. This is the reason for the church's failure to finish God's work on the earth.

For almost six thousand years this sad situation has continued. Who will respond to God's longing appeals by shaking off this blind, stubborn determination to mix into the Lord's body the miserable devisings of human planning? When God is able to develop a people who will at last recognize that being members of His body involves living by His procedures and principles alone, "He will finish the work and cut *it* short in righteousness." *Romans* 9:28 (NKJV).

Let us be that people!

Lessons from the Lives of the Patriachs

CHAPTER 9

How Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Genesis* 12:1 to 18:15 and *Genesis* 21:1–7 together with *Patriarchs and Prophets* 125 to 147 can help deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Misguided Zeal

While Satan is well pleased when he has lulled a church into self-satisfied complacency through his devices, he also knows how to use zeal, love, and dedication to God's cause to his advantage. Consequently, some of those who have unwittingly served him best are people who have consecrated themselves to safeguard and promote the interests of God and His church, as they understood them. Christ foretold that when people were persecuting and killing His faithful followers, many of the persecutors would assume that they were thereby serving God. Saul in his zeal did just this before his road to Damascus conversion.

"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." *John* 16:2.

Obviously, those who follow such a course are actually serving Satan and do not know God's ways and therefore cannot enter into His rest. At the same time they confidently and zealously imagine they are serving the Most High God.

Jesus said, "They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." *John* 16:3.

When we read these verses, we understand that they apply to those persecuting church systems which claim to be working for Christ but that are, in fact, antichrist. We are not mistaken in this evaluation, but we must be careful not to limit the application to these churches only, for even the best of God's children can make the mistake of serving Satan while thinking that they are serving the Lord. To whatever extent this is true, the soul is deprived of God's Sabbath rest.

No genuine child of God would wittingly perform any service that would retard God's cause while advancing the enemy's. Therefore, Satan works hard to keep such believers in ignorance of what they are really doing. Conversely God devotes much time and energy to educating His people in His correct principles.

One concept which Satan assiduously fosters, is the idea that if we are doing the best we know, love the cause of God with all our heart and soul, are prepared to make any sacrifice to advance God's kingdom, and have nothing but the best of motives, then, whatever we are doing is for the best good of all and therefore wholly acceptable to God.

Scriptural records show that this idea is false; that no matter how excellent the motives or how self-sacrificing the zeal, if the work is not done according to correct procedures, it can ultimately result only in harm to all concerned. Until the church is totally delivered from such erroneous concepts, its members cannot enter into Sabbath rest, cannot finish the work, and God's kingdom cannot be established in eternal glory and everlasting righteousness.

Examining a small sampling of Bible characters and the courses they followed will substantiate the truth of these propositions, and should awaken us to a realization of how vital it is to know and trust God's ways, and to follow His divinely appointed procedures.

The Faith to Leave their Homeland

We will begin with the study of Abraham and Sarah, when their names were still Abram and Sarai. Their exercise of faith, dedication to God's cause, desire for nothing more than to safeguard the best interests of God's kingdom, and their willingness to make any sacrifice in order to see God's work advance were all highly commendable. Every believer can be rich in such treasures, although we need to understand that even these do not sanctify wrong procedures, or cancel their evil influences and effects. Only when we are motivated by these powerful forces, and at the same time know and practice God's ways, while trusting to Him more than self, can we enter into His rest.

Like most well-meaning Christians, the patriarchal couple were ignorant of God's ways and of the law of position. Consequently, they took steps that were never planned by God and which instead greatly served the cause of Satan. The intensity of their zeal, the purity of their motives, and their earnest desire to do nothing to retard God's cause, did not in any sense minimize the evil effects of what they did. To this day, the curse of those actions is still with us in the endless strife between Jew and Arab, which threatens world peace repeatedly.

Abram was a man of large faith, as is evidenced by his complete and unquestioning obedience to God's command to forsake the land of his childhood, Ur of the Chaldees, and journey forth without knowing where he was going. It was no small sacrifice to depart from that fabulous capital city with its unbelievable wealth and prestige.

"Excavation of a vast cemetery from the period preceding that dynasty (26th century) produced royal tombs containing almost incredible treasures in gold, silver, bronze, and semiprecious stones, showing not only the wealth of the people of Ur but also their highly developed civilization and art." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropaedia Volume 18:1021, 1975 edition.

The city of Ur was strategically located in the valley of the Euphrates, the capital of the lower Mesopotamian kingdom, and the center of fertile farm and grazing lands. It offered Abram

and his household a glowing future filled with prosperity, and promised the best security the world could provide.

Even more difficult to break, were the close ties formed with family and business associates to whom Abram could not explain the reason for his seemingly foolish and illogical departure. To all appearances he was literally giving up everything in exchange for nothing. He had only God's unproven word to assure him that true greatness and eternal rewards were to be found away from Ur.

Because spiritual things can be discerned only spiritually (see *1 Corinthians* 2:14), Abram's idolatrous kindred could not comprehend his motives and actions. So it was, by living faith, that Abram and Sarai abandoned prosperous Ur in favor of the unknown land of promise.

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents" *Hebrews* 11:8, 9.

Such an undertaking required a great step of faith, as the following paragraphs reveal:

"Abraham's unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible. To him, faith was 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' Verse 1. Relying upon the divine promise, without the least outward assurance of its fulfillment, he abandoned home and kindred and native land, and went forth, he knew not whither, to follow where God should lead. 'By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.' Hebrews 11:9, R.V.

"It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise—whether the soil was fertile and the climate healthful; whether the country afforded agreeable surroundings and would afford opportunities for amassing wealth. God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place

on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 126.2, 126.3.

Furthermore the patriarch was a man of constant prayer. Wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was set up an altar (see *Genesis* 12:8; 13:4, 18), calling all within his encampment to the morning and evening sacrifice.

No fault can be found with Abram's faith, which led him to obey God implicitly, no matter what sacrifice was required of him. The presence of such a faith in this man of God would lead us to expect that he would always trust God more than self and do only what was right and pleasing in the Lord's sight.

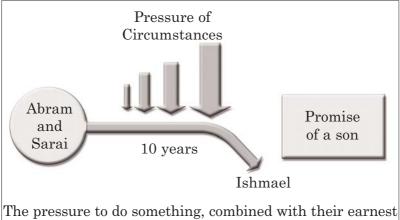
A Test of Submission

Acknowledging Abram as the true spiritual successor in the patriarchal line, God solemnly promised that through him the Messiah would be born, and that, in consequence, his seed would be as numberless as the stars.

"He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." *Genesis* 15:5, 6.

This promise Abram fully believed and nothing was more important to him and Sarai than its fulfillment. For them, the glory and honor of God were matters of the first and highest consequence. Therefore, they prayed and waited for the fulfillment with intense longing. Yet a decade passed, without any evidence that God would ever keep His word. The longer the delay, the greater the pressure Satan was able to exert on them to carry out God's work in their own way (see *Genesis* 12:4; 16:1–3, 16).

What we need to understand here, is that despite the deep devotion of this godly couple (which increased their desire to see the promise fulfilled and God's work advanced), the greater their spirit of sacrifice, the more they were in danger of attempting to do God's work in their own way. We also need to see that this same danger still faces every true Christian today, for Satan is very adept at turning the mighty powers that God builds within us into wrong directions.



The pressure to do something, combined with their earnest desire to advance the work of God, led the godly couple to miss the promise of God.

Finally, in desperation, Sarai proposed to her husband that he take Hagar to be the mother of his son, and Abram accepted this proposition. Sarai said to Abram:

"The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.' Abram agreed to what Sarai said." *Genesis* 16:2.

In no sense were they rebels against the Almighty when they took this step. They believed in God and it was out of love for His cause that they were prepared to make this great sacrifice for Him. They desired nothing more than to build God's kingdom in righteousness. All these were wonderfully commendable attributes for Sarai and Abram to possess and exhibit, but that did not prevent them from working to build God's cause in their own way, nor did it cancel out the evil consequences of the choice they made and the course they chose to follow.

Abram's Mistake

After the birth of Ishmael, Abram regarded his firstborn son with unbounded affection, apparently never doubting that God had accepted him as the true fulfillment of His promise. For thirteen years, God said nothing to Abram concerning the step taken (see *Genesis* 16:16; 17:1). It would seem that Abram took the absence of divine condemnation to mean that God approved his actions.

When God at last repeated the assurance that Abraham would be the father of many nations (see *Genesis* 17:1–6), he immediately assumed that this would take place through his son Ishmael. We can see this in Abraham's reaction when God declared that His promise would be fulfilled through the son of Sarah. In his astonishment Abraham revealed that his thoughts had been directed to his firstborn son:

"And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" *Genesis* 17:18 (NKJV).

There was more in Abraham's plea for Ishmael than may be immediately apparent. It is true that Abraham loved this youth very deeply and intensely and, in consequence, desired that he should have the place of honor promised by God. But a deeper issue was at stake than Abraham's love for his son. Subconsciously, the patriarch was defending the system, or procedure, by which Ishmael had been born. It was a call for the human way of building God's work to be accepted in the place of the divine way.

It was not that these issues were clearly defined in Abraham's mind. The divine rejection of Ishmael as the promised child stirred mixed emotional responses in Abraham that effectively prevented him from discerning the implications of God's statement and his own response to it.

In Abraham's thinking, Jehovah was proposing the truly impossible. He no longer believed that he and Sarah could produce a child. His wife had always been barren and now he had aged to the point where he was impotent. He questioned why God should wait so long to do what could have been easily accomplished years before. When Abraham heard God's announcement that he would have a son through his wife Sarah, he "fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" Genesis 17:17.

It was immediately after Abraham had adopted this unbelieving stance that the cry escaped his lips, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" *Genesis* 17:18 (NKJV).

Abraham found himself faced with a fearful situation. Despite his trust in God's word in some areas, such as in his departure from Ur, he still trusted his own judgment more than God's in other areas. Unable as yet to grasp by faith the full truth that what God had promised He was able to perform, Abraham could see no hope of Isaac being born. If the fulfillment of the promise was not to be achieved through the birth of Ishmael, then, he thought, there was no hope—he would die without the promised heir. All his hopes would end with the doom of the plan of salvation.

In Ishmael he could believe. Previously, God had assured Abram specifically that the promised child would be his own flesh and blood, but had never as specifically said that Sarai would be the mother. It had been a tremendous sacrifice for both Sarai and himself to let Hagar bear the child. He had done it with only one motive in mind—to advance the cause of truth and thus successfully banish evil from the universe. Both he and Sarai had believed in God and His work, both of them had separated from heathenism, and both were accepted by Jehovah as the true church of that time.

With all this and more in his favor, how could Abram have possibly gone wrong? If he had, in fact, adopted some incorrect procedures, would his good motives and righteous character not serve to sanctify the course he had adopted? And surely, because all that he had done was for God, the Omnipotent One must accept the product of his works—Ishmael!

In thinking along such lines, Abraham was exhibiting the false reasoning so common to humanity. Up till this point of time, he had failed to understand that every antichristian religion is a system which seeks to build God's kingdom in man's way, and that those who are involved in such efforts are very dedicated, studious, self-sacrificing, and zealous individuals. He did not see that to the extent he had applied his own devices in an attempt to advance God's cause, he had established and fostered false religion. He was unable to realize that if God were to accept Ishmael, He would be giving recognition to a form of religion which is a ministration of death and through which salvation for the human race can never be achieved.

God's Way Unequivocal

It is not sufficient to exercise deep faith in God. Such faith must be accompanied by the intelligent application of correct procedures in a spirit of healthy self-distrust. This is the only way that God's kingdom can be built God's way. He has not arbitrarily decreed that it shall be so, but there is simply no other way that will succeed.

In His reply to Abraham's pleas for Ishmael and the system which had produced him, God inflexibly refused to accord the promised inheritance to the patriarch's first son.

"No,' God replied, 'that isn't what I said. Sarah shall bear you a son; and you are to name him Isaac ('Laughter'), and I will sign my covenant with him forever, and with his descendants." *Genesis* 17:19. Living Bible.

By refusing to accept Ishmael, God declared that He would have no part in any program which attempted to build His kingdom by trusting in human planning and procedures. Because He alone had the power to fulfill His promises, any human effort to do so would result in dismal failure.

As we need to be totally delivered from the thinking which led Abraham to plead for Ishmael, God has provided a record of His unequivocal responses for us to study carefully. Unfortunately we tend to prefer a message that leaves loopholes for trusting to our own sinful devising, over the one straight and narrow way that God gives us (compare *Acts* 4:12). But this is exactly the way God presented Himself to Abraham.

When Abraham pleaded with God to accept Ishmael, God did not make the slightest concession in this direction. Instead, He said that Sarah would bear a son and that the covenant would be formed with Sarah's son, and not with Hagar's son.

"Then God said ... I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." *Genesis* 17:19.

Nowhere in this entire conversation did God say that He would establish the covenant with Ishmael.

This does not mean that Ishmael could not find personal salvation, but that he could never be the promised child through whom the Lord would finally bring the Messiah. Yet in His

mercy, God still blessed Ishmael—his descendants would multiply into a great nation.

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation." *Genesis* 17:20.

History has proved this prediction true as far as any literal fulfillment is concerned, for the millions of Arabs living today are descended from Ishmael.

Abraham, in his deep affection for his firstborn, was in danger of reading more into such a promise, than God had meant. To ensure that he did not, God reiterated the fact that even though Ishmael would become a great nation, yet the covenant would be with Isaac alone.

"But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.' When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him." *Genesis* 17:21, 22.

Therefore, no matter how dedicated, self-sacrificing, and zealous they were, Abraham and Sarah's attempts to advance the cause by their own devising could not be accepted by God. Even though He accounted Abraham's faith as righteousness (see *Genesis* 15:6 and *Romans* 4:3), this did not sanctify the wrong methods he used. When these principles are understood and accepted, we will be far less inclined to rest in the wrong idea that the course followed is not as important as good intentions. We will be more particular in making sure that we combine living faith with correct procedures, believing that God's work can never be advanced by using human methods. We will place our trust in God's ways, rather than our own ways.

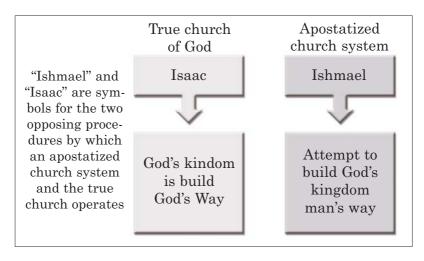
A change of name was given to Abraham, as a divine seal of approval, confirming the patriarch's acceptance of God's terms of kingdom building. No longer was he to follow his own ways in an attempt to fulfill God's promises. From now on he was to have implicit faith in God's ways. As a result, the true heir would be born to the patriarchal couple. This was reflected in the name change from Abram, meaning "exalted father", to Abraham, meaning "father of many nations", and also in his wife's new name Sarah, meaning "Princess", because she was to be the "mother of nations".

"No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.... God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." *Genesis* 17:5, 15, 16.

Two Symbols of Two Procedures

It is not enough to see a physical fulfillment of God's prediction that Ishmael would become a great nation. Both of Abraham's sons are types—Isaac portraying those who build God's kingdom in God's way, and Ishmael symbolizing those who attempt to build God's kingdom in their own way. Although both manifest much the same dedication, zeal, industry, self-sacrifice, and consuming desire to advance God's cause, only with those who are symbolized by Isaac is God's covenant to be found.

The mighty apostle Paul was deeply concerned with the differences between religion where God's work is done His way, and religion where people attempt to do God's work their own way. He could see in the birth of these two young men a powerful illustration of these contrasting procedures and the inevitable but



opposite outworking of each. He saw Isaac as a representation of the former, and Ishmael of the latter.

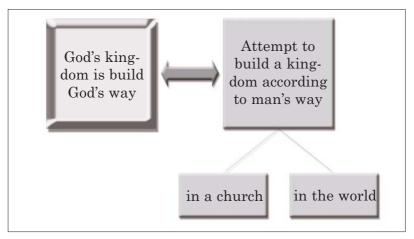
When the Galatian believers were diverted from the one true religion, Paul illustrated their experience by directing their attention to the course adopted by Abram and Sarai, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael. Then he showed them that the way Isaac was conceived provided a lesson in the procedures by which the true church operates.

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who do not travail! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.'

"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." *Galatians* 4:21–5:1 (NKJV).

Ishmael was born after the flesh, but Isaac was born after the Spirit. Therefore Ishmael had no place in the covenant, was no part of God's true work, and was not accepted by God as the promised child. Through him the Messiah could not be born.

To be born after the flesh means to be the product of human devising and trust in self. Every project we have ever undertaken without first receiving instructions from God, falls into this category of human devisings, which can be further subdivided into two types. There are people who scheme to advance their own empires, and there are other people devoted to building God's kingdom. Abraham's fathering of Ishmael falls into the latter classification.



Is Our Work Acceptable?

Professed Christians and church-goers are dedicated to what they assume to be service to God. They tend to stand apart from "worldlings" whom they see as being selfishly devoted to hedonism. They know that there should be a decided difference between the church member and the "heathen", and they believe that this difference is the opposing aims on which each is respectively expending his or her energies and resources. Most fail to see that it is not enough for Christians to have different objectives. They must also follow different procedures. It is the ways of God's people which must differ from the ways of others.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD." *Isaiah* 55:8.

As Christians, we need to learn that until our ways have been changed into harmony with God's procedures, our works, no matter how beautifully clothed with zeal, self-sacrifice, and dedication, have no more hope of being accepted by God than was Ishmael recognized as the child of promise.

Of course, most professed children of God believe that their ways are different from those of the wordling. They are conscious that they behave differently from the godless, they do not share with the world in its amusements, and they may even take care not to desecrate the Sabbath's sacred hours. All this was equally true of Abraham, yet, in his efforts to establish God's kingdom, he trusted and followed procedures which the Lord could not accept. While it is good and necessary for Christians to forsake any pleasures of the world that are sinful, they are not to rest satisfied that these differences are sufficient.

Abraham had great difficulty in accepting God's rejection of Ishmael. He thought of his own faith, self-sacrifice, devotion to God's cause, and the fact that he had done it all for God's kingdom, for which he was prepared to make any sacrifice. How could anything which was the product of these impeccably commendable motives, be disclaimed by God?

Yet the simple fact is that God did not accept Ishmael!

So it remains today. Many professed Christians cannot understand why the Almighty does not accept their works. They look at their zeal, sacrifices, knowledge of the Scriptures, large financial contributions, extensive and successful missionary efforts, and their devotion to God's cause, as absolute guarantees that the Lord must accept what they have done for Him. They feel that He would have to be very ungrateful not to approve of and bless their dedicated efforts. If, like Abraham, they discover that He does not accept their works, their concept of His character tends to harden. They imagine Him to be harsh, exacting, unappreciative, and capricious, when, in truth, He is the very opposite of these.

To prevent us from coming to such erroneous conclusions, God has provided us with the plain records of how He dealt with Abraham, what He could and could not accept, and how He worked and why. He confirmed forever that the only way His kingdom can be built is by trusting in the fixed procedures determined by law. Anything outside of that has no place, for "... what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." *Galatians* 4:30.

Even though God could prophesy that Ishmael would become a great nation, yet He emphasized, "But my covenant I will establish with Isaac" *Genesis* 17:21.

Yet despite the clarity of the lessons portrayed, Christians continue their concerted efforts to build God's kingdom in their own way, while they wonder why He does not work powerfully with them, or bring the gospel commission to its conclusion. Those who today, like Abraham in his method of fathering Ishmael, are devoted to works of the flesh, are far more numerous than those who, like Isaac, are children of faith.

When God declared that He would make of Ishmael a great nation, He was making no concessions to the shocked and grieving patriarch, nor was He acceding to Abraham's plea that Ishmael might live before Him. Rather, He was prophesying the outcome of the ever-present disposition in human beings to attempt to build God's kingdom on their own terms. Throughout history, there have always been greater numbers of professed Christians using their own procedures, in their attempts to build either God's kingdom or their own, than those who have gone forward trusting totally in God's ways.

Abraham's mistake in concluding that if his motives were so high and selfless, then his procedures could be nothing else but just and righteous, is still being repeated by thousands of other earnest Christians today. It is the error against which we all need to guard. We must take care never to argue that the end justifies the means. The methods followed are not necessarily correct just because our zeal, devotion to God's cause, spirit of self-sacrifice, and motives, are all above reproach. The first questions to ask are, Am I doing this in harmony with God's ways? Is my confidence and trust in myself or in God's ways?

Only if careful examination of our procedures shows that they are in harmony with His ways, and that we have implicit trust in Him, first and foremost, can we then pray for acceptance and entering into His rest.

CHAPTER 10

Circumcision

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Genesis* 17:1–27 together with *Patriarchs and Prophets* 145 to 155 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The Introduction of the Rite

Circumcision was first introduced to God's people when the Lord came to Abraham to inform him that His covenant would be not with Ishmael, but solely with Isaac. The timing of the introduction of this rite is especially significant and contains spiritual lessons of much value that need to be thoroughly understood and practiced by all Christians.

This is not saying that we should still practice the actual physical rite of circumcision, for it was nailed to the cross along with the other ceremonies from the Old Testament (see *Ephesians* 2:15 and *2 Corinthians* 3:13). It is the spiritual lessons taught by this rite which we need to understand and observe today.

When the Lord directed Abraham to circumcise every male in his household, as well as submitting to the rite himself, Ishmael was already thirteen years of age. This child had entered the world as the result of human procedures which could never CIRCUMCISION 163

qualify him to be the child of promise. Up until this time, Abram really believed that he had done a great work for God and that the Almighty fully accepted his devising. But the true child of promise could be born only if Abraham was brought to understand the real nature of the procedures he had followed, was deeply convicted of the error of those ways, repented of them with all his heart, and then covenanted with God to follow His ways and His alone.

Until these changes had been effected, the true child could not appear. None of these procedures as such could actually bring about the fulfillment of God's promise, but Abraham needed to follow them in order to clear the way for God to do what He had said He would.

Abraham's Reluctance

Before God introduced the rite of circumcision, Abraham had to accept the spiritual lesson behind it. The rite itself was intended to be but a picture of the spiritual circumcision of the heart that had preceded it. At first Abraham resisted the Lord's instructions. He was unable to see beyond the physical limitations imposed by both his and Sarah's ages. As he instead pleaded with God for Ishmael (see *Genesis* 17:18), he was in reality asking God to recognize and accept a system wherein people seek to build God's kingdom for Him by trusting in their own ways. It was imperative that Abraham renounce those procedures completely before he could see the promise fulfilled. There was no place for human devising and God could not enter into any concessions or compromises whatsoever, for only in God's ways can true rest be found.

In this confrontation, God was seeking to effect within Abraham a change in convictions so profound that it would result in total renunciation of the procedures by which Ishmael had been given life. Instead He would form a covenant with the patriarch, which would confine Abraham and all those of his posterity who would remain faithful to it, to God's ways alone. If such a change could be achieved and permanently established, the success of God's work in the dethronement of sin and sinners was assured.

The Lord was calling Abraham to accept the covenant by which Isaac could be born. He was asking Abraham to give up trusting in self, and to place his whole trust in His Maker.

God was saying in effect, "Up till this time you have been trying to achieve the promise by your own works, but I tell you, this is impossible. You will never achieve it this way. I must inform you that My promise can never be fulfilled through Ishmael, no matter how spiritually blind you are to the possibility of its being done My way.

"Furthermore, the true child of promise can never be given life until you are thoroughly convicted of the error resident in your ways, repent of the evil, and solemnly covenant with Me that you will trust and follow the specifications which I, in My infinite wisdom, have devised. It is important that you also understand that these plans are not formed because of any determination on My part to retain the headship to Myself. I have not arbitrarily decreed that it shall be this way. These are the only procedures that can successfully save humanity from sin and death. Immutable and perfect law dictates that there can be no other way."

Until this covenant was formed between Abraham and God, nothing more could be done towards the fulfillment of the promise. The patriarch had come to the most critical decision point of his life. Both his and the kingdom's future hung in the balance.

Abraham's Submission

Abraham finally accepted and submitted to the Lord's directions. Once this great change took place in him, the way was prepared for the birth of Isaac. It was at this point that God introduced the rite of circumcision. Like all the other ceremonies of the Old Testament, it was not to possess any virtue in itself, other than as a lesson and a positive act of confirmation that the human participant had already given up his own ways. "And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the right-eousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised...." Romans 4:11. Those who received this rite in the spirit intended, were thereby setting their seal to the presence with-

CIRCUMCISION 165

in them of a spirit of entire submission to, and co-operation with, God's ways and purposes. It signified the consecration of the instrument of their flesh to the service of God by cutting away from it all that was unnecessary to those purposes. The circumcised had dedicated themselves to trusting and following God's ways in the building of His kingdom, while resolutely in self-distrust avoiding any reversions to their own ways.

Only those who had covenanted with God to forsake their own ways of kingdom-building utterly, in favor of God's, could truthfully receive the rite. No doubt, females were regarded as circumcised if their husbands and sons had received the rite. When it was performed on infants, this was a dedication by their parents that their sons would be raised up in God's ways so that they could enter into His rest.

Isaac could be born only under the condition that Abraham was willing to give up his own works. To confirm that he really had forsaken these ways, Abraham was to perform the rite of circumcision on himself and his household. In addition to his and his wife's changed names, his acceptance of this condition was verified in two ways.

The first was his performance of the rite as a testimony that his understanding of God's ways had changed, that he was convicted of the rightness of those ways, and that he fully accepted them exactly as God offered them.

"On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him." *Genesis* 17:23.

The second confirmation was the fact that Abraham and Sarah were thereafter released from their bondage of barrenness and Isaac was born, the event which would never have taken place if Abraham had not entered into the covenant of which circumcision was the sign.

"Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." *Genesis* 21:1–5.

The circumcision of the child Isaac was also a testimony to two things. Firstly, it was a recognition of the procedure by which the child was born, and secondly, it was a pledge that he would be educated into God's ways.

The Symbol is Not the Contract

Circumcision was not the covenant—it was the symbol of the covenant as clarified when God had said to Abraham, "... it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you." *Genesis* 17:11.

Under no circumstances should the covenant symbolized by circumcision be confused with the symbol itself. The symbol is circumcision. The covenant symbolized is the contract or agreement between God and the needy sinner whereby the Father pledges to bring all the blessings of the atonement to the believer, provided he or she agrees not to introduce any thread of human devising into the scheme. (See *Romans* 4:5; *Colossi-*

ans 2:11; Romans 15:8.) Until this is done, God cannot proceed with the work of grace in the soul.

This distinction can be clearly illustrated by the contracts made between the in-



tended owner of a house and the builder who will construct it. Firstly, a plan and specifications are drawn up. The builder and the prospective owner then agree to a contract. The builder guarantees to erect the house for a price to which the other agrees. Until this is settled, no actual construction is done. When it is, the builder proceeds to construct the home according to the agreement.

So it is in spiritual things. Only after the sinner has accepted the plan exactly as God has designed it, and has decided to give up any disposition to introduce his own devisings, can God proceed to effect the work within him. CIRCUMCISION 167

Why not Earlier?

Up until this point of time God had not required circumcision of His people, but does that mean that prior to this date, conditions for receiving the benefits of the atonement were any different? On the contrary, every person who lived earlier than Abraham, just as everyone after him, had to enter into the same solemn covenant relation with God before spiritual blessings could be received. There has always been only one plan of redemption, and its conditions have never changed.

The reason why God introduced circumcision for the first time in Abraham's day was because the long centuries of apostasy and rebellion had so blinded the people that they needed a visible object lesson to awaken their spiritual understanding. If they had faithfully adhered to God's principles, they could have seen the truth that this ordinance portrayed without it.

"If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 364.2.

The Change in Abraham's Faith

Changes had to take place in Abraham's thinking, not in God's. It is evident that the patriarch's eyes were opened and mighty faith sprang into life. In that wonderful way in which the Holy Spirit works, Abraham was led to see the dark nature of his unbelief on the one hand, and the miraculous power of God on the other. He came to realize that the Lord had the power to put life where there was death and his faith grasped the reality of it. The beauty and strength of that faith which enabled him to enter into this covenant is described by Paul in these words:

"Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the

sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as right-eousness." Romans 4:16–22.

It might appear that Paul is giving a contradictory testimony from that revealed in the Old Testament. Back there it stated that Abraham laughed at God's proposition (see *Genesis* 17:17), whereas Paul assures us that he staggered not at the promise, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.

But there is in fact no contradiction. *Genesis* informs us of the state in which God found Abraham when He first came to him—of his unbelief in God's capacity to give life where there was only death. Whereas Paul describes the wonderful transformation which took place in the patriarch when he caught a vision of God's ability to do what He had promised. When this faith possessed him, Abraham was able to trust God to fulfill His Word. It was a simple matter then for Abraham to make the covenant by which he no longer attempted to achieve the promise through his own works.

The Lesson for Us Today

The story of Abraham and Sarah shows us clearly that it is absolutely necessary to do God's work in the way He has appointed, in order for us to be successful. No amount of good intentions can justify us, if we turn to our own works, trusting in ourselves to be the plan makers or problem solvers in God's stead.

Before the Almighty can fulfill His part of the covenant in blessing us, we need a positive and living faith in Him. AccordCIRCUMCISION 169

ing to God's word, those who are unable to enter into the blessed Sabbath rest experience, are those in whom resides an evil heart of unbelief (see *Hebrews* 3:12–19). In order to know God's rest we must believe that the Almighty has the power to fulfill His promises—that He is able to put life where there is only death. We can attain to the circumcision of the heart only if we let God become our Plan Maker in the place of ourselves.

When we are ready to turn from our own works and let God plan for us, thus fulfilling the condition, He will work for us in a remarkable manner. We will witness His solving our problems and bearing our burdens as if they were but a feather-weight. We can, however, expect Him to do this for us only after we abstain from our own plan making, problem solving and burden bearing. Doing this, we are obeying His commandments and will experience a corresponding peace or Sabbath rest.

"If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea." *Isaiah* 48:18.

Not an End in Itself

True circumcision has always been a symbol or expression of the necessary change of heart which leads to a change of procedures. Today the physical rite is no longer required, but the spiritual cutting away of one's own works is still necessary. Every time we are confronted with a problem and choose to let God be our Problem Solver, we are testifying that we have indeed cut away the works of the flesh and are living by faith in our eternal Lord.

This condition is not met by physical circumcision, nor has it ever been. Unfortunately, as the Jews degenerated in spirituality, the outward sign came to be looked upon as the total requirement. They failed to see that circumcision was empty and valueless unless it was the physical evidence that they had entered into covenant relation with Jehovah by forsaking their own works and accepting His way of salvation.

No one understood this better than the apostle Paul. He lived at a time when the Jews had long since lost their spiritual connection

with God, yet were very particular in maintaining the outward sign, erroneously supposing that this was all they needed to ensure their sonship with God. Paul advised them that if they had not made the covenant with the Lord on His terms, then their physical circumcision counted for nought. Until they could be brought to see this, nothing could be done to save them from destruction and restore them to unity with the Father.

"Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." Romans 2:25–29.

The same principle holds true in respect to baptism, the Lord's supper, Sabbath-keeping, and any other service that Christians are directed to perform. The outward observance is a meaningless form and may even be dangerous, unless it is an expression of the experience it represents. For this reason Paul was led to say of the Lord's supper that "anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." *1 Corinthians* 11:29, 30.

Important as it is that no one overlooks this principle, it is a sad fact that millions of well-meaning Christians down through history have erred, by making the ceremony the end in itself. By so doing, they have lost the tremendous blessing that God designed they should receive. It is now our responsibility to break this persistent pattern and giving up our own works, become spiritually circumcised. By doing this we are preparing to be among that company who, having been cleansed of all false doctrine, "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Revelation 14:4.

CHAPTER 11

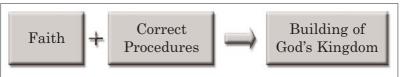
The Battle for the Birthright

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Genesis* 25:19–34 and *Genesis* 27:1–28:22 together with *Patriarchs and Prophets* 177 to 194 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The great lesson Abraham learned from the birth of Isaac was that only through faith and correct procedures can God's kingdom be built. We would expect that this lesson had been so thoroughly taught to Isaac that it would be an active principle in his life thereafter. But although this was evident in his submission to his father (see *Genesis* 22) and in his marriage arrangements (see *Genesis* 24), this was not the case when it came to rearing his own children.

After Isaac's divinely arranged marriage with Rebekah, they were childless. But in answer to Isaac's prayer, their twins, Esau and Jacob, were born. Esau arrived first, which entitled him to the material and spiritual birthright, but God's answer to Rebekah's prayer informed her that the younger, not the elder twin, was to excel. This was a statement from Jehovah indicating that the birthright was to go to Jacob.

"And Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his



The great lesson Abraham learned from the birth of Isaac was that only through faith and correct procedures can God's kingdom be built.

wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." *Genesis* 25:20–23.

As the boys matured, they exhibited entirely different interests and developed contrasting characters. "The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents." *Genesis* 25:27.

Revealing an unwise preference, Isaac loved his first-born Esau more than his brother. On the other hand, Rebekah loved Jacob more because of his commitment to things of eternal worth. "And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." *Genesis* 25:28 (NKJV).

The reason given for the preference Isaac had for Esau was that "he ate of his game". This indicates that Isaac allowed his feelings to dominate his reason in this matter. Such sentimentalism is confirmed in the following description of the situation.

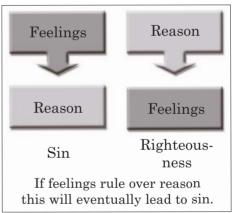
"Esau grew up loving self-gratification, and centering all his interest in the present. Impatient of restraint, he delighted in the wild freedom of the chase, and early chose the life of a hunter. Yet he was the father's favorite. The quiet, peace-loving shepherd was attracted by the daring and vigor of this elder son, who fearlessly ranged over mountain and desert, returning home with game for his father and with exciting accounts of his adventurous life . . .

"Bent on self-indulgence, he [Esau] desired nothing so much as liberty to do as he pleased. To him power and riches, feasting and reveling, were happiness. He gloried in the unrestrained freedom of his wild, roving life. Rebekah remembered the words of the angel, and she read with clearer insight than did her husband the character of their sons. She was convinced that the heritage of divine promise was intended for Jacob. She repeated to Isaac the angel's words; but the father's affections were centered upon the elder son, and he was unshaken in his purpose." Patriarchs and Prophets, 177.2, 178.1.

The most important thing to Abraham had been the advancement of God's kingdom in accordance with the promises Jehovah had personally made to him. The same was true of Isaac and Rebekah. Consequently, they diligently taught their sons the prin-

ciples and purposes of God in the everlasting covenant, and impressed upon their minds the sacred responsibilities inherent in the birthright.

But Esau, in fulfillment of the prophecy made to Rebekah before the twins were born, displayed no interest in the spiritual blessings of the birthright. He developed a character



which disqualified him from undertaking its responsibilities. He revealed his unfitness for the birthright when he sold it for a plateful of food, and confirmed it when he married two heathen wives. Just as his father preferred him to his brother, Esau had learnt to be sentimental too, allowing his feelings to dominate his reason.

"Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!' (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, 'First sell me your birthright.' 'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?' But Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau

some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright." *Genesis* 25:29–34.

"When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah." *Genesis* 26:34–35.

Isaac's Mistake

Unfortunately the father seemed to be blinded by love for his darling elder son. Isaac could not be persuaded to change his purpose of giving Esau the birthright, despite the facts that he was disqualified from its possession, and that God had revealed His choice of Jacob for this honor.

This determination of Isaac's was a source of trouble in the family. The issue as to which son would receive the promised blessing produced a divided household, which in turn delayed the bestowal of the birthright. The occasion when the ceremony usually took place was doubtless a significant one, attended by relatives. The reverent though joyous tone of the endowment service was intended to leave a lifelong impression on the minds of both the recipient and the witnesses.

But because of the division in his home, Isaac postponed the pronouncement of the birthright blessing on Esau until his failing physical health warned him not to delay any longer.

"When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son.' 'Here I am,' he answered. Isaac said, 'I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." *Genesis* 27:1–4.

The whole arrangement was contracted in the utmost secrecy, but Rebekah, who had feared just such a conspiracy, never let her guard drop. Tent walls do not inhibit the transmission of human voices, no matter how quietly spoken the words, so Rebekah was able to overhear the instructions given by Isaac to Esau:

"Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." *Genesis* 27:3–4.

Isaac was definitely in the wrong for taking these steps. While Esau was, in fact, the older, and from this point of view entitled to the birthright, he had totally disqualified himself for it by the way in which he lived. His marriage to his two heathen wives had provided conclusive evidence of his attitude to the Lord's work. But the patriarch had permitted his emotions to rule over his reason, confirming his determination to give the birthright to his godless son. Isaac trusted to his feelings instead of allowing God His way.

Rebekah's Mistake

Because of her intense love for Jacob, Rebekah desired him to have the birthright, but there appears to be a stronger motive driving her. Like Sarah, Abraham, and her own beloved husband, Isaac, she loved the cause of God and desired nothing more than its prosperity. Furthermore, she feared for her husband who was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure. These are fine qualities in Rebekah which led her to react as she did, but while the motivation was above reproach, the actions which resulted from it were entirely wrong.

When the anxious mother heard Isaac instructing their elder son, she knew that the critical hour had arrived and that she must do something. Before her were two possibilities. The first was to fall for the temptation to take over the role of problem solver herself, which is the course she chose.

The second possibility was to recognize God as the only Problem Solver to whom she should turn, and thus commit the entire matter into His hands, being very careful to avoid forming any solutions or making any plans herself. She had God's promise that Jacob would be the heir, and it was her privilege to rest in that word. Her responsibility was to claim the promise, surrender the problem into God's hands, and then calmly wait for Him to accomplish what He had assured her He would do. If there

was any part for her or Jacob to play beyond this, the Almighty would instruct them with specific orders.

It is a sad fact of history that the well-intentioned mother chose the wrong way to solve the problem. The plan proposed by a determined Rebekah and carried out by a reluctant Jacob, involved the direct violation of God's holy law, for it demanded that Jacob intentionally deceive his father. "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. 'I am,' he replied." *Genesis* 27:24. In Rebekah's scheme was not a single thread of divine planning. It was specifically an effort to protect and build God's kingdom, man's way. (See *Genesis* 27:8–29 for a description of the whole story.)

When God foretold that Jacob would have the birthright, He made the commitment in the full knowledge of everything that would stand in the way. Isaac's attitude was no surprise to Him. Therefore, He made the promise knowing exactly what it would take to implement it. He was not placed in a position where the matter was so out of control that He needed human beings to take over and fulfill the promise for Him, for He was more than capable of handling the matter Himself. In fact, only He had the capacity to do so, whereas those who took over from Him did not.

By usurping the role of problem solver, Rebekah violated the first commandment. She put herself in God's place, and tried to save the Lord's work in her own way. As in Abraham's case, her motives and intentions were laudable, resulting in an apparent success which, for the time being, satisfied her that she had done the right thing. It was not long, however, before both mother and son saw how evil their course had been and were deeply repentant for their sin. Both came to see that in attempting to build God's kingdom in their own way, they had placed their trust in themselves instead of their heavenly Father, and had so tied His hands that He could not bring about His plan to give Jacob the birthright in His own way.

Jacob's Victory

It was not until that awful night many years later, when Jacob wrestled with the Angel, that he finally experienced blessed relief from the burden of this sin. As Jacob returned to his own country, Esau, fearing that he had come to claim the material blessings of the birthright, went out to meet him with murderous intentions (see *Genesis* 32:6–7). Having meanwhile learned the lessons of Sabbath rest, Jacob did his part, but made no attempt to undertake the defense of his company, instead trusting all this to God (see *Genesis* 32:10–13). He then retired into the wilderness by the brook Jabbok to plead his case before his faithful heavenly Father whom he now trusted to be constantly caring for him. It was here that the Angel of the Covenant, Jesus Christ, came down to battle with him (see *Genesis* 32:23–32).

Hour after hour passed, while Jacob was tormented with the realization that it was his own sin against Esau which had placed the lives of him and his family in jeopardy. He experienced deep repentance—not over the results of his deceit but over the root of the problem itself. Experience had taught him that the procedure he had used with his father had been wrong and he did not want to repeat his mistake. This time he trusted his case without reserve into the hands of Him who could solve his problem to perfection, and he refused to do any problem solving or planning himself.

"The error that had led to Jacob's sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud was now clearly set before him. He had not trusted God's promises, but had sought by his own efforts to bring
about that which God would have accomplished in His own time
and way. As an evidence that he had been forgiven, his name
was changed from one that was a reminder of his sin, to one that
commemorated his victory. 'Thy name,' said the Angel, 'shall be
called no more Jacob [the supplanter], but Israel: for as a prince
hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."
(See *Genesis* 32:29.)

"Jacob had received the blessing for which his soul had longed. His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned. The crisis in his life was past. Doubt, perplexity, and remorse had embittered his existence, but now all was changed; and sweet was the peace of reconciliation with God. Jacob no longer feared to meet his brother. God, who had forgiven his sin, could move the heart of Esau also to accept his humiliation and repentance." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 197.2, 198.1.

The result of following the right procedure this time was that the heavenly Problem Solver wrought wonderfully for Jacob, and as a result his brother experienced a sudden change of mind. "But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept." *Genesis* 33:4. (See *Genesis* 33:1–16 for a description of the whole story.)

Erroneous Thinking

Because Rebekah and Jacob took God's work into their own hands, we do not know exactly how Jehovah would have fulfilled His promise. But we do see how once again, well-meaning, dedicated people, through lack of adequate education and trust in Sabbath rest principles, were led to take steps in which God could have no part, and for which they had to experience a very deep and painful work of repentance. They also suffered considerably as a consequence of their sin, one of the sad results being that they never saw each other again.

At this point the following question might arise: Both Rebekah and Jacob were born again Christians, yet they set themselves in the place of God, thereby violating the first and with it all the other commandments as well (see *James* 2:10). How could it be possible that such a sin could appear in their lives? How can a good tree produce such bad fruit?

It is true that a good tree can produce only good fruit, which symbolizes all the excellent qualities of dedication to God's service, love for His cause, spirit of self-sacrifice, and so forth. It is from the indwelling life of Christ that such admirable qualities spring. These attributes are mighty powers that exert powerful influences on our behavior, but they cannot operate safely unless we control them by an educated mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit. In the cases of Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, and Jacob, such an education was lacking, with the result that these wonderful Christians, so dedicated and well-meaning, entered into courses of action which were sinful in every sense, and with which our heavenly Father could have no part. The good trees had produced good fruit, but right use had not been made of it.

They also needed to know and trust in their heavenly Father's ways, leaving Him to work out their problems according to His timing and in His way.

Many today are not prepared to resist the subtle temptation to do God's work their own way. They suppose that a life dedicated to the Lord's service can produce only good works, and they have never questioned the erroneous idea that pure motives can sanctify any action made in good faith. We need to learn from the history of our biblical parents in order to be cured from committing the same mistake. We need to educate our minds and learn to exercise reason over our feelings, by choosing to follow God's ways, not our own. We also need to learn to trust in God and Him alone as our Plan Maker, Problem Solver and Burden Bearer, so we have the confidence that His ways are vastly superior to our own. Only when we have this experience of Sabbath rest can we expect to be the people whom the Lord can use in terminating the awful reign of sin.

Lessons from the Life of David

Chapter 12

David's Loss of Faith

A prayer-filled careful reading of 1 Samuel 16–22 together with Patriarchs and Prophets 643 to 659 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Satan is a master tactician. He knows how to seduce us into planning God's work and our own lives, and then, when serious problems appear as an inevitable consequence, he works to convince us that we cannot expect God to untangle the mess we have made. He contends that before we come to God, we must first solve the problems we have created, and then approach God with a clean slate. He tries to conceal the fact that God wants us to come to Him just as we are. "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Mark 2:17 (NKJV). "... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...." 1 Timothy 1:15.

"It is Satan's special device to lead man into sin, and then leave him, helpless and trembling, fearing to seek for pardon." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 156.1.

This advice appeals to the human psyche. When in error, we feel the separation our sin has made between us and God, just as Jesus did when He prayed on the cross, "My God, my God,

why have you forsaken me?" *Matthew* 27:46. But Satan leads us to believe that there is no hope of returning to divine favor unless we first solve the problems we have created. It is true that the sinner must do something as a prerequisite for forgiveness—we need to come to God and confess our sins and ask His forgiveness and cleansing. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." *I John* 1:9. But Satan extends this point to make it appear that we must also attempt to undo the evil in which we have become entangled. This would require more of us than God expects, because it is beyond human capacity.

These lies of Satan are readily and widely accepted, yet they are deceptively designed to keep the soul separated from God. They only compound an existing problem. As it was human plan making which first caused the trouble, then more human planning in an effort to remove the problem will in fact make it only worse. The sole solution is to turn completely away from the procedures which were the initial cause of the trouble and rely solely on God as the Problem Solver instead. We have seen how Jacob did this successfully in his encounter with Esau.

However, when we are in serious trouble and know perfectly well that it has been caused by our own unwise course of action, it is not easy to come before God and commit the unraveling of the entanglement to Him. Like the Pharisee in the parable, we prefer to present ourselves before the Almighty in commendable righteousness, rather than to appear in the shame of our iniquity, as did the poor publican and Jacob. But we must ever remember that it was the publican—not the Pharisee—who returned home freed from his burdens (see *Luke* 18:10–14). And Jacob could only meet Esau peacefully because he was experiencing the Sabbath rest of being freed from his guilt.

It is not only our pride that makes us unwilling to appear before God just as we are, but fear is often an added factor. We can be afraid to come before God because of incorrect views of His character. People tend to see God as a Being of awesome right-eousness and strict justice who will exact full punishment for every evil committed. By encouraging this erroneous concept, Satan leads them to believe that God will not relieve them of their problems until they have endured all that they deserve.

Naturally, those who are deceived by these sophistries have neither the faith nor the courage to cast their burdens on the great Burden Bearer.

If God was the Problem Solver only for those who deserved such a service, then we would rarely, if ever, receive this blessing. However, the mercies of God are not bestowed on us because we are deserving, but because of His great love and our great need. Provided we fulfill the simple conditions, nothing can prevent the outflow of divine grace to the needy. God yearns for each one of us to enter into His Sabbath rest, as Jacob did, but He knows that we never will until we learn to transcend Satan's arguments and come to Him just as we are, with all our problems.

David's Dilemma at Gath

It is in His mighty and effective capacity and willingness to succor Satan's victims, that God is repeatedly revealed in the Scriptures. A story which clearly illustrates this is David's. Despite his earlier victory against the giant, Goliath, at Gath, time after time David resorted to his own devices until he was faced with a complex, threatening, and seemingly insoluble dilemma also at Gath. When David finally gave the desperate impasse to God, He solved it for him with a smoothness, simplicity, and perfection that reveals God's capacity to resolve even the worst of problems.

What He did for David, God will do for every one of His children if they will but cast their problems on Him and leave them there, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." *1 Peter* 5:7. It is well worth our time and study to acquaint ourselves with the Almighty's responses to the undeserving David, in order to develop the faith and courage to come to Him when we have made a mistake.

David's Former Victory at Gath

As a shepherd boy in the Bethlehem hills, David developed a rich spiritual experience. Not only did he study from the written Word, he also saw the perfection of God's power and love in the wonderful book of nature. So strong did David's faith become that, when first a lion and then a bear threatened his flock, he was able to go out under God's personal direction, and destroy these powerful beasts of prey (see *1 Samuel* 17:34–36).

Later, he was sent by his father to the battle front where he became aware of the problem imposed by Goliath's threats. King Saul, to his dismay and embarrassment, could find no solution to the situation, but when young David discovered the enemy's boastful and defiant presence, he volunteered to go down and fight the giant.

"David said to Saul, 'Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.' Saul replied, 'You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'Go, and the LORD be with you." I Samuel 17:32–37.

In these words there is very little to indicate that David referred the problem to God. Many Bible students conclude that David recognized the problem, worked out a plan based on a faith powerful enough to expect God to make the solution work, and then stepped forward to carry it out.

But we know from what has now been learned in respect to divine procedures that if David had adopted this course, he would never have successfully routed the Philistine hero. He would most likely have lost his life in the encounter or been terribly wounded and forced to flee. So from these evidences alone, we can assume that David did not work out his own specific orders of battle, but received and executed a plan devised for him in heaven.

On closer examination of the scriptures, we find expressions made by David which confirm that he did not devise the solution himself, but looked to God and received the answer from Him. When the giant scornfully noted David's approach, the son of Jesse witnessed to the way in which he had been commissioned to engage Israel's boastful enemy.

"David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands." *I Samuel* 17:45–47.

David was not declaring that the battle was his and that he would win it with God's help. He plainly averred that the battle was the LORD's, that he came to the giant in "the name of the LORD Almighty" who would give him the victory. Weapons are the instruments used by human plan makers and are symbolic of their procedures. When David declared that "it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves", he testified to his conviction that the Lord did not work through human plan making, but through His own. David recognized that he was God's servant, and that the victory could be gained only if the Almighty was his Leader and Plan Maker. He was living according to the principles of God's Sabbath rest, which explains why such a successful outcome was granted him.

While we do not find the details recorded for our guidance, the evidence shows that when David became aware of the problem facing his people, he must have immediately put the difficulty into God's hands and asked Him for specific orders. These were given to him, and he walked in strict obedience to them. As God's plans are guaranteed to succeed when carried out to the letter, David's sortie terminated successfully with the death of the enemy and the exaltation of God as the Plan Maker and Problem Solver (see *1 Samuel* 17:48–51).

In his early days, David thus exhibited a close and practical acquaintance with God's ways, and as long as he followed them, he could not fail. Just as in his encounters with the bear and the lion, the giant fell before him. As far as ordinary human expectation

goes, these were incredible victories for a youth of his age and experience, but with God, they are very normal. This is the success that God intends His children to experience continually.

David's Mistake at Nob

One would expect that once David had learned the formula for certain success, he would be extremely careful never to deviate from it, but, unfortunately and inexplicably, like Joshua, he turned to human ways instead and experienced the failure which invariably attends such reversions. After some years of increasing alienation from Saul, David's deviation began when he was in full flight from the enraged king. Like Elijah, who subsequently fled from the equally enraged Queen Jezebel, David's faith let him down. "Not until Elijah had learned to trust wholly in God could he complete his work...The man of God must be made to understand the weakness of his present position as compared with the vantage ground the Lord would have him occupy." *Prophets and Kings*, 167.2. David too had to learn this lesson. His trust was in himself, rather than God. Leaving his soulmate, Jonathan, he fled to the high priest at Nob.

"David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, 'Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" *I Samuel* 21:1.

David now faced a serious problem. He knew that the power of the king would lead Saul's subjects to betray him, not because they had anything against him, but because they feared the wrath of the monarch if they did not obey him. Therefore David felt he could trust no one, including the high priest. He feared falling into the murderous hands of the jealous, enraged monarch, and was eager to take whatever steps were necessary to avoid doing so.

David was faced with a problem demanding an urgent solution. He had the choice of providing one himself, or of looking to God for it. Had he chosen the latter, then nothing could have gone wrong, but looking to himself, disaster was sure to follow. In the heat of the moment, David forgot the procedures he had so faithfully and courageously followed at the slayings of the li-

on, the bear, and the Philistine giant. Reverting to human methods, he relied upon his own resources instead of casting the whole burden on the Lord. He failed to see the weakness of relying upon himself.

There were only two devices at David's command to which he could turn in his attempt to save himself. One of these was force; the other, deception. David did not contemplate using force, for his personal might was minimal compared to Saul's, who had at his disposal tens of thousands of battle-hardened warriors, and David had no illusions of the outcome of any encounter with them. But he could still turn to deception and this was what he did.

Satan does not need to disguise his devices too closely when he can see that the person under harassment has lost his grip on living faith and is ready to accept any solution offered him. David ought to have recognized instantly that this solution was of satanic origin, if only because Satan is the author of all lies and deception, but he was too preoccupied with saving himself to test the proposition. Feeling he could not trust even the high priest not to report him to the king, the son of Jesse gave a deceptive answer to the embarrassing question this man of God asked him.

"David answered Ahimelech the priest, 'The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, "No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions." As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place." *1 Samuel* 21:2.

There was not a word of truth in this, yet once David had failed to cast the problem on the Lord and leave it there, he could do nothing else but lie. We too need to be aware of this outcome. Problems demand solutions which must come from somewhere, and if we do not entrust God with this full responsibility, we will find ourselves having to supply them. Under such circumstances, the only powers available to us are usually those of force or deception. Once either of these is resorted to, we lose all immunity from sin. Irrespective of how faithfully we may have stood for the truth and practiced Sabbath rest principles in the past, we will fall into sin as soon as we fail to cast our burden on the divine Burden Bearer and instead trust to our own devisings.

For the moment, it appeared that David had secured his safety, but terrible indeed were the consequences. Eighty-five members of the priest's household were to die, in addition to

the destruction of all life and property in Nob. The time came when Doeg, the Edomite, reported to Saul that David had approached the high priest, received Goliath's sword, and been given bread for his journey. The angry king construed this to mean that Ahimelech was conspiring with David against him and ordered the priest into his presence.

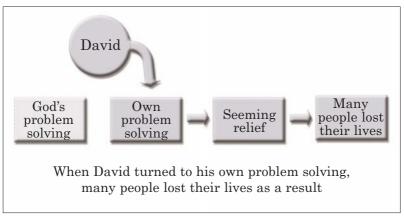
"Saul said, 'Listen now, son of Ahitub.' 'Yes, my Lord,' he answered. Saul said to him, 'Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?' Ahimelech answered the king, 'Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair.' But the king said, 'You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family.' Then the king ordered the guards at his side: 'Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me.' But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD. The king then ordered Doeg, 'You turn and strike down the priests.' So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep." 1 Samuel 22:12-19.

Had David allowed God to be His Problem Solver, this tragedy would never have happened. The truth would have saved the lives of the high priest and his extended family.

"David told the priest that he had been sent by the king on a secret errand, one which required the utmost expedition. Here he manifested a want of faith in God, and his sin resulted in causing the death of the high priest. Had the facts been plainly stated, Ahimelech would have known what course to pursue to preserve his life." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 655.3.

This incident clearly demonstrates once again the evil consequences for God's cause when people resort to their own problem

solving. The numerous witnesses in the Scriptures should encourage us to shun such procedures like the plague. Surely, if David had foreseen the outworking of what he had done, he would never have reverted to his own works. But at times of crisis, when these decisions have to be made, the consequences cannot be seen, so the only safety lies in letting God determine how the problem will be met.



David's Next Mistake

One mistake often leads to another, as it did in David's case—his wrong decision at Nob clouded his perception. From Nob, David fled to the only place which, in his judgment, could offer him any safety—the land of the Philistines. God's judgment was certainly not behind these movements, for He would never have sent David to his enemies. David's own logical processes must have been in a confused state for him to imagine that he could go safely among the people whose champion he had humiliated and destroyed some years earlier. It was neither the character nor spirit of the Philistines to forget an injury or miss the opportunity to exact revenge, no matter how long they had to wait.

Thus David created another problem for himself, for when he arrived in Gath, King Achish was informed that David was the very man who had years before slain the Philistine champion (see *1 Samuel* 21:11). This placed David's life in great

danger. Again he turned to deceit in order to solve his problem, faking madness to make it appear that he was harmless (see 1 Samuel 21:14).

It might seem as if David had solved his problem satisfactorily, because Achish did not take any steps against him (see *1 Samuel* 21:14–15) and he was able to escape from this lifethreatening situation (see *1 Samuel* 22:1). But what seems to be a good solution from a human point of view is not satisfactory when seen from our heavenly Problem Solver's perspective.

It is God's intention to save all peoples, regardless of their race or religion. For instance, in allowing the plagues to fall upon Egypt, He was giving the Pharaoh the opportunity to save himself and all the Egyptian people. Similarly, God wished to save Achish and the Philistine people. But David's actions interfered with this plan. The Philistines should have been given a revelation of God's character that would have helped them to open their hearts to Him. Instead they would have imagined from David's appearance that his God had forsaken him and would therefore surely forsake all who likewise put their trust in Him. No inspiring example was given them, no earnest appeal to turn from their sins, no invitation to receive God's mercies. Through David's trust in his own reckless decisions, God's plans were thwarted and His work hindered.

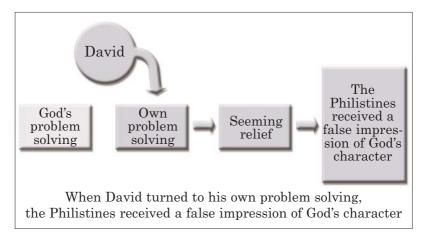
David's experience is fittingly summed up in the following paragraphs:

"The first error of David was his distrust of God at Nob, and his second mistake was his deception before Achish. David had displayed noble traits of character, and his moral worth had won him favor with the people; but as trial came upon him, his faith was shaken, and human weakness appeared. He saw in every man a spy and a betrayer. In a great emergency David had looked up to God with a steady eye of faith, and had vanquished the Philistine giant. He believed in God, he went in His name. But as he had been hunted and persecuted, perplexity and distress had nearly hidden his heavenly Father from his sight.

"Yet this experience was serving to teach David wisdom; for it led him to realize his weakness and the necessity of constant dependence upon God. Oh, how precious is the sweet influence of the Spirit of God as it comes to depressed or despairing souls, encouraging the fainthearted, strengthening the feeble, and imparting courage and help to the tried servants of the Lord! Oh, what a God is ours, who deals gently with the erring and manifests His patience and tenderness in adversity, and when we are overwhelmed with some great sorrow!

"Every failure on the part of the children of God is due to their lack of faith. When shadows encompass the soul, when we want light and guidance, we must look up; there is light beyond the darkness. David ought not to have distrusted God for one moment. He had cause for trusting in Him: he was the Lord's anointed, and in the midst of danger he had been protected by the angels of God; he had been armed with courage to do wonderful things; and if he had but removed his mind from the distressing situation in which he was placed, and had thought of God's power and majesty, he would have been at peace even in the midst of the shadows of death; he could with confidence have repeated the promise of the Lord, 'The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed.' Isaiah 54:10." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 656.3–657.2.

It is extremely comforting to know that even though David brought all this trouble upon himself, God thought of him not in terms of condemnation, but of education. His loving heavenly Father used the opportunity to show him his weakness and teach him lessons which would prevent the recurrence of these costly



mistakes. In response to God's educational work, like us, David learned slowly, but eventually God's lessons were mastered, providing us with clear illustrations to help us master them too.

The Path to Success

David's story would have been written entirely differently had he refused to look on the dark picture around him and turned his mind instead to the Lord. If he had done so, and dwelt on his many blessings, he would have been able to nourish his faith to such an extent that he would have given the problem solving back to God where it rightfully belonged.

This principle was later embodied in the advice Paul gave when he said:

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." *Philippians*. 4:8.

A failure to remove the mind from the immediate and demanding witness of sight and circumstances, and focus it instead on God's wonderful promises and His faithful fulfillment of them in the past, is common to all defeats experienced by God's children in testing times. Each of us has some such experience we can recall, but we also have the great revelations of God's works recorded in the Scriptures. These serve to increase our faith and remind us that what the Lord did for those loyal men and women back then, He is as eagerly waiting to do for us today.

But we must do our part. Instead of dreaming up plans for ourselves, our job is to turn trustingly to God. To remove our minds from the distressing situation in which we are placed and to think instead of God's power and majesty, is something we must do for ourselves. God cannot do that for us, without turning us into His puppets. Instead, He works hard to influence and encourage us to take this step, by sending His angels and Holy Spirit to our aid. Without exception, victory over sin and Satan depends on our taking this step. We must not allow our attention to be riveted on the forbidding circumstances surrounding

us, for if we do, we will certainly fail. The more we study the lives of God's faithful followers in the Bible, the more we will see how their experiences prove this point and the more we will learn to trust in our heavenly Protector.

Every time these believers looked away from their distressing and dangerous situations and focused their attention on the power and majesty of God as they had known it in their past experiences, God was able to achieve marvelous victories for and through them. The experiences they carefully and prayerfully reviewed included what God had done for them personally, and what they had known Him to do in the lives of Bible characters and personal friends. By faithful and consistent study of the Scriptures and review of their own past victories, they had kept these experiences fresh, alive, and available, so that when the hour of distress and temptation came, they were armed with faith for the conflict.

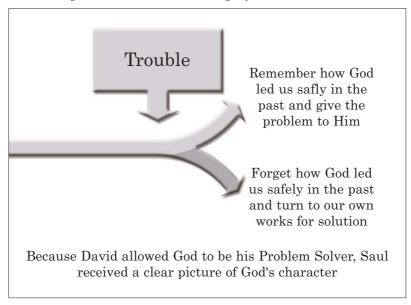
But with equal consistency, every time they dwelt on their difficult situations and imagined the worst, they came under Satan's control and followed his instructions. This is precisely what happened to Israel at Kadesh Barnea. When the forbidding prospect of trying to wrest the land from the Canaanites was presented to them, they did not remove their minds from this gloomy picture and think in terms of God's faithful protection and leadership up to that point in time. Instead, they chose to dwell upon the dark image before them, and therefore God, His glorious promises, His mighty power, and His faithful working for them in the past, were all forgotten. Their faith plummeted and the only possible outcome for them was failure and delay.

When correctly understood, these stories will deeply impress the mind with the vital importance of taking the right steps in the hour of temptation. This can be accomplished only if the mind is trained aright before that time, by learning to trust in our great Problem Solver for solutions to the inevitable difficulties we face from day to day.

"We must accustom ourselves to seek divine guidance through prayer; we must learn to trust in Him from whom our help cometh. Our desires should be unto God; our souls should go out after him, and their attitude should always be that of supplication." *The Signs of the Times*, May 15, 1884 par.2.

"Let them learn to trust His love and to cast on Him their cares." *Christ's Object Lessons* 57.2.

Every Christian, with persistent diligence, must co-work with Christ in training the mind to react correctly when troubles come. This is laboring to enter into God's rest. As well as frequently rehearsing the ways in which God has delivered us in the past, this also involves a thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testament stories, which set forth the victories and failures of God's people in times gone by. Then when temptation comes upon us, the remembrance of these events will serve to guide us and strengthen our faith in our mighty Deliverer.



Chapter 13

David Chooses the Way of Success

A prayer-filled careful reading of 1 Samuel 22–24 together with Patriarchs and Prophets 649 to 674 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

A Mixture of Procedures

The time of David's serious breakdown of faith and consequent flight from Saul to Nob and then to Philistia, was a troubled one. He no longer experienced true Sabbath rest. He did not enjoy peace and quietude during these experiences, for the simple reason that he did not look to God as his Problem Solver.

God did not interfere with David's plans. While he chose to be his own problem solver, the Lord simply stood by until His servant gave Him back His rightful position and learned to trust wholly in Him. Meanwhile, David was passing from danger to greater danger, busily adding confusion to confusion.

After his narrow escape from the Philistines, who were eager to exact revenge for his execution of Goliath, he found refuge in the hills of Judea. There he was joined by other outlaws from Israel like himself, living as wandering fugitives from Saul's wrath (see 1 Samuel 22:1–2).

The lessons David had experienced in his life until this point of time should have taught him the difference between the security to be found in following God's plans, and the dangerous failure to be expected when he trusted himself to be the plan maker. Yet during the days spent as a fugitive in the Judean hills, David continued to mix these two procedures. At times he was unswerving in his loyalty to God, while at other times he turned to his own devices for deliverance.

When any of us reflect on our past life, we will recognize that this same mixture has been present. Occasionally we have accorded God His legitimate place as our Commander, but more often than not He has been relegated to the office of our Helper. Closer analysis should convincingly demonstrate to us that whenever our problems have been totally given to God, then, no matter how complex or threatening they were, He was able to solve them with a smoothness and efficiency that was most impressive. Whereas, as was more often the case, when we assumed the responsibility of problem solver ourselves, the trouble only increased and extended.

Such a survey should convince God's people that a change must take place. Instead of turning to God only sporadically, we need to learn to trust Him fully so that we cast every single care upon Him as our very first resort. Then, instead of experiencing deliverance only occasionally, it can be our happy condition all the time. We can then enjoy the privilege of entering into true Sabbath rest continually.

As God's dealings in our past life are recalled, we will be deeply impressed with His character of love, for He is driven by an infinite compulsion to save to the utmost. Many people have the impression that God is waiting and watching to condemn, but such a view is based on an incorrect understanding of God's character. While we are busy compounding our problems by taking matters into our own hands and expecting God to help us in this work of our own choosing, He is patiently waiting for the day when we will discern the foolishness of our ways and give Him the task of solving our problems for us.

When God's real character is seen, we are amazed and humbled to find that our heavenly Father has no spirit of retaliation at all, but only an all-powerful desire to bless and restore. This

revelation cannot help but draw a response of adoration and love from the soul. This is the effect it had on David, who gave expression to his feelings in the beautiful *Psalms* recorded for our benefit and blessing. It is unfortunate that David had to learn about these wonderful characteristics of his heavenly Father the hard way, by following wrong procedures himself. Blessed will we be, when we learn from David's mistakes instead of our own, for we will then trust wholly in the Lord, instead of sometimes trusting Him and sometimes self.

David's Victory at Keilah

In considering the period when David vacillated between his own and God's ways, we will look firstly at his experience at Keilah.

Word reached David not long after he had taken refuge in the cave of Adullam, that the Philistines were investing the city of Keilah. Recognizing that as a serious problem, David did not turn to himself as the problem solver this time, but took the crisis to the Lord. He asked God what he should do, and then proceeded to obey God's specific orders.

"When David was told, 'Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,' he inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' The LORD answered him, 'Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." *I Samuel* 23:1, 2.

In obeying the Lord's directives, a fresh problem immediately arose. David's men were not prepared to go out to this battle, for they saw in it only trouble and loss. David simply went to God a second time, to ask for further specific orders from the great Problem Solver.

"But David's men said to him, 'Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!' Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, 'Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." Verses 3 and 4.

With such clear-cut specific orders containing no human devising, David was assured that the venture could not possibly

fail. He knew exactly what he must do, so in calm faith he related God's orders to his men, who went with him and gained a complete victory over the Philistines.

"So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah." Verse 5.

Had David followed these procedures in the encounter with the high priest and in selecting the place to which to flee, he would have enjoyed the same success gained here against the Philistines.

No fault can be found with the way David went about the Lord's business when he relieved Keilah. It showed a recovery from the period when he had lapsed into his own devisings and had been cursed with evil consequences.

As soon as David turned back to the Lord in faith, God willingly revealed His plans to him and trusted him to execute them. When David carried out those divine plans, God imbued him with the power to defeat the Philistines. Some people find this response of God's surprising and somewhat perplexing. They feel that before God could again fully trust David and manifest His power on his behalf, David should demonstrate, during a period of probation, that he was worthy of such blessings.

This is how people usually treat each other and their children, but it is not how God deals with His children. All David had to do was recognize his sin, make contrite confession in true repentance, restore where possible what he had taken, then trust and obey God's correct procedures when seeking solutions to his problems. As soon as he took these steps, the Lord immediately worked for him. Such is the merciful love and compassion of our heavenly Father.

David's Success in the Cave of Engedi

Before long, an even greater test was to come to David. On receiving a report that David was hiding in the wilderness of Engedi, King Saul set out to seek his avowed enemy.

"So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave." *I Samuel* 24:2, 3.

Not suspecting any danger, Saul entered the very cave where David was hiding from him, while the king's troops waited outside. David's men interpreted this occurrence as a clear work of providence, indicating that he should put his adversary to death.

"The men said, 'This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, "I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish."" *I Samuel* 24:4.

David was tempted to take this view of the matter too, but immediately he recognized it as a case of human problem solving. Instead, he "crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe." *I Samuel* 24:4.

King Saul was a tremendous problem not only to David but to the whole of Israel. He was oppressing the people, leading them away from the Lord, and thus jeopardizing God's cause. It seemed that anyone who slew him would be rendering a fine service to both God and Israel. For David personally, Saul's death would have brought grateful relief from an unpleasant, fugitive life and given him the promised crown. Furthermore, the evil king had earned the death sentence by his unjust murder of the high priest and his household.

The witness of circumstances really seemed to declare that God was openly inviting David, as His chosen instrument, to execute Saul on the spot. Therefore David's followers urged him to act without delay.

It was a masterfully organized temptation, but David did not fall for it. Even though he had failed in other situations, here he was able to distinguish God's guiding principle from the attractive proposition Satan was offering him. David understood that it was his responsibility to detect the true nature of this proposition, and, if it failed to measure up to God's principles of operation, to have nothing to do with it. He acted very faithfully on this occasion.

The counsels and warnings revealed in this story are of special importance to God's children in these last days. Satan knows how dedicated they are to the Lord's cause and interests, and he frames his temptations so that Christians will not recognize them as such. He disguises his temptations as timely God-given opportunities to advance the cause they love. Satan intends them to believe that

they are obeying the Almighty when, in fact, they are executing his own evil designs instead. Therefore, we need to test carefully every directive which comes to us, to certify its real nature and source. God has provided ample warnings and examples in Scripture to educate His children, so that they will not be deceived. Had David killed Saul that day, no plea he could have offered would have been accepted by God as justification for such a foul deed.

The source of the plan to kill Saul in that cave was revealed by the very nature of the plan itself, for it required David to assume God's role of fulfilling the promises He had made. Jehovah had anointed David king-elect of Israel and it was His responsibility, not David's, to remove the apostate ruler who stood in the way of the fulfillment of this promise. The only correct course for David to follow, was to wait patiently, trusting in the Lord to do His part in fulfilling His promise.

In this instance, David had very clear views of what he must and must not do, and he knew he should not take the king's life. He would not submit to the temptation of solving God's problems for Him. He would leave this work to God and he would do only that which the Lord directed. The one concession David made was to tear off a portion of Saul's garment to offer as proof to the king that he had been totally in his power. No sooner had he done so than his conscience told him that even that was one step too far (1 Samuel 24:6).

David's soldiers completely misinterpreted God's purpose in this event. They looked at matters from their own point of view and not from the position of God's great love by which He sought to give Saul another opportunity to see the real nature of his evil heart and repent of his sins.

For God to give Saul another chance, David, instead of taking the king's life, had to play the divinely-ordained part of demonstrating the Christian disposition of not retaliating or seeking revenge. This would lead Saul to see that David was not devoted to his destruction as he falsely believed, that his own spirit was out of harmony with God, and that he was therefore unfit to rule. Through David's ministry of love and righteousness, God powerfully appealed to the wicked ruler to repent and be converted. Even though the king deserved to be destroyed, his day of probation was not yet ended and God, bent on saving him if at

all possible, worked tirelessly in this direction. The eternal Father was pleased when David's perceptions of righteousness and his submissiveness to the divine leadership enabled God to speak powerfully and convincingly to Israel's sovereign.

As David made known to the surprised king that he had been completely in David's power (see *1 Samuel* 24:8–16), Saul was touched to the depth of his being.

"When David finished saying this, Saul asked, 'Is that your voice, David my son?' And he wept aloud. 'You are more righteous than I,' he said. 'You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family." *1 Samuel* 24:16–21.

Saul's confession confirms that God accomplished a mighty work in him that day; a work which also required David's recognition and acceptance of His Lord as the one and only Problem Solver and Plan Maker. How tragic it would have been if David had taken these roles to himself and killed the king before Saul's probation had ended.

It is sad of course, that Saul's repentance was shallow and short-lived because it was based on feeling. He followed the pattern so commonly revealed by many who come under the Holy Spirit's influence. When in the presence of that divine power, they become softened, subdued, contrite, and apparently repentant, but when removed from the sacred atmosphere, they revert to an even worse manifestation of the same evil state they were in before their conviction. Such was the superficial repentance of Israel's first crowned ruler.

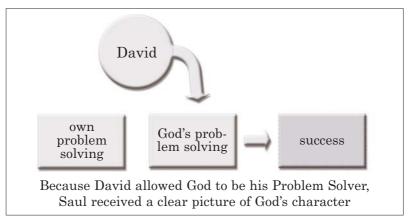
David's Success in the Wilderness of Ziph

David, fully aware that Saul's repentance would be only temporary, chose to ensure his safety by remaining in the natural fortresses of the wilderness of Ziph rather than returning to the populated areas. He knew that when the king reverted to a still worse state, it would be far more dangerous to be back among the people, than in the mountains. For a short time David enjoyed relief from the hatred and pursuit of Saul, but no sooner had Israel's prophet Samuel died, than Saul renewed his efforts to find and destroy his alleged enemy.

When David obtained intelligence of Saul's renewed campaign against him, he set out to discover the location and size of his antagonist's forces. Approaching the camp at night with Abishai, his attendant, and finding everyone locked in deep slumber, David penetrated into the very presence of the sleeping king. Once again the monarch was in his power, just as he had been in the cave. Again, it appeared that God had conveniently arranged the execution of the wicked ruler, and David's companion urged the destruction of their enemy, arguing that it was what God wanted and expected of them.

"So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, 'Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.' But David said to Abishai, 'Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives,' he said, 'the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lav a hand on the LORD'S anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go.' So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep." 1 Samuel 26:7–12.

Once more David was under test to see if he knew and would follow God's ways, or succumb to the temptation to fulfill God's promises himself. But he did not waver from the divine will. As if he saw God's way even more clearly than the first time, he explained to his friend in greater detail not only the conviction that he must not touch the Lord's anointed, but that the Al-



mighty would bring Saul to naught when his day of probation was ended. Meanwhile, they could but wait and trust. Again the witness that David had spared him, brought the king to contrition and confession. God was giving Saul another chance to receive the gift of true repentance.

"Then Saul said, 'I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." *I Samuel* 26:21.

But again Saul's repentance proved to be superficial.

Throughout these experiences, David demonstrated his knowledge of God's ways and true Sabbath rest. Even though urged by those nearest him to take matters into his own hands, he was resolute in his refusal to usurp God's place as the Problem Solver. In response, God worked marvellously for him, and, even though Saul, with his powerful forces and wide network of spies, continually sought his life, David enjoyed complete protection and was able to humble and shame the violent Saul. The simple fact was that while David walked trustingly in God's ways, the monarch could not possibly take his life.

David's peace of mind would have been assured if he had continually reminded himself that when Jehovah had appointed and anointed him to be king of Israel, He had done so in the complete foreknowledge of all the perils David would encounter on his way to the throne. He would then have realized that God, who is never taken by surprise, had made full provision for all

these exigencies, and nothing could prevent Him from achieving His purpose to crown him king. David needed neither worry nor take steps to ensure that God's promises would be fulfilled.

Relieved of all anxiety by this knowledge, it was David's privilege in the meantime to enjoy the vicissitudes of life. In every new attack upon him, he was to see the promise that God was about to give another marvellous display of His keeping power, that Saul was to suffer another defeat, and that the time was daily drawing nearer when the promise would be fulfilled to him. In this way, instead of life's events filling him with fear, they would deepen and broaden his Sabbath rest.

This is how God intends each one of us to relate to life's threats and struggles. We are not to see in them the road to ruin, but the opportunity for God to manifest His incredible ability to solve any problem, and defeat every scheme Satan may invent, no matter how complex and well laid it may be. Every trial and tribulation, and every danger encountered should fill us with the thrill of knowing that, if faithful and believing, we are to be treated to a mighty demonstration of God's works. As long as we cling to the principles of Sabbath rest nothing will disturb our peace, for we will dwell "... in the shelter of the Most High" and "will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." *Psalm* 91:1.

CHAPTER 14

David Entangled

A prayer-filled careful reading of 1Samuel 27–28, together with Patriarchs and Prophets 672 to 674 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

When Satan sees God's people sheltered within the impenetrable circle of His protection, he does not surrender the struggle to destroy them. Instead he continues to work with relentless determination in an effort to lure them out from this security into the deadly arena of their own works, where he can defeat and hopefully destroy them. All too often he is successful. Whenever there is the least excuse for Christians to revert to their own ways, Satan tries to seduce them into doing so.

David fell victim to this very temptation. We would imagine that after God had delivered him repeatedly from the clutches of Saul as he sought his life, David would have been strengthened to continue in God's ways. He should have given no ear to Satan's plea that he forsake the counsels of the Most High in preference for his own. Yet he yielded to this temptation. At the very time when Saul was forced to return to his palace humbled and ashamed, David, wearying of the incessant threat to his existence, began to work out his own solutions to the problem.

Soon David was hopelessly entangled in a net he himself had woven. He would have perished but for the amazing love and saving spirit of our merciful heavenly Father. We will study this reversal in David's life, the evil consequences which it generated, and God's incredible response in delivering him.

An Unjustified Reversion

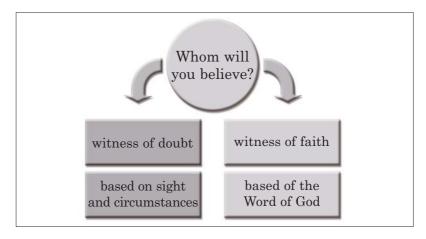
To assess how unjustified David was in turning to the Philistines for protection, we need an adequate evaluation of the extent to which God delivered him from Saul's devising.

David was in continual peril from the moment he fled Saul's presence, for the monarch was in no mood to play games. He allowed his feelings to rule his mind and was consumed with a determined passion to destroy the son of Jesse at any cost. Neither mercy nor kindness was in his heart, for blazing fires of malice, hatred, and murderous intent raged there. At his command were military forces vastly superior to those supporting David, and numerous informers kept him posted as to where the fugitives were hiding. Every witness of sight and circumstances declared convincingly, though erroneously, that David had a limited future.

But Saul reckoned without the role of God as David's Problem Solver. Saul was guided by his own devising and assumed that David was likewise directed. He therefore imagined that it was just a matter of one man and the power at his command, against another and his forces. He concluded logically that it would be a relatively simple matter to find and destroy the desperate fugitive. What he did not understand was that the Almighty had taken his enemy's case. Therefore Saul had no hope of achieving his murderous designs.

Behold the amazing spectacle of the king weeping out his confession to David in the presence of his astonished warriors as they stood outside the cave! What the king had planned as a bloody slaughter of his supposed enemy, turned out to be a contrite confession in which he admitted the evil of his doings and the righteousness of the man he sought to destroy. Not a single blow was struck, nor a drop of blood shed. Who could have predicted that God would work for David in such an amazing way?

If David's men had reflected on the way God had delivered His children in the past, they could have predicted that He would DAVID ENTANGLED 209



work as mightily for David too. They just had to remember the taming of Esau, who was as bent on destroying Jacob, as Saul was on killing David. They had but to recall the mighty exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the marvelous protection extended to the Israelites in all their wanderings. Then there were the examples of Gideon, Deborah, Barak, and countless other victorious heroes in Israel's history for them to consider. (Compare *Hebrews* 11:32.)

These are the mighty works which God delights to do for His people, and He is disappointed and robbed of His glory when, in their unbelief. His followers seek to save themselves.

When the monarch sought David's life the second time, God again reversed the king's plans, and again no blows were struck nor blood shed. Once more the king humbly confessed the evil of his ways instead of venting his feelings in bloody slaughter.

Another Flight to the Enemy

God has provided us, like David, with an education in His ways, which we can gain by prayerfully meditating on His wonderful works. In this way we can be strengthened against the danger of reverting to human problem solving and plan making.

Although God provided David with such opportunities, no sooner had the king returned to his palace, than the fugitive,

apparently forgetting all that the Lord had done for him, began to devise his own plans for securing the safety of himself and his supporters. He was correct in assuming that the king could not be trusted to abandon his determination to destroy him; that it would not be long before Saul would be hunting him again; and that nothing better than a temporary respite had been granted him. But none of this should have caused him concern. Had not God ably demonstrated His dedicated ability to preserve his life regardless of the king's anger? What evidence was there to support any notion that God was about to change, and abandon him?

God had no intention of deserting His servant, and what made David's flight particularly unjustifiable was the fact that God's deliverance was still so fresh in his experience. If God had failed him there might have been some excuse, but David could point to no such occasion, for God has never failed anyone. Just like Elijah after his victory on Mt Carmel years later (see *1 Kings* 18:19–40), David could point to no failure on God's part, but only miraculous deliverances. Yet David suffered as God's people today are equally in danger of doing, from the lapse of faith that tends to follow victory.

Disasters come only when we forget the way God has worked for us, deny Him His rightful place, and instead look to ourselves for salvation from our entanglements. Just as Elijah fled before the enraged Queen Jezebel (see *1 Kings* 19:1–4), so we find David fleeing again from the fury of King Saul. Like Elijah, David had not yet learned to trust wholly in the Lord. Even after such mighty demonstrations of God's power, David turned instead to his own wisdom.

"But David thought to himself, 'One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand." *1 Samuel* 27:1.

When David said, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul", he made a fearful mistake—he lost his faith in God. He had no reason to come to this conclusion, for there was abundant evidence to assure him that it was not God's will for him to die by the king's hand. In anointing him to be the next king, God, who foresees the end from the beginning with infallible accuracy, had already foretold that David would outlive Saul. So David's conviction that Saul would kill him was an illogical speculation that replaced God's reliable revelations of his future.

DAVID ENTANGLED 211

Nonetheless, David had lost sight of the divine plan for that future and, instead, imagined that God was leaving him to perish. He was not inclined to submit to a sacrificial death just then, and so naturally turned to himself as the problem solver. Having made the first mistake, the second inevitably followed.

Despairing of reconciliation with Saul, David determined again to seek refuge in the land of the Philistines. "So David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maoch king of Gath." *I Samuel* 27:2.

The following paragraph sums up these events.

"David's conclusion that Saul would certainly accomplish his murderous purpose was formed without the counsel of God. Even while Saul was plotting and seeking to accomplish his destruction, the Lord was working to secure David the kingdom. God works out His plans, though to human eyes they are veiled in mystery. Men cannot understand the ways of God; and, looking at appearances, they interpret the trials and tests and provings that God permits to come upon them as things that are against them, and that will only work their ruin. Thus David looked on appearances, and not at the promises of God. He doubted that he would ever come to the throne. Long trials had wearied his faith and exhausted his patience." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 672.2.

Refuge with the Philistines

In this way the office of plan maker was transferred from God to David and despite the initial apparent success of his plans, inevitably serious trouble overtook the son of Jesse and his six hundred men. It took a while for problems to develop, before which, the advantages gained seemed to confirm the seeming wisdom of the decision made.

"David was cordially received by the king of the Philistines. The warmth of this reception was partly due to the fact that the king admired him and partly to the fact that it was flattering to his vanity to have a Hebrew seek his protection. David felt secure from betrayal in the dominions of Achish. He brought his family, his household, and his possessions, as did also his men [see 1 Samuel 27:3]; and to all appearance he had come to settle

permanently in the land of Philistia. All this was gratifying to Achish, who promised to protect the fugitive Israelites." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 673.1.

The immediate result was that Saul abandoned his plans to persecute the refugee which was a welcome relief for the human nature of David and his band. "When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him." *I Samuel* 27:4.

It is not difficult to imagine the satisfaction with which David looked upon the result of his plan. It was impossible for Saul to reach him unless he achieved a major victory against the Philistines, and they were too powerful to be subjugated to this extent. So now David could relax and enjoy life without having to suspect every man around of being a possible spy. Once more he had the pleasure of his wives and children, and the threat of an early death was averted. He seemed to have every reason to believe that a very wise maneuver had been made.

But there was not one thread of divine devising in his plan—it was entirely of human origin. Therefore, nothing could go right, even though it might seem to, at first. Any peace and rest which David and his men enjoyed was not God's rest, it did not render them true Sabbath keepers, and it was, in fact, the calm during which Satan enmeshes the soul in preparation for unleashing the awful storm. The time would soon come when David was to see where he had erred, and to regret his decision from the depths of his being. He was to see that the results which he had judged as being good, were assessed in God's sight as being evil of the worst kind. Some of the dire consequences are described in the following paragraphs.

"The Lord did not send David for protection to the Philistines, the most bitter foes of Israel. This very nation would be among his worst enemies to the last, and yet he had fled to them for help in his time of need. Having lost all confidence in Saul and in those who served him, he threw himself upon the mercies of the enemies of his people. David was a brave general, and had proved himself a wise and successful warrior; but he was working directly against his own interests when he went to the Philistines. God had appointed him to set up his standard in the land of Judah, and it was want of faith that led him to forsake his post of duty without a command from the Lord.

DAVID ENTANGLED 213

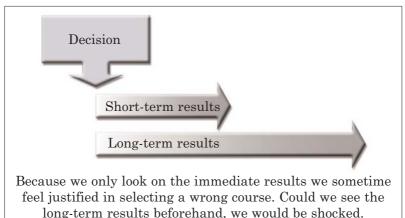
"God was dishonored by David's unbelief. The Philistines had feared David more than they had feared Saul and his armies: and by placing himself under the protection of the Philistines, David discovered to them the weakness of his own people. Thus he encouraged these relentless foes to oppress Israel. David had been anointed to stand in defense of the people of God; and the Lord would not have his servants give encouragement to the wicked by disclosing the weakness of His people or by an appearance of indifference to their welfare. Furthermore, the impression was received by his brethren that he had gone to the heathen to serve their gods. By this act he gave occasion for misconstruing his motives, and many were led to hold prejudice against him. The very thing that Satan desired to have him do he was led to do; for, in seeking refuge among the Philistines, David caused great exultation to the enemies of God and His people. David did not renounce his worship of God nor cease his devotion to His cause; but he sacrificed his trust in Him to his personal safety, and thus tarnished the upright and faithful character that God requires His servants to possess." Patriarchs and Prophets, 672.3, 672.4.

David's Error of Judgment

How different was God's evaluation of David's course from his own! While David was filled with satisfaction over the results of his planning, the Almighty was grieved and His plan to give the throne to His elect impeded. Furthermore, even though he could not yet see it, David's course was generating a storm of trouble that, but for God's saving grace, would completely destroy him.

The Scriptures repeatedly reveal this difference between human and divine judgment. The course His children often deem to be the best, God knows to be the worst. Time always confirms that when we undertake the responsibility of planning God's work, disaster is the eventual outcome. The more we benefit from studying the many recorded instances of this, the more thoroughly we will be delivered from any disposition to be the decision makers in God's place.

We need to understand that the responsibility for conducting God's work does not rest on us. That is the Lord's position. Our obligations are fully met when we obtain our specific orders from Him and carry them out to His exact instructions. If we pledge to trust and obey in this manner, we will frequently find ourselves faced with apparent failure and be strongly tempted to follow an alternative course. Although in our own judgment this would avoid the setbacks and losses apparently threatening us, under no circumstances should we yield to such temptation. With our eyes fixed on God's infinite capacities and reliable faithfulness, we are to trust in Him and confine ourselves to obeying His specifications implicitly. Had David done this, he would have been saved a great deal of anguish and trouble.



David's Deception of Achish

A characteristic of those who undertake the role of decision makers in God's place is that they determine to remain loyal to Him, and although they are actually working against God, they do not abandon themselves to the ways of unbelievers. Accordingly, when David arrived in Philistia, he would not settle in the sin-cursed capital where he and his followers would be under continual temptation to surrender their allegiance to God for a life of idol worship. Instead, David requested a quiet retreat removed from the capital, where he and his band could maintain their worship of the true God. So the king gave him Ziklag, a small center east of Gath (see *1 Samuel* 27:5, 6).

DAVID ENTANGLED 215

Having placed himself under the Philistines' protection, David set about ensuring that nothing would threaten it. He had to make it appear that he was really and finally disconnected from his own people. Therefore, when he went raiding against southern allies of the Philistines, he reported to the king that he had been devastating Israelite territory instead. This was a direct lie of which God was certainly not the author.

"Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

"When Achish asked, 'Where did you go raiding today?' David would say, 'Against the Negev of Judah' or 'Against the Negev of Jerahmeel' or 'Against the Negev of the Kenites.' He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, 'They might inform on us and say, "This is what David did." And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory. Achish trusted David and said to himself, 'He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant forever." *I Samuel* 27:8–12.

As David saw Achish's acceptance of his reports, he had reason to feel satisfied with the means he was using to convince the Philistine king that he could be trusted. We do not know how many times these untruths were repeated, but it would be as many times as David sallied forth destroying Israel's enemies over a period of "a year and four months." (See verse 7.) David's conscience must have smitten him every time he deceived his protector, the king, but he presumably quieted the inward voice with the argument that the end justified the means.

It is understandable (although not excusable) that a person may utter a falsehood under the pressure of unexpected temptation, but for David to know long beforehand that he would tell the same untruths to the king every time he came back from battle, is more difficult to comprehend. The fact was that David had no other choice once he had undertaken the responsibility of decision maker. He needed to solve the problems he had created by whatever means were available. The use of force was

obviously inadequate and undesirable, which left David limited to the use of deception. To all appearances, the procedure worked very successfully, for the king believed and trusted him.

David's Dilemma

Satan viewed these proceedings with great satisfaction. He had induced the son of Jesse to leave his divinely appointed responsibilities in Judah and seek protection in the land of his most deadly foes, the Philistines. There, he had tempted David to convince Achish that he was a loyal ally and could be trusted to fight for the king's cause in time of war, particularly against his own people, the Israelites. Thus, every move that David planned, was enabling Satan to enmesh him further in a terrible entanglement designed to destroy him.

When the deceived king came to David with the plea to join him in his planned attack on Israel, suddenly the fugitive became aware of the outworking of his own problem solving.

"In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army." *I Samuel* 28:1.

If the war had been against the Amalekites or any other of the accursed nations of that time, David would not have been in difficulty, for these were Israel's enemies. But the Philistines were not interested in such campaigns against their allies. Instead, they were bent on destroying their long-standing enemy, Israel. Thus David and his men suddenly found themselves called upon to join Achish in a war against God's and their own people.

This was something they could never do. With what dismay must David have listened to the words of Achish to whom he dared not betray his real feelings or limitations. He instantly saw the predicament in which he had put himself. By conveying the idea that he had forever forsaken Israel and was now united with the Philistines, David had naturally led the monarch to expect his support in the warfare against Israel. In fact, the king probably felt that David would welcome the opportunity to hit back at Saul.

But, despite his transfer of trust in some areas, from Jehovah to himself, David was still a child of God, and in heart he remained DAVID ENTANGLED 217

loyal to God's cause and interests. Although he could never go and fight against his own people, he could not tell this to the king, who had been given a very different impression. David had been caught by the net of his own construction. All he could do was play for time, in the hope that some deliverance would manifest itself. So he answered Achish evasively, but in a way that left the king with the impression that he agreed to go to war with him against the Israelites.

"David said, 'Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do.' Achish replied, 'Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life." 1 Samuel 28:2.

"Achish understood these words as a promise of assistance in the approaching war, and pledged his word to bestow upon David great honor, and give him a high position at the Philistine court." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 674.1.

What a dilemma David was now in! If he refused to go to war, the monarch would quickly perceive the deceptive nature of his course. A proven deceiver is a dangerous man. Achish, who, like all the ancient potentates, retained his power by the ruthless elimination of anyone who threatened him, would possibly have executed David on the spot, and decreed the slaughter of all his followers and family as well.

On the other hand, if he did go to war and if Saul were slain in the engagement, his death would be charged upon David, who would be looked upon as a traitor to God and his country. As a result, he would be debarred forever from the promised throne and branded as the enemy of God and his people. This would cost him the greatest prize of all—eternal life. Without a doubt, Israel's prospective king, the architect of his own troubles, was now faced with the greatest crisis of his career.

God's Response

If David had remained in Judah where God had placed him, neither Saul nor Achish would have required him to go to war. He would have been a fascinated spectator on the sidelines, watching God work out His plan to place him on the throne. He would never have found himself obliged to deceive Achish, who would not then have been led to hold false expectations of him.

It was because he had chosen to be his own plan maker that David found himself on the horns of this terrible dilemma where, no matter what course he followed, he stood to lose everything. This is one more Bible witness added to those we have already considered, testifying to the sorry outworking of human planning. As we study these biblical examples, the Holy Spirit will convict us that there is no safety in such procedures, and that God is the only One with the ability to plan for us and His work.

David had put himself where he was, and human justice would appear to demand that David be severely punished in order to teach him a thorough lesson. Although we do suffer various consequences of sin, God does not punish us. If that were His way it was an opportunity for God to say, "David, if you had listened to Me and followed My directives, you would never be in the situation in which you now find yourself. It is time for you to learn this lesson. I am going to leave you to your fate so that in future you will remember from whence your plans are to come."

This is the character which Satan always seeks to attribute to God. Having led us to trust in our own ways and thus fall into sin, he argues that we can hardly expect God to deliver us from the entanglement in which we have enmeshed ourselves. He encourages us to trust even more in self and less in our heavenly Problem Solver. Firstly, Satan advises, we must extricate ourselves from our difficulty, as a statement of good intention, and only then can we come to God with the hope of pardon and blessing. This is a deception for which thousands have fallen, with the sad result that the more they try to solve the problem, the more complicated it becomes.

If there is ever a time when we need to know how God will view our situation, it is when our own plan making has placed us in serious trouble. This knowledge, acquired from the study of such examples as God has given us in His dealing with the errant David, will increase our faith in our divine Burden Bearer and arm us with the courage we need to lay all our troubles on Him. Although it is true that we still suffer the natural consequences of our sin, as we turn to our infallible Problem Solver, we will be guided into the procedures we are to follow in God's ways. Wise is the child of God who diligently studies God's working with David and other Bible heroes in this light.

Chapter 15

David's Deliverance

A prayer-filled careful reading of 1Samuel 27–28, together with Patriarchs and Prophets 672 to 674 and 691can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The Problem Given to God

Of course God would not have been able to work for David, if in his extremity he had desperately sought to extricate himself, while calling on God to help him do so. Fortunately, David did not make this mistake. Fully aware of the seriousness of the situation and fully conscious that his own devisings were the cause of his dilemma, he realized that to maintain his previous course of problem solving was to surrender himself completely into Satan's power. His only hope was to cast the whole burden onto the Lord and leave it there for Him to provide the solution. And this is precisely what he did. Then David proceeded to build a strong and active faith in his divine Problem Solver to support his solemn determination that, no matter what the cost, he would not join forces with Achish against God's people.

We have already seen that whenever we are surrounded by danger, if we refuse to dwell on our distressing circumstances and instead fix our thoughts on the character, works, and promises of God, we are on the path to conquering our problem. After David had done this and spent his time reviewing the faithfulness of God in his past experience, his faith could not help but increase. As he began to trust God's problem solving power to deliver him, he added the resolve that he would not betray his heavenly Father. Once David had fulfilled his part and left the solution to God, nothing could possibly go wrong, and nothing did.

David's Repentance

God did not need to level darts of personal condemnation against His erring son, for David saw with great clarity where he had returned God evil for good. As he reviewed his past experiences and recalled the way God had so faithfully led and protected him when given the opportunity, he realized what serious mistakes he had made and how much he had hurt the Lord's work. He knew he deserved the severest punishment. In deep repentance he fervently wished he had never allowed himself to be turned aside from God's ways, and solemnly resolved that he would guard his soul with greater care in the future.

"David was caused to feel that he had missed his path. Far better would it have been for him to find refuge in God's strong fortresses of the mountains than with the avowed enemies of Jehovah and His people. But the Lord in His great mercy did not punish this error of His servant by leaving him to himself in his distress and perplexity; for though David, losing his grasp on divine power, had faltered and turned aside from the path of strict integrity, it was still the purpose of his heart to be true to God." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 690.2.

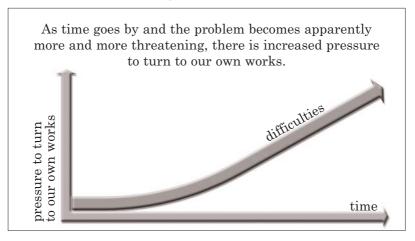
David's fall into sin occurred when he chose to trust his own plans instead of looking to God for guidance. Lying to Achish was not his first error of judgment, for David had already left the path of truth before he deceived the king. It was but the fruit of replacing God's ways with his own.

Despite his departure from God's ways, it was still in David's heart to be true to his Creator. As this loyalty was the dominant disposition within David, God was enabled to work mightily for him once the problem had been delivered into His hands. Israel's future king had no idea how his heavenly Problem Solver could possibly extricate him from the apparent dilemma facing him, but he knew that God is never caught by surprise, and would have a perfect solution ready. David had only to wait patiently for his salvation.

The Eleventh Hour

As the days passed and they marched nearer and nearer to the battlefront, David saw time running out with no visible evidence that God was doing anything to save him. Such occasions are times when the pressure to turn to our own works presses heavily upon us. It is at the eleventh hour when no solution is on the horizon that, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, we need to keep our minds from dwelling on our dangers and instead continue to review the past and recall God's wonderful capacities, ways, and dependable faithfulness. As David did this, his trust in God was strengthened and he resolutely refused to take matters into his own hands again.

Although David could not see it, God was working diligently for him and he needed only continue to wait patiently for those works to develop. As often happens, it was not until the eve of the battle that the divine Saviour was able to turn matters to David's advantage. Meanwhile, the Lord's anointed



had to persevere in naked faith while every visible evidence argued that his case was hopeless.

As David left the problem completely in God's capable hands and made no plans for his own deliverance, the angels were able to work on the hearts of those Philistine lords who were to join Achish in his war against Israel. The Philistine princes were so stirred with apprehension that they went to the king to protest against the presence of David and his force in the army marching towards the approaching conflict.

"As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. The commanders of the Philistines asked, 'What about these Hebrews?'

Achish replied, 'Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.'

But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, 'Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"?" 1 Samuel 29:2–5.

"The slaughter of their famed champion and the triumph of Israel upon that occasion were still fresh in the memory of the Philistine lords. They did not believe that David would fight against his own people; and should he, in the heat of battle, take sides with them, he could inflict greater harm on the Philistines than would the whole of Saul's army." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 691.2.

God understood the fears which deeply disturbed the Philistine lords. He knew that they would take action as their fears were stimulated by remembering the danger attendant upon David's presence among them. God foresaw that their combined arguments would persuade the king, but He did not force them to go to him. Through the ministry of holy angels He merely inspired them to realize more fully the real nature of the threat that accompanied them. In going to the king, they were entirely motivated by self-interest and did not know of the wonderful service which they were simultaneously rendering to God's cause.

"While Satan and his host were busy helping the adversaries of God and of Israel to plan against a king who had forsaken God, the angels of the Lord were working to deliver David from the peril into which he had fallen. Heavenly messengers moved upon the Philistine princes to protest against the presence of David and his force with the army in the approaching conflict." *Patriarchs and Prophets* 690.2.

As a result "Achish called David and said to him, 'As surely as the LORD lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers.... Achish answered, 'I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, "He must not go up with us into battle." Now get up early, along with your master's servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light.' So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel." *1 Samuel* 29:6–7, 9–10.

Although Achish's reply was a great relief for David, it must have been at the same time a bitter reproach for him, sending a thrill of shame and remorse through his heart. How unworthy he must have felt of such high esteem from the king who was so ignorant of how he had been deceived.

What a perfect Problem Solver is our God! One moment David was entrapped by seemingly insuperable mountains of difficulties, the next he was released from his entanglement and set free. The words of our Saviour had come true again: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." *Matthew* 17:20.

Our Deliverance

In His dealings with David, our heavenly Father reveals the perfection of His ways. In studying these we see a demonstration of how He will untangle the worst difficulties, provided the problem is given fully into His hands. David's deliverance must have seemed too good to be true, but it was real enough. Insofar as his problem of fighting against Israel was concerned, he was fully delivered. With what adoration and praise for His wonderful Deliverer must David have marched back to Ziklag again.

This story provides a contrast between the outworking of human planning or problem solving and the divine alternative. When the differences are seen, they should help to cure for the persistent tendency of our replacing God in this role. When we learn how to leave our problems and plans in God's hands, then how swiftly will His work be finished and Jesus return!

It is God's intention that David's recorded experiences shall teach us the folly of following our own ways, compared with trusting the infallible perfection of His procedures. The Lord wants us to know that when, through our misguided foolishness, we find ourselves in deep water, the only way of escape is to cast the problem into His hands. Once it is wholly given to Him, He can speedily resolve it. By so doing, He will expose Satan's lie that Jehovah turns His back on those who seek His deliverance from troubles brought on themselves by their own devising. Even the problems resulting from our own plans He can solve, although He cannot fully save us from the consequences that our own sinful ways have set in motion, as the next experience and the future life of David both show.

Chapter 16

A Deeper Lesson

A prayerful / careful reading of 1 Samuel chapters 29–31 and 2 Samuel chapters 1, 2, 11 and 15, together with Patriarchs and Prophets chapters 66, 68, 69 and 71 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Aremarkable education was given to David in the experience he passed through when marching with the Philistines to battle. Placed where he had no choice but to rest his case with the Lord, he was given a marvelous demonstration of God's ways. David's predicament was similar to Israel's when they were fleeing from Egypt and "Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again" Exodus 14:13.

The Lord gives similar experiences to His beloved children today, and in order for the lesson to be learned more deeply and the repentance gained to be surer, He often permits the believer to pass over the same ground again. Suddenly and unexpectedly, we can find ourselves engulfed in troubles even worse than those from which we have just been rescued. Satan quickly argues that this fresh entanglement is evidence that the Lord did leave us and we now have to disentangle ourselves through our own plans. In a determined effort to separate us from our great Problem Solver and plunge us into still greater difficulties, Satan urges us to take matters into our own hands. He contends that God will not help us until we help ourselves, but he knows the opposite is true. Thus he tempted David after his return to his Philistine home in Ziklag.

Like David, we have still to learn the lesson of depending on our divine Plan Maker and Problem Solver more fully, and so we need to be tested more deeply in order to be delivered from any lingering tendency of turning to our own works.

"It is thus that God still tests His people. And if they fail to endure the trial, He brings them again to the same point, and the second time the trial will come closer, and be more severe than the preceding. This is continued until they bear the test, or, if they are still rebellious, God withdraws His light from them and leaves them in darkness." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 437.1.

David's Return to Ziklag

When David and his men reached Ziklag, a shocking sight greeted them. They found their city a smoking ruin, their possessions plundered, and their families taken captive.

"David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep." *I Samuel* 30:1–4.

These were the consequences of David's wrong course of action and he saw in the loss of relatives and in the burning ruins, the outworking of his sin. David and his men were at that moment in great danger of reverting to their own devices, as so often happens during a crisis. Their trust in God was under severe attack, for the witness of sight and circumstances was a strong argument that He was unreliable as a Source of protection and guidance.

David's men had been marvelously delivered, so probably cherished the expectation that from now on everything would go well with them. They may even have imagined that God owed them a smooth pathway because of their repentance, when they were suddenly confronted with this entirely unexpected turn of events. It was unfortunate that in their hour of extremity, David's men lost confidence in God's leadership. The only possible option left to them was to turn again to their own works.

To have reacted in this way, as David's men did, was to display a sad ignorance of the outworking of natural law. Their ruthless attacks on the Amalekites had stirred a bitter spirit of revenge in those warlike people who watched for the opportunity to vent their fury on their attackers. When, in their self-confidence, David and his men left the city unguarded, they were openly inviting the trouble that was so quick in coming. To blame the outcome on a seemingly unpredictable God, instead of taking responsibility themselves, would only worsen their plight, and they would have been speedily delivered into Satan's hands if David had not manifested a very different attitude. In their spiritual blindness they did not recognize this, but made David their scapegoat.

"Here again David was chastened for the lack of faith that had led him to place himself among the Philistines. He had opportunity to see how much safety could be found among the foes of God and His people. David's followers turned upon him as the cause of their calamities. He had provoked the vengeance of the Amalekites by his attack upon them; yet, too confident of security in the midst of his enemies, he had left the city unguarded. Maddened with grief and rage, his soldiers were now ready for any desperate measures, and they threatened even to stone their leader." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 692.3.

Their only safe course would have been to admit that they were threatened with a harvest of their own sowing. If they had chosen such an honest attitude, they could then have strengthened their faith by recalling the fact that God had never failed them in the past. They could have reminded themselves that whenever they had brought calamities upon themselves, as in this instance, as long as they had given the problem to the Lord, He had faithfully fulfilled His role as Problem Solver.

David's men should have thus fortified their faith firstly by removing their minds from the distressing circumstances under which they were placed, and secondly by recalling and reviewing God's wonderful works in their past. Then they would have been assured that not only would He again deliver them, but that the destruction of their city, which He had permitted, was a blessing not a curse in the school of life. It would have been neither natural nor easy for them to see this, until an increase in their faith had cleared their vision.

Had David's men followed this course, they would have been at perfect peace in the midst of terrible adversity, but unfortunately they did not adopt this one safe procedure. Instead, they charged God and David with their troubles and were in fact so infuriated that they planned to stone David to death.

"David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters." *1 Samuel* 30:6.

They did have a valid point, for the fall of Ziklag was a further outworking of David's proposal to find shelter among the Philistines. God was not in any way responsible for this calamity. As David saw this result, he gained a clearer picture of his lack of faith in seeking refuge among the foes of God and His people and of how much safety he could therefore expect. His was not an enviable position.

"David seemed to be cut off from every human support. All that he held dear on earth had been swept from him. Saul had driven him from his country; the Philistines had driven him from the camp; the Amalekites had plundered his city; his wives and children had been made prisoners; and his own familiar friends had banded against him, and threatened him even with death." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 692.4.

The wicked unbelief which possessed his men imposed an increased burden of temptation upon David, and the pressure to turn to human planning in order to escape the threat was heavy upon him. If ever there was a time when he needed to abandon his own ways in favor of God's, it was then. It would have been natural for David to assert his authority over his men and, with them, set about making plans for the recovery of their wives, children, and possessions. But it would have been disastrous for them all had he done so.

David's reaction was quite different from that of his men. He accepted the lesson God was trying to reveal and his trust in God, rather than self, increased. His courage was not a consequence of a mighty stirring of feelings, but the result of reviewing God's previous dealing with them.

"In this hour of utmost extremity David, instead of permitting his mind to dwell upon these painful circumstances, looked earnestly to God for help. He 'encouraged himself in the Lord.' He reviewed his past eventful life. Wherein had the Lord ever forsaken him? His soul was refreshed in recalling the many evidences of God's favor. The followers of David, by their discontent and impatience, made their affliction doubly grievous; but the man of God, having even greater cause for grief, bore himself with fortitude. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee' (Psalm 56:3), was the language of his heart. Though he himself could not discern a way out of the difficulty, God could see it, and would teach him what to do." *Patriarchs and Prophets* 692.4.

Consequently, he who had so often before relied upon his own resources to plan his escapes, this time remained steadfast in his loyalty to God as his Plan Maker and Problem Solver. He did everything exactly right and was rewarded with a wonderful victory over the enemy and the recovery of all his loved ones and those of his men.

David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back." *I Samuel* 30:18–19.

The Key to Success

What were the correct steps that David took at this trying time?

- Firstly, he refused to permit his mind to dwell upon the forbidding circumstances.
- · Secondly, he looked earnestly to God for help.
- Thirdly, by reviewing his own past life, and seeing how the Lord had never forsaken him, he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." *1 Samuel* 30:6 (KJV).

Steps to Success:

- 1. David refused to permit his mind to dwell upon the forbidding circumstances.
- 2. He looked earnestly to God for help.
- 3. By reviewing his own past life, and seeing how the Lord had never forsaken him, he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God"

As he did this, although he could not see a way out of his difficulty, David's confidence grew stronger and stronger in God's willingness to teach him what to do. The language of his heart was: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you." *Psalm* 56:3.

David made no effort to work out a solution himself, but went to God via Abiathar, the priest, with the question, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?"

God's answer was prompt and positive, "Pursue them,' he answered. You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue." *1 Samuel* 30:8.

Immediately, the tumult among David's men ceased and they set out after the enemy. They marched so rapidly that one third of their number collapsed after the first thirty miles. The remaining four hundred pressed on (see *1 Samuel* 30:10). God blessed them with the discovery of an Egyptian slave who had been abandoned by his Amalekite master. When this man was assured that he would not be delivered to his cruel master, he guided David and his men to the very spot where the raiders were absorbed in a drunken victory feast (see *1 Samuel* 30:11–16).

As they came upon the encampment of the Amalekites the scene of revelry met their gaze.

"He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah." *I Samuel* 30:16.

David ordered an immediate attack and his men rushed fiercely upon their confused and surprised prey.

"David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives." *I Samuel* 30:17, 18.

In self-distrust David had turned away from himself as the problem solver and had trustingly placed the responsibility into God's hands. With the matter completely in His care, God was able to reveal His plan for the deliverance of His servant unimpeded by human interference. Knowing all the factors involved—where the Amalekites had gone, the degree of their self-confidence, their false sense of security, and when and where they would become beclouded and off-guard as they abandoned themselves to riotous feasting and drinking—God was able to arrange the recovery so successfully that David and his men regained everything.

If we learn, as David did, to turn away from ourselves as problem solvers and give this responsibility entirely to God, we will be blessed as he was, with total deliverance from the problems which confront us. No matter how black and hopeless our situation may be, God still has a thousand ways to resolve the difficulties of which we know nothing. All we have to do is give Him our problem, trust Him completely, and do exactly as He directs. The outcome can be nothing short of successful if this course is followed.

Escaping Fate?

One thing David must have feared more than anything else was the molestation of his wives and children. They were completely in the Amalekites' power for several days, which gave the enemy every opportunity to treat the Israelites as they wished. When David had invaded their territory, he had killed all the inhabitants of the cities he attacked. Not one was left to carry the news to Achish. Even though they could prove nothing to the Philistine king, the Amalekites knew that David was the culprit, and had sworn revenge. Surely they had promised themselves that if ever David's people came under their power, they would summarily execute them all. Yet the amazing thing is that when the opportunity arose, these intentions were not carried out. Why not?

The women and children escaped their fate because David accorded God His rightful position as Problem Solver. God was thus able to preserve their lives, even though they were in the hands of their worst enemies. It is a witness of God's power to restrain the heathen, which should encourage us during the prophesied time of trouble in the last days, when God's Sabbath-keeping remnant will suffer terrible persecution. What God did in David's day, He is able to do again in these last times.

"When David had invaded the territory of the Amalekites, he had put to the sword all the inhabitants that fell into his hands. But for the restraining power of God the Amalekites would have retaliated by destroying the people of Ziklag. They decided to spare the captives, desiring to heighten the honor of the triumph by leading home a large number of prisoners, and intending afterward to sell them as slaves. Thus, unwittingly, they fulfilled God's purpose, keeping the prisoners unharmed, to be restored to their husbands and fathers." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 693.5.

We need to remember that God did not forcibly restrain the Amalekites. He knew their thoughts and was able to select those which He could strengthen by His divine influences. In this way they were led to make decisions which resulted in the preservation of the families of David and his men.

David's Specific Orders

David's experiences in Philistia seem to have marked a turning point in his career. After his triumphant rescue of those whom the Amalekites had taken captive from Ziklag, he and his people set to work to repair their damaged dwellings, while awaiting news about the outcome of the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. When word finally came that Saul and Jonathan were dead, David knew that the way to the throne was now open and that he could safely return to his own country.

David did not spend any time making his own plans to return. He saw clearly now that this was God's responsibility, not his. Accordingly, he took the question to the Almighty and trustingly awaited His orders.

"In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. 'Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?' he asked. The LORD said, 'Go up." 2 Samuel 2:1.

When inquiring if he should return to his own land, David's question was straightforward in nature and God gave him a simple affirmation in response. This did not satisfy David, who then asked quite specifically, "Where shall I go?". In reply, God gave him further specific orders, telling him exactly where to go. "To Hebron,' the LORD answered." 2 Samuel 2:1.

This is God's way, which we must learn if we are to be successful in the end. In response to those who seek His directions, God often provides general orders first. Too many are content with this and immediately propose to do what they fondly imagine is a great work for the Lord, making their own specific orders.

However, when we learn to trust the Almighty's ways, we will know that we must also receive our specific orders from Him before embarking on any project. But we need to remember that God will never issue specific orders to those who do not ask for them. Therefore, the responsibility rests with us to make sure that we receive not only general orders, but specific orders as well.

The Lord directed David to return to Hebron rather than Jerusalem, because He knew that the nation had to be given time to recover from its loyalty to the house of Saul. David obeyed the explicit directive given him, and settled in Hebron from where he reigned over Judah for the first seven years after Saul's death. He did not embark on a campaign to secure the kingdom for himself, but waited patiently for God to give it to him. This Jehovah accomplished in due time according to His promise.

David's Mistake with Bathsheba

In the record of his deception of Achish, we find no information about any negative consequences for David, apart from the attack of his enemies on Ziklag. But this should not lead us to conclude that we will escape the results of our own wrong course of action.

David was unfortunately not fully delivered from his disposition to make his own plans. When he later became king of Israel he reverted to his own plan making in the affair with Bathsheba.

When he was overcome by temptation he did not immediately repent of the sin. His initial reaction was to solve the problem himself, his first device being to recall Uriah from the battlefront in the hope that he would sleep with his wife and then assume that her baby was his. When this failed, David's desperation led him to plan the murder of his faithful soldier (see *2 Samuel* 11).

David's misguided attempt at problem solving resulted in complications and tragedies. These include:

- The innocent and noble Uriah lost his life;
- · Four of David's sons died as a result;
- David had to face the terrible shame heaped upon him as the whole nation became aware of his transgression;
- He lost a great deal of parental and regal authority as the respect of family and nation was withdrawn;
- The resultant stress that David had to bear broke down his health and strength until he eventually died, a shadow of his former self;
- Throughout the land, sinners were encouraged to act out the dictates of their evil hearts;
- God's work was retarded and doors were opened for the advancement of that terrible apostasy which marred Israel's history in later years.

David himself escaped the immediate death sentence—the punishment required by law—because the people had called for a monarch like those ruling over the nations around them, and this placed him, like them, in a position where the law of Israel could not touch him. Furthermore his deep repentance enabled God to protect him.

Later, when David fled for his life from his own son, Absalom, he discovered that Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel, had joined the conspiracy against him.

"But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. Now David had been told, 'Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." 2 Samuel 15:30, 31.

David recognized this as another outworking of his sin because Ahithophel, who was an able political leader, was acting out of revenge for the disgrace done to his family.

A Deeper Lesson 235

Such consequences served as a warning and a school to the humble, repentant soul of David, who accepted them in the right spirit. God often permits the consequences of our wrong behavior to teach us vital lessons in the school of life. If we accept them as such they will be a blessing for ourselves and for the cause. They will be like the fire of purification of which is written:

"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness." *Malachi* 3:3.

A Lesson for Us

The life of David is a valuable lesson book left on record for us. Primarily, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining strict integrity. If, however, we succumb to Satan's artful devices and find ourselves in complicated entanglements, the record of God's dealing with David is a demonstration and an assurance of the way in which He will similarly deliver us, as long as we fulfill the conditions in true repentance. By thoroughly familiarizing ourselves with these records, we can develop the courage and faith to commit our problems entirely to God, so we will know exactly what to expect of Him in times of crisis.

David's history also provides stark warning of the terrible consequences of trusting to our own efforts to solve problems, whether they arise out of our own or others' misdeeds. These lessons must be thoroughly learned if we are to enter into God's Sabbath rest.

Other Examples

Chapter 17

How It All Began

A prayerful / careful reading of *Genesis* 3 together with Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 52 to 62, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

So far we have presented evidence and arguments to show the evil effects of our taking on God's role of Problem Solver. To confirm this conclusion we will now briefly consider how the trouble with sin began.

To gain his ends, the tempter chose the procedure of persuading the original couple to transfer the role of problem solver from God to themselves. In the record of his coming to Adam and Eve in Paradise we find a powerful example of this temptation.

Eve Tempted

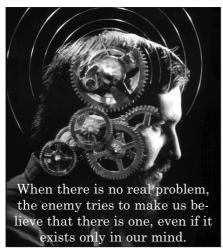
When Satan came to Eve in the guise of a medium, he tried to introduce doubts into her mind by asking a subtle question.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?" *Genesis* 3:1.

Satan followed this question with flattering compliments about Eve's unsurpassed loveliness, in order to set the stage for the effect he desired to gain. He wanted her to imagine that there was nothing too good for a being of such exceptional beauty as she. Eve found his propositions very pleasing, and made the mistake of lingering to hear more.

While listening, Eve did not realize the real issues at stake. Satan was in fact suggesting that a problem existed in her life. He argued that, here she was, the most beautiful creature in existence, possessing an intelligence and reasoning power unknown in the animal kingdom, being denied the right to eat of this special and rather mysterious tree. To prohibit a cow or horse from eating of it may have been reasonable, but to forbid her was another matter.

When Eve agreed that the Lord had forbidden her any right to the tree (see *Genesis* 3:3), Satan was ready to maintain that God in reality had a serious problem. Through the medium of the serpent, Satan further declared that in order to solve this problem,



God had stooped to deception, by telling Eve and Adam that they would die if they touched the tree.

This was of course a lie, but the tempter succeeded in inducing Eve to believe it was true. In direct contradiction to God's warning that they would forfeit their lives, he declared, "You will not surely die". *Genesis* 3:4.

Satan pretended that there were magical properties invested in the tree

which, if they ate of it, would elevate them to the level of God. The reason he gave for the Creator's prohibition was that He did not wish Adam and Eve to know about this possibility. Satan insinuated that God was so anxious to prevent them finding out about this, that He had resorted to falsehood to protect Himself, because He could not trust them to keep away from the tree if they knew of His jealously guarded position.

Satan said, "You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." *Genesis* 3:4, 5.

Eve's Solution

The poison of flattery must have seriously dulled Eve's mental perceptions, for Satan's argument was quite unreasonable and illogical. But she allowed her feelings to rule her mind, and chose the path of sentimentality. All around her she could see created works which spoke of a flawless God, able to do anything He desired. It was absurd to suggest that He had so seriously erred in His creative work that a tree had appeared in the Garden which was both an embarrassment and a decided threat to Him. God had of course planned the entire Garden down to the last tiny atom, and everything was exactly where and how He had designed it should be. Far from being a threat to Him, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been specifically placed in the center of the Garden of Eden as a test for the holy pair. God certainly did not need to lie to protect Himself from it.

Yet Satan blatantly and successfully proposed to Eve that God had blundered, and to extricate Himself from this self-imposed problem, He had resorted to deception. After unwisely listening to Satan's flattery, Eve's trust in the serpent grew and she was ready to accept his false assertions about her Creator.

Once she had believed his lies, it was easy for Satan to convince Eve that she had an actual problem, when in fact, she had none at all. He deceived her into imagining that a self-centered and despotic God was deliberately preventing her from achieving her real destiny, and that it was up to her to solve the problem. The last thing Satan wanted at this point was for Eve to carry this difficulty back to her husband or to turn to God. If she had gone to either of them, Satan would have been thoroughly defeated, for in order to achieve his malicious objective, he had to entice Eve to take matters into her own hands and become her own problem solver.

To ensure this, Satan implied that it was no use turning to God, for had He not created the problem? Was it not God who had tried to prevent her and her husband from eating of the one tree which would give them full equality with Himself? God would certainly not clear up the difficulty He had deliberately initiated in order to preserve His own position.

Thoroughly captivated by these specious arguments, Eve found herself desiring this promised exaltation more than anything she had ever known, and was convinced that the only person to whom she could entrust the problem was herself. The apparent solution was readily accessible, for all she had to do was reach out, pluck the fruit, and eat it, which she eventually did.

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." *Genesis* 3:6.

Satan rejoiced as he saw his objectives realized. He had set out to persuade Eve to transfer the role of Problem Solver from God to herself, and this was exactly what she had done. He knew perfectly well that God had not blundered in His creative work. He understood that the holy pair would die if they ate the forbidden fruit, and was fully aware that he, not God, was the liar.

How different the history of the world would have been if Eve and also Adam had known, trusted and followed God's ways that day instead of their own.

Adam Tempted

Eve did not, of course, have the problems which Satan led her to believe she did, but when she went to her husband carrying Satan's lies on her tongue and the forbidden fruit in her hands, Adam found himself in a really serious dilemma. He knew that his companion had transgressed the specific command of their Maker and was doomed to certain death. But how could he bear to be separated from her? Should he obey God or comply with his wife's wishes?

"Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." *1 Timothy* 2:14.

The question now was, how should he handle the difficulty confronting him? The choice lay between recognizing that his loving, heavenly Father was the only legitimate Problem Solver, or undertaking this work himself. The future of humanity hinged on the decision he would make. If he had trustingly and submissively said, "God is our Problem Solver. I will not make any move to unravel this difficulty myself, but will commit it into the hands of my Creator and accept any solution He offers", the Father would have provided a perfect solution. Adam would have remained as the prince of this world and Satan would have been defeated. Sin would never have become established on this earth, and there would have been no sickness, death, destruction, wars, or misery of any kind.

We do not know what God's solution would have been, nor what would have happened to Eve. By choosing to be his own problem solver, Adam deprived God of the opportunity to reveal His divine solution.

Adam did not make his choice lightly. He knew very well what had happened. The angel they had been warned about had deceived his spouse and he knew this would result in his separation from her whose society had been his joy. A deep insight into Adam's decision is revealed in the following paragraph:

"There was a terrible struggle in his mind.... all these blessings were lost sight of in the fear of losing that one gift which in his eyes outvalued every other. Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator—all were overborne by love to Eve. She was a part of himself, and he could not endure the thought of separation. He did not realize that the same Infinite Power who had from the dust of the earth created him, a living, beautiful form, and had in love given him a companion, could supply her place. He resolved to share her fate; if she must die, he would die with her. After all, he reasoned, might not the words of the wise serpent be true? Eve was before him, as beautiful, and apparently as innocent as before this act of disobedience. She expressed greater love for him than before. No sign of death appeared in her, and he decided to brave the consequences. He seized the fruit and quickly ate." Patriarchs and Prophets, 56.2.

Thus Adam made his choice, usurping God's position as the Problem Solver. Although his motive was love for Eve, it would have been a wiser and more perfect expression of that love if Adam had chosen to let his Creator handle the problem for him.

Thou Shalt Not be Thine own Problem Solver

In this way sin, with all its attendant woe and misery, became established in the world. It came as a direct consequence of God's children appointing themselves as problem solvers and plan makers in His place. It was the attempted exaltation of the creature to the level of the Creator. That was the real sin committed in Eden. Partaking of the forbidden fruit was but the means of expressing the decision to replace God with His creatures.

Some may contend that the sins committed in Eden were direct violations of the individual commandments. When Eve believed Satan's lies about God and carried these to her husband, she was certainly a bearer of false witness. Furthermore, she coveted the fruit before she stole it, and by thus bringing death upon herself, her husband, the Son of God, and all her children, she also broke the command forbidding murder.

Adam joined her in sin, and by entering into a relationship with Satan in the place of their true husband, Jesus Christ, they committed adultery. In so doing they dishonored their heavenly Parents, had another god before the real One, worshiped an object as the symbol of their ambitions, and held God's name in vain. Furthermore, by depriving God of His rightful position as Problem Solver, they also broke the Sabbath in principle, losing their Sabbath rest.

It is therefore true that they broke every one of the commandments, but we need to see more deeply into the meaning of their transgression. If we evaluate those laws from the perspective of God's role, we can see that each of them is a prohibition against our solving our own problems.

Why do people remove others by killing them?

It is usually because the victim has become a problem to them, and the only way they can see of solving the difficulty, is to kill the person who stands in their way. Some killings appear to be for different purposes, such as vendettas or random killings. However, when these are carefully analyzed, it can be seen that they, too, are human attempts to solve seemingly insoluble problems. Exacting revenge is a method of intimidating any others who might be contemplating attacks on the avenger or his family. It is intended to solve the problem of threatened future assaults. Random killings may appear senseless, but they are an attempt by the murderer to solve the torments which rage within.

Why do people lie, commit adultery, steal, and so on?

Again, they do all these things because they know of no other way to solve their problems.

In summary, the message contained in every one of the ten commandments is: Thou shalt not be thine own problem solver.

That, on the other hand, is precisely the position Satan wants us to adopt. He knows no other method more successful in separating us from God than to persuade us to attempt to exalt ourselves above our Maker. The success he enjoys is incredible. Even with the hindsight that all the woe and misery in the world is the direct result of Eve and then Adam electing to take on the role of



problem solver in Eden, their descendants continue to cling to this position, trusting themselves more than God, and suffer the inevitable consequences.

Are We Willing to Pay the Price?

Satan reigns on and sin continues to exact its terrible toll because he is still able to induce people to trust in themselves as problem solvers in God's place.

If we are in doubt as to whether we should let God occupy the role of Plan Maker, or whether we should appoint ourselves to that position, we have ample evidence upon which to base our decision. We can study what developed as a result of the wrong choice made by Adam and Eve, and compare those consequences with what would have been if they had submitted their problems to God instead.

If we consider the price which our first parents paid for the doubtful privilege of becoming their own plan makers, we will be less likely to walk in their footsteps. Their choice cost them everything. Despite their full and deep repentance, they still had to suffer the consequences of their sin. They lost their home in Eden, they lost their two first-born sons, and they brought untold misery and suffering on this world. They had to suffer hardships and experience sorrows which they would never have known if they had followed God's plan for them. Finally their foolish choice cost them their lives, although because of their true repentance they did not lose eternal life. An eventual consequence of their wrong choice was that the only begotten Son of God was put to death.

All those who reject the Sabbath rest principles by trusting in their own ability to solve their problems in preference to God's ways, will similarly suffer the consequences. The options are clear-cut. If we let God be our Problem Solver in every respect, it will be impossible for us to be lost. Eternal life is guaranteed to those who continue to trust and submit to God. If we make a mistake and realize we have trusted our own plans in the place of God's, and then turn back to God in full repentance, we will regain true Sabbath rest.

If we knowingly insist on making our own plans and solving the resultant problems ourselves, we will pay the price in full. Eternal separation from God and everlasting oblivion are all that we can expect. When we could be enjoying eternal bliss, we will instead have passed through the second death and be facing eternal extinction. (See *Revelation* 2:11, 20:6, 14, 21:8.)

Let each of us ask ourselves: Is the cost of trying to play God worth it? The answer is self-evident.

Chapter 18

The Consequences of God's Plans

A prayerful reading of 1 Kings 17 and 18, and Daniel 3, together with Prophets and Kings, chapters 9 and 12 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

In Elijah's day, after following their own ways, Israel had descended into deep apostasy and terrible degradation. God had foreseen this sorry state of affairs from eternity, and had a plan ready to effect a thorough and lasting reformation. Elijah was to play an important role in this plan, as described in the following paragraph:

"Among the mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan, there dwelt in the days of Ahab a man of faith and prayer whose fearless ministry was destined to check the rapid spread of apostasy in Israel. Far removed from any city of renown, and occupying no high station in life, Elijah the Tishbite nevertheless entered upon his mission confident in God's purpose to prepare the way before him and to give him abundant success. The word of faith and power was upon his lips, and his whole life was devoted to the work of reform." *Prophets and Kings*, 119.1.

From the outset, Elijah's faith rested in God as His heavenly Plan Maker. As a faithful and dedicated workman, Elijah made no plans of his own but followed the specific orders laid out by Jehovah. He had not elected himself to the position of prophet, for his heavenly Father had appointed him to it. The successful discharging of this great responsibility depended on his maintaining a correct relationship to His divine Leader, trusting in Him rather than self.

Elijah Prophesies the Drought

To the prophet Elijah was entrusted the mission of delivering to the godless king a message of judgment. God's plan called for the work to begin by Elijah's journeying to Samaria and walking into Ahab's presence unannounced in order to prophesy:

"... there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." *1 Kings* 17:1.

Elijah knew the wicked king was a mean-tempered despot who would, without hesitation, execute anyone who displeased him, so he needed great faith to follow God's specific orders. Elijah did not hesitate, but obeyed the divine summons explicitly. Because faith was an outstanding feature of Elijah's life, the Master Architect was able to use him as a valuable worker in carrying out His plans.

A description of this faith and the circumstances of his appearance before Ahab follows:

"The prophet set out at once and traveled night and day until he reached Samaria. At the palace he solicited no admission, nor waited to be formally announced. Clad in the coarse garments usually worn by the prophets of that time, he passed the guards, apparently unnoticed, and stood for a moment before the astonished king.

"Elijah made no apology for his abrupt appearance. A Greater than the ruler of Israel had commissioned him to speak; and, lifting his hand toward heaven, he solemnly affirmed by the living God that the judgments of the Most High were about to fall upon Israel. 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand,' he declared, 'there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.'

"It was only by the exercise of strong faith in the unfailing power of God's word that Elijah delivered his message. Had he not possessed implicit confidence in the One whom he served, he would never have appeared before Ahab. On his way to Samaria, Elijah had passed by ever-flowing streams, hills covered with verdure, and stately forests that seemed beyond the reach of drought. Everything on which the eye rested was clothed with beauty. The prophet might have wondered how the streams that had never ceased their flow could become dry, or how those hills and valleys could be burned with drought. But he gave no place to unbelief. He fully believed that God would humble apostate Israel, and that through judgments they would be brought to repentance. The fiat of Heaven had gone forth; God's word could not fail; and at the peril of his life Elijah fearlessly fulfilled his commission. Like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, the message of impending judgment fell upon the ears of the wicked king; but before Ahab could recover from his astonishment, or frame a reply. Elijah disappeared as abruptly as he had come, without waiting to witness the effect of his message." Prophets and Kings, 120.2–121.2.

Elijah Waits on the Lord

The first part of the plan, involving the prophet's appearance before the king, called for faith and courage. The next phase called for faith again, as well as patience. God instructed Elijah to hide himself unnoticed by a remote brook.

"Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan." 1 Kings 17:3.

As the dreary months of solitude and inactivity passed by, it must have been difficult for a man of such positive action as Elijah, to wait patiently for God's plan to be executed. Even more trying was the fact that he was not told how long he would have to remain there alone. Elijah demonstrated his virtues as a faithful and reliable workman by refusing to move until the divine plan provided for it. He permitted no thread of human devising to mar God's scheme, no matter how great the pressure on him to do so. While he maintained this position with total confidence in his heavenly Plan Maker, the strategy moved forward with perfect precision toward its ultimate consummation.

Eventually the rivulet dried up. God had foreseen this development and had His solution ready. The prophet was directed to the widow of Zarephath (also called Sarepta), where he was to remain until the time came for the showdown with Ahab and the wicked priesthood (see *1 Kings* 17:9).

The widow was another of God's faithful workers. She had a specific role to play in His plan, and she carried it out with the same exactitude, submission, dedication, faith and courage as that manifested by Elijah. They were a reliable team. (The story is recorded in *1 Kings* 17:8–16).

It is encouraging to notice that while they were doing precisely what the Lord directed them to do, He was able to provide fully for their needs. The Lord always works in this way when these conditions are fulfilled. The only matters that should concern the trusting Christian are: What has God assigned for me to do at this moment? and How does He want me to fulfill my assignment? If we devote ourselves to carrying out God's specific orders exactly when and how He has commanded, all the necessary facilities will be provided.

The Confrontation on Mount Carmel

While Elijah patiently waited in the widow's home, the heavenly Plan Maker was carefully supervising developments. When the appointed time came, fresh instructions were delivered to His servant Elijah, who accordingly presented himself before the king with the command to gather Israel together on Mt. Carmel.

"Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." *I Kings* 18:19.

In this way the stage was set for a confrontation between the God of the fearless prophet and all the servers of Baal, in full view of the people of Israel.

Throughout the long day, Elijah followed God's specific orders to the letter, giving the priests of Baal full opportunity to manifest their power. When their prayers for fire failed, the prophet of God solemnly re-erected the sacred altar upon which, in reOne of Satan's methods is to turn things upside down, inside out, or back-to-front. When Ahab met Elijah, the king blamed the prophet for the drought (see *1 Kings* 18:17).



sponse to his prayer of faith, the fire immediately descended. The enemy was thoroughly defeated and the people chanted their re-awakened acknowledgment of the true and only God (see 1 Kings 18:21–39).

Not a single hitch flawed the performance of God's plans for two reasons. In the first place, the plan itself was perfect because it originated from Him alone. Secondly, Elijah never deviated even slightly, from God's specifications. What the Lord directed him to do, he did. That was the secret of his success. He trusted that God knew best, and he had full confidence in God's ability to fulfill His part, as long as he—as a human co-worker—did what God asked of him.

Elijah's subsequent prayer for rain was also under God's direction, as was his guidance of the king through the storm back to Jezreel (see *1 Kings* 18:41–46). Once Ahab passed through the gates, Elijah, having fulfilled his duty to the monarch, fell asleep while the rain poured down in torrents.

Elijah Flees

At this point, God's perfect plan was nearing its consummation. Elijah was about to see the fruition of all the waiting and sacrifice which had filled the previous three years. God purposed to break the power of Jezebel and Ahab, and to effect a deep reformation throughout the land. Because these wicked rulers would not repent, they were to be removed from office. God's

judgments were due to fall on the unrighteous queen, provided Elijah continued to follow His specific orders. Such events would have deepened the effect that had already been made on the people as they witnessed the fire consuming Elijah's sacrifice, and there would have been a mighty turning back to God.

"Had he remained where he was, had he made God his refuge and strength, standing steadfast for the truth, he would have been shielded from harm. The Lord would have given him another signal victory by sending His judgments on Jezebel; and the impression made on the king and the people would have wrought a great reformation." *Prophets and Kings*, 160.1.

Satan was desperate. He knew there was no hope of his frustrating God's plans unless he could induce Elijah to renounce them in favor of his own. Though staring defeat in the face, both Satan and his agent, Jezebel, acted as though everything was going their way. A messenger was sent to Elijah threatening him:

"You killed my prophets, and now I swear by the gods that I am going to kill you by this time tomorrow night." *1 Kings* 19:2 (The Living Bible).

Through this device, Satan aimed to convince Elijah that nothing had been gained, that God's plans were not trustworthy, and that he was about to sacrifice his life in vain. It proved to be an effective bluff.

Elijah should have reacted, as Jezebel had, confidently as if everything was going the Lord's way. This was in fact so. But instead, he allowed Satan to persuade him that the cause was lost and that he must take immediate steps to ensure his own safety.

"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert." *1 Kings* 19:3.

Instead, Elijah should have turned to the Lord for strength in his hour of need. If he had trusted in his divine Protector who had never let him down, and taken the step of praying for extra protection, then God would have been His shield against Jezebel's threats.

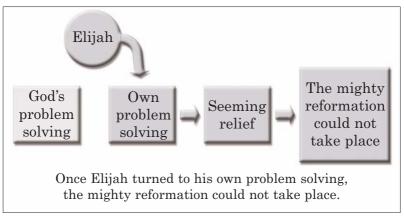
"But a reaction such as frequently follows high faith and glorious success was pressing upon Elijah. He feared that the reformation begun on Carmel might not be lasting; and depression seized him. He had been exalted to Pisgah's top; now he was in the valley. While under the inspiration of the Almighty, he had stood the severest trial of faith; but in this time of discouragement, with Jezebel's threat sounding in his ears, and Satan still apparently prevailing through the plotting of this wicked woman, he lost his hold on God. He had been exalted above measure, and the reaction was tremendous. Forgetting God, Elijah fled on and on, until he found himself in a dreary waste, alone." *Prophets and Kings*, 161.1.

Dire Consequences

With what tremendous relief must Satan have viewed this panic-stricken flight of the prophet. After the strain of seeing God's plans proceed so smoothly for the previous three years, thereby threatening his cause, the devil must have been mightily pleased when he at last succeeded.

Without His faithful workman, Jehovah's plan could proceed no further. As a result, Jezebel did not die, the golden opportunity to impress the king and his people passed, and the reformation largely failed. The wicked queen lived for many more years, during which she continued to control the king and deepen the darkness that hung over the land.

The course Elijah should have taken is clearly mapped out in the following paragraph:



"Elijah should not have fled from his post of duty. He should have met the threat of Jezebel with an appeal for protection to the One who had commissioned him to vindicate the honor of Jehovah. He should have told the messenger that the God in whom he trusted would protect him against the hatred of the queen. Only a few hours had passed since he had witnessed a wonderful manifestation of divine power, and this should have given him assurance that he would not now be forsaken." *Prophets and Kings*, 160.1.

It was the plan made in heaven which had brought Elijah to the gates of Jezreel. He had no mandate to move from that place until God gave him fresh instructions. It was his duty to remain there no matter how terrible the threats against him, nor how great the cost, for the results accruing from following plans made by God are not the responsibility of the worker. His only duty was to carry out the instructions given to him and then leave the consequences entirely with God.

God knew what Elijah was doing and was not caught by surprise when Jezebel, in the face of actual defeat, threatened Elijah as if she was still in total control. The Lord had made full provision to meet this development, and the sacrifice of Elijah's life was not a part of the plan. Perfect protection was assured him, although this should not have been a consideration with Elijah. If the scheme called for his martyrdom, the prophet should have been submissively willing to accept this too.

What a tragedy it is that Elijah, after faithfully following God's instructions for so long, turned from trusting God's to his own works when the divine plan was almost fulfilled and total victory nearly gained.

Daniel's Three Friends

God's workers should have nothing to do with either the plan making or the consequences resulting from the divine plans He has made for their lives. If we wish to serve God, we need to learn and practice this vital lesson. We must do our part of the work in faith and leave the rest with the Lord, even when apparent dangers threaten us. This principle can be stated in the following way: "Christ's ambassadors have nothing to do with consequences. They must perform their duty and leave results with God." *The Great Controversy*, 609.1.

Often when God gives us specific orders and calls us to take certain steps, our imagination immediately pictures unwanted consequences and our short-sighted evaluation imagines that great calamities will follow. But our thoughts are seldom God's thoughts! What we label a "great calamity" might in God's sight be the best thing that could ever happen to us. Yet we often need some time in order to view it in the same light as God does.

"We should choose the right because it is right, and leave consequences with God." *The Great Controversy*, 460.2.

If every believer would plead with the Holy Spirit to write these words indelibly on their minds and resolve to live undeviatingly by them, how quickly would the work be finished! We need to trust more in God and less in our own wisdom. If we have a clear mandate and a "thus saith the Lord" before us, then we are to step forth in faith, fearless of the consequences we will reap if we follow God's plans.*

An illustrious example of choosing the right and leaving the consequences with God is provided in the course adopted by Daniel's three colleagues, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (better known by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, demanded that they worship his golden image or be cast into the fiery furnace (see *Daniel* 3). These three men knew that it was God's plan for them not to bow down to the image, for they understood the second commandment "You shall not make for yourself a carved image ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them..." *Exodus* 20:4, 5 (NKJV). Therefore they chose to follow

^{*} This does not mean that we should go through life totally unmindful of any consequences resulting from our occasional unwise behavior. We need carefully to contemplate the consequences of our choices, especially upon other people. Whenever we are faced with making an important decision, we need to think through the conse-

quences of it thoroughly before we choose our course of action.

[&]quot;See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise." Ephesians 5:15. (NKJV)

[&]quot;Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." Colossians 4:5.

this general order of the Lord's, no matter what the consequences to themselves. Filled with faith in God's capacity as the perfect Plan Maker they answered the astonished king:

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." *Daniel* 3:17, 18.

With faithful workmen such as these, God was able to advance His plan from its initiation to its successful completion. Satan was utterly defeated and God's work advanced without sacrificing the lives of His servants (see *Daniel* 3:24–30). It was a signal victory for the cause of truth, which in turn laid the groundwork for further advances.

There are few things we have to face more difficult than to continue obeying God when doing so has already brought us face to face with disaster or even death. The mind reasons that if so much obedience has brought so much trouble, then continued obedience will only increase the problem. It is natural, easy, and usual for us to shrink from following God's instructions, to form alternative schemes which, in our view, we imagine will prosper the work much more successfully than the plans made in heaven. But we should not be deceived. The only safe course to follow is to carry out God's plans exactly as He has made them, with a living faith in His love and wisdom. When at last God has a people who will confidently execute His perfect plans in full Sabbath rest, knowing that they have nothing to do with consequences, the work will be speedily finished.

Chapter 19

Christ Our Example

A prayerful reading of *Matthew* 4:1–11 together with *The Desire of Ages* 114–123 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Imitating Christ

In Christ, the believer has the perfect Guide for every step in life, and for every principle of operation. In His continuing role as God's instrument to manifest righteousness and truth, Christ is the unfailing reference for all decisions which face the Christian. The words He spoke at the last Supper with His disciples are equally true for everything else He did:

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." *John* 13:15.

As true disciples we should imitate our Master, as He in turn imitated His heavenly Father.

"Follow God's example in everything you do just as a much loved child imitates his father." *Ephesians* 5:1 (The Living Bible).

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." 1 Peter 2:21.

In order to follow His example, we must have a thorough understanding of what Christ did. And we need a very clear, accurate, and ever-increasing knowledge of the way in which Christ relates to His Father.

Christ Affirmed

Christ's unqualified success in executing His vital mission on this earth was due to His looking to the Father in a certain, specific manner from which He never deviated. At the end of His work He was just as faithful to those same principles with which He had commenced it. Therefore, He could truthfully say, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." *John* 17:4.

Christ knew exactly how to relate to His Father, and no matter what pressure was brought to bear upon Him, He refused to operate by any other principles. Satan, also realizing the terms under which Christ was guaranteed success, was unrelenting in his efforts to divert Christ from God's perfect ways. If he had succeeded even in the smallest degree, the plan of salvation would have been ruined.

When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, a voice from heaven declared His relation to the eternal Father.

"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." *Matthew* 3:16, 17 (NKJV).

When God spoke those wonderful words, "This is My beloved Son", He was announcing a relationship and affirming His recognition of His own responsibilities in it. He was the Father; Christ was the Son. In these respective roles, each had His part to play. The Father must provide the plans to be executed, as well as guidance in the fulfillment of them, protection from the designs of the enemy, all the physical, mental, and spiritual power and also materials necessary to achieve the proposed results.

No matter how much it might appear that the eternal Father was not meeting His responsibilities, the Son for His part, must not assume any of them to save either Himself or the work. It was imperative that Jesus remain in His own position, acting out the role of a totally dedicated servant, the obedient instrument of the Most High.

It was a simple matter for Christ to accept these terms at the Jordan. He was kneeling in the radiant light and power flowing down from heaven, His Father's voice was ringing audibly in His ears, the tempter was not harassing Him, and no threat was being leveled at Him or the Lord's work. The inspiration of that glorious moment could only inspire an unblemished confidence that He was safe in the arms of a competent Father under whose perfect guidance nothing could possibly go wrong.

Believers often enjoy a similar experience. Gathered together at a camp meeting or a Sabbath service, they listen to a faith-charged preacher reading God's glowing promises to them. The words are so direct, so simple, so understandable, and so powerful, that they are gripped by the inspiration of the hour. Confidence in God is awakened, His promises are grasped, and the listeners respond by accepting the relationship offered. They now rest in the powerful assurance that the Lord will do all that He has promised.

It is not difficult to enter into this covenant when we are in an inspirational meeting, free from satanic pressure, and enjoying good health. Confidence in God's capacity and willingness to keep His word is abounding, and we leave the gathering assured that we are safe in our heavenly Father's care.

But it is another matter to maintain that relationship when Satan is using every device and exerting every pressure at his command, to break it. At such times God seems far away, apparently unmindful, uncaring, and uninterested in meeting His responsibilities. It is then that the terrible temptation to do something to save ourselves presses with almost irresistible force on the soul. Should we trust and wait upon our heavenly Problem Solver who is apparently not responding to us, or should we trust in our own ability to resolve the urgent problem? It is the pressure to which practically every human being, apart from Christ, has bowed at one time or another.

Yet to resist such temptation is the victory which everyone who is finally saved must gain.

This was the experience through which Christ passed on the mount of temptation immediately following His baptism in the Jordan. Here it was that He and Satan met in direct confrontation, bringing the way in which Christ related to His Father into sharp focus.

The Impression Fades

When, on the banks of Jordan, the heavenly light faded from His kneeling form and the voice of God could no longer be heard, Christ arose. Under the Holy Spirit's personal direction, He departed into the wilderness where, by fasting and prayer, He was to brace Himself for the coming conflict.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." *Matthew* 4:1, 2.

If we have experienced that inspiration from contact with the Infinite, which normally lasts some time afterwards, we will know that the associated feelings gradually die away. Unless refreshed again, the experience fades, until finally the impression can be left on the senses that all is lost. As a human being with a human nature the same as yours and mine, Jesus was no exception. The glory from the throne of God that was reflected in His face left Him after He entered the wilderness. His experience changed as follows:

"When Jesus entered the wilderness, He was shut in by the Father's glory. Absorbed in communion with God, He was lifted above human weakness. But the glory departed, and He was left to battle with temptation. It was pressing upon Him every moment. His human nature shrank from the conflict that awaited Him. For forty days He fasted and prayed. Weak and emaciated from hunger, worn and haggard with mental agony, 'His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.' Isa. 52:14. Now was Satan's opportunity. Now he supposed that he could overcome Christ." The Desire of Ages, 118.1.

Christ's Condition Deteriorates

Satan, who is a master technician, had watched with fiendish interest each step Christ took. He had held back from harassing the Saviour until the glory of God left Him completely and the long fast was underway. In the fearful struggle with the Saviour, Satan sought to take the utmost advantage from the surrounding circumstances. While he withheld his final all-out assault until the forty days were ended and Christ was reduced to His lowest physical level, he attempted to wear the Saviour down from the moment He entered the wilderness.

As day after day passed without food, Christ drew nearer and nearer to death, knowing all the time it was critically important that He continue to live. He must stay alive for the work's sake, His Father's sake, and for the salvation of perishing millions. By the sure word of prophecy He knew His time to die had not yet come, but it was clear that, unless something was done to nourish His emaciated body, He would never survive to accomplish His mission.

Even when it is nothing more than self-preservation, the desire to live is one of the most powerful known to humanity, but Christ was driven by a far stronger motive than that. We, who have never experienced the burden which Jesus carried, cannot appreciate how much He felt the need to live then. Later, on Calvary, He would die willingly because the time had come for the supreme sacrifice, but He knew this was not required in the wilderness.

As His physical condition daily became more desperate, Christ received no indication that the Father was either mindful of His situation or intended to do anything about it. The usual human response to such apparent indifference is to lose trust in God as the Problem Solver, turn from Him to self, and undertake the work oneself. There are often more attractive alternatives which a person can choose. In Christ's case, it would have been a simple matter before He became too weakened to do so, to walk back to His mother's house. He knew that He would receive a warm welcome and food there. Or He could call on His divine powers to provide for His physical needs.

During this time of terrible suffering and mental anguish, Christ sought refuge in prayer, but no matter how earnestly and persistently He directed His petitions to His Father, no answer came back. Every witness of sight and circumstance declared that His Father had forgotten and abandoned Him to the power of the evil one and inevitable death.

This was a terrible experience for Christ. To all appearances, despite the promise implicit in the declaration at the Jordan that Jesus was His beloved Son, God was not acting as a Father towards Him. It is both a father's duty and desire to feed his child and protect him from enemies, but God was seemingly unconcerned. He had directed Jesus to enter the wilderness where there was nothing to eat and where He knew that Satan would attack His Son, yet He provided no food and left Christ to fight the battle with no visible evidence of support from Him.

If an earthly father treated his child in this fashion, he would be regarded by society as an unfit parent, and if the child were underage, he would be taken from him by court order.

But despite appearances to the contrary, God was not acting in an unfatherly manner towards Jesus. The requirements of the great controversy, not His paternal instincts, determined what God had to do. Christ had made a solemn covenant with the Almighty that He would gain the victory which so many fail to achieve, by demonstrating that irrespective of pressure to do otherwise, we are to live by God's Word alone (see *Deuteronomy* 8:3).

Satan's Temptations

If the heavenly Father had surrounded Christ with His visible Presence and satisfied His physical needs, Satan would not have been able to bring the full pressure of temptation to bear upon Him. Jesus would thus have been prevented from gaining the vital victory necessary to ensure that the evil one is ultimately defeated.

On the other hand, Satan was determined that Christ would follow in his footsteps. If he could lead the Saviour to do this, he would acquire the most convincing argument possible to justify his own wrong course of action. To succeed, he must destroy the relationship between Christ and His Father, by leading Jesus to lose faith in His divine Parent and to assume responsibilities which belonged to God alone.

He therefore came in person to suggest a possible solution for Christ's problem. In order to solve the entire trouble and escape his fate, Jesus had to take over the role of a father providing food for his children.

"The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." *Matthew* 4:3.

Christ certainly had the power to do so which is proved, for example, by His twice feeding a great multitude of some thousands. That was God's plan for Him at those specific times. But had He succumbed to this temptation in the wilderness, He would have usurped His Father's position by becoming His own problem solver. To tempt Christ to do so, Satan tried to fill His heart with doubts of His Father's ability to be a caring parent. The following paragraph explains Satan's mission:

"The words from heaven, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17), were still sounding in the ears of Satan. But he was determined to make Christ disbelieve this testimony. The word of God was Christ's assurance of His divine mission. He had come to live as a man among men, and it was the word that declared His connection with heaven. It was Satan's purpose to cause Him to doubt that word. If Christ's confidence in God could be shaken, Satan knew that the victory in the whole controversy would be his. He could overcome Jesus. He hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in His Father, and work a miracle in His own behalf. Had He done this, the plan of salvation would have been broken." Desire of Ages, 119.1.

Satan knew exactly what to do to tempt Jesus to sin, and he set about the process with all the determination and subtlety at his command. More than four thousand years of intense preparation for this conflict had developed him into a formidable foe. His successes in most instances over other humans with whom he had done battle, gave him confidence that he could also overcome God's Son.

Christ also knew exactly what to do to resist Satan's deceptive attack and maintain God's cause. He understood that under no

circumstances was He to move except at His Father's command. It was by that word He was to live and move. "In him we live and move and have our being." *Acts* 17:28. Nothing else was to influence His decisions. No matter how great the pressure or cost, He must leave the responsibility for the supply of food and shelter, guidance and protection, with His Father. Not in the slightest degree was He to undertake any of this work Himself. He would continue to have confidence in His Father to do His own work alone.

If Christ had been uncertain of the issues under contention, of Satan's specific objectives, and of His Father's requirements, it would have been impossible for Him to have emerged victoriously from the struggle. So too will we fail, if we are ignorant of these matters.

A Lesson for Us

We need to study the struggle between Christ and Satan in the wilderness of temptation, in order to see the exact nature of the issues involved clearly revealed. Only if we spend time and energy in acquiring a thorough knowledge of what took place, will we be equipped to resist our wily foe when he comes against us just as he came against Christ. More than we do, we need to realize that "The way in which Satan tempted Christ, he is today tempting every soul." *The Review and Herald*, May 3, 1906 par. 7.

"Jesus dealt with the tempter in the way in which all His followers are to deal with him through all time." *The Review and Herald*, April 24, 1894 par. 1.

The issues have not changed. What Satan sought to tempt Christ to do, he induces His followers likewise to do. As Jesus was the Son of God, so His followers are His children who are to relate to Christ as He related to His Father. When Satan heard God's declaration that Christ was His beloved Son, he was determined to make Christ disbelieve this testimony and instead save Himself by working a miracle.

When the same evil foe sees us entering into covenant relationship with God, he determines likewise that he will rob us of our faith in the almighty Saviour, and thus lead us to take steps to trust in and save ourselves. As Christ utterly refused to for-

get that He was a Son, and to take over any of the Father's responsibilities, so too must we remember who we are and keep our place, even if it should cost us life itself.

If we meet Satan as Jesus did, we are assured of the same decisive victory our divine Leader and Example gained. On the contrary, if we do not, we are guaranteed defeat.

Learning from Israel's Errors

Jesus gained the victory where others have failed. His responsibility as a submissive, obedient Son, was to go where His Father sent Him, and to wait there, content with whatever the Almighty supplied, until directed to go elsewhere. Even if, as every appearance suggested, God had decided no longer to discharge His obligations, Christ would still not step out of His assigned position as the dependant Son. He would die eternally rather than do that. It was His Father's work to feed Him and therefore He would not solve this problem Himself. To Him, maintaining the Father-Son relationship was the most important principle to be upheld.

Of course, if Jesus had died in the wilderness, all would have been lost. His awareness of this fact placed tremendous pressure on Him to live. But if He had succumbed to the temptation to do anything to preserve His life, the plan of salvation would still have failed. The only way to succeed was for Christ to wait with infinite patience until the Father supplied His needs.

Although it was not without a tremendous struggle, the Saviour replied to Satan in harmony with these divine principles, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." *Matthew* 4:4 (NKJV).

This was Christ's way of saying that God is our Problem Solver, Plan Maker, and Burden Bearer who forms the plans by which He executes His work. As dependent receivers, we are to trust the ways and wisdom of God, without question, and act only as directed. It matters not what loss and suffering this may involve, for we must understand that the victory cannot be gained without self-sacrifice. Whatever may befall, we are to look to Christ just as He looked to His Father. In no other way can God's work be done successfully.

Christ had obviously learned this lesson from the experience of Israel. More than 400 years earlier, Moses had delivered them the message that the education gained through enduring hunger was to teach them the lesson that they were to live by every word from God rather than merely by physical food.

"The LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness.... He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." *Deuteronomy* 8:2, 3 (NKJV).

Just as divine provision was granted Israel to teach them to trust in the word of God, so Jesus expected help from the selfsame word. He knew that obedience to that word was superior to any other consideration. His experience is expressed as follows:

"In the wilderness, when all means of sustenance failed, God sent His people manna from heaven; and a sufficient and constant supply was given. This provision was to teach them that while they trusted in God and walked in His ways He would not forsake them. The Saviour now practiced the lesson He had taught to Israel. By the word of God succor had been given to the Hebrew host, and by the same word it would be given to Jesus. He awaited God's time to bring relief. He was in the wilderness in obedience to God, and He would not obtain food by following the suggestions of Satan. In the presence of the witnessing universe, He testified that it is a less calamity to suffer whatever may befall than to depart in any manner from the will of God." *The Desire of Ages*, 121.1.

When the Lord permitted Israel to suffer hunger, they felt that He was unfaithful to them. Had they been prepared to understand that God had a special educational purpose in this, they would have borne the trial with fortitude and even gratitude. To them, as with the majority of people, the most important thing was to live in comfort, health, and prosperity. They failed to learn that what is of far greater consequence is to recognize and accept their rightfully appointed place as sons, not fathers, no matter what the resultant suffering and loss might be.

There is no doubt about sickness, loss, and death being major calamities in themselves, but they are minor when compared with the much greater calamity of departing, in any degree, from God's will, which eventually results in eternal death. In the presence of the witnessing universe, by the example of a flawless faith, Jesus testified to this truth. His children are invited to bear the same testimony.

Continual Submission

Every visible evidence which so emphatically indicated that His Father had deserted Him, left Christ unmoved, for He knew and trusted His Father. Therefore He could not be persuaded that the Almighty had in fact forsaken Him. He rested in the assurance that God was working out the mighty counsels of His divine will, that there was a vital objective to be achieved, and that the Lord would not suffer Him to be tempted more than He could bear, or more than was necessary.

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*." *1 Corinthians* 10:13 (NKJV).

As Christ reviewed His past life, He could see that He had not placed Himself in danger. The existing difficulties were not of His own creating, but the result of His obedience to God's guidance. Therefore the Father was responsible for any consequences. He had implicit trust in His heavenly Father and knew that an army of angels would come to His aid if this became necessary. The words Jesus spoke later, in the garden of Gethsemane, show with what clarity He was aware of the invisible world standing ready to help if required.

"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" *Matthew* 26:53.

This is the faith of Jesus, and it is also the faith that we must have if we are finally to be triumphant.

"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus." *Revelation* 14:12. NRSV.

Though Satan gained no victory or advantage in the desert, he relentlessly pursued the Saviour throughout the remainder of His earthly ministry. The final confrontation took place at the cross, where the devil gathered the combined strength of all his forces to break down the wall that Christ had built to resist his temptations. He tried every possible device in order to come between Christ and His Father, to tempt the Saviour to take matters into His own hands, but he was entirely unsuccessful.

With perfect fidelity Christ lived out the Sabbath rest principles in those awesome battles with the master of evil, and by so doing He assured Himself of total victory in every confrontation. He remained a faithful Son, holding fast His submission to His heavenly Parent until death. Throughout His life He carried out the will of His Father and never trusted to His own will.

"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." *John* 6:38.

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." *John* 5:30 (NKJV).

"My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." John~4:34.

We too need to submit our wills just as fully and continually to our heavenly Father if we are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and finish the work.

Chapter 20

Christ Shows The Way

A prayerful / careful reading of *Matthew* 26:36–27:50 together with *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 74 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Severe as the test in the wilderness was, it was not so terrible as the pressure exerted upon Christ in Gethsemane. There, because of the load of sin which was being placed upon Him, He felt an awful sense of isolation from His Father. He was powerfully tempted to feel that He had been abandoned, and that the only One to whom He could look for solutions to His crushing problem was Himself. Perceiving the extent of the opportunity offered him, Satan worked with all his highly developed skill and cunning to convince Christ that He must surrender His lifelong submission to His Father's will and undertake the planning of His future Himself.

We tend to think that our submission to God's will would be much easier if we could see the full outworking of His perfect and holy purposes at the time the plans are given to us. But in His mercy God gives us only as much as we can bear each day, and we need to trust His wisdom in this. We often wish we could hear Him audibly speaking to us; and see or feel His close presence. Under such conditions, Satan's temptations would be

greatly reduced in power and effectiveness, but our faith would not be given the opportunity to grow. It is in a crisis where we have to walk by faith, not by sight, that the real extent of our commitment to God or self can be seen.

Gethsemane and Golgotha

In this last fearful struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane, the basic issue of the great controversy was being fought out. Christ was battling to hold fast His submission to His divine Head, while Satan was doing all in his power to enlist Him on the side where, losing faith in God, He would resort to His own devices to solve the awful problem that was coming close to crushing the life out of Him.

Either Christ would resist Satan, no matter what the cost might be, or He would follow the same tragic footsteps as trodden by Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob, and so many others who have made the mistake of trying to build God's work their own way.

As Jesus felt the pressure to its depth, He poured out the feelings of His human nature and gave His problem to His Father.

"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." *Matthew* 26:39.

Barely had these words escaped His pale lips when He confirmed that He would be true to his position of Son, no matter what the consequences would be, by immediately adding: "Yet not as I will, but as you will." *Matthew* 26:39.

Christ refused to save Himself by His own plans even though His human nature shrank as much from suffering as does ours.

From Gethsemane right down to the very end, Jesus resolutely clung to His submission and trust in His Father and resisted the temptation to be His own problem solver. The wonderful demonstrations of supernatural power that were seen in His earthly life prove that He could have escaped His murderers if He had wanted to do so. Christ could easily have saved Himself when they mockingly said: "If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe

Him." *Matthew* 27:42 (NKJV). But He absolutely refused to turn to His own works. Forsaken by humanity and apparently deserted by God, Christ fought that battle and won, even though in the end it cost Him His life. "Christ bowed His head and died, but He held fast His faith and His submission to God." *The Desire of Ages*, 761.1.

It was His holding fast to His submission to God that was the victory. We all need to understand the full significance of this perfect example of trust and submission, for then we will know the exact nature of the issues Jesus battled against. We will see that Christ proved forever that the only way in which God's work can be done successfully is by absolute submission to His will and leadership. The nature of the trial through which Christ passed, and the victory He gained, should be the constant study of all of us who are preparing to be the Lord's instruments in the final struggle against the powers of darkness.

Eternally Obedient

The relationship with His Father which Christ so flawlessly maintained while upon this earth was "according to his eternal purpose which he [God] accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Ephesians* 3:11.

Therefore, it was not a special performance limited to His sojourn on this earth. It began when the mystery of God was established so far back in the distant recesses of eternity that it is virtually without beginning, and it will continue throughout the everlasting future. He who was equal with God in every respect accepted and adopted the position of the Son, the Receiver to whom the everlasting Father transmits the riches of life and power, so that He, in turn, could dispense all this to the creatures and worlds making up the universe.

Earthly sons have a way of growing up and casting off their submission and obedience to their fathers, but not so with Jesus. Now that He has returned to the heavenly courts, He still maintains the same submissive, obedient trusting relationship to His Father that He manifested on earth. So it must be, for it is written of Him that He is "Jesus Christ ... the same yesterday and

today and forever". *Hebrews* 13:8. Confirmation that this is so is given in at the beginning of the book of *Revelation*, which was written after the ascension of our Lord:

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John." *Revelation* 1:1.

By virtue of His eternal pre-existence and omniscience, Christ has no need to receive a revelation about Himself from His Father. He already knows all things. But, because He has accepted the position of Son, He will honour that position for eternity. He knows His place and how to keep it. Therefore, even now, He receives from His Father that He might in turn give to others. It is an eternal commitment, the same as that into which the true believer is called.

The Test Repeated

This principle of submission needs to be remembered when we hear God's declaration of His true position in relation to us. The Lord says to each of us, "I am your Saviour, Protector, Doctor, Problem Solver, Plan Maker, Burden Bearer, and every other role necessary for life and happiness." In recognizing God's true position, we accept His divine invitation, and come into covenant relationship with Him. From the moment we commit ourselves to this position, we pledge to maintain it as consistently and eternally as did Jesus.

Unfortunately, under severe testing, which inevitably comes along, we sometimes forget we are children of God and break our covenant. As probation draws to a close and the forces of light and darkness are locked in their final struggle for supremacy, human nature will be placed under similar pressures to those suffered by Jesus at Gethsemane and Golgotha.

This situation will develop as a result of the fearful troubles which, enveloping the world, will threaten our very existence. The enormous global problems will demand a solution, but instead of looking to God and His ways to provide the answer, people will endeavor to do the Lord's work for Him. The situation will become so desperate that nations will put aside their feuds and unite under one head for the sake of self-preservation. Be-

cause Sunday is the symbol of man setting himself in God's place, everyone will be required to observe this child of the papacy as a token of allegiance to, and conformity with, the grand human plan for restoration to temporal prosperity.

The true people of God will not be misled, for they will discern the real nature of this movement. They will recognize that the solution the law makers deem to be the one sure way out of their troubles, will in fact entrap them in a hopeless snare. They will therefore, in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, raise their voices to warn the world's peoples of the certain disaster they are bringing upon their own heads. But, instead of heeding these warnings, the majority will do all they can to compel the loyal followers of Jesus to adopt their plans in the place of His.

As a result of the increase in trouble and disaster, the civil authorities will find themselves unable to contain the fearful woes falling on the earth. The united churches will then arise and propose that if the state gives them its power, the churches will solve its problems. This is the same proposal made by Jezebel to Ahab when the latter found that he could not gain possession of Naboth's vineyard (see *1 Kings* 21).

As the world unites under one head—the papacy—people will hail this development as the answer to human troubles and divisions, and no resistance to the movement will be tolerated. They will confidently proclaim that the long-sought millennium of peace is about to be instituted.

Instead of this grand human scheme bringing the expected peace, unity, and prosperity, world conditions will rapidly worsen. The blame for this will be levelled at God's children who are protesting against the system, and they will consequently be subjected to fearful persecution, including eventually, the sentence of death.

Apparently Forsaken

For God's people it will be a night of terrible trial made worse by the fact that, to all appearances, God has forsaken them. Their experience will be similar to Christ's in the wilderness of temptation, with Satan attacking them as he attacked the Saviour, and they will have to gain the victory exactly as He did. During this time, as they are suffering from starvation, it will appear that the people of God have been left to perish, with seemingly no difference between their situation and that of the godless around them. The wicked are dying from famine and disease, and in their own hunger, it seems that God's people will soon share the same fate.

Christ was not left to perish but it certainly looked as if He was. So, while God's remnant people will not be left to die, the appearances all indicate that they will. To them, God will seem far away, unmindful and uncaring, and the pressure bears



The true people of God will rest in the knowledge that the almighty God is fulfilling His role as their caring Father to its limit, especially when all around them the world is turning to its own problem solving in order to find peace. down upon them to break the covenant and join forces with the enemy. They will pray as Jesus did during those forty days He fasted in the desert, but just as no recognizable answer came back to Him, so none will come back to them. God's children will feel completely alone, forsaken, and vulnerable to Satan's fury. The glory of the loud cry period will have departed, and they will be left to battle with the temptation that presses on them every moment.

Apart from Christ's confrontation with Satan, humanity will never have been more severely tested. The ability to withstand this awesome pressure does not come in a moment. Obviously then, those who will be fitted with the necessary knowledge, faith, and endurance to stand in that day, must be learning to do so now. It will be a qualified people through whom the Lord performs that work by which the great controversy is finally concluded satisfactorily, a people dedicated to the principle that "it is a less calamity to suffer whatever may befall than to depart in any manner from the will of God." *The Desire of Ages*, 121.1.

Being utterly committed to this ideal, Christ was fully successful in His mission. And when God has a people who can be fully trusted to the same extent, He will finally be able to finish the work on this earth. This will be the ultimate exemplification of the Sabbath rest principles by which, long, long ago, God's people could have entered into His rest.

God's Witnesses

Chapter 21

God's Witnesses

Why is Suffering Permitted?

Because God is the Source of all things, He has all the power necessary to protect His people from their enemies. So why does this God of love actually allow Satan to bring suffering upon his beloved children? This question is a source of unrest to many. In fact, the workings of God's government are a mystery which tends to fill them with doubt and perplexity. It could be expressed in the following way:

"The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God because He suffers the basest of men to prosper, while the best and purest are afflicted and tormented by their cruel power. How, it is asked, can One who is just and merciful, and who is also infinite in power, tolerate such injustice and oppression?" *The Great Controversy*, 47.1.

A satisfactory grasp of the answer can be acquired only by a thorough study of the issues lying at the heart of the great controversy between God and Satan. It is encouraging to know that such investigation will prove to be a significant factor in establishing God's Sabbath rest in the soul. The trials of life will then pass from the realm of mystery into an area of meaningful and even beautiful purpose. What had previously been a cause for discouragement, doubt, or confusion, becomes instead comprehensible and a cause for peace and even holy gratitude. Reading the accounts of the martyrs reveals expressions of deepest joy as they realize they are accounted worthy to suffer the greatest sacrifice for their Saviour.

There are several good reasons why God allows Satan to bring trials upon His children. One purpose which is easily understood is that God uses trials as instruments to shape the character after the divine pattern and thus fit the soul for heaven. Many of these trials are brought upon us by our own foolish course of action, yet they serve to reveal weaknesses and deficiencies which need to be corrected. Such revelations, even though they come the hard way, are in fact a blessing and when seen aright will be regarded as such.

But we will turn our attention to another, highly important reason for Satan's being permitted to strike some of God's people with disease and even death. This reason particularly applied in the cases of Job, John the Baptist, and Lazarus, for example.

The Origin of Rebellion

In order to understand this reason and find blessed Sabbath rest in its knowledge, we will go back to the dawning of rebellion.

From the beginning, it was Satan's argument that the law of God could not be kept under every circumstance. He argued that, for untold millenniums, God had withheld information from him because He did not trust him with that knowledge. During that period, Satan, who was then known as Lucifer, in his apparent ignorance had served God with undivided attention. However, once he imagined he had discovered God's carefully guarded secrets, he felt he was left with no option but to rebel.

Lucifer decided that the only possible course he could follow was to sever all connection with God. He left his position and in a pretended show of loving, self-sacrificing consideration for the still loyal angels, endeavored to alert their minds to the "real" character of God whom he portrayed as deceiving and mistrustful. He claimed that the only reason why the sinless angels in heaven continued their allegiance, was that they had not yet learned or accepted the actual facts. They were still, Satan contended, in a situation of prosperity and ignorance where they would continue to keep the law, but let them be "enlightened" as he was, or placed in similar circumstances to his, and they would rebel just as he had.

There is just no other way Satan can explain his own faultless righteousness until the time he fell, and the similar faithfulness of the angels who are still loyal to God, than by arguing that obedience can be rendered only under limited, favorable conditions. He is extremely skilful at seeking to explain away facts which cannot be denied. Those who would fully enter into God's Sabbath rest must be familiar with his devisings and know how to counter them.

The Temptation of Eve

While the loyal angels were not deceived by Lucifer's sophistry, nor "delivered" by his philosophy, Eve was prepared to listen and to accept it. Satan successfully presented the argument that God did not trust her, which he said was proven by God's giving her and her husband false information about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan's approach to Eve is a clear revelation of his arguments against God's government. On gaining her attention at the forbidden tree, he immediately raised the question of God's prohibition concerning it.

"He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"" *Genesis* 3:1.

Eve was quick to reply that they could eat of all but one tree. This had been prohibited only because to eat of it was to die. Satan now came right to the point, declaring that this was not the real reason at all. In direct contradiction to God's statement he declared: "You will not surely die." *Genesis* 3:4.

This was to accuse God of being a liar, which in turn meant that He did not trust Adam and Eve. But Satan was the one who was actually lying. His declaration implied that here was a marvelous tree with the magical power to elevate them to equality with God—a development which he claimed God feared more than any other. Satan further insinuated that God could not trust them to know this and still refrain from partaking of the forbidden fruit, so He had told them a lie to prevent them from even touching it.

In this way Satan aimed to lead Eve and later Adam down the same pathway that his own footsteps had trodden. His objective was to persuade them that they served God blindly because God, mistrusting them, had been careful to hide the real truth about Himself from them. Satan was confident that once he had placed Adam and Eve in a situation different from the idyllic one in which God had established them, they would no longer maintain their obedience.

He was not disappointed, for they did withdraw their allegiance from God, and gave their support to Satan's sophistries instead (see *Genesis* 3:6). Once they had accepted his accusation that the Creator did not trust them, it was inevitable that they would join Satan in his work of rebellion. But they had neither justifiable reason nor acceptable excuse for their defection. Satan was jubilant, for he considered that they had provided him with indisputable proof that his contentions were correct.

However the eternal Father took the decidedly different view that Satan had not proved his point at all. It was true that Adam and Eve had accepted his arguments and taken their place on his side, but this did not prove that his assertions were correct. Their decision only showed that, if people are persuaded by Satan's sophistries, they will cease to walk with God. Their action had not disproved the fact that God's law can be kept under difficult circumstances as well as favorable ones.

Nor did the wrong course taken by our first parents give any support to the charge that God had withheld information because He could not trust them with it. God had kept back no light whatsoever. It was made fully available to them as it is to us. One of the great blessings accorded to God's children is the opportunity to be ever growing in knowledge and understanding. Eternity itself will not exhaust the fields of study open to the redeemed and the unfallen worlds. In His love for Adam and Eve, God had protected them from the knowledge of evil. If they had asked Him about Satan's allegations, He would have given them ample reassurance.

How to Demonstrate God's Claims

The positions God and Satan occupy in the great controversy are diametrically opposed to each other. The devil's efforts are concentrated on casting God in a false light, especially in regard to His holy law. He states that it is not possible to keep God's commandments under all circumstances. God, denying this, affirms that under no circumstances or conditions is law-breaking justified or necessary.

Unfortunately, this controversy cannot be settled by declaration. It had to be submitted to actual contest in which both sides, under the scrutiny of all created beings, demonstrated the real nature of their claims. It may seem surprising that the sheer authority of God's word did not obviate this necessity, but the very fact that it did not, clearly proves that the problem could not be solved by declaration alone. Even now, after almost six thousand years of demonstration and counter-demonstration, the issue is not yet fully and finally resolved.

God cannot provide this demonstration Himself. He is dependent on created beings through whom it can be given. They need to be in a position where they can experience prosperity or adversity, health or sickness, life and death, yet still keep His law. Obviously, the only beings who qualify are those who dwell on this earth.

To illustrate this point, imagine that God has advertised for voluntary witnesses to confirm that He is the God of truth and righteousness when He says that the law can be kept in any situation. Joyfully, a bright and holy angel steps forward and indicates his wish to be such a witness.

God says to him, "I need to ask you a few questions to see if you qualify. Firstly, are you able to experience poverty and hardship?" To this, the angel has to reply in the negative as he must to each of the following questions. "Can you become sick?" "Can you face death?" "Can you be physically and mentally tortured for your faith?" The angel's honest replies leave God with no option but kindly to refuse his offer on the grounds that he does not qualify.

No sinless being can give the required demonstration. Therefore it is up to human beings to offer themselves as candidates for the task of proving that God's claim is correct.

The Law of Self-sacrificing Service

When sin entered the universe, the sinful rejected the principle of service to others no matter what the cost to self, and chose instead the rule of self-exaltation irrespective of what it would cost others. Since that point in time, each dweller in the universe has chosen one or the other of these two principles.

As the character of Christ is formed in us, the spirit of self-sacrificing love becomes the operating principle of our lives. And as we come to understand the issues in the great controversy, we learn that it is the situation, not God, which demands considerable self-sacrifice in the form of loss, suffering, or even death. When that time comes, we willingly pay the price, knowing that it will bring blessings to others and to ourselves as well.

God will never deny His children the high privilege, blessing, and education obtained by living out the law of self-sacrificing love. Therefore, when the circumstances arose which provided Job with the opportunity to suffer for the cause he loved, the Lord would not maintain a hedge of protection around him. God would not withhold from His servant the weightiest trust and the highest honor—the gift of fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

It is when these principles are understood that the peace of God within the believer is preserved, no matter how severe the trial that God permits him or her to bear. Therefore, Satan continually seeks to rob us of these principles so that he can prevent us from entering into God's rest.

Unavoidable Suffering

Acceptance of God as the Plan Maker involves the believer's total trust and submission to whatever the everlasting Father, in His infinite love and wisdom, may elect to send or permit. Often, that which the Lord allows His people to suffer is the opposite from what they would plan for themselves. If God had said to the youthful Joseph, "Sit down and draw up a plan for your future service to Me", he certainly would not have included a pe-

God's Witnesses 285

riod of servitude in Egypt, followed by imprisonment in a foul dungeon (see *Genesis* 37:12–28 and *Genesis* 39:19–20).

Likewise, Daniel and his three friends would never have included a lifetime spent in Babylonian captivity if given the opportunity to outline their future (see *Daniel* 1:1–7). John the Baptist would not have asked for a Roman prison nor for beheading (see *Matthew* 14:1–12). The apostle Paul would not have chosen the infirmity of weak eyesight (see *Acts* 9:9; *Galatians* 6:11), his arrest (see *Acts* 21), or a martyr's death (see *Acts of the Apostles*, 509), and Job would never have chosen to have his possessions swept away, his children annihilated, and his health broken down until he was suffering as few ever have (see *Job* 1:13 – 2:10).

An Extreme View

Because we would never plan suffering for ourselves nor for our loved ones, we tend to cherish the thought that our Heavenly Father would not permit such things to happen to us either. Despite clear evidence that He does allow such suffering, some go so far as to say that the only thing God will ever do for His children is to bless them with health, prosperity, and life. They reason that because God is all-powerful and all-loving, He will never allow suffering or death to overtake His children unless their lack of faith prevents Him from exercising His will. Consequently, if a believer dies, or suffers ill-health or misfortune, they conclude that the only reason for such suffering is the presence of unbelief or hidden sin, or both. This false belief, combined with a spirit of self-confidence and exaltation, makes it easy for them to pass judgment on others. Thus, in their eyes, every Christian who has died down through the ages, including the mighty apostles, prophets and martyrs, is judged as wanting in faith and righteousness.

While such serious error is maintained, it is impossible for God to achieve His deep, wonderful, and yet mysterious purpose in those who hold such views, so they consequently fail to enter into His rest. Losses, suffering, and bereavement for which their belief provides no place, will confuse and trouble them, leading them to doubt the goodness, mercy, and love of their heavenly Father. They will be plagued with doubts as to what they have

done wrong and will wonder why God does not show them their errors. They will feel that He has deserted them, and is working against them, rather than for them; that He is not a covenant-keeping God; and that He makes promises which He fails to keep. Until this erroneous thinking is corrected, they will find true peace and rest elusive.

It is true that God is all-loving and all-powerful, and that He does not wish to see His children suffer and die. He needs a living company of believers through whom He can finish the work, and, eventually, He will have such a group. But, in the meantime, it is not a question of what God wants, but of what the great controversy demands. The simple fact is that the battle of the ages cannot be won without sacrificial suffering by all of God's children. This will vary in degree from case to case, depending on the circumstances and the needs arising from them. For some of God's children the sacrifice has to be total— Lazarus, John the Baptist and all the other martyrs being prime examples. If a believer is not willing to give all that the controversy demands, then the ultimate victory for the cause is delayed. The principle of operation needed is service to others no matter what the cost to self. Any intrusion of self-service will impede the progress of both the individual believer and the cause of God.

God's Sacrifice

No better example can be found of the difference between what God wants and what He must accept as necessary for the resolving of the great controversy, than in His approval of Christ as the sacrifice for sinners. There was nothing the Father desired less, than to see Christ leave His presence, come down to this earth, and pass through a life of fearful suffering and humiliation which was to end in a cruel and undeserved death at the hands of the very people whom He came to save.

If there had been any way in which God could have terminated the great controversy and effected our salvation without either Christ or any of His other children suffering and dying, He most certainly would have used it. But there was no alternative.

God's decision to solve the sin problem committed Christ and those who share in redemption's blessings, to whatever suffering and death is necessary to defeat the enemy.

God never sacrifices people in order to establish His honor and His kingdom. He is not the one who requires this sacrifice. Therefore it is not a case of the end justifying the means. Just as He does, we have to accept the fact that without sacrifice there is no solution to the sin problem. We cannot enter into the peace of God's Sabbath rest unless we follow this principle. And if we fail to enter into His rest, then we will be seriously disturbed in mind and spirit when calamities and troubles befall us.

Who Can Witness?

God's purpose in enlisting His followers into His army is not just to grant them His healing power and protection. All are saved to serve, to reveal His true, just, loving, and righteous character in the battle against evil, and to share with Him in His noble work of ending rebellion throughout the universe. As His witnesses, we cannot do this work without being partakers with Him in His sufferings. Paul, who understood and accepted this principle, is a worthy example for us. He said:

"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him." *Philippians* 1:29.

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." *Romans* 5:3, 4.

The presence of adversity and suffering in Paul's life did not disturb his peace for a moment. Understanding God's character and working, Paul recognized that tribulation occupied an essential place in his service to God and his fellows. He knew the value of adversity and suffering in developing Christian experience and he accepted the nature of the witness he could give only under these conditions. He realized that tribulation afforded him a privilege which not even the angels have. Therefore, he not only accepted these trials calmly, but actually rejoiced under suffering. This attitude will be shared by all who enter into God's Sabbath rest.

"I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." *Colossians* 1:24. NRSV.

In this respect, we too can enjoy a privilege the angels will never experience. We can provide a witness for God which the sinless, heavenly host, being completely separated from poverty, distress, disease, persecution, and death, can never give. What makes this privilege even more meaningful, is that our witness is so essential to the cause of God that the great controversy cannot be finished without it. This is why God declares that we are His witnesses, called to reveal by declaration and demonstration that He is Truth.

"You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'that I am God." *Isaiah* 43:10–12.

How can we Witness?

Unfortunately, the average professed Christian imagines that witnessing is nothing more than speaking in support of God, just as political supporters make speeches in favor of their candidates. If this were so, God's children would never need to be placed in distressing situations where they suffer and sometimes die. But, while preaching the Word and having the courage to share our convictions with others is a vital part of the Christian witness, God requires more than that. He needs Christians whose lives prove by demonstration that the law can be kept to advantage, no matter what their circumstances may be.

It is for this reason that the Lord permits Satan to afflict His children from time to time. This is why He allowed Satan to sweep away Job's possessions, kill his children, and take away his health. This also explains why John the Baptist perished, Lazarus was stricken with a fatal illness, and the martyrs faithfully demonstrated that the awful pressure of persecution and

God's Witnesses 289



death could not change their service to God. These sufferers all understood to a greater or lesser extent that this is why they were in the world—to be God's witnesses—not just to be the recipients of His salvation.

The better their understanding of these principles and the deeper their consecration to this kind of service, the more stable the martyrs were in maintaining an untroubled peace through even the darkest, most try-

ing hours. As we have seen, they found that they could rejoice because they knew they were privileged to bear a witness vital to God's cause and their own salvation, which even the angels could not give. God's permitting Satan to afflict them was no mystery to them. It was simply a part of that impeccable plan whereby God will eventually terminate the reign of sin. They rejoiced in surrendering their bodies to any suffering God permitted as necessary to achieve these objectives, and this was why they confounded their persecutors by joyfully singing as they died.

The final generation of Christians must learn to walk in the footsteps of the martyrs in order to accomplish their divinely appointed mission. Such an awakening among God's children will elevate their thinking until they sweetly rest in the assurance that "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him." *The Desire of Ages*, 224.5.

The untarnished beauty of perfect Sabbath rest is the wonderful experience awaiting all who come to understand, accept, and live out, these principles. Perplexities will vanish and they will find a plain path before their feet. They will truly be able to rejoice in suffering, knowing that provided it is not the result of their own disobedience, they are accorded the privilege of being God's witnesses on a level unknown even to the holy angels. When every one of God's children is totally committed to this quality of service, the end will quickly come!

Chapter 22

The Life of Job

A prayer-filled careful reading of Job~1:1-2:13 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

There was an occasion when Satan, as the prince of this world, presented himself at a council meeting of the sons of God (see Job 1:6). Jehovah invited Satan to explain how Job's perfect obedience fitted in with his claim that the law could not be kept by created beings under every circumstance. Job's life actually demonstrated the falsity of Satan's claims, for if one man housed in fallen, sinful, mortal flesh could obey the law to perfection, then others could do so too. And if fallen mortals could keep God's law, then the untainted inhabitants of the universe definitely had no excuse for rebellion.

Above all, Satan's own course was particularly condemned by the righteousness of Job. The faithful patriarch was serving God under conditions far more difficult than those experienced by dwellers in the sinless realms. Daily harassed by temptations and handicapped by weak, fallen, sinful, mortal flesh, Job continually witnessed to the certainty that God's law was made for the blessing and protection of all His creatures.

Thus it was in love for Satan that God addressed him with the words:

The Life of Job 291

"Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, 'From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.' Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." Job 1:7–8.

Job's faithful obedience provided God with a powerful argument to use in His loving appeal to Satan to surrender his pride and self-will. Therefore, when God directed Satan to consider Job's obedience, He was asking him what further proof he needed to end the controversy.

The Real Accusation

Making no attempt to deny the fact that Job was obedient, Satan falsely attributed evil motives to him.

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 'Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." *Job* 1:9–11.

Here, Satan spelled out his position precisely—that the divine law can be kept only under limited circumstances. Satan argued that, favored by prosperity and protection, Job could keep God's commandments, but if those conditions were changed to adversity and suffering, Job would reveal his wickedness. This is the message so often promoted through works of fiction where the good obey the law only until they believe it must be broken in order to destroy the evildoers.

As the controversy over Job waxed hotter, Satan clarified his stand still further through his spokesmen, Eliphaz the Temanite and his friends.

"A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice" Job 4:12–16.

With these words Eliphaz claimed to have received his information by direct inspiration, but it was satanic inspiration, not divine. God denied being the source of his inspiration when, at the end of the drama, He charged Eliphaz with speaking that which was not true regarding Himself (see *Job* 42:7). If God was not the source, then the only alternative was Satan. Thus we can be sure that Eliphaz acted as Satan's agent when he said:

"Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? If He puts no trust in His servants, if He charges His angels with error, how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before a moth?" *Job* 4:17–19 (NKJV).

The key issue in the charges of Satan and his agents is that God puts no trust in His servants. The great deceiver contends that God can expect obedience from His subjects only if He confines them to a controlled context. Beyond that, He cannot trust them to remain faithful to Him. Satan thereby sought to justify his own separation from God's government.

Could God Trust Job?

When God was confronted with Satan's lying accusations at the meeting where Job's obedience became an issue, He needed make no concession to Satan. All the Creator's counsels and judgments are made in absolute righteousness and are therefore immutable. If this were not so, then the everlasting Father would never have allowed Satan the freedom to threaten Job's position.

But God understood the foundation of Job's faith and obedience. He trusted Job to provide the witness needed, even though it entailed paying a fearful price in loss of loved ones, health, and personal possessions. Accordingly, Jehovah confidently submitted Job to the devil's power.

Satan then set about proving his bold claim that Job would continue his obedience only while enjoying special protection and prosperity, but once this was swept away, he predicted that the patriarch would curse God to His face. Satan moved quickly to change Job's position into one of tragic loss and suffering.

The Life of Job 293

None of this was the result of Job's own sins, nor was it the work of God, even though His cause was greatly blessed by Job's sterling witness.

It was Satan who rapidly stripped Job of his flocks (*Job* 1:13–17), his children (*Job* 1:18–19), and his health (*Job* 2:7–8). To pressure him further, Satan induced Job's own wife to question his course and tempt him to turn from his allegiance to God. (*Job* 2:9). "He replied, 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said." *Job* 2:10.

Job stood as a rock in the midst of a raging storm. His words of perfect trust have been an inspiration for many who have suffered as a result of the demands of the great controversy.

"... Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." *Job* 1:20–21.

Job passed the test brilliantly, which qualified him to receive a fresh revelation of God's perfection and power beyond any that he had previously witnessed. In chapters 38 to 41 in the book of *Job* we read how God opened up the book of nature and blessed the patriarch with wonderful views of His might and His love. In response, Job saw his own nothingness in comparison to the majesty of God, and was thus enabled to take yet a further step in his spiritual development.

Did the End Justify the Means?

Job's fortitude and faithfulness in the face of suffering provided the human witness which confirmed God's position and vindicated His character. It was the means whereby the required end was achieved.

This could give the appearance that the end justified the means, but can this be? No instance can ever be found where God operates by such a principle. He uses only those procedures which are right in themselves. He allows us to be afflicted by the school of life for our own edification. Our sufferings are

sometimes the outworking of our own mistakes, and sometimes not. But even in our most difficult moments, God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, as long as we trust in Him (see *1 Corinthians* 10:13). So although we might not be able to understand some of God's ways, we can by faith trust that they are righteous for the simple reason that God Himself is the epitome of righteousness and can operate in no other way. We can therefore accept that God's permitting Satan to afflict Job was entirely righteous and faultless. As God's children, we believe this by faith, no matter what arguments may be presented to the contrary, nor how convincingly every appearance may declare otherwise. The only alternative is to reject God as a liar and cast ourselves on Satan's side.

There is never any unrighteousness with God, nor resorting to unjust means simply because the end appears to justify them. What God and Job did in partnership was but the outworking of a righteous principle—the law of self-sacrificing, self-denying, and self-abnegating love. This is the law of life for both heaven and earth. When God permitted Satan to touch Job, He was simply accepting the faithful patriarch's consecration to serve his Maker at any cost, in order to help finish the great controversy. God was much too loving to refuse Job this service and the resultant blessing.

Job's "Comforters"

Satan was determined to destroy Job's Sabbath rest. He attempted to achieve this by convincing Job that his troubles were the direct result of his own sinfulness—rather than because Satan was afflicting him. Acting through his agents, who were recognized authorities in religious matters, Satan worked to impress upon the patriarch the conviction that a wrathful God was afflicting him because of some great personal wickedness. Their arguments were based on the oversimplified logic that, as sin causes sickness and sickness brings death, then wherever there is suffering there must be sin, whether it is visible or not. As Job was severely afflicted, they reasoned that his sin must be exceedingly great.

The Life of Job 295

Here is a sample of their argument as Eliphaz expressed it: "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish." *Job* 4:7–9.

Under Satan's inspiration and direction, Job's so-called friends continued to press these arguments on him, although he emphatically refused to accept them. They even went so far as to say, "Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves." *Job* 11:6 (NRSV). This was the logic of those men who, instead of helping Job, placed a further burden upon his shoulders.

As usual, the enemy presented only one side of the truth to support his cause. While it is true that "those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it." (Job 4:8), it is false that the innocent never perish and the upright are never destroyed (Job 4:7). The real truth is that, while the wicked do perish because of their sinfulness, in many cases the children of God also die, but in their case it is because they are righteous. In fact, the more righteous they are, the greater is the possibility that they may be called to serve God's cause by making the supreme sacrifice.

Although his friends did not understand these principles, Job certainly did. Thus he represented God's side of the controversy while they took Satan's side. Throughout the time they were together, this was the issue contested between them. In the end, God spoke the final word by giving His endorsement to Job's stand and His condemnation of the position taken by his "comforters" (see *Job* 42:7–8).

Had those men been successful in convincing Job that all suffering is the result of one's own sins, they would have robbed him of his Sabbath rest. Fortunately, they were not able to do this, and the patriarch was thus able to maintain his trusting relationship with his great Source.

Job's Understanding

A vital factor in Job's success as God's witness was his awareness that both the wicked and the righteous perish; the wicked as a consequence of their wickedness and the righteous because of their righteousness. Job stated his convictions in this way:

"It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked." Job 9:22, 23.

Job's certain knowledge that sickness, suffering, bereavement, and death are not reserved for the wicked alone, but have a very important purpose in the Christian warfare, enabled him to rest in the assurance of his standing with his heavenly Father. Despite the incessant urging of his so-called friends that his suffering could only indicate that he was an exceedingly wicked person, Job steadily testified to the contrary, for he was a righteous man who had kept God's commandments. Some may interpret his testimony as self-righteous boasting, but this was not the case. It was a sweet and living testimony of what God had done for, in, and through him. It was not self-praise, but vindication of God's work.

"And Job continued his discourse: 'As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live." Job 27:1–6.

The story of Job plainly demonstrates that while it is vitally important to confess sin when it is a part of us, it is equally important to refuse to confess it when it is not there. Satan delights in bringing before us sin we have already confessed and put away, urging us to confess it all over again. To do this is to disbelieve those promises by which God assures us that He has forgiven and cleansed us of our sin, taken it and placed it far away in the sanctuary.

Every Christian needs to know what Job understood; namely, that while sin brings sickness, suffering, and death, it is not the only cause of such problems. We need to accept that Satan is able to inflict these things on even the most righteous person, and there are times when God permits him to do so, granting us the privilege of suffering with our Master.

The Life of Job 297

In Christ's Day

The same error promulgated by Job's "comforters" was taught by the Jews in Christ's day. It comes to light, for instance, when Jesus healed the blind man of whom the disciples, reflecting erroneous Jewish theology, asked: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." John 9:2.

The disciples' question revealed the popular opinion of their time. The existing theology taught that suffering was a sure indication of cherished sin. Through this belief, a heavy load was added to the sufferer, who not only had to bear the pain caused by the suffering itself, but his falsely educated conscience also accused him, and his neighbors cast condemning looks at him.



Suffering, persecution, and even death, are not positive indications that there is sin in the life. Job suffered fearfully, but it was as a righteous man, and anyone who argues otherwise is taking the same position as the men whom Satan used in his attempt to destroy Job's faith and to deprive him of his Sabbath rest.

"It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as the penalty of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. It is true that all suffering results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted. Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God,—as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction or calamity had fallen had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner....

"God had given a lesson designed to prevent this. The history of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan, and is overruled by God for purposes of mercy. But Israel did not understand the lesson. The same error for which God had reproved the friends of Job was repeated by the Jews in their rejection of Christ." *The Desire of Ages*, 471.1, 471.3.

These principles must be thoroughly understood if God's people are to maintain an experience of Sabbath rest in the face of adversity and death, which will confront those involved in the Christian warfare. Without this knowledge, His people will fail Him when He needs them most. But when such principles are incorporated into their lives, their abiding peace will astonish even their enemies, making His faithful followers witnesses of the highest order.

Chapter 23

John the Baptist

A prayerful reading of *John* 3:22–36; *Luke* 7:18–23 together with *The Desire of Ages*, 214–225 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Satan's Temptations

The truths that Job had learned under duress were also taught to John the Baptist while he was in Herod's prison. John had faithfully performed his divinely appointed mission only to be rewarded, so it seemed, by being left to languish in a Roman dungeon. Satan saw the opportunity to bombard him with doubts about Christ's mission and therefore, his own work, which had prepared the way for Christ.

Even before he was cast into prison John had been tempted to feel competitive and jealous by reports from his disciples about Jesus' growing popularity.

"They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." *John* 3:26.

Thoughts and fears such as these harassed John while he was doomed to inactivity in his lonely dungeon. His disciples, who had access to him, behaved like Job's comforters when they brought him news about the activities of Jesus, which they cast in a doubtful or unfavorable light. Their attitude revealed a deficiency that is a common tendency in human nature: they failed to see how their master could serve God through suffering or death. This was particularly understandable in their case because of the false concepts they cherished in regard to Christ's kingdom. Consistent with their ideas about the anticipated Messianic reign, was their expectation that Christ would deliver John from prison, since they could see He had the power to do so.

If they had been receptive to divine light on this subject, John's disciples would have encouraged him by assuring him that the only reason God had permitted Satan to place him in a Roman dungeon, was to work out a very wonderful purpose in advancing the cause they loved so much. Instead of being restless with doubt, fears, uncertainty, and troublesome questions about the character and mission of Christ, they would have rested peacefully in God's will, revealing the Sabbath rest principles in operation.

John had to struggle against the temptation of yielding to the negative thoughts that arose in his imagination.

"The life of John had been one of active labor, and the gloom and inaction of his prison life weighed heavily upon him. As week after week passed, bringing no change, despondency and doubt crept over him. His disciples did not forsake him. They were allowed access to the prison, and they brought him tidings of the works of Jesus, and told how the people were flocking to Him. But they questioned why, if this new teacher was the Messiah, He did nothing to effect John's release. How could He permit His faithful herald to be deprived of liberty and perhaps of life?

"These questions were not without effect. Doubts which otherwise would never have arisen were suggested to John. Satan rejoiced to hear the words of these disciples, and to see how they bruised the soul of the Lord's messenger. Oh, how often those who think themselves the friends of a good man, and who are ea-

ger to show their fidelity to him, prove to be his most dangerous enemies! How often, instead of strengthening his faith, their words depress and dishearten!" *Desire of Ages*, 214.2, 215.1.

The Problem Solved

Like Job in his distress, John did not turn to his friends to solve his problem or find consolation. He was wise enough not to compound his difficulties by discussing them with his disciples and expecting them to act as his problem solvers. Therefore, as did Job before him, John eventually gained the victory over temptation. He entrusted two of his disciples with a mission to Jesus, who alone could solve his problems to full satisfaction. They came and delivered his question to Christ: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" *Matthew* 11:3.

Christ did not answer them by declaration, but by demonstration. As they waited for His answer, they observed His work throughout the day. They watched Him ministering to the sick and preaching the gospel as the day wore on. It was such demanding, hard, strenuous work that He had to deny Himself of comfort in order to serve those in need. Everything that they saw, they brought back as a report to the lonely prisoner (see *Luke* 7:18–23).

Consecration Renewed

Just as Paul did later, John had dedicated his life to God's service. The same spirit which actuated the messenger to the gentiles was resident in this messenger to the Jews.

"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." *Philippians* 1:20.

Such dedication had brought John deep peace and rest of spirit. But as he had allowed the suggested doubts to creep into his mind, he had lost this blessed Sabbath rest to some extent. So as he meditated on the delivered report, John saw that his own life

of self-sacrificing service was but a reflection of the spirit and work of Christ. He realized that the Master was building a kingdom upon the same foundation of self-abnegation which was embodied in his own life. The spiritual nature, which the Holy Spirit had formed within John, was responding to Christ's nature, delivering him from false concepts of the Saviour's mission. By beholding, he was changed more into the divine likeness.

His now fresh and more accurate understanding of the character and work of Christ led him to consecrate his life anew to the cause he loved. As he thus stepped onto higher ground, his life was united more closely with Christ's.

"Understanding more clearly now the nature of Christ's mission, he yielded himself to God for life or for death, as should best serve the interests of the cause he loved." *The Desire of Ages*, 218.2.

A True Commitment

Such a consecration as John's is a true Christian's commitment to living service. The trusting child of God does not choose his or her future. We are not to set our hearts on never being sick, or always being delivered from suffering and death. We should expect problems, trials and difficulties in our daily Christian walk. We recognize that we are God's witnesses, called to manifest righteousness under whatever conditions the Lord may choose for us. We may serve God until we are very old as did Moses and Abraham, or we might die by violent means at a relatively early age as did John the Baptist. We could even be called upon to spend time in slavery and prison as did Joseph, or we might serve in royal halls as did Daniel and his companions. We may be unknown, or famous as were the apostles and the great Bible heroes of the Old and New Testaments. If we are one of the 144,000, we will, like Enoch and Elijah, be translated to heaven without seeing death.

In the marriage ceremony, contracting couples promise to love, honour, and cherish each other in sickness and in health, in prosperity or adversity, and through life until death. Similarly, as true Christians, we offer ourselves in service to God on the JOHN THE BAPTIST 303



same terms. It is God who decides which kind of service will best help resolve the great controversy.

Under no circumstances is it given to us to choose where or how we will serve God, now or in the future. These decisions only the Master Architect can make, for He alone knows what will prosper the work and what will hinder it. Undoubtedly, if we were to choose according to the desires of our human nature, we would prefer to serve God with a long and prosperous life, but should

this be the lot of everyone, the witness essential to the successful termination of sin's reign would never be given. Some must suffer and die for the cause, their work being just as important as that performed by those called to give a long life of service. The short period spent by John in active labour was no less vital than the long term given by Moses.

Only that life which is fully submitted to God's choice of health or sickness, prosperity or adversity, life or death, conforms to the principle of Sabbath rest. Such a submissive spirit can be maintained only when we understand and accept that we are God's witnesses upon whom Satan may be permitted to bring afflictions, sickness, trials, poverty, bereavement, and death. It is incumbent upon all of God's professed followers to comprehend this principle and live by it. If we do not, we will most certainly follow the alternative of seeking to plan God's work for Him. As a result, we will allow the spirit of self-trust to control us, instead of trusting in God's role as our Plan Maker. If we follow this course we will lose the Sabbath rest experience and God's blessed peace from our heart, life, and practice.

An Encouragement

It would have been very easy for God to have saved John the Baptist from Herod's prison. His ability to do so was demonstrated

a few years later when Peter was released from his cell in the middle of the night (see *Acts* 12:3–17). Christ's forerunner could have been delivered in a similar manner, but he was left to perish because God specifically chose to permit that fate to overtake him.

God's reasons for leaving his servant to perish did not include any unfaithfulness on John's part, for there is no record of sin against the prophet. God permitted Satan to smite John with suffering and death for the same reasons and on the same terms that He allowed Satan to strip Job of children, possessions, and health. To both men was granted the marvelous privilege of bearing witness to God's truthful position that the law could be kept, no matter in what physical conditions they were placed.

"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....

"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!

"Satan was permitted to cut short the earthly life of God's messenger; but that life which 'is hid with Christ in God,' the deJOHN THE BAPTIST 305

stroyer could not reach. Col. 3:3. He exulted that he had brought sorrow upon Christ, but he had failed of conquering John. Death itself only placed him forever beyond the power of temptation. In this warfare, Satan was revealing his own character. Before the witnessing universe he made manifest his enmity toward God and man.

"Though no miraculous deliverance was granted John, he was not forsaken. He had always the companionship of heavenly angels, who opened to him the prophecies concerning Christ, and the precious promises of Scripture. These were his stay, as they were to be the stay of God's people through the coming ages. To John the Baptist, as to those that came after him, was given the assurance, 'Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end.' Matt. 28:20, R. V., margin.

"God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. 'Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.' Phil. 1:29. And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor." *The Desire of Ages*, 223.4, 224.2–224.5.

The testimony of John's faithfulness to the end, served God's cause far better than if he had been delivered from his dark dungeon. The time was to come when thousands of believers would die for the truth during the Dark Ages. As they endured torture and faced execution, they were buoyed by the remembrance that John had died under similar circumstances, meriting and receiving Christ's personal testimony to his dedicated and unblemished service (see *Luke* 7:24–30). Knowing this, those who perished under papal domination were able to meet Satan's lying accusations aware that they died, not because they were transgressors of God's law, but because they were faithful to it. Such an understanding will provide us too with the Sabbath rest we need when faced with persecution in the future.

A Vital Distinction

To avoid misunderstandings or extremes, a distinction must be made between afflictions which come upon the individual as a result of his or her iniquity, and those which the Lord permits Satan to impose upon the righteous. If we imagine we are suffering in order to give a needed demonstration in the great controversy, when the real cause of our trouble is a deviation from God's ways, then we will not only be deceiving ourselves but we will also give a false impression to others.

"If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." *1 Peter* 4:15–16.

Therefore Christians must be able to distinguish between evils which fall upon them because of their sins, and those which come because of their righteousness. If the trouble is self-imposed through sin, then it is critical to be cleansed of the cause through acceptable confession and forsaking of that sin. If we follow those steps, we will thus enable the Lord to solve our difficulty.

If we are in doubt as to whether our afflictions are self-caused or a test of our righteousness, then we need only give the question to our mighty Problem Solver who will clearly show us the source of our trouble. We will then know exactly how to relate to it to provide a valuable witness to others.

Chapter 24

The Resurrection of Lazarus

A prayerful reading of *John* 11 together with *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 58, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The story of Christ's actions and those of His disciples and their counteractions throughout the sickness, death, and resurrection of Lazarus helps to shatter our trust in the short-sighted plans of humans. Instead it builds our faith in the perfect plans of God. The course pursued by Christ as He obeyed His Father's will, mystified and troubled the disciples because of their ignorance of God's operating procedures. They reacted by forming plans for Christ and themselves which they could understand. But when Christ did not follow these plans as they expected, they became even more troubled and confused, which resulted in a loss of their Sabbath rest.

What makes the story of Lazarus more significant and therefore more impressive, is the crucial timing of the issues. It was not a situation where, because of people's refusal to adopt God's directives, their failure was redeemable some time later, as was the case when Israel turned back at Kadesh Barnea. In that case God was able to organize another opportunity, at which time they achieved what might have been accomplished at the earlier date. But not so on this occasion.

The Issues Involved

In the death and resurrection of Lazarus, the issues were critical. Christ's claim to be God's Son was to be either established forever or eternally disproved. Why was it so vital that this confirmation of Christ's claim be given?

In direct contrast to the fearful destroyers—Satan and sin—God is the Life Giver, Life Saver, and Life Sustainer (*Psalm* 36:9). But Satan has charged God with being the opposite, declaring that He is the one responsible for all the death and suffering in the world. An example of this spirit in operation is seen in Elijah's case where the king, who was responsible for the drought, charged the guiltless prophet to be the cause of it (see *1 Kings* 18:17).

So powerful and subtle are Satan's arguments, that the issue cannot be solved by declaration alone. It requires demonstration as well. Therefore, when Christ was here on earth, He had to give a visible demonstration of God's character and power as the Life Giver, by giving life back to the dead. Countless times He had accomplished this by delivering people dead in trespasses and sins to newness of spiritual life. Perfect and complete as this spiritual manifestation of God's character was, it did not suffice. Those whose minds were entrapped by sin could not discern this wonder-working power, for they could see and understand only physical things. That is because spiritual things are spiritually discerned (*1 Corinthians* 2:14). Therefore Christ had to raise dead physical bodies in order to give a conclusive witness both of His Sonship to God and of the character of His ever-loving Father.

Two Previous Resurrections

Prior to the death of Lazarus, Jesus had already raised two dead people—the widow of Nain's son (see *Luke* 7:11–17) and Jairus' daughter (*Mark* 5:21–24, 35–43). But neither of these met the need of an indisputable witness, because each occurred under circumstances which the Pharisees and Sadducees could explain away.

The widow's son had been dead only a few short hours when his funeral cortege was met by Christ just outside the village. In those days, when the poor could not afford embalming fluids, they dared not delay a burial very long because of the rapid onset of decay. The Pharisees would have argued that Nain was an obscure little village where there were no competent witnesses to confirm that the youth was really dead. They would have maintained that the young man had simply fallen into a deep coma which was accepted by the villagers in their apparent ignorance as being actual death. Then they would have alleged that Christ just happened to arrive on the scene at the opportune moment when the youth was just regaining consciousness. They would have maliciously charged that Jesus had recognized and seized the opportunity to make it appear that He had the power to raise the dead. In this way, the wonderful evidence of Christ's supremacy over death and the grave was made of none effect.

The same arguments, no doubt, were circulated in respect to the young girl's resurrection. She had been dead only a few minutes, the whole affair took place in a small private bedroom with no expert witnesses present, and so again there was no incontrovertible proof that a true restoration to life had been effected.

The Specifications Required

Therefore, as Christ's time on this earth drew towards its close, the vital demonstration, which the Saviour must furnish before His ministry could be completed, still remained to be given.

Obviously, another resurrection was required under very different circumstances from the previous two. Whereas both of them had been hidden from general sight, a resurrection was now needed under full public scrutiny. A well-known person had to be raised, but not one of the patriarchs such as Abraham or David for instance, because no one living in the time of Christ could positively identify them. Finally, the evidence of death had to be so absolute that no one could deny it.

The question to be determined was upon whom would Christ bestow His gift of life? Who fulfilled the specifications? In some respects, John the Baptist would have qualified. He was a well-known figure who was undoubtedly dead, for no human being can survive a beheading. But John had died in an area removed from the center of Jewish power and resistance to Christ. According to Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, the desert prophet was imprisoned and executed in the fortress of Macherus, which was located on the east side of the Dead Sea.*

John's disciples took delivery of the mutilated body and gave it burial, but there is no positive evidence of the location. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, it was taught from A.D. 360 on, that John the Baptist was buried at Aenon by Salim, but there is no confirmation of this. But whether it was near the fortress where he was imprisoned or in some nearby site, in both cases it was too far removed from a public place where the miracle needed to be performed under full open scrutiny. Furthermore, John had already finished his work on this earth and the Eternal Father had other plans for him.

Lazarus however, met all the required specifications. He had lived, died, and was buried in Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem where many people could witness the act; he was a well-known figure because of his identification with Christ; he was totally dedicated to God's cause; and, because time was given for his body to decompose, it could not be denied that a real resurrection had been achieved.

Did God Plan the Death of Lazarus?

It might seem therefore, that God planned the death of Lazarus in order to consummate a purpose which could be achieved in no other way. But if that were so, then God is a destroyer who

vent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death." Antiquities of the Jews, Book XVIII, chapter v, paragraph 2.

^{* &}quot;Now, when [many] others came to crowd about him [John the Baptist], for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to pre-

takes the lives of His best children for no better reason than expediency. This is not a new charge against God, for it has been leveled against Him ever since the great controversy began.

One theory teaches that before sin appeared, God lacked an opportunity to display fully all the wonders of His wisdom, love, and power. In order to supply this deficiency, it is suggested that He deliberately introduced sin so He would be called upon to demonstrate these powers and qualities which would otherwise remain forever hidden. This theory implies that God's real purpose was to attract personal adoration, and to so impress His creatures with infinite superiority that His authority would be unquestioned. Therefore this teaching charges Him with being selfishly preoccupied with His own exaltation and security, no matter what might be the cost to others.

It is true that the emergence of sin has brought revelations of God's beautiful character which otherwise would never have been possible. God's handling of the sin problem has opened doors to research and learning that will keep the redeemed and the unfallen beings occupied for eternity, for they will never come to the end of knowing God.

But to conclude that God deliberately engineered this situation in order to advantage Himself at fearful cost to others, is to attribute to Him the basest of motives. It is the way of Satan and his fallen angels, as well as sinful humans, to satisfy their selfish ambitions by using such a strategy. At the cross, Satan exhibited this spirit in its most advanced and evil form, by declaring that he would have his way, even if it cost the life of the loving Saviour who had given him everything he had.

That is the manifestation of Satan's character, but not God's. In Christ, the everlasting Father has shown to what lengths of personal self-sacrifice He will go in order to bring life and happiness to others. How totally opposite these two principles are!

It is written in the Bible that God is love to an infinite degree (see 1 John 4:8–16; 1 Corinthians 13:8), which means that in Him there is not the slightest trace of selfishness. We cannot then, draw the conclusion that God deliberately engineered the appearance of sin, or the death of Lazarus, while we simultaneously believe that the Scriptures are the infallible revelation of truth. Instead, we see evidence after evidence witnessing to the fact that

God has never done anything to promote His own interests at the expense of anyone else. The contrary is true. He ever promotes the interest of others, no matter what the cost to Himself. On the basis of this principle, we can forever rest assured that God planned neither the entrance of sin, nor the death of Lazarus.

But although the Creator never planned sin or death, He did provide for them. That is because in His infinite foreknowledge, He saw these things coming long before they eventuated. He worked out perfect solutions to these problems, so that Satan's plots for the destruction of His kingdom and His people served to strengthen rather than weaken God's work.

In the death of Lazarus, Satan was permitted by God to reveal his character as the life taker, while the Creator was revealed as the Life Giver. This is the story of the great controversy—Satan working his evil while God counteracts it.

Why did Satan Choose Lazarus?

Why did Satan single out Lazarus as his victim? To answer this question, we need to consider the spiritual experience enjoyed by Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. They lived together in the tiny village of Bethany. No mention is made of their parents, so it is possible that they had both died. Seemingly too, none of the trio had married, but lived together instead as a devoted and happy family unit. They accepted Jesus as the Messiah and entered into the spirit of His life and teachings. Jesus valued His visits to this home, for He found there a love and fellowship unavailable to Him anywhere else (see *Luke* 10:38–42).

The peace and understanding Christ found in this household testified to the extent its members had grasped His principles. All three siblings had obviously entered into God's Sabbath rest and He did not want to rob them of the blessing the trying ordeal before them would give them. It served only to add luster and grace to the beautiful, trusting relationship between them and the eternal Plan Maker. When the seeming tragedy struck, they did not doubt the Father's wisdom and love, nor enter into a complaining spirit against Him, as did John's disciples at the imprisonment of the prophet.

Positive evidence of their devotion to God's ways is given in the prayer that Mary and Martha addressed to Jesus as soon as they saw the severity of the disease which afflicted their brother. They simply sent the message, "Lord, the one you love is sick." *John* 11:3.

This was a true Christian prayer which simply gave the problem to the Lord and left Him to apply whatever solution He might choose. There was no calling upon God to follow a human plan or solution. The two sisters had entered into Sabbath rest sufficiently to understand the difference between God's part and theirs, and they were determined not to usurp His position. It is no wonder that the Saviour found such sweet fellowship in that home and loved to visit there as often as He could.

With what profound joy and satisfaction must Christ have received the words of that simple, Christian prayer. It told Him that there would be no difficulty in achieving God's purpose, for the submissive spirit of the sisters assured this. God can only accomplish His designs when His chosen servants carry out His plans exactly as He has formed them. As Christ witnessed this trusting spirit, He was therefore able to respond by declaring that it would be to the glory of God.

"When Jesus heard *that*, He said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." *John* 11:4 (NKJV).

A Special Family

It would have been natural for the sisters to interpret the words "this sickness is not unto death" to mean that Lazarus would not die. Christ's statement added the promise of His word to the promises of His love and power they already had. This filled them with the confidence that He would promptly do whatever was needed. Although making no plans for the Saviour, they would naturally have expected Him to come immediately with His healing might.

Yet, despite the strong assurances that these promises gave them, Lazarus died. This sad event tested and proved their devotion to the Sabbath rest principles they had learned from Jesus. During this dark hour, they maintained the same sweet, confiding trust in Christ that had been developed in happier times. If doubts, uncertainties, and murmurings had possessed them, it would have indicated that they were not soundly committed to God's holy ways or filled with His Sabbath rest, and therefore no different from most of Israel.

But their faith stood the test. When Lazarus at last died, they were understandably bitterly disappointed. But the sustaining grace of Christ kept them from reflecting any blame on the Saviour. Not the least indication of accusation is recorded in the scriptures (see *John* 11:1–45).

Lazarus and his sisters were rare individuals in that, unlike the multitudes and even the disciples, they did not make plans for their Master and then apply pressure on Him to do things their way. They followed Christ in the way He wished others would. Nothing was so trying or discouraging to Him as the spirit of self-sufficiency, which led most people in Christ's day to seek their own instead of God's way. To find this family with a different spirit was like coming to an oasis in the desert. Whereas the masses exhausted Him, He was refreshed and encouraged by Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He found a oneness of spirit and purpose there with which He could identify. Their hearts responded to His with warmth of fellowship and communion that He, apparently, found nowhere else in Israel.

While it is true that the Saviour drew strength from above through close communion with God and nature, He needed human fellowship as well. When this was denied, it did not cause Him to stumble, but it did add a very trying burden. This is, perhaps, nowhere better illustrated than in Gethsemane, when He called upon His disciples to pray with Him (see *Matthew* 26:36–46). But each time He returned to receive the assurance that they were fellowshipping with Him in His agony, He found them locked in slumber.

We may wonder why Christ should feel such a need. We might imagine that He received from His Father all the support He ever needed. But let us remember that the divine nature was only one part in Christ's life, while He shares His human nature with us. It is hard to conceive of the isolation and deprivation He must have suffered while dwelling among people who

rarely revealed His character and spirit. But what an inspiration and comfort those who were in harmony with Him must have been to Him.

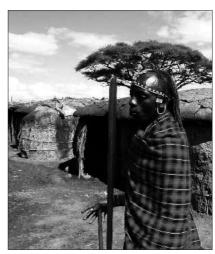
An Illustration

The following illustration will serve to explain Christ's need. Suppose that a person has been sent as a missionary to some remote area where the inhabitants are bound by tradition and prejudice to a false religion. He leaves behind the loving fellowship of his family and fellow believers to endure the loneliness and self-denial to be experienced in a primitive and hostile land. For several years he labors diligently, and finally succeeds in winning one convert. The new believer is transformed by the message until he and the missionary share a common fellowship and hope.

What comfort and blessing this one convert would be to the missionary so far from home and friends. From time to time, it would be his joy to turn from struggling with unbelievers to rest and commune with his fellow believer. From these seasons, he would return refreshed and encouraged to the field once more. Of course, Satan, who never rests in his determination to hinder and destroy God's work, would seek to eliminate this source of

strength and support by either killing the believer or causing him to apostatize.

Christ similarly found at the home in Bethany a fellowship which refreshed and encouraged Him. There He rejoiced to see true fruit for His labors and was encouraged in the conviction that His work would not be in vain. He yearned with unspeakable desire to see the same results in the lives of all people, but instead he suf-



fered torture of spirit when the majority, in their blindness and slowness to learn, or in their stubborn rejection of His grace and love, refused to enter into fellowship with Him.

Satan's Strategy

Although Christ knew better than to expect understanding and fellowship from the unbelieving world, He had a right to look for it in the Jews and their leaders, and above all, in His disciples. But the chosen people had become so committed to themselves as plan makers, that they had nothing in common with the Saviour. Nor did the disciples understand and appreciate the principles He had come to establish, even though they had forsaken everything to follow Him. They imagined He would build a kingdom similar to the nations around them, so they went about planning a kingdom like that, expecting Him to add His power to their planning. When He would not, they were aggrieved and sought to remedy this supposed problem by exerting on Him all the pressure they could.

How different from this was the spirit Jesus found at the home in Bethany. He never left that home without being refreshed, strengthened, and encouraged. The trio was making a contribution to God's cause which they little appreciated, for they saw Christ as a blessing to them rather than vice versa.

Satan noticed the blessing this family was to Jesus, and he determined to eliminate this factor which was working to his disadvantage. Having failed to induce Christ to turn from God's directives to His own devisings, Satan determined to isolate Him by holding as many as he could in the bondage of their own works, by destroying the faith of those who escaped him, and by killing those who would not yield. Thus Lazarus and his sisters became marked people. They were to suffer, not because of any sin in themselves, but because of their righteousness.

Satan's success in putting John the Baptist to death gave him confidence to believe that he could likewise remove Lazarus. He never dreamed that Christ would raise him again and thereby deal a fearful blow to his cause. Therefore Satan inflicted the fatal illness upon Lazarus, and God permitted it.

Christ's Unexpected Reaction

Under the Father's personal direction, Christ deliberately remained away from the sickroom, thereby certifying that Lazarus would die. "Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days." *John* 11:6.

The disciples well knew Christ's strong affection for the family at Bethany. When the message was delivered "Lord, the one you love is sick." (*John* 11:3), they expected their Master to rush immediately to the side of His sick friend. His long delay was a mystery to them. They imagined that His presence would have been a real comfort to the afflicted family and could not account for His delay.

Indeed it would have been very simple for Christ to have made the journey to Bethany in time to save Lazarus from death, which could tempt us to think that this was the only right course to pursue.

Why do we think this way?

The idea is fixed in our minds that the first consideration is to save a human life from physical death if at all possible. In fact, to fail to put forth the utmost effort to prevent death, is regarded as a criminal act attracting a court case and heavy penalties.

Because we tend to form our expectations of God's behavior in the light of how we would respond in the same circumstances, we require God to make deliverance from sickness and death His highest priority too. When He, who is the possessor of almighty power, does not use that awesome might in the way we think He should, we are tempted to question the righteousness of His character and entertain doubts about His love for us. Because of such false beliefs, even devout followers of Christ deprive themselves of the deep privilege of being partakers with Christ in His suffering.

A Higher Level of Faith

When the whole drama was over, and Lazarus and his sisters saw what had been accomplished by his sickness, death, and resurrection, they rejoiced. They had been privileged to share with Christ in His mighty work of ridding the earth of sin, by revealing the perfection and power in God's character of love and justice. They were grateful to have been the instruments through which such a significant and critical victory had been gained.

It is, of course, regrettable that they had to wait until the resurrection before they could rejoice. The same joy they had by sight when Lazarus arose from the dead, could have been theirs by faith when he was sick and dying. It was highly commendable that the sisters did not cast any reflection on Christ or His Father for not coming, as they expected He would, to the bedside of their beloved brother when he lay dying, but there was yet a higher level of faith for them to attain.

That faith, based on a clear understanding of the principle that God's children are called to be His witnesses in sickness or in health, in life or in death, would have brought gladness to their hearts even in the midst of their trials. They could have encouraged each other with the inspiring thought that, while God had not informed them of the glorious purpose being achieved through their pain and sacrifice, they were chosen instruments without whom the Lord could not carry forward His work. If they had done so, they would have looked forward in happy anticipation to the outworking of God's purposes.

Lack of Faith

It may be safely said then, that our attitude during days of suffering, loss, and bereavement is an indication to ourselves, if we are wise enough to see it, of the level of faith we have attained (see *2 Corinthians* 13:5). We seldom consider this, for in trouble and difficulty, we tend to imagine that God is working against us when, in fact, the opposite is true.

"God works out His plans, though to human eyes they are veiled in mystery. Men cannot understand the ways of God; and, looking at appearances, they interpret the trials and tests and provings that God permits to come upon them as things that are against them, and that will only work their ruin." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 672.2.

Those who adopt such an attitude reveal but a low level of faith. For them, life's trials and burdens are a mystery, bringing them perplexity, confusion, and doubt about God's character and methods. Because they cannot see God working for their blessing and salvation, they turn to their own plan making, expecting God to add His mighty power to their schemes. These people do not know Sabbath rest, nor are they instruments through whom God can do His mighty work. They spend their lives in self-appointed work for Him, instead of allowing God to work through them. If we look at ourselves honestly and find ourselves in this category, we must recognize our need to rise to higher levels of understanding and faith. We need to "... make every effort to enter that rest" Hebrews 4:11. We should allow ourselves no respite until our grasp of God's ways and our trust in His workings enable us to rest during the severest trials and perplexities.

God's Leading

When our faith grows to higher levels, we are able to see a necessary education in the trials which an all-wise God lovingly permits. This thought is well expressed in these paragraphs:

"Many who sincerely consecrate their lives to God's service are surprised and disappointed to find themselves, as never before, confronted by obstacles and beset by trials and perplexities. They pray for Christlikeness of character, for a fitness for the Lord's work, and they are placed in circumstances that seem to call forth all the evil of their nature. Faults are revealed of which they did not even suspect the existence. Like Israel of old they question, 'If God is leading us, why do all these things come upon us?'

"It is because God is leading them that these things come upon them. Trials and obstacles are the Lord's chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.

"The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines. The blacksmith puts the iron and steel into the fire that he may know what manner of metal they are. The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work." *Ministry of Healing*, 470.2–471.2.

Let us pray for a meek and willing spirit, that we will see the great privilege of being chosen to suffer affliction in the cause of our mighty Plan Maker.

Chapter 25

Opposing Principles of Operation

A prayerful reading of *John* 11 together with *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 58, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The Disciples Troubled

While the family in Bethany had a deep experience of Sabbath rest, the disciples still had much to learn. The greatest obstacle in their acquiring such an experience of true rest was their continuing misconception of the nature of Christ's mission.

Contrary to His disciples, the Saviour operated at the highest levels of faith and submission to divine planning. When the news reached Him that Lazarus was sick, He knew immediately that His Father had instituted a plan of great importance, so the event was no mystery to Him, nor was it any cause for sadness and gloom. Consequently, He displayed neither concern nor sorrow when the messenger from Bethany arrived.

But the disciples seemed to be ignorant of the principle that God's children are called to be His witnesses under a wide variety of circumstances. There was no place in their thinking for the fact that Lazarus was serving God in sickness and in death. They could see no good purpose being achieved, so they inevitably began to form plans for Christ, instead of resting in perfect faith in God's wisdom. They decidedly and unanimously felt that Christ must go at once to Bethany to raise Lazarus from his sick bed.

If the disciples could have enforced their will as the plan makers, as they were certainly disposed to do, Christ would have been sent immediately to restore Lazarus. But unable to influence their Master who, in apparent cheerful indifference, made no moves to do what they planned for Him, they became perplexed, confused, and filled with doubt. They certainly did not enjoy sweet rest and abiding peace, nor were they looking forward with happy anticipation to the victory to be gained, even though the Saviour assured them that an important purpose was to be achieved. He said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." John 11:4.

There is no record to show us that Christ mentioned Lazarus or his sisters in the following two days. His silence upon this subject would have been painful to His disciples. It seemed as if He had dismissed the news from His mind. Remembering the fate of John the Baptist, which they could not explain, they enveloped themselves in darkness of mind. Had not their Teacher warned them of trials, losses, and persecution? (See *Matthew* 10:16–39.) Would He forsake them too in their trial? Some began to question if they had mistaken His mission. All were deeply troubled.

When Lazarus eventually died, Christ's faith even led Him to say that He was glad that He had not been present in the sick-room.

"So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." *John* 11:14, 15.

This was beyond the disciples' ability to understand. How could Christ say that He was glad He had been absent during the time when He could have restored Lazarus to health again? They had expected Him to react with an exhibition of sorrow and worry, and drop every other commitment to hasten to Bethany. When they saw none of this, they interpreted His spirit of rest in God as being cold indifference, and they started to doubt His love for the family, now that its members were in trouble.

Christ, who understood their thoughts, had already provided an explanation for His behavior which, if they had trusted and accepted it, was more than satisfactory. While not intimating exactly what the plan was, He had told them that the whole matter was in God's perfectly capable hands and would turn out well in the end. His words: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God" should have been a consolation to them. Therefore, they had no more reason to be sorrowful or worried than did their Master. His attitude, not theirs, demonstrated true Sabbath rest, and is the example for us to follow today.

Human Plan Making Exposed

After waiting for two days "... he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." *John* 11:7.

The disciples were perplexed. If their judgment had been followed, Christ would have gone to Bethany while the sufferer was still alive. Once Lazarus had died, in their opinion it was too late to go there. Christ's conduct did not fit in with their plans at all.

Furthermore they could see nothing but danger in the course their Master was about to pursue. Repeatedly the Jews had tried to put Him to death (see John 5:16; 7:25, 32, 44; 8:59). Anxiety for Christ and for themselves was now uppermost in the minds of the disciples.

"But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" John 11:8.

Here we have a clear revelation of the short-sightedness of human plan making. When, in order to fulfill God's purposes it was critical that Christ stay away, they said He should go. After two days, when it became essential for Him to go to Bethany, the disciples insisted that He must not go. If the plans formed and advanced by the disciples had been the order of the day, God's work would have been completely frustrated, for they decided on courses which were diametrically opposed to God's will. Had they been dedicated to defeating Christ's mission, they could not have made more effective choices.

The real fact was, of course, that they loved the cause of God and were dedicated to doing all they could to advance it. But

they had still not learned to trust in God alone as their Plan Maker and Problem Solver, instead of themselves. They had yet to realize that it was not their job to determine how Christ's work should be conducted.

How fortunate that not one thread of human devising was introduced into Christ's movements during those crucial days. He had ears for only His Father's directives, which He followed with undeviating faithfulness. Everything necessary for the successful advancement of God's kingdom was thus achieved.

The Dilemma of the Disciples

The disciples were in a peculiar position. Although they had sacrificed all for their Master and openly identified with Him, they remained largely in sympathy with the Pharisees as far as their ideas of kingdom building were concerned. On one hand they could find no fellowship with the Jews, who would have nothing to do with them because of their relationship to Christ, but on the other hand they could not enter into close communion with the Saviour because they did not understand or trust God's procedures. So all too often, instead of co-working in coordination with Jesus, they were at cross-purposes with Him.

Christ had wisely, lovingly, and diligently labored to re-educate their minds to understand the nature of His kingdom and trust His ways, but they had too much confidence in their own ideas and so failed to heed the lessons. Satan was ready to make the most of their lack of faith and ignorance, using the Pharisees and Sadducees to press upon the disciples the same doubts that were harassing John's disciples. Why had Jesus not delivered John from prison if He were the mighty Saviour as they claimed?

If they had understood the light He was bringing them, Christ's disciples could have easily answered the charges laid against their Master by the Jews over John's death. They needed only to state that God's kingdom is built on very different principles from those of the world—that God's government is founded on principles of total selflessness, whereas worldly empires are established through the enforcement of utter selfishness. In God's system, the King requires nothing of His people

which He is not prepared to give Himself. In Christ, God proved this by making the greatest personal sacrifice of all. John the Baptist had understood and lived these principles by yielding himself for life or for death as would best serve the cause he loved. When he died, he was exemplifying these ideals by sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and would as surely become a partaker with Him in His glory. John demonstrated that he was not concerned with this transient earthly kingdom, but with that glorious land where there is no death, suffering, and decay. Had the disciples boldly answered the Jews with such arguments, they would have both strengthened their own faith and silenced their opposers.

But as long as they continued to plan the conduct of Christ according to their own ideas, it was no wonder that they could not answer their enemies and defend the course Christ was pursuing!

No Excuse

The disciples of Jesus had no excuse for their ignorance of Jehovah's ways, as they had past history to guide them. Careful, prayer-filled study should have shown them that every time God's people, in their deep desire to see the work advance, had left the plan making to the Creator Himself, nothing had gone wrong, whereas as soon as they began to usurp this role, success swiftly changed to failure.

The love and zeal of the disciples for God's cause did not compensate for the wrong course adopted. Good intentions and sincerity of purpose do not change wrong procedures into successful ones. This lesson has to be learned thoroughly by all who are members of Christ's body.

The disciples' inability to understand Christ's behavior, did not justify their doubt, their accusations against Him, and the consequent unrest. Nor was it reason to formulate alternative plans and exert pressure on Him to accept them. They were required to trust God in the unknown because of what they had learned of Him in the known, and to leave the work of plan making and problem solving to Him alone, no matter how chaotic the situation might appear. Had they done this, they would have

rested in the perfect confidence that the Master Architect knew exactly what He was doing, that everything was under His attention and care, and that Christ was working in perfect harmony with His Father. Under these conditions, nothing could go wrong. All the disciples had to do was follow Christ's instructions, while awaiting in joyful anticipation the perfect outworking of God's plans. But instead, they placed their confidence and trust in their own plans and abilities to solve problems.

Are We like the Disciples?

This is still the problem for many people today. Our own misconceptions of God's plans lead us to trust self instead of leaving everything in His capable hands. In His Word, we read of the close, sweet fellowship of true Christian life and we may have even experienced this at times. We may earnestly seek to enter into the joy of this on-going peace, regardless of what happens to us, but despite our sincere prayers, the desired result is not achieved. Our peace deserts us when we most need it at times of temptation. This is a trial to our faith, for we can see no reason why the promise should fail us, and like the disciples, we are tempted to murmur against God in our hearts, while tending to trust still more to our own works. If we do so, this leads to further separation from Christ with even less possibility of true fellowship. We need to see that only when we understand, trust and practice the principles of Sabbath rest, can we enter into sweet communion with Christ and receive His constant peace in our hearts.

When we do accept and obey Sabbath rest principles, we find that this effectively unites us with other believers who have the same faith, while separating us from those who do not. This division is inevitable, for the two groups stand on opposite sides of the great controversy, and can never be reconciled, although people within them may change their understanding and allegiance. Our place in that titanic struggle is determined by the procedures we follow in seeking to build either God's or our own kingdom.

Because the disciples failed to learn those principles of Sabbath rest while Christ was with them, He walked very much alone. He could find true communion with none of the twelve who labored directly with Him. What a loss this was for the disciples and what a set-back for God's cause. When they could have been enjoying rich, intelligent communion with Him, they were groping in the miserable darkness of doubt and unrest. Their character development, training for their future work, and preparation for an eventual place in God's kingdom, were all seriously retarded. And Jesus was deprived of the human support and comfort He would have appreciated and which would have advanced His cause.

The Disciples' Plans

To the extent that the disciples had not come out of Babylon, they still expected Christ's work to be organized in a manner similar to the Jewish hierarchy they had left. A variant of the commonly accepted way of church organization today would have been held by the disciples in Christ's day. If it had been followed by their Master too, the disciples would have been the members of the executive committee—the administrative, decision-making body guiding the movement. From a worldly point of view, the disciples could have claimed eligibility for this role, second to none, because their dedication to Christ's cause was so total that they had left all personal interests and family ties to devote their entire lives to His cause. Had they not stood by Him when all others had forsaken Him? Had they not, for His sake, endured opposition, ridicule, misunderstanding, and persecution? Had He not declared they were closer to Him than even His brothers or mother? And were not their interests so bound up in His that they could be trusted to make right decisions?

To the disciples these would have been weighty claims, but God did not view them in the same light, for He knew that neither these nor any of their abilities, would qualify them to administrate His work. Working through human committees was not His method of leadership when He delivered Israel from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and brought them to Kadesh Barnea. It was not His way in the erection of the sanctuary, nor at Jericho, or Ai. Neither was it His system during Christ's ministry on earth or in the organization of the apostolic church.

Had such a method been in operation throughout the sickness and death of Lazarus, what a disaster it would have been for God's work. The disciples were unanimous in their decision that Christ must go when He had to stay, and that He should stay when He had to go. Their judgments were diametrically opposed to those required by the work at a time when correct decisions were vital. They could not see beyond the immediate need to raise Lazarus. They were unable to perceive that had Christ restored Lazarus from illness to health, the miracle that is the most positive evidence of His divine character would not have been performed.

As this story adds its powerful witness to many other scriptural evidences, light is shed on the wonders of God's plan making, which helps undermine our confidence in our own planning.

Early Church Organization

In fact God commits the management of His work to Jesus Christ alone, for the Father "... placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." *Ephesians* 1:22, 23. There is no alternative head for God's true church. Only when God, through Christ, is the Plan Maker, can nothing go wrong.

But when human beings take over this role, then no matter how deep their spiritual experience, how sincere their purpose, how unselfish their aims, how long and broad their administrative training, or how dedicated they are to advancing God's cause, nothing can go right. They will continually make decisions which they regard as masterpieces of wisdom, but which are in reality exactly contrary to the divine purpose.

Some may point to apparent successes resulting from human planning, as proof that it is overstating the case to say that when consecrated people are the decision makers, nothing can go right. While they admit that human beings sometimes make fearful blunders, they will claim that on occasions humans have made good plans that have markedly advanced the work of God. But we should not be deceived, for appearances can be very mis-

leading. Invariably, that which to human judgment is the best for the cause, is the worst in God's assessment, while what we might look upon as disaster, can be the pathway to victory.

Take, for example, John Huss. When he offered up his life to be burned at the stake, his followers thought it was a great loss for the cause. But his death was to the world such a witness of the righteousness of his teaching and such a revelation of the unrighteousness of his enemies, that it helped to spread the reformation far more effectively than a few more years of his life could have done. "The execution of Huss had kindled a flame of indignation and horror in Bohemia. It was felt by the whole nation that he had fallen a prey to the malice of the priests and the treachery of the emperor. He was declared to have been a faithful teacher of the truth, and the council that decreed his death was charged with the guilt of murder. His doctrines now attracted greater attention than ever before." The Great Controversy, 115.3. Furthermore, as a result of this reaction to his martyrdom, the emperor Charles V was afraid to repeat the unfaithful conduct of Sigismund who broke his pledge to Huss. Therefore Luther was spared the same fate and the reformation spread still further.*

In the disciples' case, if they had been the decision makers, Christ would have gone to Bethany and delivered Lazarus from sickness and death. The disciples would have looked upon such a result not only with great satisfaction, but as confirmation that they had selected the one course which would truly advance God's cause. This is how it would have appeared to them, when in fact, it would have been the most disastrous course possible. On the other hand, the procedure Christ adopted seemed to them the worst that could befall the infant church.

The fact is that we are incapable of either planning God's work ourselves, or of accurately assessing what outcome is for the best good of the cause. Only the Lord is able to determine such matters. Therefore, we need to beware of reasoning that because the immediate outcome is deemed by human minds to be a success, this is proof that we can sometimes make wise plans for God's cause.

^{*} see The Great Controversy, 163.2.

The only safe way to evaluate developments is to ask how they came about. If they result from human planning, then no matter how desirable and wonderful they may appear, the plan making and its outcome are wrong. On the other hand, if the problem solving was left entirely to God, and His perfect directives followed implicitly, then everything has gone right, even if it does not appear to be so. It is difficult for God's professed people to accept this, for within us is a natural disposition to be the deciding force in both our own and God's affairs. Furthermore, when we do achieve a result which, in our own estimation, is advantageous to the cause, we are encouraged to repeat the mistake.

Unfortunately, when this is done, we never know what would have happened if God had been accorded His rightful place as the Plan Maker. When we turn to our own problem solving, we deprive ourselves of God's workings. Our self-satisfaction over the fine work we think we have done for God, would change to dismay and remorse if we could only see what we have really done in frustrating and delaying God's work.

Satan is delighted when we determine what course will be pursued and then, to all appearances, obtain what we think is an excellent result. He is even more pleased when we point to these achievements as justification for the course we have adopted. He observes with satisfaction the tendency of the human mind to evaluate an event without due reference to the context in which it has happened. Viewed in isolation, the proposed deliverance of Lazarus from his sick bed would be an apparently good thing, but in the context of God's purpose, it would have been positively evil.

Are we Walking in the Light?

There is a specific formula for success and another for failure. A formula can be defined as a procedure according to law. The two formulae for success and failure were clearly spelled out by Christ during His earthly sojourn. Never was there a more appropriate time for Him to convey these truths to His disciples than after their sad failure in the Lazarus affair.

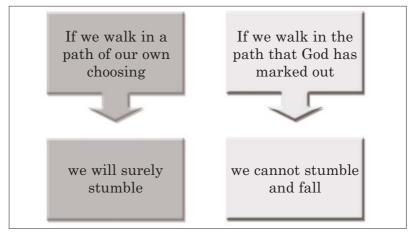
When they protested about His conduct, "Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." *John* 11:9, 10 (NKJV).

The formulae for both guaranteed success and certain failure are given in this instruction. If we sincerely desire success and wish to escape failure, we should heed these teachings from Him who, together with His Father, is the highest authority in the universe.

But what does it mean to walk in the day? Various people would give different answers. A clear explanation is found in the book *The Desire of Ages* 527.1:

"If any man walk in the day,' He continued, 'he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.' He who does the will of God, who walks in the path that God has marked out, cannot stumble and fall. The light of God's guiding Spirit gives him a clear perception of his duty, and leads him aright till the close of his work. 'But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.' He who walks in a path of his own choosing, where God has not called him, will stumble. For him day is turned into night, and wherever he may be, he is not secure."

This explanation defines what God's will is by adding the words, "... who walks in the path that God has marked out", as distinct from walking "... in a path of his own choosing". In other



words, having accepted God's general orders, we are to wait patiently to receive His specific orders in order to avoid a way of our own choosing. This is the key to success outlined here.

On the other hand, if we walk in a path of our own choosing, irrespective of whether we imagine we are working for God's cause or not, we will surely stumble. These formulae are according to law. Every person on earth is following one or other formula in any given situation. Some people have learned from God enough to follow the correct procedures in some instances, although they may still cling to incorrect procedures in others. As a result their lives are a mixture of success and failure.

It behooves all of us to ensure that we learn God's ways, ascertain the path He has marked out, and walk in that path. If this is faithfully done, trusting in Him alone to guide us, success will be ours.

This is a powerful assurance that if we do God's will, we cannot stumble or fall. Many possess a commendable desire to do God's will, but very few understand how to do it. People often appoint themselves a work for God and then believe that, because they appear to be doing the good works God calls for, they are carrying out His will. For example, it is generally thought that engaging in missionary or church work according to our human understanding is automatically doing God's will. The ancient Israelites thought so too, when they set about making their own specific plans for the execution of God's general orders. What fearful loss was the result!

In our hearts, none of us desires to spend our lives doing what we imagine is God's will, only to find that we have been mistaken. A number of us will be finally told that the Lord never knew us, that our works will never be accepted, and that no place has been given us in the kingdom. That precisely this will be the portion of some is verified in *Matthew*:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" *Matthew* 7:21–23.

What a sad fate this will be for multitudes of earnest church workers who have sacrificed their lives doing what they believed was God's will for them, when all the time the work was actually self-appointed. What a dreadful shock awaits them when they discover that God can classify them only as "evildoers" or "workers of iniquity." How careful each of us must be today to ensure that correct principles are operative in our lives so that God's way alone is known, trusted and practiced. He has given us ample warning of this danger, so that we will not be deceived and lost.

Overcoming Self

Valuable indeed is the lesson of following God's plans alone, as taught in the story of Lazarus of Bethany. It is well summarized in the following paragraph from the pen of Ellen G. White who observed the outworking of that principle in church history for more than 70 years:

"Christ's workers are to obey His instructions implicitly. The work is God's, and if we would bless others His plans must be followed. Self cannot be made a center; self can receive no honor. If we plan according to our own ideas, the Lord will leave us to our own mistakes. But when, after following His directions, we are brought into strait places, He will deliver us." *Desire of Ages*, 369.1.

The success of this principle of operation is clear. The account of Lazarus' death and resurrection shows that there is no room for self; no place for human plan making in God's work.

The various courses followed by Christ, Lazarus, his sisters, and the disciples, reveal the sure truth that "... a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps." *Jeremiah* 10:23. "We have not wisdom to plan our own lives. It is not for us to shape our future." *Ministry of Healing*, 478.3.

Even Christ did not plan His own life. He demonstrated this by refusing to trust in His own wisdom, depending instead on the counsels of the Almighty. Similarly Lazarus and his sisters followed God's plans for them. They were rewarded for their loyalty to His ways with significant roles involving the fantastic miracle of a resurrection and the absolute confirmation that Christ was indeed the Son of the living God (see *John* 11:43–45).

The disciples assumed that their dedication to building the Messiah's kingdom, and the considerable sacrifices they had made, qualified them to be decision makers in the movement—a mistake made by church leaders and its members from the beginning of the great controversy. But when we consider the disastrous consequences that would have accrued if any concession had been made to their plans, how Christ's mission would have failed and all would have been lost, we will lose all faith in human plan makers and rest instead in Jehovah. When such lessons are learned, the work can be speedily brought to its end.

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations." $Revelation\ 2:26.$

To be a true overcomer includes gaining total victory over any disposition to take God's place. This is what it means to come out of Babylon and partake not of her sins (see *Revelation* 18:1–4). Those who are thus delivered are the ones who will then enjoy complete success during their earthly sojourn, and who will walk the streets of gold.

To be a true overcomer includes gaining total victory over any disposition to take God's place.

In Practical Terms

Chapter 26

The Living Connection

We have established, through many examples found in the Scriptures, that there is an inseparable connection between following God's ways and entering into His rest. We have seen that every time God was accorded His rightful place as Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer, nothing but wonderful success attended His people, while on each occasion when others assumed these roles, then confusion, loss, and suffering was the eventual inevitable result.

We have, therefore, recommended the adoption of only those procedures to which the Holy Spirit refers as "my ways" (see *Hebrews* 3:10). The arguments in support of this are both Scriptural and convincing, but it would be a fatal mistake to suppose that nothing more than correct procedures is required. God's ways will never work no matter how exactly they are followed, unless there is a living connection with the divine Source. We therefore need to consider this essential relationship now.

Two Illustrations

Communicating by telephone provides us with an apt illustration. A person may follow the correct procedure to contact someone by phone, keying in the number in its appropriate sequence,



but various factors, such as an engaged line, could prevent the caller from making a direct connection with the person being called. This aspect in the use of telephones is equally true in the application of divine procedures. To

reach the desired result, both correct procedures and a direct connection are necessary.

If we are convinced of the arguments set forth thus far in this book, but find that our application of Sabbath rest principles does not work for us, we should not make the mistake of condemning the message. Instead, we should check carefully to see if we have established and are maintaining a living connection with our divine Source.

An illustration from scripture is given by Paul in *1 Corinthians* 12, where the apostle likens the church with its one Head, Jesus Christ, and its many members, the believers, to the human body, which similarly has one head in charge of a variety of members. It is not difficult to see that the members can operate successfully only when there is a living head directing them individually and collectively. The moment the living connection between any member and the head is broken, that member loses its capacity to function. The same is equally true in the spiritual realm.

Communion with the Father

No one in human history ever understood or practiced the Sabbath rest principles more thoroughly, nor reaped the blessings more abundantly, than did Jesus. He is the perfect and complete example for every believer. A study of His life confirms that a vital factor in His daily success was His faithful preservation of a living connection with His divine Source. Irrespective of how busy He was, or how pressed with responsibility, He drew aside while others slept and spent many hours establishing so close a communion with His Father that He never had the slightest difficulty knowing and executing the will of His divine Head.

Although no other life was ever crowded with so much labor and responsibility as that of Jesus', He sustained a constant prayer life. Often we find reports like these in scripture:

- "... having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." *Mark* 1:35 (NKJV).
- "... crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." *Luke* 5:15, 16.

"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. *Luke* 6:12 (NKJV).

The connection between Jesus' prayer life and His unfaltering obedience is recognized in the following paragraphs:

"In a life wholly devoted to the good of others, the Savior found it necessary to withdraw from the thoroughfares of travel and from the throng that followed Him day after day. He must turn aside from a life of ceaseless activity and contact with human needs, to seek retirement and unbroken communion with His Father. As one with us, a sharer in our needs and weaknesses, He was wholly dependent upon God, and in the secret place of prayer He sought divine strength, that He might go forth braced for duty and trial. In a world of sin Jesus endured struggles and torture of soul. In communion with God He could unburden the sorrows that were crushing Him. Here He found comfort and joy....

"As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that should connect humanity with divinity. Through continual communion He received life from God, that He might impart life to the world. His experience is to be ours." *The Desire of Ages*, 362.4, 363.1.

In these hours spent with the Eternal Father, Jesus did more than pray to Him. The Scriptures affirm that He communed with Him. From Jesus there ascended mighty Spirit-indicted supplications, in response to which the life of the Almighty flowed in rich streams into the needy Petitioner. In this way, when Jesus prayed, He was mightily revitalized with God's life, light, love and power.

So great was the living connection established between Himself and heaven, that Jesus had not the slightest difficulty in

hearing the voice of God directing Him moment by moment, nor did He lack the power to execute His heavenly Commander's will. This is the level of communion with heaven that each Christian must aim to achieve, knowing that no one can truly experience the Sabbath rest principles as a working, living reality without this essential connection.

We should beware, however, of immediately attempting to spend a whole night in prayer, as Jesus did, for this is something into



which we can grow only gradually. Most of us are incapable at our present level of development of spending more than a short time in earnest prayer with God. Prayer is a divine science which must be mastered by all who would successfully practice the Sabbath rest principles. Just as in any other science, it requires diligent study and earnest application of the lessons learned before worthwhile proficiency is attained.

The Holy Spirit's Role

Before praying, we need first to remember that we have no power in ourselves to reach the highest heavens. We are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit's omnipotent power, for only those prayers inspired by the Spirit ever reach the audience chamber of the Almighty. The promise is:

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." *Romans* 8:26.

We are to pray in Christ's name and in His spirit:

"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." *John* 16:23–24.

"We must not only pray in Christ's name, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This explains what is meant when it is said that the Spirit 'maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Rom. 8:26. Such prayer God delights to answer. When with earnestness and intensity we breathe a prayer in the name of Christ, there is in that very intensity a pledge from God that He is about to answer our prayer 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' Eph. 3:20." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 147.3.

When we realize that the Holy Spirit supplies the power whereby our prayers obtain sufficient energy to reach our heavenly Father, then at the very beginning of our prayer, with a faith that will not be denied, we will claim the promise that the Holy Spirit will inspire our prayer. Those who understand and do this find a power and freshness developing in their prayers that they had not thought possible. The Holy Spirit so willingly and effectively plays such a vital role in the prayer life of God's needy children on earth, that it is beyond our fullest appreciation. But the better we understand, value, and appropriate the Holy Spirit's assistance, the more closely we will be united to our Saviour and King, and in turn to one another.

Christ our Intercessor

The Holy Spirit delivers those prayers which are made mighty by His own inspiration to the all-powerful Intercessor who stands at the Father's right hand. Christ then mingles His spotless righteousness with such prayers so they are actually presented to the Father in all the power and perfection of our great High Priest.

A beautiful revelation of Christ in this role is given in *Revelation* 8:3–5.

"Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." The Angel referred to in these verses can be none other than Christ, for no other angel has the power to minister in the heavenly sanctuary. The manifestation of Christ in His high priestly office, is a revelation of truth into which the believer needs to search deeply and diligently. If we carry with us a clear vision of Christ standing at His Father's right hand mingling the all-powerful merits of His righteousness with our feeble petitions, then we will know that our prayers arrive in the Almighty's presence with an energy, purity, and force that He cannot deny or refuse. This knowledge inspires us with greater faith to press our petitions to the throne of grace. We can know with positive certainty that prayers of this character are answered by God.

The Ministry of the Angels

When we seek to establish a living connection with our divine Head, we will also be aware of the ministry of angels who take an active part in the delivery of our prayers.

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" *Hebrews* 1:14.

Like Jacob, we will by faith see angels ascending to heaven taking our prayers and returning with answers.

"He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." *Genesis* 28:12.

We can be encouraged by considering the ministry of these heavenly helpers:

"Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God." S.D.A. Bible Commentary, 4:1173.5.

What a stimulus to God's people is the assurance that the very highest angels the Lord has at His command are commissioned to carry out the prayers of those who, having made a vital connection with God, present their petitions to Him according to the Sabbath rest principles.

The study of the true science of prayer is so large a theme that it is beyond the scope of this book. Only a brief survey of it is possible here despite the importance of the subject. The point being emphasized is that none of God's systems can work for us unless there is a vital living connection between us and our Leader, and that it is our responsibility to develop this close union. The promise is that when this connection has been established, His people will "be filled with all the fulness of God" (*Ephesians* 3:19) and so become a mighty force under His command.

Sufficient Faith

When correct procedures are combined with faith in God as our Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer, how rapidly the work will advance to its conclusion. True and living faith is crucial to the achievement of positive results. We need to examine ourselves carefully in the light of the Scriptures to ensure that our faith is of the correct order, for so many confidently believe they trust in God supremely when in fact they have more confidence in themselves.

This was true of Elijah when he fled from Jezebel's threat, and of Abram when he and Sarai schemed the birth of Ishmael. Despite being men of great faith, they were still not completely immune from turning to their own works. How could they be such mighty men of faith, inspired to do the Lord's work so wonderfully, yet buckle under the heavy pressure that was leveled against them later on?

At the time of their failures, they lacked sufficient understanding of God's word to build that level of faith needed to protect them within God's will. This must be so, for "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." *Romans* 10:17. If faith is lacking, it is because the Word of God has not been studied and understood as it should be. Often this is not so much the fault of the person, but rather is to be charged to the power of long established preconceptions. Until these are broken, the Lord finds it difficult to penetrate the darkness which grips the mind and shuts out the light.

However, both Abraham and Elijah were conversant with the Scriptures and had accomplished great things under God's personal direction, in view of which, we would not expect them to lose faith under temptation. Yet they did, and as surely as they did, there was some part of the Word which they had not come to understand to the point where their faith was immovable. What was that area in which clarity, and therefore faith, were lacking?

Are Perplexities Normal?

Both Abraham and Elijah understood and accepted God's general orders and, to a point, had heard and obeyed His specific directives as well. But this did not prove to be sufficient to build indestructible faith in those wonderful men. Something more was needed. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Word, they had still to grasp the vital truth that no matter how much it may appear that obedience is bringing disaster and destruction rather than blessing and victory, they are to be neither surprised nor dismayed by these developments. Instead, they are to recognize such problems as quite normal, while retaining the assurance that even though they may be brought to the utmost extremity with no visible prospects of relief, victory is certain and God's work will triumph.

It is education in these lines that will ensure our faith is not changed to unbelief. When we learn through the Scriptures that it is usual for God's commands to generate a storm of persecution, loss of friends, seeming disaster, and other dire threats before glorious victories are gained, we will not be so surprised or disturbed. Rather, our faith will grow stronger as we look forward to the telling triumph into which we know the Lord is leading us. We will retain the unshakable conviction that the only thing for which we are responsible is strict submission to the will of God. The consequences of our faithful performance of the Lord's instruction are not our concern.

Let the faithful witness of Jesus never be forgotten that "... it is a less calamity to suffer whatever may befall than to depart in any manner from the will of God." *The Desire of Ages*, 121.1.

When we have thoroughly learned this truth and are fully convinced that there is no alternative principle to guide us in our service to our Master, then we will be established in the faith of Jesus and will not crumble in the hour of extreme pressure. We will have become a polished and reliable instrument in the Lord's hands, finally qualified to join the army of those through whom at last the Almighty will finish His work.

The Final Resolution

The light being given to us by the Sovereign of the universe reveals our need for such a close connection with Him that we will see His ways with clarity and power, obviating any excuse or reason for not living in harmony with them. As surely as this is so, the time has come when God is gathering a goodly remnant from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people of those who will respond to His gracious pleas. The stage is being set for the final confrontation with the powers of darkness, whose defenses for once and for all are to be breached, and their fortifications thrown down never to be raised again. So totally and conclusively will the issues be resolved that no question will ever again be raised in regard to them. It will be settled forever throughout the universe that the only way into God's eternal rest is by knowing and following His perfect ways.

May the believers in Jesus Christ so learn those ways and make them a practical reality in their lives by establishing and maintaining a living connection with their divine Head, that they will belong to that army through whom the final battle will be won.

Chapter 27

Divine Guidance

We may tend to feel that God is far away and does not communicate His specific orders to us audibly or even by signs and wonders. We could therefore imagine that we have no option but to direct our own activities. Some people believe that there is no other alternative, unless the Lord personally and audibly delivers specific instructions to them every day. They affirm that if God would do this, they would gladly and instantly obey every divine command. But the evidence of history denies this claim.

There was a time when God spoke directly to His people through the prophet Moses, but they showed little disposition to follow these clear, direct orders. Again and again they rebelled, determined to have their own way in preference to God's. Human nature has not changed since that time. We still tend to steer our own course today, no matter how clearly the Lord may communicate His will.

How do we Receive Personal Instruction?

Obviously, if God is to be our true Head, by fulfilling the role of Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer, He has to communicate His orders in a way that we can understand. We DIVINE GUIDANCE 347

cannot be under His directions if we cannot discern Him speaking to us. The message of Sabbath rest is only empty theory if the Almighty is unable to reach us with His specific instructions.

While it is true that the Lord does not give us an audible briefing every morning, He nonetheless does instruct those of His faith-filled children who have been trained to hear and recognize His voice. Every believer who wishes to live according to God's ways and enter into His rest, must learn how to discern His instruction by progressing through the following steps.

1. Learning the Procedures

Firstly, we need to understand and accept the principle that only those who know and follow God's ways can enter into His rest. We need to see how faith combined with right procedures always results in success. Then the Sabbath rest principles, as explained in this book, must become the motivating power in our lives. In order to be assured of divine guidance, we need to learn to trust in our heavenly Father's wisdom more than in our own.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." *Proverbs* 3:5, 6.

2. Developing Faith in the Promises

When we have learned these procedures we can but conclude that the Lord is fully able, and will gladly communicate His specific orders to us. We then need to search the Scriptures to find where the Almighty has assured us again and again that He will personally guide every one of us when we put our trust in Him. As we discover each such promise, we need to believe it implicitly and make it part of our own life experience.

In particular, it is helpful to consider God's positive declarations that He will undertake the role of Head of every individual who trusts in Him.

"The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." *Isaiah* 58:11 (NKJV).

Continual, consistent guidance is a precious blessing. The mariner who is navigating the ocean's trackless waters has no

use for a faulty or unreliable compass which cannot provide dependable guidance. The situation is even more critical in a high-speed aircraft traveling through clouds in busy airspace. Cut off from all ground reference, the pilot must be able to rely totally on the instrument guidance systems.

Similarly, we need guidance every step of the way. We need to learn that we cannot trust our own faulty judgment, for our lack of wisdom born of human frailty and limited experience, and our lack of knowledge, renders us unfit to choose our course safely. Only God has sufficient wisdom, and knowledge of all the factors involved, past, present and future, to be able to mark out the best route for us to follow from day to day and year to year. Our confidence needs to be in Him as our Navigator, rather than ourselves.

We will therefore now examine some of the significant promises in which God assures us of His leadership as our Head.

We are Sheep of His Pasture

From the depths of a heart filled with infinite love, God promises to give us just what is needed—continual guidance.

David knew this blessing in his life and sang of it in these wonderful and inspiring words:

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23.

The human guidance David gave to his sheep was constant and reliable. During his waking hours, there was never a moment of the day or night when his watchcare failed. David could see that the care he gave his sheep was a picture of the greater, and even more faithful, care that his heavenly Father gave him. This truth was so beautiful and wonderful to him that he could not help but express it in psalms of praise.

DIVINE GUIDANCE 349

There were times when a sheep would go astray. Ignoring the guidance of the shepherd, it chose to select other pastures and inevitably brought trouble upon itself. Whenever such a deviation from his guidance took place, David saw in it a lesson revealing the fate which awaited him if he should wander in paths of his own choosing.

David's reference to the shepherd's watchcare over his sheep, as an illustration of the relationship God sustains to His true people, is very appropriate. In the psalmist's day, the shepherd never drove his sheep. He went before them and they followed him. They knew his voice and he in turn, knew them all by name. The sheep had no problem in choosing which course to pursue. They learned to trust the shepherd and simply follow wherever he led the way.

Similarly, we are the sheep of Christ's pasture, and we are assured by the good Shepherd that we will know just as unerringly which path we are to follow from day to day. It is the responsibility of the divine Shepherd to select the way and to communicate this choice to His sheep – their job is to hear His voice and follow Him. But in order to receive such guidance, we need to come to our heavenly Shepherd in faith and lay our burdens at His feet.

"As Christ lived the law in humanity, so we may do if we will take hold of the Strong for strength. But we are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Our hearts will often burn within us as One draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue." *The Desire of Ages*, 668.4.

What a glorious assurance this is! These are words of life; words to be believed and acted upon. We are not to fear that we are too insignificant to be noticed among His huge flock of sheep, for no matter how vast the number in Christ's flock may be, He knows and watches over each of us as if we were the only one.

"I have summoned you by name; you are mine." Isaiah 43:1

"I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." *Isaiah* 49:16 "You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD." *Ezekiel* 34:31

"As an earthly shepherd knows his sheep, so does the divine Shepherd know His flock that are scattered throughout the world....

Jesus knows us individually, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live, the name of each occupant. He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep.

"Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Savior died. The distress of every one touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear. He came to draw all men unto Himself. He bids them, 'Follow Me,' and His Spirit moves upon their hearts to draw them to come to Him. Many refuse to be drawn. Jesus knows who they are. He also knows who gladly hear His call, and are ready to come under His pastoral care. He says, 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.' He cares for each one as if there were not another on the face of the earth." *The Desire of Ages*, 479.2–480.1.



DIVINE GUIDANCE 351

The thought that God leads us as a shepherd of old led his sheep, leaves no room for any doubt about God's ability to communicate His specific orders to us. Our job is to fulfill the simple conditions. It is important for us to cultivate a strong and unshakable faith in these promises. Each of us is to know with positive certainty that God will make His will known, and that if we listen to His call we can follow in the way He indicates. It is just as simple for us to follow our Shepherd, as it was for David's sheep to follow him from pasture to pasture. In reality, there is no satisfactory alternative, for we do not have the capacity to guide ourselves any more than did David's sheep.

Christ is Still with Us Today

The good Shepherd has lost none of His capacity to guide His sheep as a result of His physical separation from them. Instead, through the ministration of the Holy Spirit and the angels, He is able to do this even more effectively than if He were actually among them in person.

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." *John* 16:7.

"Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Savior would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high." *The Desire of Ages* 669.2.

Further Promises

Here is a sample of other promises assuring us of divine guidance and success if we fulfill the necessary conditions.

"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." *Psalm* 25:9.

"Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him." *Psalm* 25:12.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." *Psalm* 32:8.

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." *Psalm* 16:11.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." *Psalm* 48:14.

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." *Proverbs* 16:3.

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." *Jeremiah* 29:11.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." *Psalm* 37:5 (KJV).

If in our hearts we are willing to be guided in our daily lives, and if we express this desire to our divine Shepherd, we can claim the promise:

"You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah." Psalm 21:2.

When we are granted a clear vision of our duty and the way we have to go, we can say with David:

"I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." *Psalm* 16:8.

There are many more such promises of divine guidance in the Scriptures. If we search for them and feed on them daily, they will be a mighty inspiration to us.

God is Never taken by Surprise

Another faith-strengthening promise is that God is never taken by surprise. He knows the end from the beginning, and has made full provision for every emergency before it occurs.

Therefore long before sin appeared, the solution to this problem was ready. Christ "was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." *1 Peter* 1:20.

Was God caught out by Adam and Eve's fall? Not at all—He did not need to stop and carefully devise a solution when sin made its entrance on earth, but in full foreknowledge He had already planned for it. The Son of God had offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin long before it actually raised its ugly head.

"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belong-

DIVINE GUIDANCE 353

ing to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." *Revelation* 13:8.

As it was with the first appearance of sin, so it is with every other problem which might come up. No problem can ever arise for which God has not already provided the solution in His infinite foreknowledge. For instance, in Israel's journey through the desert they were in need of fresh water, but found that the water at Marah was bitter. Realizing that it could not quench their thirst, Moses gave their desperate problem to God. In response, the Lord did not ask for time to devise a solution. Instead He directed the attention of His servant to a shrub which was already in existence, having been put there in His wise foreknowledge. It served as a remedy to solve this problem to full satisfaction—the water instantly becoming pure and sweet (see *Exodus* 15:22–25).

This encouraging feature of our mighty Problem Solver is affirmed in the following words:

"Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet." *The Desire of Ages*, 330.1.

"Those who surrender their lives to His guidance and to His service will never be placed in a position for which He has not made provision. Whatever our situation, if we are doers of His word, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexity, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend." *The Ministry of Healing*, 248.2.

How sure and positive these promises are!

3. Making a Definite Covenant

Having learned the Sabbath rest principles and established faith in the promises of God, the next step is to apply them actively to every aspect of life. This requires a solemn contract to be formed between the believer and the Saviour. In this, the believer covenants to recognize God, and Him

alone, in His appointed position of Plan Maker, Problem Solver, Burden Bearer, and Guide.

This is no easy commitment to make, for it requires the abandonment of all earthly methods of guidance and deliverance, in favor of trust in the unseen God. When we pray a prayer such as, "Lord, from now on You alone are my Plan Maker, Problem Solver, Burden Bearer, and Guide", this is saying that no one else will occupy these positions in our lives from that moment onwards. It is like the marriage commitment which requires the forsaking of all others in favor of the one to whom our life is now joined. It is ending one way of life in favor of another. A living faith is required in order to enter into such a covenant.

But we should not do so without carefully weighing the responsibilities involved. Once the covenant has been formed, the time will surely come when serious problems will confront us and test our submission.

4. Daily Consecration

Once a covenant has been made, every day should be commenced with a total dedication of our life to the Lord for that day.

Paul dedicated his life daily and unconditionally to the service of his Lord. He was therefore content with whatever his heavenly Father had chosen for him. This attitude was the result of Sabbath rest in Paul's life.

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." *Philippians* 4:12.

We too need to begin each day with a similar consecration of our life into the Lord's care. The following paragraph will help us implement this resolve:

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day

DIVINE GUIDANCE 355

you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ." *Steps to Christ*, 70.1.

Every true child of God begins each new day prepared to surrender the wonderful plans God has given him or her, if the unfaithfulness of others makes this necessary. This can of course, be very disappointing, as it must have been for Caleb, Joshua, Moses and Aaron when they had to give up their plans to enter the promised land, and instead were compelled to follow an alternative plan for the next forty years.

We too should be prepared to give up any plans we have made in an attempt to organize the work God has given us to do. Our plans must be given up or carried out as His providence shall indicate, even though we may be sure of them at the time of making them. When we learn to trust our divine Plan Maker to overrule circumstances and when we submit to the daily revelation of His plans for us, then He will have a people who can finish His work under His guidance.

CHAPTER 28

Putting Theory into Practice

In seeking guidance from God, we have seen that we need to follow certain predetermined steps. First we need to learn the divinely given procedures, then we need to develop faith in God's promises. Only then will we be adequately prepared to make a covenant with God. And finally, each day we need to consecrate ourselves anew to Him. If we follow these four steps, God will guide us daily. But we must be receptive to His guidance, discern His voice and recognize the temptations that will buffet us as we continue to serve Him and follow His ways.

How to Face Daily Temptations

As we become more aware of the day-by-day temptations facing us, we will see the need to pray David's prayer each morning as we renew our consecration to our Protector: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." *Psalm* 51:10 (KJV). We will then be ready to deal with whatever problems the day brings us. Like David, we need to practice the following safeguards:

1. Resist the disposition to solve problems yourself.

Once our daily consecration has been made, we arise from our knees and move into the work of the day. In the course of this we will come face-to-face with conflicts and, from time to time, we will be confronted with new problems. When this happens, the natural inclination is to devise possible solutions and then select one of them as the best way out. But this is the Babylonian way of formulating solutions to problems and then asking God to supply the power necessary to effect them. We must resist this temptation as soon as it appears.

If a solution has already formed in the mind when the problem arose, the first work is to ask God to cleanse it from us.

2. Ask God to show you if the problem is the consequence of your own sin.

Once our minds are cleansed of our own solutions, the next move is to go before God in prayer and ask Him to search our hearts and reveal to us wherein our mistakes or sins have brought this problem upon us. For instance, it was David's flight to Philistia and his lies to King Achish that developed the problem confronting him when he was obliged to march to war with the Philistines. All this needed to be repented of and confessed, before the Lord could deliver him.

3. Give the problem to God and leave it there in peace.

Our problem must be given to God with no conditions attached, leaving Him to apply any solution He chooses without interference from us. The Saviour can never handle any problems that are not fully given to Him. Therefore, at this stage we must make very sure that we have really given the difficulty to our divine Problem Solver, and that it is entirely out of our own hands.

One evidence that this has been accomplished is the presence within us of a restful confidence that the matter is in competent hands, and that we have no further worries in regard to it. Only after being relieved of the burden of our problem is it possible to experience the peace of God.

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." *Isaiah* 26:3.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." *John* 14:27.

Sometimes we might bring our problems to the Saviour, but, after telling Him all about them, we continue to bear them ourselves. Devoid of any sweet, submissive peace, we find ourselves worrying and fretting while continuing to devise solutions which we then expect the Lord to put into effect on our behalf. This shows us that we have not attained that peace which will be ours if we fully trust the Lord to be our Problem Solver.

4. Be specific.

In order for God to handle our problems He needs to have them given fully into His hands. We must give them to Him, not only in a general way, but definitely, in a specific manner. This is where many religious people fail. For instance, when they have erred, they tend to ask God to "forgive us our sins" at the end of the day, assuming that this will set matters straight before they lie down to sleep. With such general, unspecific requests our heavenly Father is left with no other option than to leave the matter until a definite contrition has taken place and confession is made.

By contrast, when David fell after the temptation with Bathseba he was very specific in the acknowledgement of his sin.

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah." *Psalm* 32:3–5.

"A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place." *Psalm* 51:1–6.

Likewise with every other problem, a specific turning over of the problem to God is required. This is in our own interest. When Satan later tempts us to believe that God is unmindful of our trouble or is not really dealing with our problem, we can remember this specific procedure and with positive assurance know that our divine Problem Solver is working on it.

5. Be not reluctant nor hesitant.

Many are reluctant to place their burdens on Christ, for they feel that He has too much already that is more important to do. Such need to realize that He is disappointed and frustrated when they take this attitude, for He bids us to cast "all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." *1 Peter* 5:7.

"... He desires us to lay our perplexities and troubles at His feet and leave them there." *The Ministry of Healing*, 249.3.

These invitations should be obeyed, no matter what preconceived opinions, false pride, self-confidence, or personal dispositions have to be laid aside. We need to recognize that we are in the position of dependent receivers and that we do not have the capacity to carry our own burdens or solve our own problems. Christ alone is able to do this work for us. Once we realize this, we can willingly accept His offer to carry our burdens. We should then bring our cares to Him without delay.

"Cast your cares on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." *Psalm* 55:22

The Patience of the Saints

Refuse to rely on appearances

Once Christ has the case in His hand, He immediately goes to work on it, although it may take days, weeks, months or even years for His solution to be effected. On other occasions the answer comes immediately. It depends on the various factors involved.

For instance, when Daniel was pleading with the Lord for answers in respect to Israel's future, a delay in replying to the prophet was caused by the necessity to do battle with the Persian king. Three weeks passed before Gabriel could be released to communicate with Daniel.

"Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia." *Daniel* 10:12, 13.

The reason why immediate solutions cannot always be achieved is because the Lord never uses force to gain His ends. In Daniel's case the Persian king was a key person in the Israelites' return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and Satan was using all his power to prevent this from happening. God had to counter this influence with His own, and the battle became close and severe. It took time to win the king to the Lord's side, but once this was accomplished, the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the sanctuary.

Pray for patience

During the interval between submitting the problem to the Saviour and the solution becoming obvious, it may appear that our prayer has gone unheard, or has been shelved, and that God is doing nothing about the matter. We must not be deceived by these appearances, even though Satan will be doing his best to persuade us that things are just as they seem to be. Although we cannot see it, God is working at full capacity on the problems committed to Him. Our task is to rest in the assurance that our case is in His hands, and patiently, in confidence and trust, wait for the consummation of His work.

At times this will be difficult, for it can look as if everything is headed straight for disaster. In fact the darker things grow, the more confident and happy God's true children can become in the sure knowledge that He is in command of the situation, and is about to treat them to a marvelous demonstration of His power and skill.

At this point we need to ask God for special patience, for it is a critical element in the achievement of victory:

"This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." *Revelation* 14:12.

"By your patience possess your souls firm you will gain life." *Luke* 21:19. (NKJV).

"We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." *Hebrews* 6:12.

Our Part

The divinely formulated solution to the problem may involve our participation, or it may not.

When we have no active part

An example of when it did not involve the active participation of the person in trouble, was when David was forced to march with the Philistines against the Israelites. David committed the problem to God but saw no evidence that the Lord had even heard his prayer, nor was he called upon to do anything. Instead, mighty angels were sent to the Philistine lords to influence them to do the work of persuading the king on David's behalf. Meanwhile he did nothing to solve his problem himself but waited patiently for the Lord to instruct him about the next steps to be taken.

Likewise, we will find that there are times when God does not use us and gives us no part to play in the solution of our problem. Others may be directed to make moves which will untangle the mess we find ourselves in, while we quietly go about our daily responsibilities.

When we do have an active part to play

At other times, we will have a part to play. It depends on the nature of the problem, and the solution the Lord has chosen.

An example of such an occasion would be the experience of Naaman recorded in 2 Kings 5. This captain of the host of the king of Syria was stricken with leprosy. Encouraged by a young girl who was serving in his house, he went to Israel to the prophet Elisha and gave him his problem. In Naaman's case the solution involved his own participation of which he was informed at the right time: "Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, 'Go, wash

yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 2 Kings 5:10.

When the Lord communicates His orders to us

If the Lord has appointed us a role, we will find that a plan of action devoid of any of our own devising forms in our minds. It will impress us with its simplicity and perfection, but we are not to jump to the immediate conclusion that it is from God, for it is also possible that Satan has suggested it.

We may find it hard to believe that Satan has this power, or that God would permit him to use it. But the fact is that he does have it, and the Lord does not stop him from using it. Proof of this is provided in Christ's life when, on the mount of temptation, Satan came to Him in the guise of an angel from heaven with a plan that seemed to be the answer to His problem. He suggested to the famished One to turn the stones of the desert into bread in order to escape starvation (see *Matthew* 4:1–3).

Christ tested this plan in order to determine its origin, and very quickly recognized that the supposed angel from heaven was, in fact, Satan. Even though tempted, Christ resisted this invitation by rejecting the plan entirely. Only those directives which emanated from His Father in heaven would He obey. All other schemes were given no place in His life.

So we need to understand that, when we commit our problem to God and a plan forms in our mind, this solution can be either of divine or satanic origin. It is either the real thing or the counterfeit. We do not need to feel guilty or ashamed about this. If our plan is from Satan, that does not mean that we are evil, only that we are tempted. Christ was likewise tempted, but He never sinned. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." *Hebrews* 4:15. It is not a sin to be tempted; only if we yield to the temptation.

If our plan is of Satan, then, even though initially it may seem to do much good, it will only produce great harm to us eventually and to God's cause. Therefore it is essential for us to reject the plan if it is not from God, but to carry it out if it is of divine origin.

This means that if we have faithfully followed the correct procedures up to this point, we are still not out of danger, for if we now accept and execute a solution formed in Satan's mind, even though firmly believing that it is from God, we will be warring against Jehovah. Ignorance is no protection from disaster.

To make things more difficult, Satan is very careful to offer a plan which has every appearance of being from God. He is far too cunning to bring along a clumsy proposition or tempt us with a plan which is manifestly from him. He knows that he would achieve nothing by doing this, for his success depends on the art of deception. Whenever we fall for his devices, we suffer the inevitable consequences sooner or later.

But there is a simple procedure which guarantees protection from this eventuality. As soon as the plan forms in our mind, if we immediately give it to the Lord to be given up or carried through as His providence shall indicate, we will be safe. "Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ." Steps to Christ 70.1. Our plan can be safely left in God's hands. If it is of satanic origin, He will see that it gets nowhere, but if the plan comes from Him, then it will certainly move through to ultimate success.

Beware of forcing the issue

Having laid all things in His care, we can then calmly proceed with whatever the Lord gives us to do for that moment. If, in carrying out the plan, great obstacles appear across the pathway, we must simply recognize this as being another problem and repeat the procedure. If the hindrance disappears, we can move forward. If it does not, then we must wait till the Lord opens new doors. Above all, we must make no attempt to force the issue, but leave the Lord full liberty to carry the work forward as He sees fit.

Most amazing of all is how individuals who know nothing about the problem and who may be quite hostile to God's cause, can unwittingly make moves necessary for the success of the plan. These procedures maintain the Lord in His rightful place, and the human dependents in theirs. God is too wise and skilful a Problem Solver ever to advance an unsatisfactory solution to a problem, so those who follow His ways are assured of not only rest, but victory and success.

What is God's Will for Me?

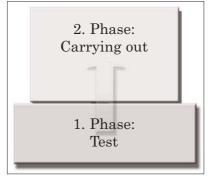
When we try to find out God's will for us it is important to distinguish between two phases:

- The first phase is a time of testing where we watch for indications of either divine approval or disapproval. The plans we have given back to God will either eventuate without our interference, or alternatively they will come to naught through the working of His providence.
- The second phase is the time for the actual carrying through of the plans made by God.

It is essential to know exactly in which stage we are in, because the procedures to be followed are different in some respects in each. This distinction will save us confusion and perplexity in our endeavor to follow God's plans for us.

The first stage

Let us suppose we are uncertain as to how we should go forward, so consequently we give our problem to God. Then a plan develops in our mind, but we are unsure if this is really God's voice to us or our own ideas. So the next step would be to give this plan back to God in order for it to be carried through or given up as his providence indicates.



Now the first part begins. This is the time of testing. It is important to be truly willing to abandon the whole project if necessary. We must put ourselves wholly on the altar of sacrifice, for without our full consecration God will be unable to reveal His

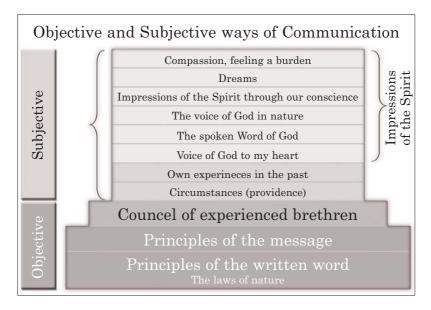
will to us. If we cling tenaciously to our own ideas as did Baalam (see *Numbers* 22–24) we will go astray like him. With an openness to be ready for either approval or disapproval of the plan, we will move cautiously forward ever looking for an indication from God that He is opening or closing doors as He sees best.

As we do our part in the great plan we have to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove (see *Matthew* 10:16). The voice of God can be easily heard if we cherish a spirit of submission. In this phase the mighty Plan Maker will speak to us through various ways—His word, experienced elders, circumstances and the voice of His Spirit.

In this connection it is important to distinguish between two different ways in which God will reveal Himself to us:

- The more important way is when He speaks to us independently of our own influence or judgment. The means He uses to do this are His word (which includes the law of the ten commandments and the natural law), the principles of the message, and the counsel of experienced brothers and sisters in the church. This way does not come through ourselves and as such is a neutral and objective witness.
- The second, which is next in importance, is the way God speaks to our hearts or minds. He does this through circumstances, impressions of the Holy Spirit on our conscience, and His voice in nature, or from another source where we can hear His voice speaking to our heart. We can also learn from our own experiences that we have had in the past. This way is dependent on our own understanding and feelings, and as such is subjective.

The conviction that a plan has come from God is a personal experience to be gained through submission and humility. We must be ready to hear and recognize the voice of God through whichever channels or media He chooses: His word, the principles of the message, the respectful but clear warnings of our brothers and sisters in the truth, His providences, as well as the voice of His Spirit or whatever He may use to convince us, even when it closes the door on our plan. If our faith rests in God, we will be ready to discern every small indication He sends us. When doors are closed, we have to be prepared to abandon our plans even when



we cannot account for the reasons. But when doors open without using force, then we can move forward in faith and humility. As in other areas, so in this important phase, everything has to be confirmed by two or three witnesses (see *Deuteronomy* 19:15).

In this first part of testing we need to obey the rules of obedience and submission carefully in order to escape the deception of \sin in our own hearts. God will speak to us as a Shepherd guiding His flock and as we learn to hear His voice we will recognize it as such (see John 10:1–5). We will then be able to distinguish it from that of well-meaning friends or even our own stubborn will.

But a great danger lurks in our own hearts here, ever ready to lead us astray. We tend to seek the counsel of those who advise us according to our own inclinations. When a brother or sister, as a true witness, gives us advice contrary to what we ourselves would choose, we tend to think they are without love and begin to remodel their counsel to suit our own wishes and preconceptions. We must be on the alert against this danger. We are not to re-interpret or ignore any counsel given to us, try to manipulate circumstances ourselves, interpret the word of God according to our own understanding, nor silence the voice of His Spirit through self-justification.

The second stage

When the testing stage is finished and the plan is confirmed by two or three witnesses, the next phase begins. Now we have to carry the plan through in full responsibility to God and the church. In faith we must seek our strength from God alone. If obstacles now come up against the confirmed plan, they no longer have any weight. Human voices which try to frighten us or influence us against the revealed will of God should find no response in us. The plan which was tested in humility and responsibility to God and the church has now to be carried through without being disrupted by distracting voices. Nonetheless we should still move forward with due consideration for others, as demonstrated by the example of Gideon (see Judges 6:33 to 7:25). We are part of the body of Christ and in order to co-work successfully with the different members, we must fulfil our role. Just as in the testing phase, while carrying out God's plans we should be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Distinguishing the two stages

If we mix up the two stages, then confusion is certain to follow. If we go forward in the first phase with determination, disregarding all indications of providence as unimportant, we will be led astray. When we think that in this first stage we are not responsible to the leading brethren and there is no need to watch for God-given circumstances, we reveal a perverse self-will and a lack of humility. Then, when the second phase begins—which in this case we will have created ourselves—we tend to place the responsibility for carrying out our plan upon others and feel forsaken by them when they do not do as we expect.

Other unfortunate consequences can result if we refuse to carry any responsibility ourselves and expect others to tell us what to do instead. In this scenario, because we think that we have to listen solely to the counsel of experienced brethren, we do not listen to God's voice speaking to us personally. Instead we but put ourselves in an unhealthy relationship of dependence on the agents He uses. Once we begin with this false humility, we usually move into the next phase in which we try to continue this dependence upon others. As a result, we are not prepared to cope with the developing hardships and we will be

tempted to question that if God has really led us, why these difficulties have come upon us? We will not be able to withstand tribulations and we will expect God's plans to be free of obstacles. Frequently we imagine that others, whom we think have guided us in this plan, should be responsible for its frustrating outcomes.

A Series of Uninterrupted Victories

Once we have established these principles of operation in our life, we will find ourselves praising the Lord for His marvellous works. Joy unspeakable will attend us as we follow our Lord from victory to victory.

"...the life of His [Christ's] trusting disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter." *The Desire of Ages*, 679.2.

Our life will breathe forth a sweet fragrance and will attract others to the Saviour. We will be living witnesses of the perfection found in our heavenly Father, and our names will be written in the Lamb's book of life. Eventually, we will step hand-in-hand with Christ from this earth to the eternal abodes where we will continue to live the life begun with God here.

But throughout this earthly sojourn, we must ever guard against the fearful tendency to which so many have succumbed in the past, of reverting to human ways. Ever fearful that this will happen to us, we need to spend time every day in close and deep communion with nature and with God. We must constantly review the stories recorded by inspiration so that we will learn to avoid the mistakes of the past. For those who are diligent in these things, the rewards are beyond computation.

Chapter 29

The Place for our Plans

Humans are not Robots

The burden of this book is to set God in His rightful place as Plan Maker, Problem Solver, Burden Bearer, and Source, in a balanced way. However, some practical minds might conclude that if the arguments thus far are correct, then we are reduced to mere automatons with little freedom to think, plan, or organize for ourselves.

Yet God's truths are both balanced and consistent. The Lord has built certain abilities into us which are subject to the highest development, and these are to be used in their proper time and place.

We are not robots. We are highly intelligent beings capable of making decisions and well able to organize our own activities. God did not endow us with these abilities in order to deny their exercise—on the contrary, He gifted them to us for a specific purpose.

Our problem is that we do not know our limitations, or understand the sphere in which we are to work, with the result that we intrude into the realm belonging



to God alone. In doing this, we are essentially different from God, who even though He is the Lord and owner of the universe, will never take over any part of the work which He has assigned to us. For our part, we must learn in which areas God is to be our Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer, and where we are to plan the work once it has been given to us. Initially, these distinctions may appear blurred, but as long as we continue to commune with the Lord, practicing Sabbath Rest principles step by step, we will find the mist clearing away and the differences discerned.

Successful Co-working

God has designed us to aspire to heights of achievement that can be attained only through the co-working of the divine and the human. Paul saw this principle of being a co-worker with God clearly and encouraged other believers to apply it as diligently as he and his fellow workers did.

"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." *2 Corinthians* 6:1.

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." *1 Corinthians* 3:9.

In laboring together, we need to recognize the part which God alone can play and the responsibility we are to bear. In order for both partners to co-work successfully, each of us must understand just what our respective role is and perform it faithfully and completely. If one of us vacates our appointed station, or seeks to assume that of the other, coordination ceases and failure replaces success.

An illustration of this was an occasion when a large symphony orchestra was rehearsing for a coming concert. There was quite a variety of instruments present, from the large double bass, to the tiniest of them all, the piccolo. As they were playing through a passage, the piccolo player began to meditate on the smallness of the silver instrument in his hands. It was no more than a few inches long and could easily be popped into his coat pocket and there disappear completely from sight.

His eye wandered over the great brass and silver horns, the drainpipe proportions of the beautiful bassoon with its rich, sono-

rous tones, the long slender flutes, the big bass drums, and the other members of the orchestra family. It was not difficult for him to recognize how essential these large and important instruments were, but his little piccolo with its high-pitched notes seemed so insignificant as to be superfluous and unnecessary. So absorbed did he become with these cogitations that he unwittingly ceased to play his notes. Only a few seconds went by before the conductor rapped the podium with his baton and called, "Where is the piccolo?"

The work of the orchestra was marred by the silence of its smallest member. The conductor quickly discerned the lack and called

for the piccolo player to take up his work again exactly as had been planned for him.

So it is in God's cause. Each person has been assigned a task and a place. Whether the assignment is large or small is not important. What matters is that it



must be done exactly how and where it has been commissioned by the Master Plan Maker. The failure of any one worker in the plans formed by God, undermines His work, especially if that failure is united with self-appointment to another position and work.

We therefore need to understand clearly where human responsibility ends and the divine begins. This requires careful study to dispel any initial impressions that the distinction is confusing or inexplicable. If we continue to study under our divine Teacher, we will find our difficulties resolved as simple guiding principles fall into place.

Some Biblical Examples

The conquest of Jericho

A simple biblical illustration of this distinction is provided in the conquest of Jericho. The actual plan of attack was worked out by the Master Plan Maker and delivered to the people through Joshua (see *Joshua* 6). They then knew what they had to do, but from that point on, it was their responsibility to organize themselves in carrying out their appointed work.

The march on the seventh and final day began with the marshalling of the armies at dawn's first light (see *Joshua* 6:15). Once they knew this, it was up to each man to plan and organize his preparations so that he was ready at the appointed hour. He would have to use the mental abilities the Lord had given him to estimate how much time he needed to spend on his ablutions, dressing, morning worship, breakfast, buckling on of armour, and presentation on the parade ground. Then he would know when he needed to wake up. His preparation had to be organized so that it was accomplished smoothly and efficiently. God would do none of this for him. That was where the individual had to make wise plans for his work.

The important thing to realize is that the people did not appoint themselves a work. That came from God and once it had, their responsibility began.

The resurrection of Lazarus

The same truth is illustrated in the resurrection of Lazarus. Before Christ gave the word calling the dead to life, the stone had to be rolled back from the entrance to the sepulchre in order that His work as the Life Giver might be seen by all spectators. This task of rolling away the stone was given to man in order for him to participate in the blessing.

"Jesus said, 'Take away the stone." John~11:39 (NKJV).

Had those men proceeded to remove the stone without a directive from Christ, then they would have been usurping His position by making plans they had no right to make. But God, through Christ, gave the specific order to roll away the stone and they obeyed the command. Once the order was given, it was over to them to plan its execution. They may have needed certain tools such as levers to overcome the great weight, or perhaps it required two men pushing and another pulling to move it over. Whatever it took was for them to know and work out.

Christ could have called the angels to do this task or used the mighty power of His Father simply to speak and thus remove the stone, but He would not deprive men of their appointed place in God's wonderful scheme of things. In this way the divine and the human successfully co-worked together.

"Christ could have commanded the stone to remove, and it would have obeyed His voice. He could have bidden



the angels who were close by His side to do this. At His bidding, invisible hands would have removed the stone. But it was to be taken away by human hands. Thus Christ would show that humanity is to cooperate with divinity. What human power can do divine power is not summoned to do. God does not dispense with man's aid. He strengthens him, co-operating with him as he uses the powers and capabilities given him." *The Desire of Ages*, 535.3.

Israel at Kadesh

Another example can be taken from Israel at Kadesh. We have already spent some time studying the procedures adopted there. Let us consider now what they should have done and how they should have organized their work.

When the command came from God for them to occupy the land, they should have simply waited for the specific orders directing them to take a certain route. Then in God's chosen sequence, they should have confronted the cities they were to invest. When those specific orders came through, it would have then been their responsibility to make sure that the preparations were thoroughly made, their armor checked, their weapons sharpened, and that they were well practiced in the use of their equipment. The camp would have had to be set in order and everything for which they were responsible, thoroughly executed. God would not do those things for Israel, nor would He honor or make up the deficiencies for inexcusable inefficiency. God expects the thorough development of every capability He has invested in His children.

It is obvious that if there were no place for the use of the skills that God gives us, there would be no point in these gifts being provided. The Lord gives them to be used and He expects the wise application of all these talents. He will not do for us what we can do for ourselves, but He will work together with us to produce the finished work.

From Principles to Practice

The production of this book is also an apt illustration of these principles of co-working.

The decision to produce the book is rightfully God's alone. If the idea is conceived in a human mind, then it is man taking God's place as the Plan Maker. Not only is it God's prerogative to decide that the book shall be written, but He must also determine when this will happen and who the writer shall be.

When the human instrument undertakes this task, the Lord does not dictate the book to him or her word by word. Once the general and specific orders have been given to do the work, it becomes the human's responsibility to organize the assigned task. The writer must use all the skills and abilities that God has given, in order to express the message in the most powerful and effective way possible.

But this does not mean that the Lord's part is complete when He gives His direction to the worker. God's part never ceases. From the time when the commission is given and the actual work begins, God and human are to be co-workers. The true Christian writer is consciously and continually dependent on divine wisdom and guidance. The author never commences writing without first asking God's guidance and blessing. Then every time a problem appears, another prayer ascends to the divine Problem Solver. So the work progresses until it is finished.

When the manuscript has been completed, it is not yet deemed ready for print. Proof readers and editors check the copy, correcting, and noting many places where changes are called for. Some sections are rewritten. Even so, the author wishes that more time could be spent on polishing and perfecting the manuscript.

After a number of years, the first edition of the book having been distributed, the need may arise to print a second. During those years the skills of the writer have improved. Many lessons on the art of writing have been mastered, knowledge of the subject matter has greatly enlarged and new light has also been given. This means that the author is now able to effect a much better result than in the original book. Accordingly, before the sec-

ond edition appears, the writer works on a careful revision. If the original writer has died, then God gives this work to another writer or writers.

If it was God's way to dictate the words to be written, then it would not matter how skilled or inexperienced the human instrument was. The book would be written perfectly and beyond improvement. There would be no place for human talent or development and therefore no point in God's giving these abilities to people in the first place, nor in providing for their growth.

The Writing of the Bible

These principles of divine communication remain true no matter how close the walk with God may be. The writers of the books of the Bible demonstrate the reliability and success of these principles. There is certainly great advantage in establishing a close communion with God, for this enables Him to give richer revelations of truth than would otherwise be possible. But the fact that each Bible writer produced a book with a style characteristic of himself, proves that God did not dictate the precise words. He did reveal the messages to be recorded and He inspired the writing of them. But it was the responsibility of the human instrument to use every skill and talent, sanctified by God's power, to present the testimony of Jesus in the best way possible under these circumstances.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in right-eousness" 2 Timothy 3:16.

The fact that the Bible was given by inspiration does not mean that God dictated it word by word. Rather, He inspired the thoughts of the writers. It was God, the Plan Maker, who gave the instructions as to what should be written, when it should be written and who should undertake the task. Once these specific directions were given, it was up to the chosen writers to use their God-given abilities to produce the work under His inspiration and guidance. A clear description of this co-working of the divine and the human in the production of this sacred book is given in the following paragraphs.

"The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

"The ten commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us'. John 1:14.

"Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony." *The Great Controversy*, v.3–vi.1.

"The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

"It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God." Selected Messages 1:21.1, 2.

There is no difference between the procedures by which God works with a person to whom He has given the prophetic gift, such as Paul, Isaiah, or Ellen White, and messengers such as

Martin Luther, William Miller, Alonzo Jones or E. J. Waggoner. God never provides verbal inspiration, for this is not His way; instead He inspires the person.

Consequently, there rests upon every one of us the solemn responsibility to develop to the highest pitch every ability the Lord has invested in us. We must aim at achieving the best levels of efficiency and productivity so that we will execute our assigned tasks to our own and God's satisfaction. We need to



make wise and well-organized plans in our given areas in order to carry out the orders received from the great Source. At the same time, we need to guard very carefully against poaching the role of the great Plan Maker, Burden Bearer, and Problem Solver. Those are God's offices which He cannot vacate in favor of humans, for He knows that it is beyond our capacity to fill them. It is unfortunate that we are slow to learn this truth and so seldom leave God to do His work while we do ours.

To complain that these principles allow us little to do is hardly justifiable. If we devote our life to developing our entrusted talents, building a character fit for eternity, and fulfilling the work God has appointed us, we will find that we have no spare moments left to spend in planning our own life. It will be more than full. We are more likely to wish that there was not quite so much demanding our attention.

Our Own Plans

If God is the Source of all the plans for the work which we are to do, then these plans are formulated in the infinite mind of Him who knows the future. But once they have been given to the human co-worker and we accept them as our sole guideline, they could be rightfully called our plans.

Take as a comparison *Revelation* 19:8. There it is stated that the "fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (KJV). The righteousness is said to be theirs but no one would conclude from this that it had originated with them. God was the Source of it, but once He had given it to them, it became theirs, so it can be correctly stated that it is the "righteousness of saints".

Likewise plans, originating in God's mind, given to and accepted by us could be spoken of as our plans. Only such plans can work successfully. These are the plans mentioned by Solomon and David when they said:

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." *Proverbs* 16:3.

"May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed." *Psalm* 20:4.

Relinquishing our Plans

No matter how sharp our spiritual power and perception, there are situations when it is impossible to see immediately whether the plan has been advanced by God or Satan. Knowing that Satan has the power to come as an angel of light as if in answer to our prayers, raises the serious question of how such problems can be handled with certainty. Especially in those cases where we have a part to play in solving the problem, we must be able to determine positively whether the solution is of divine or satanic origin.

There is no need for us to be anxious, for God has provided a way of escape from every device of Satan. We need to know the surprisingly simple way to avoid this problem. As we saw in a previous chapter, the following rule can be a great help in a successful co-working with the heavenly Plan Maker:

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ." Steps to Christ, 70.1.

At the outset of each day, if we have learned to hear His voice, we will have received God's plans for that day. These must be surrendered back to God, to be given up or carried through as His providence shall indicate. The admonition to surrender all plans to Him includes both types of plans—the ones that God makes for us and the ones we make to carry out the work He has planned for us.

When this has been done, perfect protection from being deceived and misled is assured, for, if the plan came from God, He will successfully implement it, but if not, He will lay it aside and the scheme will come to nothing. This is a simple matter for Him, provided the problem is in His hands.

There are three possible reasons why it might become necessary to give up our plans.

First reason

No matter how close the walk with God, we are never placed beyond the danger of deception. Therefore every plan which appears to come from God must be carefully tested, especially if it looks attractive to our human nature which is a notoriously untrustworthy guide. The enemy, knowing what appeals most strongly to us, is an expert at devising schemes calculated to win our acceptance. At the same time, he knows how to clothe the wolf in sheep's clothing to make the acceptance justifiable, and to conceal, as far as possible, any requirement to violate principles. He is so clever at this that on many occasions it will be impossible for us, as mere humans, to detect any apparent unrighteousness in his schemes, making it all too easy to accept them as God-sent.

Second reason

It is wrong to conclude that a plan which God has given to us should never be relinquished. Although God's plans are perfect, they sometimes have to be abandoned because other people, also involved in the planning, have acted totally out of harmony with the Lord.

An illustration which we have already studied involves the experience of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. God's plan for them was their immediate entrance into Canaan. They were in harmony with God and fit to enter the promised land, but, because of the people's insurrection, they had to give up the beautiful plan made for them. It would be quite dangerous to conclude that once God has formed a plan and given it to us, then under no circumstances can that plan be surrendered. Moses, Aaron, and the other two would have taken a hazardous wrong step to insist on going into the promised land without the other Israelites.

We must be constantly prepared to give up the plan we have received from God, if He Himself overrules it. We are not to cling doggedly to our plans under all circumstances.

Third reason

Another reason we may have to give up our plans is to provide an abiding reminder to us that God is the Source on whom we are continually dependent for all things. This safeguards us against self-sufficiency and forgetfulness of God, the problem which has brought so much loss and sorrow to the church in the past. We especially need to depend on our Source as we plan to execute the work God has given us. We must constantly remember that in every step taken, there is to be the closest co-working between the divine and the human.

When we have given our plan back to God then we should do what the day requires, resting at perfect peace in the knowledge that it is safely in the Lord's hands. If there are opportunities to carry out the plan without having to force it along, then we should do so, while remaining sensitive and responsive to the indications of Providence. If the way closes up, we can remain at rest in the Lord, thankful that the plan is coming to naught, for it has been laid aside by God who alone can see the end from the beginning. Maybe other circumstances arose, rendering the original plan null and void, or perhaps it originated with Satan, the destroyer. We can remain confident that God has the whole mat-

ter in hand and that He will show the way out when the time comes. If these procedures are faithfully followed, then absolutely nothing can go wrong.

The need to obtain a new plan when the first one fails, does not mean that God provided a solution about which He later had second thoughts. God cannot make a flawed plan, nor does He ever need to rescind one in favour of another because the original was intrinsically faulty. Any plan which fails to work when properly applied, either comes from another source than the Almighty, or has been overruled by Him. While it may look most promising, in the end it will be the cause of sorrow and loss, so it is wise to be rid of it as early as possible.

Chapter 30

Our Need for the Sabbath

Why the Seventh Day?

The principles of Sabbath rest are not limited to one day in seven, but are to be the Christian's way of life continuously, all week long. There is not a moment when we can turn safely or righteously to any other procedure. Why, then, should we keep just one day in seven as a special day of rest as the Lord has specified in *Exodus* 20?

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work" *Exodus* 20:8–10 (NKJV).

Does not the faithful recognition of the truth and careful cooperation with God as the Source, Christ as the Connector, and ourselves as receivers, mean that we are keeping the Sabbath every day of the week? Surely then there is no need for one special day of Sabbath-keeping?

There are church organizations whose members argue that they operate within the Sabbath principles—as they understand them—every day of the week, and so they see no need to observe the seventh day. But why do these same churches observe Sunday as a special day of rest? On that day they cease from their regular employment and attend church services. If they truly believe in keeping the Sabbath every day of the week, then why do they treat the first day of the week as holy? Furthermore, if they respect one day above the rest, then why not the one God designates?

The real facts are that we cannot adhere to the Sabbath rest principles during the six working days, unless we receive, on the seventh—the biblical Sabbath—the light and power which God provides through the special communion available on that day. The seventh-day Sabbath is a God-given necessity for humanity. No other day can take its place. To the extent that we fail to receive from it what God makes available through it, we will be incapable of practicing the Sabbath rest principles during the rest of the week. To that degree, we will replace God with ourselves as the Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Burden Bearer. If we separate ourselves from our Maker in this way, we will eventually make a fearful mess of His plans for our life.

Made for Man not for God

The Lord is totally selfless in all His actions—He does nothing for selfish reasons. When God created Adam and Eve in their sinless state, He knew their need of the Sabbath and provided it accordingly. When He had placed our first parents in their Eden home, He blessed the seventh day, sanctified it and gave it to the holy pair as a love-gift.

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." *Genesis* 2:2–3.

The Lord deliberately arranged for the Sabbath to be instituted in order to satisfy the needs of humankind. It was not designed to fulfill any needs of His own. He did not desire recognition or respect for His absolute authority and position for His own sake. For too long has Satan impressed on human minds the idea that God is a selfish despot who imposes His will on His creatures for His own benefit. The devil's concepts have been so

thoroughly and widely inculcated that even God's true children tend to think along these lines until they have been re-educated in the divine principles. Even then, there is the constant danger of reverting to the world's way of thinking.

To whatever extent Satan's lies are adopted, even subconsciously, the Sabbath is seen as a device designed to exalt God at humanity's expense, and the tendency is to regard it as an oppressive yoke of bondage. This leads many people to reject it utterly, while others tolerate it in the hope that God's favor thus earned will bring them rich rewards.

In these last days, the Lord is delivering His children from Satan's deceptions and offering them a true concept of His character in exchange. He wants them to see that He is truly a God of love in whom there is no selfishness whatsoever. He desires everyone to understand that the Sabbath is in reality a love-gift from the Almighty invested with incalculable blessings and advantages. In truth it can be said: "The Sabbath was made for man ..." *Mark* 2:27.

As the almighty Creator designed the perfect life-style for His children, He included the Sabbath institution to maintain their security and happiness. Even in sinless Eden, the Sabbath was indispensable to their welfare. Together with marriage, it came to our first parents, and through them to us, as a much needed love-gift from the Infinite (see *Genesis* 2:3,22).

"God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God, and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath, to remind him more vividly of God, and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 48.2.

Understanding how and why God saw that the Sabbath was essential to man, will greatly increase our appreciation of His character and of the Sabbath. When these truths are thoroughly grasped, the Sabbath will no longer be regarded as a restrictive yoke of bondage. It will indeed become a delight to all who know and keep it (compare *Isaiah* 58:13).

We need to strive diligently to understand why the Sabbath is so essential to us, for the better we know these things, the more effective the Sabbath will become to us. We will be able to relate more closely with our heavenly Father and thus prove to be a valuable witness of His wisdom and love.

Unlimited Potential

The reasons for the indispensable presence of the Sabbath are found in the character of God and the perfect plan of creation.

God is infinite, unchangeable love, so there is no trace of self-ishness in Him (see *1 John* 4:8–16). Everything He does is for the good of others and He is not in the least concerned about His authority and kingship, except when the rejection of Him in that role brings separation and death to any of His subjects. Any regard He has for His position is for the sake of His people, not Himself. Therefore it is written:

"... if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm..." *Jeremiah* 7:6.

The Lord's infinite love and wisdom was satisfied with nothing less than the very best for those whom He had created. His love demanded it, His wisdom conceived it, and His power produced it. Thus there was bestowed on humankind the wonderful gifts of life, a home, all the necessary powers by which to operate, the laws to guide and safeguard in the use of these mighty forces, and perfect freedom to either serve or disobey God as each might choose from moment to moment. No one could ask for more than this, and there was nothing better that the Creator could give.

Once God had instated the holy couple in Eden, He could have very easily designed things so that they had nothing to do. Each day, food could have been placed before them without any expenditure of effort on their part. The Garden could have been structured so that it needed no care at all. Human beings could have been given an existence of total idleness and ease.

But this was not the best that limitless love and wisdom could provide. God did far better than that. He supplied us with infinite opportunities for achievement and development. Inexhaustible mines of information on all the sciences were buried within our reach, offering us research projects that not even eternity could exhaust. At our command and disposal were placed raw materials from which we could develop every kind of wonderful invention and facility.

To a great extent, our unlimited advancement was interrupted by the entrance of sin. Even so, humanity has come a long way since Eden in its understanding and application of technology and science, but this is nothing compared to the treasures of knowledge which will open for study when the original creation is restored, and the earth made new (compare *1 Corinthians* 13:12).

The descriptions in the word of God of our future life, in the world made new, show that even in eternity to come we will not live a life of idleness but will have our part to play in cooperation with the heavenly world.

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ... They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands." *Isaiah* 65:17, 21, 22.

An inspiring window into the new world is revealed in the following paragraphs.

"There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.

"All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen

beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator's name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.

"And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy..." The Great Controversy, 677.2–678.1.

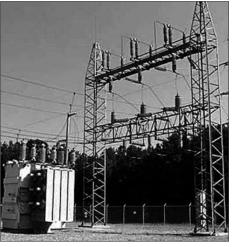
The Protection of the Law

Though faultless perfection marks all of God's handiwork, it is not immune to destruction, as has been proven again and again in the history of this world. Its security depends on the perfect application of the divine laws to every exercise of power. The moment those principles are violated, then destructive forces are set in motion. This does not mean that there are inherent weaknesses or defects in the system, for there are none. But the structure of the balanced forces upon which human existence depends, must be carefully protected to ensure its preservation.

Electricity should serve as an example here. While electricity itself is invisible, the outworking of this power is very easily seen in a hundred ways in everyday life. In order to avoid damage and loss of life, we are constantly warned not to touch it directly. Signs are attached to every household appliance detailing how to use it, cautioning not to immerse it in water and not to repair it without disconnecting it from the source first. Warnings are written wherever there is danger of coming in direct contact with the mighty power of electricity. Everyone who

works with electricity must be very careful to keep within safety limits and take every precaution so that no contact with water, metal or other electrical conductor is possible.

If the law is carefully obeyed then there is no danger of any damage, and the electricity serves as a mighty blessing indeed. But if this power, which can supply us with



a thousand blessings, is touched directly, or the laws are violated in any other way, then it will cause great injury and often death.

The Humility of God

An unchangeable factor in the preservation of human existence is the humility of God. This is one divine characteristic of which the average person is unaware. Human experience associates the possession of great power with great pride, for this is the outworking they see in their own and other lives. When they view God's exceeding might, they naturally assume that He is the proudest Being of all.

But the Eternal One is not affected by riches and power as we are. Nothing has ever changed the perfection of His character, and nothing ever will. God is totally righteous, which excludes all pride.

When the Saviour came to this earth, an important part of His mission was to reveal the Father as He really is. If the eternal God was, in fact, a proud Being, then Christ would have had to walk this earth with equal pride, for a humble being can never accurately represent a proud one. But Jesus was in fact the humblest of the humble. He said:

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." *Matthew* 11:29.

In the meek and lowly One was manifested the character of the eternal God. Therefore, the Father whom He came to reveal must also be the perfection of humility.

One characteristic of a humble person is that he never fights for his rights. In this, Jesus, as the Revelator of His Father's perfect character, is the ultimate example. Never was there an instance in His life where He was seen fighting for whatever was His by right. In this He lived out the principle He Himself gave:

"But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." *Matthew* 5:39–40.

"Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God's countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently. The Desire of Ages, 89.4.

Just as Christ demonstrated humility on earth, so too in all His dealings with humanity, God never fights for His rights. This characteristic puts a greater responsibility on us never to withhold from the Father that which is rightfully His, because our humble God will never fight for it. To withhold what belongs to God is to separate from Him and thus bring death and destruction upon ourselves. It was to preserve us from this fatal course that the Sabbath became a necessity.

Because God will never fight for His rights, we must understand exactly what those rights are, in order to give them to Him. The problem is that as God is so humble and therefore occupies so retiring a position in divine-human relationships, people often forget His part, and see only their own. We tend to ascribe to ourselves the credit due to the Almighty. The resultant punishment which descends on us is not the expression of an offended God, but the sure result of separation from Him. Human beings cannot successfully occupy the Lord's place. Any attempt to do so leads to fatal consequences.

A Working Partnership

God is our Supplier and wants us to co-work with Him. An example of such a working partnership is provided in the production of a loaf of bread. God could have chosen to deliver baked bread to us every day, but instead, He made land available to be cleared and plowed, seed to be sown, and grain to be harvested, winnowed, and ground, ready to be mixed into dough and baked. This gives the human agent a great deal to do, but it was never God's intention that it be done otherwise than in partnership with Him.

Unless God does His part, our efforts will produce nothing. We are able to plow our fields and sow our seed only because the life of God is in us and His power sustains us to do so. The seed sown must have life in it—another factor which only God can provide. Once it is sown, the seed needs light, water and air at the right time and in the required quantity in order to germinate and grow successfully. The process of harvesting, milling and baking is again accomplished by the power of God working through the human agent.



The problem is that God, in His great humility, does His work so quietly and unobtrusively that, in this sin-cursed earth, His contribution can be seen only with the eye of faith. On the other hand, we have no difficulty in seeing what we have done, and, unless the Sabbath gives us what God intends it should, our contribution tends to loom larger and larger in our own eyes while God's fades into oblivion.

These thoughts are summarized in the following paragraph:

"In feeding the five thousand, Jesus lifts the veil from the world of nature, and reveals the power that is constantly exercised for our good. In the production of earth's harvests God is working a miracle every day. Through natural agencies the same work is accomplished that was wrought in the feeding of the multitude. Men prepare the soil and sow the seed, but it is the life from God that causes the seed to germinate. It is God's rain and air and sunshine that cause it to put forth, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:28. It is God who is every day feeding millions from earth's harvest fields. Men are called upon to co-operate with God in the care of the grain and the preparation of the loaf, and because of this they lose sight of the divine agency. They do not give God the glory due unto His holy name. The working of His power is ascribed to natural causes or to human instrumentality. Man is glorified in place of God, and His gracious gifts are perverted to selfish uses, and made a curse instead of a blessing. God is seeking to change all this. He desires that our dull senses shall be quickened to discern His merciful kindness and to glorify Him for the working of His power. He desires us to recognize Him in His gifts, that they may be, as He intended, a blessing to us. It was to accomplish this purpose that the miracles of Christ were performed." The Desire of Ages, 367.3.

God Forgotten

It is not difficult to see that this is exactly what has happened in our world. Forgetfulness of God and the exaltation of the human is now a universal fact of life.

When, for example, astronauts land on the moon or accomplish some other mission in space and then return safely to the earth, the glory for the achievement is given to those who flew

and to the gifted scientists who designed the spacecraft. Scarcely a word, if any, is spoken in recognition and appreciation of God's vital role in the whole mission.

People fail to realize that all the knowledge of scientific law, the powers which were placed at the scientists' command, and the utter consistency of the forces which propelled the space vehicle on its way, came



from a loving Creator's hand. Were there any prayers uttered in quest of divine guidance and protection? Few, if any, of the scientists or the astronauts considered themselves as co-workers with the Divine.

The entire emphasis in human education is also self-centered. During the years spent in school, the student is continually exposed to influences which exalt the achievements of human beings—great inventors, mighty conquerors, powerful rulers, wise statesmen, brilliant scholars, virtuoso musicians, talented artists, strong athletes, and so on. We are taught by direct and indirect influences to believe that men have shaped human destiny, that God is not a force to be reckoned with, and that humanity is elevating itself so successfully that it may eventually attain equality with the Infinite.

All this human "wisdom" is "foolishness" with God (see *1 Corinthians* 1:20–21). Its effect is to replace a totally competent God with beings devoid of the wisdom to shape their own affairs. The end result is ruin and death. Jehovah mourns over this stupidity, but because He will never force the will of anyone, nor fight for His rights, He cannot compel people to follow Him.

A Safeguard

One of the most important safeguards that God introduced to furnish us with protection from separating from Him, was the Sabbath. The Creator knew that the Sabbath, which was a necessity even for unfallen man, was therefore much more essential for fallen man. Six days were allotted for work activity. During that period, our first parents were to experience the sheer joy of accomplishment. They were to see the fruit of their labors, and to rejoice in what the Creator had empowered them to do. Life was designed to be a continual, joyous co-working with the Father; an everlasting ascent from one level of achievement to another.

There would be no time for idleness with every moment being profitably filled through useful and interesting activity. The whole being would be totally absorbed in these wonderful occupations. So complete might this concentration of interest become, that there was danger that our Source would be forgotten, we would come to view ourselves as the originator of all that we were accomplishing, and fearful consequences would come upon us.

The loving Creator saw that some provision had to be made to safeguard His creatures from the development of these evils which would separate them from Him. Whatever measures were chosen had to be the means of maintaining and strengthening our knowledge of God's role as the Source and the human agent's as the receiver.

The way the Lord chose to do this was very simple. His solution, if followed faithfully, would guarantee everlasting protection from apostasy, as well as access to increasingly higher levels of fellowship with the Divine. Having given us six days in which to carry forward the works appointed to us, God set aside the seventh day for a different purpose.

During the six working days of the week, the Lord relates Himself to His people differently, in certain respects, from the way He does on the seventh day. During the week He fellowships with them as a co-worker in all their busy activities, but on the seventh day He rests from that kind of work and communes with them in a way which is designed to refresh and enlarge their concepts of His might and power.

If we understand the different work God does on the Sabbath day and relate ourselves to it accordingly, we find in the Sabbath blessings of extraordinary value. We discover that a truly balanced view of God and humanity will develop, and we will return from these refreshing hours of special education better fitted to hold our proper place in the divine order and accomplish the tasks God sets us.

A Delight

As we grow in our understanding of divine order, we will appreciate the fact more and more that one thing Omnipotence cannot do, is to make us self-sustaining. This is a position which only God can occupy, by virtue of the fact that He needed no one else to give Him an origin. He is from everlasting to everlasting and none can take His place.

These are principles we must never allow ourselves to forget. In order to guarantee this, we must understand our danger, and appreciate the blessed provision of the Sabbath as the divine remedy for the situation. God has built tremendous blessings and riches into the Sabbath. It is for His children to obtain from this institution what He has put into it.

It is not to be seen as a day of prohibitions, a period of time to be endured until the setting sun once more heralds the beginning of another week of busy and profitable activity. Only those who have never truly seen God's wonderful purpose in His gift of the Sabbath ask the question, "What things must I be careful not to do on this day?" Those who are aware of the fellowship and education the Lord provides through this beautiful institution, find themselves eagerly looking forward to another weekly feast of good things. They call the Sabbath a delight, not because they are admonished to do so, but because that is what they have found it to be.

"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken." *Isaiah* 58:13, 14 (NKJV).

Chapter 31

The Sabbath Blessing

Every true believer will want to know what procedures to follow in order to realize the fullness of God's purpose through the Sabbath in his or her life. So how can the Sabbath day become all that God intended it to be for you and me?

A Sense of Need

In the first place, we never reach out for God's promised blessings until we have a sense of need them. Self-sufficiency is one of the most serious barriers to entering into Sabbath rest. We therefore need to plead for the Holy Spirit to awaken in us a real sense of our personal need. Are we aware of our imminent and continual danger of forgetting who our Source is, and of attributing to ourselves the glory which belongs to our Maker?

Under the guidance of our heavenly Teacher, the Scriptures need to be studied daily with the specific purpose of seeing how prone we are to forsaking God's ways and following our own. We should also consider the fearful outworking of forgetting God and substituting our plans and procedures in place of His. We can never relax our guard and imagine that we are no longer in danger of turning to our own ways.

There is continued value in studying the Scriptures in order to confirm our understanding that God alone is our Source, Christ is our great Connector, and we are always the dependent receivers. In no better way can we be so effectively taught what both ours and God's true places are. We need to learn that no matter how much pressure is placed upon us, God never moves from His place, for with the Father "there is no variation or shadow of turning." *James* 1:17 (NKJV). It is equally important that we learn to hold consistently to our own God-given position.

We must plead for a true sense of need that is to be cultivated and strengthened daily. As long as life shall last we are to "... fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest," we might "come short of it." *Hebrews* 4:1 (KJV).

The Purpose of the Sabbath

Once this sense of need and the accompanying godly fear that we might lose our way have been established, careful study should be given to God's purpose in the Sabbath. We must learn that, on the seventh day of the week specifically, the Almighty, although never resting from the responsibility of sustaining the universe, is not available to work with us in our daily pursuits. God rests from that labor on the Sabbath day, and devotes Himself to special communion with His followers. It is therefore pointless to pursue our weekly work on the Sabbath, for we will not gain God's blessing in so doing. And we will miss out on His special Sabbath blessing unless we lay aside our daily toil and commune with Him.

Just as God rests from His labor on the seventh day, so we as true Sabbath-keepers, are to lay aside all the work He has appointed us during the six working days, and give ourselves to devoted fellowship with Him. We must approach each Sabbath day acutely aware of our need to behold our heavenly Father's matchless love, incomparable humility, and limitless power. We will understand that of ourselves we have no power to see these wonders, but we will rejoice in the assurance that our needs will be fully supplied because our heavenly Father, who has perfect knowledge of our requirements, desires nothing more than to furnish them.

When the disciples asked Jesus, "teach us to pray" (*Luke* 11:1), He repeated the Lord's prayer that He had given in His sermon on the Mount, then He illustrated it with the parable of the friend who supplied his neighbour's need of bread. "Christ's lessons in regard to prayer should be carefully considered. There is a divine science in prayer, and His illustration brings to view principles that all need to understand. He shows what is the true spirit of prayer, He teaches the necessity of perseverance in presenting our requests to God, and assures us of His willingness to hear and answer prayer." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 142.2.

This gives us great confidence to plead for the richest bestowals of the promised blessings.

Pressing into His Presence

As true believers, we will cultivate a positive attitude towards the Sabbath. We will say, "The Lord has made tremendous and necessary blessings available to me through this day. It is His desire that I be filled with the fullness of these mercies. Therefore, I come boldly to the throne of grace and lay hold upon these blessings, knowing that I have them by faith. I thank and praise my all-wise, loving, heavenly Father, who, mindful of my great need, provided the Sabbath and the blessings which it brings in order to meet that need."

Deep faith expressed through strong confidence in God's promises, and accompanied by positive action, brings great rewards. These include not only a closer communion with our Maker, a better understanding of His ways, and strength for the coming week, but also significant changes for the better within us. This is the faith that must be learned and exercised by those who would achieve much for God.

The Faith of Elijah

Such a faith is well illustrated by Elijah's experience when, on Mt. Carmel, he pleaded with God for the drought-breaking rains to fall. Knowing that Israel had at last repented of their sins, and that God desired that they be given relief from the desperate conditions to which they had been reduced, the prophet went to pray. In a very humble attitude he supplicated the throne of grace.

"... Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees." *1 Kings* 18:42.

Six times the servant was sent to observe the heavens and every time he carried back the message: "There is nothing there." *1 Kings* 18:43. But Elijah refused to desist from his prayerful pleadings until the blessing had manifested itself. Elijah must have been a man of large faith so that the Lord could use him in this grave crisis.

When at last the servant saw just a tiny cloud on the horizon, Elijah's faith immediately grasped in that small token the full realization of the promised outpouring of rain:

"The seventh time the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.' So Elijah said, 'Go and tell Ahab, "Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you."" 1 Kings 18:44.

The great faith of this man of God is revealed in the following paragraphs:

"As he prayed, his faith reached out and grasped the promises of Heaven, and he persevered in prayer until his petitions were answered. He did not wait for the full evidence that God had heard him, but was willing to venture all on the slightest token of divine favor. And yet what he was enabled to do under God, all may do in their sphere of activity in God's service...

"Faith such as this is needed in the world today—faith that will lay hold on the promises of God's word and refuse to let go until Heaven hears. Faith such as this connects us closely with Heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. Through faith God's children have 'subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.' Hebrews 11:33, 34. And through faith we today are to reach the heights of God's purpose for us. 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' Mark 9:23.

"Faith is an essential element of prevailing prayer. 'He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' 'If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.' *Hebrews* 11:6, 1 John 5:14, 15. With the persevering faith of Jacob, with the unyielding persistence of Elijah, we may present our petitions to the Father, claiming all that He has promised. The honour of His throne is staked for the fulfilment of His word." *Prophets and Kings*, 156.3–157.2.

Our Own Faith

Just as Elijah successfully prayed with great resolve and persistence until Israel received the blessing of flooding rain, so we are to pray with equal faith and tenacity for the blessings God has promised us in the Sabbath. Our faith needs to grow to be like that of Jacob when he wrestled with the angel (see *Genesis* 32:23–32) and with determination to gain the promised blessing he cried out: "I will not let you go unless you bless me." *Genesis* 32:26.

A heart-felt prayer of this kind will be most surely answered by the Almighty. He cannot withdraw Himself from such a person clinging to Him, while pleading his great need.

This story contains much comfort for God's children. We generally do not receive from the Sabbath all that God intends. We lack a real sense of our need for such blessings. But if we will come to God with the unwearied persistence of Elijah, cling to the Saviour as he and Jacob did, we can be assured that the Lord will give us a true sense of our need to obtain from the Sabbath what He has put into it. Having been blessed with this consciousness of our need, we can then press our case with continued powerful faith and intense determination, assured that the blessing will be bestowed. The Sabbath will then become to us what the Lord designed it should be.

So rich and rewarding will be the experience thus gained, and so clear the views of God's love and power, that we will see with greater and greater clarity the infinite might of the Omnipotent and the smallness of the human agent. It is the sharpening of this perception which generates a correspondingly increased sense of dependence within us, and this in turn enables God to do mightier and still mightier works through us.

Of Elijah's experience it is written:

"It seemed to him that he was nothing, and that God was everything; and when he reached the point of renouncing self, while he clung to the Saviour as his only strength and righteousness, the answer came." *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1891 par. 8.

Stripped of all self-sufficiency, Elijah became a man mighty with God. Thus it will be with every one who, as Elijah did, learns to cling by faith to the promises of God. This is the class of people, who, finding the way to the Sabbath blessings, enter into and abide in God's rest. They see themselves as they really are—inconspicuous elements in the infinite scheme of things—while they view God as the omnipotent Ruler of the universe, as well as Provider and Sustainer of all life.

Not a Time for Inactivity

Elijah was a very busy person while pleading with God for the promised outpouring of rain. He spent none of that time sleeping or in idleness. Likewise, those who truly keep the Sabbath will not find it a day of inactivity. God never intended the sacred hours of the Sabbath day to be wasted in sleep. The nightly hours of darkness have been provided for that purpose. The day-time hours of the Sabbath are for that spiritual refreshment which is obtained by gaining broad and exalted views of the Most High. Not one second of its precious opportunities should be wasted. It is a day for being up early to commune with God in the freshness of the morning. Later, it is good to assemble with other believers for Bible study, singing hymns, and prayer, but the entire day should not be spent in this way.

Helpful guidelines on how to keep the Sabbath are given in the following extract.

"In order to keep the Sabbath holy, it is not necessary that we enclose ourselves in walls, shut away from the beautiful scenes of nature and from the free, invigorating air of heaven. We should in no case allow burdens and business transactions to divert our minds upon the Sabbath of the Lord, which He has sanctified. We

should not allow our minds to dwell upon things of a worldly character even. But the mind cannot be refreshed, enlivened, and elevated by being confined nearly all the Sabbath hours within walls, listening to long sermons and tedious, formal prayers. The Sabbath of the Lord is put to a wrong use if thus celebrated. The object for which it was instituted is not attained. The Sabbath was made for man, to be a blessing to him by calling his mind from secular labour to contemplate the goodness and glory of God. It is necessary that the people of God assemble to talk to Him, to interchange thoughts and ideas in regard to the truths contained in His word, and to devote a portion of time to appropriate prayer. But these seasons, even upon the Sabbath, should not be made tedious by their length and lack of interest.

"During a portion of the day, all should have an opportunity to be out of doors. How can children receive a more correct knowledge of God, and their minds be better impressed, than in spending a portion of their time out of doors, not in play, but in company with their parents? Let their young minds be associated with God in the beautiful scenery of nature, let their attention be called to the tokens of His love to man in His created works, and they will be attracted and interested. They will not be in danger of associating the character of God with everything that is stern and severe; but as they view the beautiful things which He has created for the happiness of man, they will be led to regard Him as a tender, loving Father. They will see that His prohibitions and injunctions are not made merely to show His power and authority, but that He has the happiness of His children in view. As the character of God puts on the aspect of love, benevolence, beauty, and attraction, they are drawn to love Him. You can direct their minds to the lovely birds making the air musical with their happy songs, to the spires of grass, and the gloriously tinted flowers in their perfection perfuming the air. All these proclaim the love and skill of the heavenly Artist, and show forth the glory of God.

"Parents, why not make use of the precious lessons which God has given us in the book of nature, to give our children a correct idea of His character? Those who sacrifice simplicity to fashion, and shut themselves away from the beauties of nature, cannot be spiritually minded. They cannot understand the skill and power of God as revealed in His created works; therefore their hearts do not quicken and throb with new love and interest, and they are not filled with awe and reverence as they see God in nature.

"All who love God should do what they can to make the Sabbath a delight, holy and honorable. They cannot do this by seeking their own pleasure in sinful, forbidden amusements. Yet they can do much to exalt the Sabbath in their families and make it the most interesting day of the week. We should devote time to interesting our children. A change will have a happy influence upon them. We can walk out with them in the open air; we can sit with them in the groves and in the bright sunshine, and give their restless minds something to feed upon by conversing with them upon the works of God, and can inspire them with love and reverence by calling their attention to the beautiful objects in nature.

"The Sabbath should be made so interesting to our families that its weekly return will be hailed with joy. In no better way can parents exalt and honour the Sabbath than by devising means to impart proper instruction to their families and interesting them in spiritual things, giving them correct views of the character of God and what He requires of us in order to perfect Christian characters and attain to eternal life. Parents, make the Sabbath a delight, that your children may look forward to it and have a welcome in their hearts for it." *Testimonies* 2:583.1–585.1.

These instructions direct the believer to obtain richer and clearer revelations of the Almighty through participation in studying the Scriptures, in Christian fellowship, and in communion with God's created works. They also emphasize the responsibility of parents to educate their children in true Sabbath observance. Obviously, parents cannot do this effectively unless they have learned these lessons themselves.

The Learning Process

Learning to keep the Sabbath so that the believer receives from these sacred hours what God has put into them, requires as much diligent application as any other field of study. Sabbath observers often seem to be unaware of this truth. Many have the idea that all that is required to keep the Sabbath, is to cease from all work upon that day, attend church services, and take a drive or go for a walk in the afternoon. Provided such activities are not done from a purely legalistic point of view, a blessing will be received. However, it will be nothing compared with what God's children would gain if they really worked diligently and consistently at getting out of the Sabbath all that He has put into it.

A practical illustration of how to accomplish this is provided in the acquisition of musical skill. First, the instrument, such as an electronic keyboard, is bought. The makers, using the skill and knowledge God has enabled them to develop, have built wonderful possibilities into the equipment. The salesperson, who demonstrates it in the showroom, thrills the buyer with its rich tones, subtle harmonies, sparkling melodies, and seemingly endless combinations. The aspiring musician cannot wait to get it home to produce and enjoy the same wonderful sounds. But not being an accomplished organist, he finds to his dismay that very little of what the salesperson produced is now forthcoming. At this point he suffers an acute sense of disappointment, and may even wonder if there is a problem with the keyboard.

But there has been no change in the instrument. The salesperson did not substitute an inferior one for the original that was ordered and paid for. Nothing has happened but the outworking of natural law. The simple fact is that the individual has to work hard at learning how to get out of the instrument all that was built into it. No one is an instant virtuoso. The person chosen to sell the equipment was selected because he had developed the ability to bring out the best in the instrument. It would have cost him endless hours of study and practice to develop those abilities and maintain them.

Likewise, the new owner must realize that if he wishes to enjoy the exquisite pleasure to be derived from bringing out the best in his new instrument, he must study and practice with great diligence and close application. No one has ever attained any heights of achievement without persevering effort and concentrated study. The harder we work at developing our skills, the more competent we become in the use of those blessings.

Those who do reach the higher levels of excellence and proficiency are few in number compared to the earth's teeming millions. Most are content to expend no more effort than they are obliged to, being satisfied with a mediocre or even impoverished existence, where instead they might be rich in developed talents and increased abilities. By this indolence, they rob themselves, their fellows, and the Lord who made them.

Some would excuse themselves by claiming that, in their limited circumstances, they are deprived of the opportunity to develop as they might. It is true that some will never see their full potential in certain directions because of constraints imposed on them by financial difficulties or restricted conditions, but all are afforded the opportunity to become highly proficient in some line, no matter how unimportant it might seem. If nothing else, we should labor at cultivating a cheerful disposition until, no matter how dark and stormy the situation around might be, we will lighten the darkness with the sunshine of a radiant personality.

Making the Most of our Opportunities

The story is told of a poor boy who worked on a New York sidewalk shining shoes. There were hundreds of other boys doing the same thing, but while they were content with a mere mechanical performance, this lad studied diligently to improve his skills. He was not motivated by a competitive spirit, nor by the ambition to rise to a better position, for he saw no hope of ever escaping from his lowly occupation. He was simply determined to learn all he could and to render the best possible service.

He gained considerable knowledge by studying the various types of shoe-leather on which he worked, and observing how the different types responded to polishing. As opportunity afforded, he slipped into the public library and read all he could find on hides, tanning, leather, shoemaking, and so forth. Back on the street he applied his growing knowledge to his work, while aiming to be the best shoeblack possible.

The fact that the average person took him for granted, being unaware of the effort he was investing in his work, did not discourage him. Day after day, he sought to increase his knowledge and to sharpen his skills in a trade which the other boys regarded as being unworthy of the effort. They believed they could

learn all there was to learn about shoe-shining in the first day. After that, it was simply a matter of applying the polish and collecting the money.

One day, a stranger whom the boy had never seen before, asked to have his shoes shone. The lad recognized at once that the shoes were made of a poor quality of leather and doubted if he could do much with them. Nonetheless, he worked hard, but finally admitting defeat, he briefly explained to the man the nature of the leather, its origin and quality, and the manufacturing process through which it had passed. Because of these factors, he explained that he could not give the shoes a good shine, and suggested to his customer how he could identify a better quality leather the next time he bought shoes.

The man thanked him and went on his way. The next customer, who had overheard the conversation as he waited his turn, stepped up and began to ply the lad with questions. He listened in astonishment to his answers about shoes and leather. He had never met a shoeshine boy like this before. He was much impressed with the fund of knowledge the boy had accumulated. As it happened, this man owned a large shoe factory and saw in the boy a valuable worker for his plant. The job he promptly offered the lad was as quickly accepted. It was not long before the shoeshine boy became the chief buyer of leather for the entire factory and eventually occupied the position of manager.

This boy brought out the best in himself because he worked at it. He did everything he could to improve his knowledge and abilities. That principle holds true for all who have risen above the lower levels where the majority are quite content to remain. While the rest have spent their time in useless amusements or wasteful idleness, these few have applied themselves to learning and practice until they have far outdistanced those who might have run with them.

Keeping Sabbath

The same is true with Sabbath-keeping. When we begin to keep the Sabbath, our experience may be similar to the novice with the new keyboard. All the blessings, all the wonderful potential is there, but it is impossible for the new believer to realize these marvels fully at this stage. Furthermore, we never will unless we are prepared to work diligently at the business of getting out of the Sabbath all that God has put into it like the boy who worked on the job of shining shoes did his best to improve.

Once we understand these principles, we need to apply disciplined effort to become great Sabbath-keepers. We will realize this cannot be achieved in a few moments—that it will take years of steady progress to attain really significant results. Having made the resolve, we need to work towards our goal with concentrated diligence and dauntless determination. We must not be disheartened if progress seems slow, but press towards the mark with unwearied zeal.

It will be a lonely quest, for the vast majority of Sabbath-keepers are content to remain at lower levels. For those who do not understand the need to strive for greater excellence in Sabbath-keeping, or who have no desire to subject their lives to the necessary discipline, each Sabbath is much the same as the one before. There is little that is fresh or new, and little if any advancement from one level of excellence to the next. The rich treasures of knowledge and truth remain hidden from such, unappreciated and untapped. Eventually, to these unfortunate souls, the Sabbath becomes stale, flat, and unprofitable. Not realizing that the real cause of their poverty lies in their own lack of intelligent, diligent, disciplined effort, such people complain that God gives them very little when they need so much.

We all need to realize that we have a work to do for ourselves which God cannot do for us. We must overcome the natural tendencies of the flesh to seek the easy way that requires minimal effort, and little, if any, discipline. In order to become true Sabbath-keepers, we need to gird up the loins of mind and heart, and press towards the prize with all the powers at our command, being careful to confine ourselves to the part assigned to the human agent. Under no circumstances must we undertake the Lord's role.

A Competent Teacher

If we wish to play a keyboard and come into possession of a new instrument, our first action is to engage the services of a teacher. So it should be with those who desire to learn how to receive from the Sabbath the blessings within it. A Teacher needs to be commissioned to train and develop these skills.

Only God through the Holy Spirit can be that Teacher. We must lay out our need to Him in a prayer such as this:

"Dear Heavenly Father, I now realize that true Sabbath-keeping is a science that must be learned and developed through consistent, diligent, disciplined effort. I am not able to teach myself these things, but You are my Teacher and I commit the entire responsibility for this work to You. I sit here at Your feet and ask for the humility and trust of a little child, with my heart open to receive all that You have to show me, and ready to do all that You direct me to do. I know that it will not be the work of a moment to perfect my Sabbath education. The work will seem slow and difficult, but as I dedicate myself to endure the discipline in order to obtain the promised reward, I ask for Your patience, perseverance and fortitude. By faith, and therefore in fact, I receive these blessings, possess them, and thank You for them, knowing that I shall realize them when I need them most. All this I receive in Jesus' name. Amen."

The Lord will individualize the instruction to suit our personal temperament and need, and to keep pace with our own learning abilities. We can either retard the process by failing to apply ourselves to our lessons, or we can keep pace with the Teacher by working hard on our studies.

The divine Educator will direct us to study God's creative work and commune with nature and Himself on that day. He will lead us to understand our own personal need until we are motivated to seek the answers to those needs. The Lord will teach us how to come to each Sabbath with a positive determination to experience greater and greater blessings from that holy day. He will give us the understanding of the relationship between the fellowship provided on the seventh day, and the work to be done on the other six days.

Communion with Nature

We will learn that it is not enough to spend time studying God's Word or merely walk through nature, unless through these means communion with God is actually established. It is quite common for people who give no thought to God and His truth, to spend time strolling in parks, forests, or by the sea, on Sabbath afternoon. They are enjoying the peace and beauty of nature and it is good for them, but one can hardly conclude that they are truly observing the Sabbath.

We should aim to hear God speaking to us throughout the Sabbath day. So vast is the gulf established by sin that it is difficult for humanity to hear the heavenly voices through the medium of nature, but it is important that this capacity is developed.

Those who set out to achieve this usually find the initial results so discouraging that they feel the quest is hopeless and tend to give up right there and then. It is much the same as when we arrive in a foreign land for the first time. We are surrounded by people speaking to one another in their own language, which is completely unintelligible to us. We decide that we must learn the language, but the words are so unfamiliar and difficult, the grammar so complicated, and the vocabulary so large, that we feel the task is impossible. However, if we doggedly persist in our pursuit of learning, we will find that as the months go by, we learn more and more. We will finally be able to communicate on a limited basis, and eventually with full fluency.

Likewise, when we first seek to enter into communion with nature on the Sabbath day, the results are totally disappointing. We feel that while we enjoy and admire God's created handiwork, there is no positive communication. We have come with the mistaken idea that we will experience complete fellowship from the first moment, forgetting that no one is an instant virtuoso. The reaction is to abandon the task right there and then, instead of remembering that no language is understood or learned on first contact.

There is no need to be surprised and disappointed that so little communication is achieved the first day. This is quite natural. We must return again the next Sabbath and every one thereafter, with the determination that even though it is a long, hard task, achievement where full communion with God through His created works will be established, lies at the end of it.

Eternal Reward

The possibilities God has invested in the Sabbath day are beyond human computation. In fact, they are infinite and therefore inexhaustible. The time will never come when we have gained all that might be found in the Lord's day. Eternally, there will be new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, and fresh blessings to be received. With every new Sabbath we will learn and grow throughout eternity.

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the LORD, 'so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD." *Isaiah* 66:22–23.

These things await us and it is left with each of us, by dedicated application of the principles involved, to find these treasures for ourselves. If we do, we will emerge from this fellowship with such exalted views of God's infinite power and majesty, and of our own lowly estate, that we will be in no danger of asserting ourselves above God.

The Sabbath was made for needy humankind. Let us make the most of this inestimable love-gift!

Chapter 32

God's Way In Missionary Work

A prayerful / careful reading of *Acts* chapter 8, together with *The Acts of the Apostles* chapter 11, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

The Promised Latter Rain

We are rapidly approaching the time when the gospel will achieve its greatest results ever. Empowered by the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the light of truth will penetrate into every corner of the globe (see *Revelation* 18:1–24). From the darkest depths of spiritual ignorance to the most enlightened areas of contemporary civilization, every man, woman, and child will be aware of God's claims upon them. The warning will be given, it will be heard, and all will find themselves obliged to make a positive or negative decision in response to it.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." *Matthew* 24:14.

Thousands upon thousands will be converted in a day, as the prophecy of *Joel* is fulfilled for the second and final time (see

Joel 2:28–32). It received its first fulfillment in that miraculous time when the Holy Spirit descended upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost (see *Acts* 2:1–47). Mighty as that manifestation of divine power was, it will be surpassed in that soon-coming day when the loud cry goes forward.

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." *Joel* 2:28–29.

"As the time comes for it to be given with greatest power, the Lord will work through humble instruments, leading the minds of those who consecrate themselves to His service. The laborers will be qualified rather by the unction of His Spirit than by the training of literary institutions. Men of faith and prayer will be constrained to go forth with holy zeal, declaring the words which God gives them. The sins of Babylon will be laid open. The fearful results of enforcing the observances of the church by civil authority, the inroads of spiritualism, the stealthy but rapid progress of the papal power,—all will be unmasked. By these solemn warnings the people will be stirred. Thousands upon thousands will listen who have never heard words like these. In amazement they hear the testimony that Babylon is the church, fallen because of her errors and sins, because of her rejection of the truth sent to her from heaven." The Great Controversy, 606.2.

This is the success story that the members of Christ's body have always dreamed about, but never fully realized. The major reason for this disappointment is the persistent determination by God's people to achieve these results in their own way—which is actually not possible to do. Therefore, when the final work goes forward so powerfully and effectively, it will be because God's methods alone are being employed. There will be no trace of human devising at that time. The way in which missionary work is carried out then, will be different from how it has usually been attempted until now.

This is clearly foretold in the following words: "Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning." *Testimonies to Ministers*, 299.2.

The Usual Method of Missionary Work

Christ has said: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." *Mark* 16:15. How do the various churches go about fulfilling Christ's commission to preach the gospel in all the world? What is "the common order of things" in missionary endeavor?

The various methods adopted by the different church organizations are generally similar, although there are, of course, variations in the actual application of those basic methods. Different devices are continually being thought up to catch the attention of the general public, some of which are quite novel and clever. A typical example for a church approach to missionary work is as follows.

The church nominating committee appoints a missionary leader, whose responsibility it is to use every means he or she can devise to induce the members to go out and win converts. Having motivated some to volunteer for the Lord's service, a meeting is called to plan the campaign. Territory is selected, literature is supplied, and the new missionaries are assigned their individual areas of operation.

At the appointed time, the volunteers sally forth to commence a methodical house-to-house visitation according to the usual pattern. They will leave no house unvisited, knocking on every door they pass on their systematic campaign. As each contact is made, the objective is to generate a spiritual interest, hold a conversation, share their faith, leave some literature, and pave the way for a return visit. Most of the people reject the advances with responses varying from polite to abusive, but there is the occasional person who does show an interest, and from this sprinkling, some eventually join the church.

It is hard, discouraging work, but it is the system adopted by many churches—"the common order of things." No scriptural foundation for this method can be found. It was devised by the people in the churches themselves, not by God. Why then should we follow it? Those who are under God's personal leadership will be led by their divine Head to do missionary work in an altogether different way. We need to inquire what the Lord's way is. How should missionary work be done according to the Sabbath rest principles?

Philip's Missionary Experience

In the Scriptures we find a clear example of the Lord's way provided in the experience of Philip and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. At the time it happened, Philip was engaged in a very productive ministry in Samaria (see *Acts* 8:5–8); so much so, that Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to assist him (see *Acts* 8:14). At an industrious time like that, they would not plan to leave such a fruitful place. Instead they would spend all their efforts in establishing the new believers on a firm foundation.

But the great Plan Maker had other plans for the main worker of this locality. Quite unexpectedly, Philip was directed to leave this area just when things were progressing well, and journey southwards to the route that led to Gaza.

"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it." *Acts* 8:26–29.

It is obvious that no thread of human devising was to be found in this plan. Philip had no knowledge of the Ethiopian's visit to Jerusalem, nor of his need to have the gospel explained to him. But God knew not only the man's need; He also knew the exact time and place for Philip to be brought into contact with him. He had been working on the heart of this precious soul and had arranged things so that Philip could reach him precisely at the opportune moment.

It would have been less arduous and time-consuming for Philip to have gone to Jerusalem to meet this man, but the Lord waited till the Ethiopian had traveled far south of the city on his homeward journey. So perfectly was the apostle's departure from Samaria timed, that he met the traveler exactly where God intended he should. The result of the encounter was that the Ethiopian was thoroughly converted.

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." *Acts* 8:35–38 (NKJV).

This man then carried the glad tidings of a risen Saviour back to his home country where the message was received with joy. The Sabbath became the national day of worship and remained so for centuries. J. N. Andrews commented on this as follows:

"In consequence of their location in the interior of Africa, the Abyssinians ceased to be known to the rest of Christendom about the fifth century. At this time, the Sabbath and the Sunday in the Catholic church were counted sisters. One thousand years later, these African churches were visited, and though surrounded by the thick darkness of pagan and Mohammedan superstition, and somewhat affected thereby, they were to be found, at the end of this period, holding the Sabbath and firstday substantially as they were held by the Catholic church when it lost sight of them. The Catholics of Europe, on the contrary, had in the meantime trampled the ancient Sabbath in the dust. Why was this great contrast?—Simply because the pope ruled in Europe; while central Africa, whatever else it may have suffered, was not cursed with his presence nor his influence. But so soon as the pope learned of the existence of the Abyssinian churches, he sought to gain control of them, and when he had gained it, one of his first acts was to suppress the Sabbath! In the end, the Abyssinians regained their independence, and thenceforward till the present time have held fast the Sabbath of the Lord." History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week, 428, 429, by J. N. Andrews. Published in 1887.

We can only rate the outcome of Philip's missionary contact as being outstandingly successful. The first and immediate reward was the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian, but this was only the beginning. He, in turn, carried the light to his queen and to the people, and the nation became a bastion of truth for centuries.

On the Verge of the Kingdom

Many Bible students would look on Philip's experience as a wonderful exception to the general rule, seeing nothing in the incident to direct them to let the Lord plan all their own missionary contacts rather than doing so themselves. Rather wistfully, they might wish that they could be guided as Philip was, but unfortunately, God can lead people only insofar as they have a living connection with Him and allow Him to be their Plan Maker as Philip did.

Firstly, God cannot lead His people, regardless of their beliefs and profession, unless they are submitted to His leadership instead of their own or someone else's. Secondly, those who do not have the living gospel message cannot be led by God to share it with the perishing, until they have experienced it themselves.

This emphasizes the truth that God's system can only work when the believers are truly joined to Him. Therefore, if we wish to be effective soul-winners, we must first make sure that we have the life of Christ within. Let us examine our souls prayerfully and not just assume that we are His. We need to concentrate our efforts on this, spending time in deep communion with the Lord, or we will be in danger of coming fruitless to the great judgment day.

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." *John* 15:4.

"The power of love was in all Christ's healing, and only by partaking of that love, through faith, can we be instruments for His work. If we neglect to link ourselves in divine connection with Christ, the current of life-giving energy cannot flow in rich streams from us to the people." *The Desire of Ages*, 825.1.

There is no doubt that Philip had this qualification of Christ's life and love within, which is why the Lord was well able to direct all his ways, and to use him successfully in taking the gospel to the Ethiopian.

Those who desire to enter into God's rest and rejoice in a fruitful ministry, can confidently follow the same procedures God used in directing Philip to the rendezvous with the Ethiopian, as they are a perfect guide. This Ethiopian was no exception, but rather an example of many who are anxiously seeking for light.

"This Ethiopian represented a large class who need to be taught by such missionaries as Philip,—men who will hear the voice of God and go where He sends them. There are many who are reading the Scriptures who cannot understand their true import. All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109.1.

Upon these souls the Holy Spirit has done the preliminary work, without which human effort would be fruitless. Once this is accomplished, God's next step is to select the appropriate worker as His instrument to explain the gospel truths to the needy one. The only people who can serve in this capacity are those who are willing to be used as missionaries like Philip. They must be people who will hear the voice of God, recognize His specific orders as such, and go where He sends them. They will not accept specific orders from a church-elected missionary leader, nor plan their own missionary work and send themselves.

The Wrong Method

By way of contrast, it is helpful to see how the usual procedures adopted by churches effectively frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. After the missionary leader has met with those who are willing to work under his guidance, and has assigned their territory, they embark on their mission, usually in pairs. As we have noted they systematically call from house to house, omitting none. When they find no one at home, these workers note the address and call again later—a commendable thoroughness.

Now let us imagine that in one of the homes the missionaries will shortly visit, lives a man upon whom the Holy Spirit is working, but for the time being he is not yet ready to receive the gospel. At this early stage, the convicted one does not understand his true need, and in the unrest and unbelief in which he

is still encased, he has no desire to see a Bible-worker. Consequently, when the missionaries arrive at his door, the man makes it clear that he has no interest in listening to them.

The callers, judging from what they see, decide that this is just another cold, disinterested lover of the world and turn away, satisfied that there is no point in calling at his address again. But after their departure, the Holy Spirit patiently continues His work until the soul is brought to deep repentance and longs for a true Christian to come and teach him the way of life.

By this time the workers are several blocks or even suburbs away, methodically fulfilling a plan that is not of the Holy Spirit's devising. It also shuts out any possibility of the Spirit's leading them back to where light is needed. In this way the human system deprives the needy of help at the critical moment.

But this is not all. It is an extremely inefficient system. So few in number are Christ's true followers, that it would be physically impossible for them to visit every home in the world with the gospel invitation. Even if they had the financial resources, they would not have the time or the energy. But the Lord knows the exact whereabouts of each precious soul who is seeking the light as was the Ethiopian, and He has promised to guide missionaries such as Philip, directly to them. He will lead His consecrated followers from the door of one such seeker to the door of the next, even if these doors are geographically separated by miles, or even countries.

Christ's Method

A far more effective approach would be for Christ's professed followers to learn and practice His ways of missionary work. Their first and most important priority is to ensure that they do have the necessary spiritual qualifications, after which they must believe the promises of God assuring them that He will lead them to the very souls who are ready for their loving, unselfish ministry.

"... to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." *Luke* 1:79.

Angels of glory will help us to find those who are longing for heavenly light for "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" *Hebrews* 1:14.

"An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God's way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109.2.

"There are in our world many who are nearer the kingdom of God than we suppose. In this dark world of sin the Lord has many precious jewels, to whom He will guide His messengers. Everywhere there are those who will take their stand for Christ. Many will prize the wisdom of God above any earthly advantage, and will become faithful light bearers. Constrained by the love of Christ, they will constrain others to come to Him." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 140.3.

Jesus is able to make unimaginable plans for missionary contacts. He has perfect knowledge of the situation and heart condition of everyone who is seeking for light. This is beautifully illustrated in the object lesson of the shepherd and his sheep.

"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep..." *John* 10:14. "You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD." *Ezekiel* 34:31.

"I have summoned you by name; you are mine." *Isaiah* 43:1. "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" *Isaiah* 49:16.

The application of these texts is summed up in the following paragraph:

"Jesus knows us individually, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very house in which we live, the name of each occupant. He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep." *The Desire of Ages*, 479.3.

Jesus would give such directions to His servants to go to specific houses far more often, if only He had missionaries similar to Philip—men and women who will listen to His voice and go where He sends them. How many more souls would then be quickly gathered into His kingdom! Following is such a personal testimony written by F.T. Wright.

Personal Testimony

"I, personally, learned this vital lesson many years ago in the early 1950s. Prior to that time, I was employed as a teacher in a missionary college. The light of the gospel had already come to me and delivered me from the bondage of sin.

Surprising as it may seem, my grasping, experiencing, and teaching the power of the gospel as the way of salvation from sin, was met with serious opposition from the college and church leaders. For several years, I was obliged to share my faith rather guardedly in the full knowledge that doing so was heading me towards a crisis.

Finally, I came to the beginning of what I sensed would be my last year at the college. At this point, I found myself faced with a dilemma. If I continued to share my faith, it would result in serious division in the school, diverting the minds of the students away from their lessons, and causing bitter conflict between the leadership and myself.

I seriously questioned whether this was right and wondered what course to follow. Looking to the Scriptures for guidance, I was impressed with the way in which David related to King Saul. He knew that the monarch was in a state of rebellion against God and that his reign was ruinous to Israel. He also understood that he, David, had been anointed to replace the unfaithful ruler, but he would not raise a finger to depose King Saul in order to save Israel or to enthrone himself. Evil as the monarch became, the Lord had put him there, and it was the Lord's responsibility to remove him in His own good time and way.

From this witness I understood that I should not agitate the message in the school. The responsibility for the spiritual and educational welfare of the students was in the hands of the principal and it was not for me to usurp his position or correct his work by instituting a great work of reformation, no matter how wrong his influence might be.

However, in other Bible stories I read, I learned of the Lord's sending messengers into the courts of apostate rulers with the plea to forsake their evil ways and accept the light so graciously sent to them from heaven. I also knew that we have nothing to do with consequences, but must concern ourselves only with following God's directions.

At first, these two instructions seemed to be somewhat at variance and, for a short time, I was in a quandary as to what I should do in the coming months. Then the Lord directed my mind to the fact that Jesus Christ is not only our righteousness, but also our wisdom, as it is written: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." *1 Corinthians* 1:30.

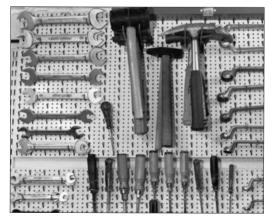
I saw that while I did not have the wisdom to know just what to do, the Lord did. All I had to do was give Him the problem and await His directions

Tools in the Master's Hand

In my capacity as a woodwork teacher, I saw my own position in relation to the tools on the workshop shelves, as a clear picture of the position I was to fill in relation to my Head, Jesus Christ.

Those tools patiently hung in their places until a workman came to use them. They were all different and none could do the work of any other. Some were very specialized and rarely put to

use. while others were used everv working day. Each was employed in turn when the workman needed them, but not otherwise. Meanwhile, those not in use served equally well by waiting quietly and uncomplainingly until they were needed again.



With great clarity, I saw myself as a tool in the Master's hand. It was not for me to make decisions as to whether or not to engage in certain missionary activities. That was the Master Workman's personal responsibility. I had only to wait patiently and uncomplainingly until His directives regarding work came to me.

I was filled with great joy at the revelation of these principles. Something about them was beautiful and attractive to me, and I welcomed them wholeheartedly, immediately falling upon my knees and making a dedication to God different from any that I had ever made before. I told Him that I would make no plans to seek out souls, but would speak about the message only to those with whom He brought me into direct contact. I would be careful to test each encounter to make sure that it was the Lord, and not Satan, who was managing things.

I found that it was just as important to stand and wait when God so directed, as it was to run with the truth. Complete submission to Jehovah's will became the most important thing in my life.

Waiting on the Lord

Once that dedication was made, I found that for quite a few weeks, the Lord let me stand and wait. That time passed with not a single opportunity for missionary work presenting itself, though there were abundant temptations to make arrangements to speak to others. I am thankful that I did not become anxious, nor was I tempted to break the holy covenant which I had made, although Satan certainly put pressure on me to do something. He artfully suggested that the absence of a commission to work indicated the Lord's rejection of me, and that therefore, I needed to generate missionary activity in my life in an effort to confirm God's acceptance and approval.

Looking back, I am fully satisfied that my divine Head was testing the strength of my resolve to serve Him according to His ways, even though I did not understand the Sabbath rest principles then as distinctly and extensively as I did later on. I know that I passed that test, for not once during the waiting time did I deviate from my covenant. I was at perfect rest in myself and

prepared to spend the remainder of my life in silence if that was God's plan for me, for the person also serves the Lord who only stands and waits, when He so directs.

The time came when the Lord was apparently satisfied with the firmness of my resolve to operate within what we have since come to know as the Sabbath rest principles, for He began to open doors on the right hand and on the left. Some of these providences were quite remarkable and resulted in thorough conversions to the message. Each contact came about in a different way but always it was clear that God had planned the meeting.

Decades passed by after that, during which time the work grew to global proportions, but this made no change to that consecration and the consequent exercise of the procedures whereby God brought me into contact with many who were hungering for the truth. Once or twice I allowed others to influence me to make plans of my own, and each time the results were detrimental to the work. Otherwise, I steadfastly refused to initiate any schemes or devise any procedures whereby I could contact people and generate an interest in the message. These things I left entirely with the Lord. He kept me so busy that I had no need to do this anyway, and, after many years of seeing the effectiveness of Christ being the Head and Plan Maker, I had no disposition to work any other way."

Determining God's Purpose

There should be nothing unique in the experience of Philip. This is the way God desires to work through every believer. To each person He has appointed a work.

"It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch." *Mark* 13:34.

"Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 326.4.

Although everyone has a work to do, not all are to do the same work. There may be many who could never give a Bible study

per se, but God prepares each of us to share the light that He has given us with others. For every believer God has a work which is just as important and necessary in His eyes as preaching the finest sermon, and for which each is perfectly suited. In His grand scheme of things, God has a purpose for us all. The first essential is to be sure that we are occupied in doing the work which the Lord has assigned us and not something of our own or another's choosing. Once this has been determined, it is then left with us to see that we do it with the whole heart and according to God's procedures.

Those who are careful to operate according to these guidelines cannot fail in their missionary endeavors. The gospel is a mighty force, and the methods which the Lord has devised to proclaim it are the most effective ones. If those methods are understood and followed, definite results will be achieved. Souls will be saved and the church of God will grow wonderfully, as it is written:

"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him." *Psalm* 126:5, 6.

When Christ is Lifted Up

In view of the guaranteed success which always follows adherence to God's ways, one may wonder why people seek out other methods of labor. The reason for this is not hard to find.

When professed believers lose that living connection by which alone God's procedures can operate, they naturally start inventing other ways of achieving the same aim in order to cover up the loss. For God's ways to work, we must have a personal, living connection with the Source of all light and truth. This fact cannot be overstressed, for no matter how often we are reminded, the risk of forgetting it or taking it for granted still remains.

The life of Christ is the perfect illustration of the effectiveness resulting from the divine Presence working actively within a human being. It was not necessary for Jesus to devise ways and means of generating interest from the people, nor did He need to go after them. People were attracted to Him in their thousands. At times, He had to hide in order to find time for rest and that

communion with God which He recognized as being essential to the success of His work. It was Christ's understanding of these principles which enabled Him to say that if He were lifted up, He would draw all people to Himself.

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." *John* 12:32, 33.

Obviously, Christ was making a direct reference to when He would be hung, in full view of all spectators, between earth and heaven waiting to die. But that was not all He meant. That physical elevation pointed to wonderful spiritual lessons which He desires every one of us to see and understand. It is when the Saviour is lifted up in the experience and teaching of every true believer, that He will draw all people to Himself. The needy will recognize that He is the channel of life and that without Him, they can certainly do nothing nor be anything.

Those whose lives are fully patterned on Christ's, will be as successful in missionary endeavor as He was. They will not need to devise methods and invent schemes for reaching the perishing multitudes. As Christ is lifted up in and through the true believer, people will be drawn to the Saviour. It will not be a question of how to find contacts, but of how to cope with the numbers who come for life and help.

It is time to repent deeply of the kind of missionary work which is after the common order of things, and to learn to do it in the Saviour's way. Then, believers will certainly come with rejoicing, bringing precious sheaves with them. If the methods are right, the harvest is guaranteed.

True Missionary Work

How to start? We should begin by finding God's tremendous assurances that those who work in right lines will not be disappointed. Such promises as the following need to be studied prayerfully until they become our own.

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed." *Isaiah* 55:10–13.

No matter how long the drought, when the rains return, the farmer is assured that the seed will germinate and a harvest will follow. The Lord uses these illustrations from nature to assure us that, just as certainly, the sowing of the gospel seed will bring forth an assured harvest. There is nothing God desires more than to see the gospel taking effect in humanity, and He promises that it will accomplish the very purpose for which He has sent it into this sincursed world. As long as we go forth following God-given plans and methods, the Holy Spirit will water our efforts. Lives will be transformed as symbolized by the pine tree replacing the thorn bush.

If we desire to become fruitful servants of God we must meditate on these wonderful promises. Every time the rain comes, let the certainty with which it will stimulate growth, speak of the same surety of the gospel's power to attract and transform sinners. Let us absorb the beauty and might of God's word into our minds and hearts until we believe it implicitly and go forth thinking only positive thoughts that leave no space for the fear of failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat.

This is but one of the many glowing promises to be found in the Scriptures. We need to make God's method of missionary work our own by following these daily steps:

- Search for those promises and assemble our own jewel collection until we are rich in precious stones. Make each blessed assurance our own.
- Meanwhile, establish and deepen a close communion with the heavenly agencies so that there will be a daily infusion of divine life into the soul. It is only as we receive life from God that we can impart it to others.
- Consecrate ourselves on a daily basis, making this the very first work of the day. Place ourselves at God's disposal to speak or not to speak as He shall direct. Many are

- willing to do much talking for God, but few are willing to be silent if that is His plan for them. We need to realize that whereas in other circumstances, silence would be a betrayal of sacred trust, there are times when silence is the only way to serve Him.
- In those prayers of consecration, reach up by faith and claim souls for Him, whether they be won by silence or by speaking, by us or by others whom the Lord may send to them. Cling to the Saviour with the unwearied persistence of Elijah and Jacob, refusing to let Him go until we are blessed with fruits for our labor.
- Finally, devise no schemes for bringing ourselves into contact with the needy. Simply set our hand to the duties nearest us, and the Lord will take care of the rest.

If we follow this missionary plan, then the common order of things will be replaced by God's way, success will follow, and we will find ourselves resting in the Lord and experiencing a joy which knows no bounds. Hundreds of souls will be won where there is now only one.

Lesson from the Life of Paul

Chapter 33

Dispute Resolution

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Acts* chapter 15, together with *The Acts of the Apostles* chapter 38, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Traditional Thinking

Those who were assigned leading tasks and therefore positions in the infant Christian church had not been totally delivered from the way of life in their previous religious environment. When they left Judaism for the Christian religion, they still had much of their old thinking within them and naturally sought to continue this system in their new faith. They honestly believed it to be both their right and their responsibility to exercise dominion over their fellow workers by giving them personal, specific orders on how they should act in certain situations.

Because of their position thinking, they overlooked the fact that Christ had given instruction that such a hierarchy should not exist among brethren in the true Christian Church. He had said:

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become

great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." *Mark* 10:42–45.

In the church, which is His body, there are many members but only one Head. No member can be the head of another member. The human organism illustrates this truth well. After Paul has described different aspects of the physical body (see *1 Corinthians* 12:12–26), he draws this parallel: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." *1 Corinthians* 12:27.

All the believers in the church are the members of this body, while Christ is the one Head who guides, directs, and disseminates the divine orders to the listening members. "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour." *Ephesians* 5:23.

The responsibility to direct the various members, by giving them general and specific orders about how things should be done, belongs to the Head alone. Christ does this in a very different way from how we usually think of and experience "heads" of companies, churches, families, and other groups. One member cannot give specific orders to another member. Members cannot direct each other or play the role of the one true Head.

In order to steer the fledgling movement away from shipwreck, God had to be the sole Plan Maker back in Christ's day as now. The traditional evil thinking and training, which the leaders of the early Christian church had inherited from their former church system, had to be rooted out.

It is not surprising that when the leaders in Jerusalem emerged from the Jewish organization, they did not leave all they had acquired behind them. We are not delivered instantly from all wrong ideas and theories inculcated by the educational influences of the background from which we come. The only kind of organization known to those men while they had been members of the Jewish church was human dominated. Christ had no place in it. Therefore, they had to be taught the very different operational principles which were to be established in the Christian church. Such learning did not come easily. Old ideas and habits strove for the mastery, especially when it required great faith to abandon them in favor of God's principles of operation.

The Dispute

In His great love and mercy, God understood the predicament of these Christians who had been converted from Judaism and He patiently worked to redirect them into right paths. However, even though they had embraced the gospel's principles, those who had been so long steeped in the ritualism of the legal code found it difficult to let their traditional beliefs go. Consequently, the slowest in keeping pace with the advancing light were strongest in their demand that the Gentile converts should keep the ceremonial law. There was much quarrelling about this question.

To avoid the divisions that threatened the church, it was decided to send Paul, Barnabas and some other leading brethren to Jerusalem. There a great council was convened to discuss the sensitive subject of the ceremonial law.

"Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.' The apostles and elders met to consider this question." Acts 15:1-6.

The Great Council

When they met, the believers approached the problem in typical human manner. Each person arrived with a definite idea of

what he thought the accepted procedure should be, determined to enforce it, instead of looking to God as the perfect Problem Solver. Thus the meeting opened with men striving against men for the supremacy. Every indication pointed to the development of a Babylonian system. It was the sad but continuing picture of people endeavoring to establish themselves in God's place within the church, while assuming that they were blessed by God for doing it.

The Scriptural evidence telling us that this was indeed the case is the fact that when they came together, there was "much disputing." *Acts* 15:7 (KJV).

Disputation only occurs when individuals are attempting to establish their contrary points of view. It will never be found among those who come together to lay their problems before God prayerfully and trustingly awaiting His judgment. Under such circumstances, rest and peace are evident instead of the loud, intense, and often angry voices of those contending for their particular convictions against people with equally strong counter-views.

It was fortunate for the early church that God had at least one faithful servant present through whom He could appeal. Otherwise the meetings would have broken up in disunity. If that had happened, the actual splintering of the church might have been avoided by the members accepting the majority decision, but there would have been serious division of feeling and deepening unrest. Worst of all, the disposition for people to exalt themselves in the church would have been immeasurably strengthened. It was a critical moment in history. The only hope for events to take a turn in the right direction was for someone under God's direct leadership to stand up and point them to the correct principles to be followed. Peter proved to be that man.

"After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you

try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." *Acts* 15:7–11.

The argument which Peter advanced proved to be completely effective, for the Scripture affirms that "the whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them." *Acts* 15:12.

The Holy Spirit's Revelation

What was the vital point in Peter's argument which so quickly settled the difficulty? He reasoned as follows: there is no need to dispute over solutions to our problem when God has already solved it. The Almighty has decided the matter for us, by giving the Holy Spirit with equal power to the uncircumcised Gentiles as to the circumcised Jews.

Peter simply laid before them the principle that the delegates were not the decision makers or problem solvers in Christ's body, the church. Therefore, it was not their business to be disputing over what they thought the answer should be. Their duty was to open their ears to the voice of the true Head of that church, to the answer He had already supplied.

Those men and women in the early church were believers with strong faith and deep convictions. They loved the cause of God and wanted nothing so much as to see it prosper. But when they came together, their procedures were just as wrong as their forefathers' had been at Kadesh, and they were just as blind to the fact. Valuable time was wasted in useless disputation, seeking a solution for problems God had already solved. How long this lasted is not recorded. The dispute could have continued for hours without their being any nearer to a solution than they were at the beginning, but when they desisted from this human procedure and listened to God's voice, the answer was immediate.

We can therefore divide the meeting of the great council in Jerusalem into two parts.

Two Different Strategies

The first part

The first part of the council covered that period when the believers sought a solution through conventional human procedures. Present were those who were strongly committed to the retention of the ceremonial system. They were prepared to fight tenaciously for what they sincerely believed to be right. There were also a few whose eyes had been opened to the truth as God sees it and had therefore ceased to observe the sacrificial services. Others were perplexed by the controversy and were undecided about which was correct.

To follow the usual human procedure involved different courses of action for all three parties. Those who were strongly for retaining the ceremonial law were there to stick determinedly to their argument. Nothing would satisfy them short of their position being accepted.

Those who had seen the truth on the subject would have prayerfully and humbly argued for their position, deeply concerned lest the church be held back in darkness when there was such freedom and light available to it.

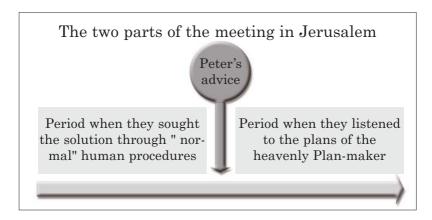
Finally, the undecided would have listened to the arguments propounded by each side, and would have attempted to reach a decision on the basis of what they heard from these human sources.

The divine plan for all the believers to be closely unified could never be achieved under this system, for the simple reason that the one body would have many heads, each directing according to its own ideas

The second part

The second part of the meeting was initiated when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter argued that they were following wrong procedures. He declared that there was no need to debate the question. It was God's responsibility to announce what He wanted and all they had to do was listen. In fact, the Holy Spirit had already revealed the divine answer.

The deep sincerity and earnest consecration of those believers was demonstrated by their willingness to accept this counsel. An immediate change took place. All disputing ceased, as one and



all permitted God to be their Problem Solver. They subsequently followed the instruction sent to them by the Holy Spirit. Just in time, the church had turned in the right direction. If it could only be kept in the same pathway from then on, the speedy and successful achievement of its mission would be assured.

A Golden Opportunity

Only one person spoke up for God's principles at that meeting, but that one voice turned the tide completely. When each of us learns to appreciate what happened there from a spiritual perspective and what this means for us today, we will have a greater sense of our individual responsibility to know and to stand for the Sabbath rest principles. The time will come when God needs the voice of each of His children to turn the tide in the right direction. For a given individual, the opportunity may arise only once in his or her lifetime, or it may occur a number of times. Whenever it comes, we must be ready as Peter was. If, at the critical moment, we do not speak the right words of counsel under the Holy Spirit's direct guidance, then events will be balanced in the wrong direction and could delay the work for decades.

But even if the right words are spoken at the right time, there is no guarantee that the tide will be turned. The people may be so determined to have their own way that they will not heed the divine counsel. An example of this was when Samuel protested

to Israel the dire consequences of their having a king like the nations around them. But at least the blame for that failure did not rest on the prophet (see *1 Samuel* 8:4–18).

Unification

The council in Jerusalem accomplished far more than settling the dispute over circumcision and the keeping of the ceremonial law. It opened the eyes of the leaders in Jerusalem to the principle that God is the true Leader of His people; "... that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader, not looking to man for direct guidance; that His workers are to be molded and fashioned, not after man's ideas, but after the similitude of the divine." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 401.3.

God truly accomplished a marvelous work at that council. The church leaders who had been so determined to run the work in God's behalf, saw that they were following procedures which would have injured rather than assisted the work. The decision was taken to inform all the Christian churches of the revelation of God's will in the matter. They sent some members of the council together with the apostle Paul to the various local churches, accompanied by a letter which summed up the solution to this problem as their divine Leader had revealed it to them.

"Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law'—to whom we gave no such commandment—it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater bur-

den than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." *Acts* 15:22–29 (NKJV).

We can see how, at this council, there was a marvelous liberation from traditional ideas and theories. God's people took a giant step out of Babylon. The usual human way, in which the dependant receiver assumes the position of director, problem solver, plan maker, and burden bearer, was discarded in favor of God's way. A marked advancement in God's cause immediately followed. A flood of new light was received, the gospel penetrated new regions, and thousands were added to the movement. The church began to enter into the Sabbath rest promised it, and was well into the process of fulfilling God's work for it. The believers had been set on to the correct course and they were safe while they faithfully guarded against any reversion.

In a comment on this important event in history we read:

"Among those present at this meeting, were some who had severely criticized the methods of labor followed by the apostles upon whom rested the chief burden of carrying the gospel to the Gentile world. But during the council their views of God's purpose had broadened, and they had united with their brethren in making wise decisions which made possible the unification of the entire body of believers." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 401.1.

God did not wait for the early Christians to be completely converted away from Babylon's ways before endowing them with the Holy Spirit and establishing them as His movement. To the extent they had given Him His rightful place as Plan Maker, God was able to work wondrously through them. His purpose was to lead them on until His ways were fully established among them and they had made a total separation from Babylon, after which it was their sacred responsibility to ensure that there were no reversions. To achieve this He used the opportunity afforded Him in the council and in Peter's willingness to be His spokesman. On that occasion, the believers learned the lesson well.

But, the tragic aftermath was that when they had the least excuse to revert to their own ways again, they did, and, in doing so, changed the course of history from a divine victory to the sure development of the papacy and the long delay in Christ's return.

Chapter 34

The Reappearance of the Problem

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Acts* chapter 21, together with *The Acts of the Apostles* page 399 to 405 can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Paul's Return to Jerusalem

It was years later, at the close of his third missionary journey, that Paul returned to Jerusalem for the last time, bearing both a testimony of God's wonderful works among the believers in Asia Minor and large financial contributions for the work.

"When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God..." Acts 21:17–20.

"On this occasion, Paul and his companions formally presented to the leaders of the work at Jerusalem the contributions forwarded by the Gentile churches for the support of the poor among their Jewish brethren. The gathering of these contribu-

tions had cost the apostle and his fellow workers much time, anxious thought, and wearisome labor. The sum, which far exceeded the expectations of the elders at Jerusalem, represented many sacrifices and even severe privations on the part of the Gentile believers.

"These freewill offerings betokened the loyalty of the Gentile converts to the organized work of God throughout the world and should have been received by all with grateful acknowledgment, yet it was apparent to Paul and his companions that even among those before whom they now stood were some who were unable to appreciate the spirit of brotherly love that had prompted the gifts." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 399.2–399.3.

As Paul stood before the brethren in Jerusalem, he was conscious of a very different spirit within some of those leading men from that of the believers who had given these generous, self-sacrificing contributions. And Paul was not mistaken in his perceptions. There was in fact a striking contrast between the two. Such an unfortunate condition among the believers at Jerusalem had not developed in a moment, but had insidiously crept in over a number of years. Although the victims of it did not understand what had happened within them, this did not make the evil any less real or destructive. We who live in these closing days need to acquire a thorough understanding of both the nature of the problem and the way it developed in order to avoid a similar situation ourselves.

Roots not Eradicated

When, at the council in Jerusalem years before, the leaders had seen and accepted the principles of Sabbath rest, they had begun to move in the right direction. A wonderful new impetus had attended the work. Many souls were won and the gospel penetrated into regions hitherto unentered. These developments confirmed the correctness of the new stand taken, and ought to have sealed them forever against any reversions.

At this point, the believers would have been greatly assisted if they had seen their experience in relation to the events in their own history, rather than as an isolated incident. They would then have understood that the resulting surge forward in the church's fortunes was not a mere coincidence, but the sure outworking of divine law. Their own experience would have confirmed the witness given by God in His dealings with their forebears, showing them that His ways are utterly reliable. The Scriptures do not specifically state whether they saw this larger picture or not. The evidence revealed in their subsequent history indicates that either they did not, or if they did, they soon forgot the lesson.

Just as Joshua and others had done before them, the leaders of the Apostolic church reverted from God's procedures to their own, when they had no excuse for doing so. Had the work suffered serious setbacks and been beset by apparently insoluble problems, there might have been reason to question the procedures which had been followed, but this was not the case. The very opposite had happened, providing no justification for reverting to ways which would inhibit God's work exactly as history had repeatedly shown before.

An analysis of the deeper reasons for the existing prejudice and dictatorial spirit which had developed in Paul's absence is given in the following paragraph:

"In the earlier years of the gospel work among the Gentiles, some of the leading brethren at Jerusalem, clinging to former prejudices and habits of thought, had not co-operated heartily with Paul and his associates. In their anxiety to preserve a few meaningless forms and ceremonies, they had lost sight of the blessing that would come to them and to the cause they loved, through an effort to unite in one all parts of the Lord's work. Although desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church, they had failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their human wisdom attempted to throw about workers many unnecessary restrictions. Thus there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions." The Acts of the Apostles, 400.1.

The leaders in Jerusalem had not worked on the task of eradicating all the roots of their erroneous thinking and traditional concepts. As a result, old habits of thought and earlier prejudices came to the surface again, stronger than before. Again those men began to strive for the maintenance of the ceremonial law, even though they had previously confirmed that it need not be kept any longer. Their good motives gave them a halo of justification for their wrong procedures. It provided sheep's clothing for the evil wolf underneath.

The evil was the leaders' insistence "that they had the authority to direct their brethren" and give them personal orders as to the methods they used and the places in which they were to labor. They were demanding Christ's place in the church for themselves. There is no "wolf" more ravening and destructive than this one.

The sheep's clothing was their position in the church and the motive which controlled them. They were members of high standing in the one true church, they really loved the cause, and they were "desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church". They were quite genuine and would be the last to wittingly make any moves that would injure the movement. They would have been confident that there was little danger of this, because they could not see how anything they instigated would be against the church. It was easy to persuade themselves that, with the motives they had, whatever they did had to be right. The sheep's clothing was most convincing.

But, no matter how thoroughly a person may be deceived by it, the sheep's clothing never changes the wolf underneath. Nor could the genuine motives of those leaders save the church from the evil results of the course they insisted on following. They did not rightly analyse their spirit and work, nor did they correctly read the lessons of the Old Testament. They were not able to understand the cause and continuation of Israel's enslavement to the Romans. They did not discern that the Jews had put themselves into this awful predicament by their determination to establish themselves as heads of the church in Christ's place. If they had, they would have realized that, in the Christian church, should they continue the same principles of operation which had proved so disastrous to Israel, they would

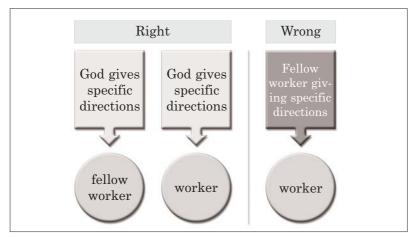
bring the same fate on the Apostolic church. No amount of consecration, sacrifice, good motives, or hard work, could either compensate for, or nullify, the evil outworking of the wrong course of action. The only church that is safe, is the church over which Christ is truly the one and only Head. All others end up as Babylon.

A Reversion

Here is a clear description of how that reversion happened among the leading Christians at Jerusalem.

"Afterward, when it became apparent that the converts among the Gentiles were increasing rapidly, there were a few of the leading brethren at Jerusalem who began to cherish anew their former prejudices against the methods of Paul and his associates. These prejudices strengthened with the passing of the years, until some of the leaders determined that the work of preaching the gospel must henceforth be conducted in accordance with their own ideas. If Paul would conform his methods to certain policies which they advocated they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support." The Acts of the Apostles, 401.2.

The heavenly impressions received by those men in the great council at Jerusalem, which had led them to recognize God as the Plan Maker and Guide, who alone could give specific orders to His workers, diminished as time went by. The old Babylonian disposition to rule their fellows and dictate their personal responsibilities, reasserted itself until they were determined that the work of the gospel be carried forward in accordance with their own ideas. They became possessed of a set purpose to manage and direct the workers in the church. They believed that they were personally responsible to God in this, and that otherwise the church would speedily come to ruin. They were blind to the seriousness of the stand they had taken, little realizing that they were directly usurping God's place among His people. They were sowing those evil seeds which would bear a baleful harvest in the awful era of papal dominance during the Dark Ages to follow.



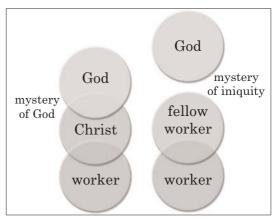
"These men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader, not looking to man for direct guidance; that His workers are to be molded and fashioned, not after man's ideas, but after the similitude of the divine." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 401.3.

The loss of the leaders' ability to assess the real nature of their work correctly did not diminish its evil. When a person drinks a glass of poison, the deadly effect is not canceled by ignorance of what is in the glass. Either way, that person dies in agony. So when those men introduced what would become the papal principles of men ruling over others in God's place, they threatened the church with terrible danger. If the leaders would not repent once this stand was taken, the only hope for the church in general was to reject their rulership.

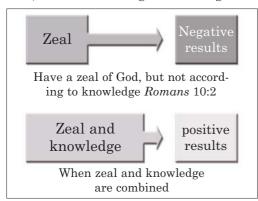
The Mystery of Iniquity versus God

Those leaders in Jerusalem had lost sight of the principles embodied in the mystery of Christ and were unwittingly working to establish in its place the mystery of iniquity. While they tried to do their best for the church and were not consciously at war with God's cause, they were in fact fighting against the Head of their church. What they desired to do did not alter what

they were really doing. One of the most effective deceptions used by Satan is his persuasion that a zeal for God's cause which drives us to exert our best energies and devote our resources to furthering the work, is positive assurance that we are God's



children. Although the Lord's true followers will indeed manifest zeal for God and His cause, it is still possible to "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge". *Romans* 10:2 (NKJV).



When zeal for God is not accompanied by that knowledge and wisdom which comes from above, any apparent success only heightens the deception. One of the reasons ล movement may grow in numerifinancial cal and strength is because it

attracts a class of people who love a religion that offers them heaven as a reward for their own works. This will not be the kind of true success which followed the great council at Jerusalem when genuinely spiritual souls were added to the church.

The End Cannot Justify the Means

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the results gained from following God's procedures versus our own. For this reason it is not safe to use such results as proof that the methods adopted are correct. The only safe course is to become thoroughly acquainted with God's ways and to follow them regardless of what the outworking might be. No responsibility rests on believers for any consequences which follow strict obedience to heaven's commands. But when church members take it upon themselves to plan the work, then all the evil which follows is charged against them.

"We should choose the right because it is right, and leave consequences with God.... Christ's ambassadors have nothing to do with consequences. They must perform their duty and leave results with God." *The Great Controversy*, 460.2, 609.1.

This means that if we understand the principles of Sabbath rest, we will not set out to achieve particular targets in numbers of missionary contacts, Bible studies given, souls "saved", or money raised. Instead we will concentrate on learning how to understand and follow God's program for our life. Once we are confident we are doing our Master's will, we will recognize that any success which accrues is a confirmation of the procedures followed. Rather than looking to success as proof we are following God's plans, we will understand that only when such success is the result of right procedures can it be the assurance of God's presence and blessing.

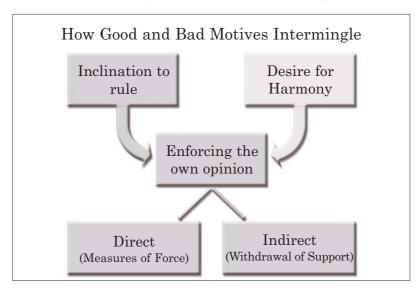
God, in His great love and mercy, had taught these facts to the church leaders in Paul's day and it was their duty never to forget them. They were zealous and hardworking men, but as they saw the Jews' hostile reaction to Paul's message and methods, they felt that he and his co-workers were endangering the church. And they feared the consequences. This tempted them to take matters into their own hands and they began to work with all their power to solve these difficulties. By taking authority, they made themselves the problem solvers in God's place and forgot that they had nothing to do with the consequences; that their responsibility ended with knowing and doing the will of their divine Leader. They formed solutions in their own minds which they insisted must be followed by workers out in the field.

Force is Unacceptable

Initially, the church leaders entertained the idea that respect for their position of authority would lead the laborers to conform to their directives, but when this did not eventuate, they resorted to the use of force. In their increasing determination to "save" the church, they demanded submission to their policies as far as it lay in their power to do so. They threatened to withdraw their support from Paul and his workers.

"If Paul would conform his methods to certain policies which they advocated they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise, they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 401.2.

These tactics have met with considerable success whenever they have been used. The only souls who can resist such pressures are those who have a sound knowledge of God's ways and an inflexible determination to follow them. People who resort to such forceful methods are thereby identifying themselves as enemies of God and His church, no matter how well-meaning, earnest, zealous, self-sacrificing, or hardworking they might be. Instead of concentrating on the tasks the Lord has given them to



perform, they see their responsibilities as giving them the mandate to direct others. Such position thinking inevitably results in oppression and force.

That was the position into which those leading men had permitted themselves to drift under Satan's subtle guidance. While the congregation generally shared with them the belief that they were models of righteousness, they were in reality serving the enemy and endangering the church. Insofar as the people shared in the leaders' position thinking, they too were guilty of its consequences.

Through the leaders' course of action, God was being replaced as the Head over His own body. In this way they were repeating the recurring sin of their forefathers in working to put themselves in the place of Christ in His church. In so doing, they were literally laying the foundations upon which the man of sin would rise to power (see *2 Thessalonians* 2:3, 4). So deceived were they, that they could not see how the course which in their eyes would deliver the church from such apparently dangerous men as Paul, would instead be the guarantee of its total conversion to Satan's service. From the mild and loving servant of God, the Christian church would be transformed into the cruelest oppressor history has known—the papacy.

The following diagram will help show the principle at work in these issues.

The Two Mysteries at War

While this evil spirit was developing in the leaders, the Master Teacher was working through Paul to counteract these influences. To the inspired apostle were given marvelous revelations concerning the mystery of God which, if faithfully followed, would assure the speedy completion of the church's mission. It would break the power of the leading men and deliver the believers from their influence.

Thus two mighty forces were contending for supremacy in the early church. On one side stood Christ, who was working through His delegated messengers—Paul and his faithful fellow laborers—to establish the all-powerful mystery of God.

Paul was especially chosen to reveal the mystery of God as he confirms himself:

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." Ephesians 3:1-11.

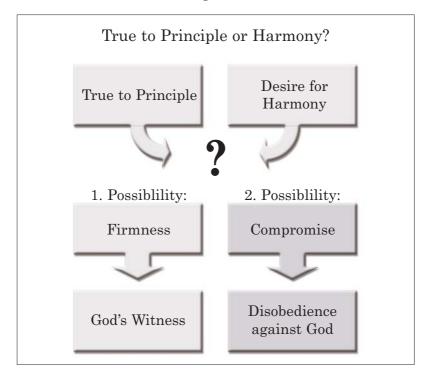
Throughout his ministry, Paul exerted a powerful influence upon the church. As long as he continued to fulfill his divinely appointed mission, it was not possible for the mystery of iniquity to become fully established.

But on the other side, Satan, having deceived the church leaders, was working to establish the mystery of iniquity. The opposition was strategically placed and solidly entrenched. What better agents could he have recruited? These were men of great authority in the Christian church who enjoyed tremendous respect from the believers and gave every appearance of being totally committed to God's service. Any suggestion to the general membership that these men were working for Satan would have met with utter astonishment and disbelief, for they shared their position thinking. Nothing could have suited the arch-rebel better, for through these men, he was determined to destroy God's work by instituting the papal system within the

church. He could do this most successfully if the people concerned were not aware of his devices.

The future of the church depended on which of these contending forces gained the mastery. If Christ prevailed, the church would speedily complete her task, the end would come, and the Saviour would return. However, if the forces of darkness gained control, a long delay would be enforced during which time the world would be subjected to unspeakable oppression and ignorance.

For God's cause to succeed, it was essential that Paul and the other workers maintain a correct relationship to their divine Leader, by looking to Him alone for their general and specific orders. Never must they submit to the authority of the leaders who were determined to take God's position of authority over them. For years Paul remained faithful to this principle, during which period his work was marked with wonderful success and he was safe from the scheming of his enemies.



Desire for Harmony

Paul testified that he preached nothing that came from himself, but only what had been given him from above. He was a faithful servant, never forgetting his correct relationship to the heavenly Father. Under no circumstances would he put himself in God's place, nor would he allow others to put themselves between him and his divine Leader in order to establish the mystery of iniquity. His stand is an example that teaches the necessity of heeding only those orders which are received from the Master Architect.

It was Paul who was in the right—not the leaders who incessantly criticized him and blamed him for the troubles in the church. He walked in the path that God had marked out, and, as a direct result, "the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." *Acts* 16:5.

The movement was surging forward toward ultimate success despite the well-meaning but detrimental stand taken by the central leaders. Even though he was conscious of God's leadership, protection, and blessing, Paul felt the disunity between himself and these leading men very keenly. His tender, loving spirit cried out for harmony between himself and them, especially when among the leaders was James, the brother of Christ.

Before him there were two options as the following diagram shows:

A Last Appeal

For a number of years while Satan strengthened his forces in the church, by tempting those leaders into a more and more determined stand, he was unable to establish undisputed supremacy because Paul consistently refused to accept these men as his plan makers in God's place. During this period, Paul was often geographically separated from the leading brethren, being far away on the mission frontiers, while they were in Jerusalem at the center of the work. But when Paul returned from the mission outposts, there was a direct confrontation. They did not, of course, show a hostile spirit. Paul exhibited an attitude of respect for them, while they maintained a very dignified and polished demeanor. Observers would have concluded that relationships between the two parties were good.

When Paul presented the liberal offerings from the field and related God's wonderful providences, the Holy Spirit seized the opportunity to appeal once more to these fine, but misguided men. He desired to restore in them what they had previously received at the great council but which had been lost as they reverted to their old thought patterns.

Such is the wonderful love of the God who is ever seeking to forgive and to restore. Those men were without excuse, even as we are today. They had experienced the guiding hand of the Lord, they knew that Paul had been especially chosen to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and that he was acting under direct inspiration. Therefore, they should have been willing to leave Paul under the care of the Head of the church who had called and commissioned him. Yet, despite their willful rejection of these principles, the Lord still desired to save them if He could. This was why, when Paul stood in their presence, the Holy Spirit spoke with a power and directness which could not be ignored.

After he had presented the gifts, Paul "reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" *Acts* 21:19. This was another appeal to those responsible men to surrender their pride and position thinking and to recognize that the wall of partition had been torn down. The following paragraph expresses this thought:

"This recital of facts brought to the hearts of all, even of those who had been doubting, the conviction that the blessing of heaven had accompanied his labors. 'When they heard it, they glorified the Lord.' They felt that the methods of labor pursued by the apostle bore the signet of Heaven. The liberal contributions lying before them added weight to the testimony of the apostle concerning the faithfulness of the new churches established among the Gentiles. The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul's ministry in a new light and were convinced that

their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 402.3.

The Imposition of Human Solutions

The Holy Spirit did not call upon the conflicting parties to meet halfway. Paul's position was in full harmony with God's ways, so the Lord required no concessions from him even though, with his truly Christian spirit, he had the greater disposition to submit. The leaders, on the other hand, with the spirit they had, showed no inclination to forsake their errors. This was proved by the fact that Paul did yield to their demands to a certain extent, while they showed no real willingness to respond to the convictions generated within them by the Holy Spirit. The awful consequence was disaster for the church and for the entire world.

To whatever extent their work and position was the fruit of human devising, those leaders had no contribution to make towards God's work. On the contrary, they retarded and damaged the cause.

Failure to comprehend this point generates problems of such magnitude that they deprive many of the kingdom, for no teaching, practice, theory, or idea, has any place in God's work if its origin is human devising. This is not because God has arbitrarily reserved the position of Plan Maker for Himself alone, but because we are not possessed with the capacity to plan the Lord's work for Him. Yet it is common practice for dedicated people to appoint themselves to the position of problem solver, and then strive to impose their solutions on others.

A Recurring Problem

The course of such a development in church history often runs as follows. During the decline of a movement, quite a few of its members become increasingly concerned because of the multiplying evils strengthening in the church, but they do nothing initially because they have unquestioning confidence that the leaders will set everything in order.

However, the realization eventually sinks home that the leaders, dedicated and sincere though they be, are powerless to reverse the downward plunge. Thoroughly alarmed and rudely awakened, a small number are convicted that something must be done. They feel it is imperative that a reformation be initiated at the lower levels of the organization, under the capable guidance of someone other than the official leaders. The church members must be called back to strict obedience to all the commandments of God.

Across the land, small groups spring up, each with a self-appointed leader as its head. Their unsparing condemnation of the church's sins requires that they keep all the commandments blamelessly, and this they dedicate themselves to do. Ignorant of the saving truth that only those who have been transformed by the indwelling presence of Christ can obey the law, they develop a system of rigid legalism like the religion of the Pharisees, an attempted righteousness by their own works. It brings neither physical nor spiritual satisfaction. Consequently, its adherents are ever seeking for something which might yet be added to make their work complete.

In the meantime, God calls His own messenger, equipping him or her not with a message of condemnation, but with the saving, healing gospel of Jesus Christ. God sends His chosen messenger forth to proclaim the gospel as the only solution to humanity's problems. This vigorous portrayal of God's way of salvation attracts the attention and excites the interest of the reform groups. They come out to listen, and are thrilled with what they hear, but fail to realize that they cannot accept the gospel and still retain their own message. They take the stand that they too have a message and that therefore, the two should meet halfway. They let it be known that if the messenger will accept their reforms, they will be glad to accept the gospel message.

They believe the Lord's true messenger is preaching a very imbalanced message which emphasizes the gospel at the ex-

pense of law-keeping. Therefore, they consider that the preacher must accept their position and work in order to give the law its rightful place.

But God's true people have no concessions to make to such socalled reformers. The religion of the Pharisees has no more place among God's faithful children now than it had in Christ's day. Humbling as it may be to their pride, the fact is that they have no contribution to make to God's cause, neither do they have any real intention of adding the true gospel to their movement. The living gospel can never be accepted conditionally. Truth is to be accepted for no other reason than that it is the truth. No honor is accorded to the gospel when people declare that they will believe it provided the bearer of the truth meets them halfway by accepting their teachings. That is an insult to God's Word, for it manifests a human pride and arrogance which is an abomination to the Lord.

Today, God likewise expects His people, to whom He has given the last warning message, to refuse to make any compromise with other movements whose origins are the product of human devising. Living truth does not come through such companies, for God does not use as His channel those who follow human procedures for building His work.

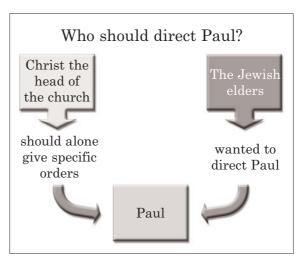
Chapter 35

Paul's Mistake

A careful prayer-filled reading of *Acts* chapter 21 together with *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 38, can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Another Golden Opportunity

t was not necessary for Paul to make any compromise with, or any concessions to, the leaders in Jerusalem. On the contrary, as the bulwark against the spreading mystery of iniquitv in church, God depended on him



to stand firm against the leaders' efforts to bring him under their jurisdiction. In no way whatsoever, was he to yield to their requirements by accepting their solutions to the problems in the church. He was to look to his divine Head and none other, just as he had been doing up until that point in time.

When Paul, standing before the leaders in Jerusalem, presented them with the liberal offerings from the Gentile believers and testified to the wonderful things the Lord had done, the powers of light and darkness had come into direct confrontation. The mystery of God and the mystery of iniquity stood face to face. It was a critical moment in history, for the future of the church was hanging in the balance.

The first option

Of the several possibilities that could happen, the most desirable was that under the Holy Spirit's convicting power, the elders would humbly acknowledge their wrong, and unify with Paul and the other workers. They should have abandoned for the second and final time the Babylonian principles of church members dictating to other church members. Instead, they should have left this work to God alone, as He is the only one who can give specific orders. They should have immediately and thoroughly repented of the evil and told Paul that from there on, they would never again interfere with his divinely-appointed mission nor concern themselves with the consequences to the church of Paul's preaching what God gave him to preach. This would have constituted a resounding defeat for Satan and his forces, spelling death to the mystery of iniquity in the church and eventually throughout the world. Swiftly would the work have been finished and Christ would have returned.

These men were given every opportunity to take this step. The mighty presence of the Holy Spirit was able to reveal to them the real nature of their position and to convict them of their need to repent and forsake their sin. They were left with no excuse for not adopting a right course. This would have been the golden opportunity to confess frankly that God had worked wondrously through Paul and that they had been in the wrong.

With great love and skill, God had brought the leaders this opportunity to obtain full deliverance from the shackles of sin which Pauls's Mistake 457

bound them. Had they made the correct choice, how different would have been the history of both the church and the world.

The other option

But it is a sad fact of history that the church leaders decided to choose the wrong side of the issue. Their counsel given to Paul shows their stubborn disposition not to surrender.

"But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice. They did not stand nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong, but sought to effect a compromise by counseling him to pursue a course which in their opinion would remove all cause for misapprehension." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 403.1.

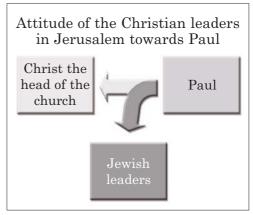
The counsel given by the church leaders was that Paul should show by his attitude to one of the ceremonial laws that he still upheld this law as binding on all believers.

In response to his testimony, they said, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." *Acts* 21:20–25.

As their words reveal, they clung to their determination to bring Paul under their dominion when they said to him, "...do what we tell you", instead of directing him to do whatever the Lord instructed him to do.

Their statement was a direct demand that Paul accept them as his plan makers in God's place. Therefore, even though they did not realize it and would be the last to admit it, they were dedicated to building the papacy and destroying the mystery of God. In their view, Paul was the one threatening the future prosperity and success of the church, not they.

Repeatedly, down through history, Satan has gained the advantage in the struggle simply because God's chil-



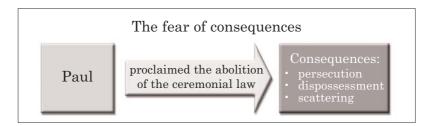
dren have not been able to perceive the real nature of the course they pursue. The last person they think they are serving is the devil. They consider themselves the most loyal followers the Lord has. So today Christians need to be very aware that they are at war—a war in which they must have the spiritual perception to recognize the workings of the enemy. The fact that in the past God's people have lacked this discernment has led to many tragic defeats.

Faulty Analysis

The leaders in the true church at Jerusalem were more disposed to trust in their own abilities to manage God's work than in God's power to do so. For them, Paul's ministry had created serious problems which they felt required urgent solutions. It had generated an intense hostility in the Pharisees and Sadducees which threatened to explode in terrible persecutions. Many believers would die, while others would be dispossessed and scattered. The leaders knew that they would not escape from loss and suffering themselves, and in their human nature they shrank from the ordeal.

"The brethren hoped that Paul, by following the course suggested, might give a decisive contradiction to the false reports concerning him. They assured him that the decision of the former council concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law, still held good. But the advice now given was not consistent

Pauls's Mistake 459



with that decision. The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel. Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 404.1.

In Paul, the leaders saw the cause of all these troubles, for he boldly proclaimed the abolition of the ceremonial law and its replacement with the antitypical sacrifice and priestly ministry of Christ. No teaching would more certainly inflame the animosity of the Jews and initiate their ruthless attack upon the Christian church than this. Ignoring the fact that God, not Paul, was the One responsible for what was being proclaimed, they determined to compel the apostle to preach as they thought he should. It is true there was a definite problem, but instead of placing it entirely in God's hands, they decided to handle the difficulty themselves, being confident that Jehovah would approve of their zeal to protect His church from the effects of what they imagined were Paul's ill-advised activities.

For this reason they devised the plan that they expected would give the Jews a different view of Paul's position and teaching. By attending the temple and performing there a rite from the ceremonial law, Paul was to demonstrate that he did not really mean what he taught. This was supposed to pacify the multitudes and forestall the unleashing of persecution. But the people were not deceived by this hypocritical solution. There

was no mistaking the plain teaching of the apostle which they correctly recognized as being an attack on the traditional Jewish rites. It was a human solution to a problem in the church and it simply failed to work.

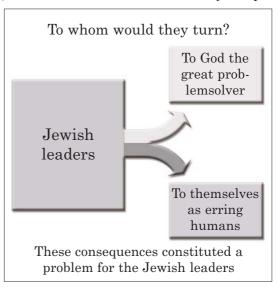
The Consequences of Right-doing

The church leaders were wholly concerned with consequences. In doing so they took upon themselves a responsibility which belongs to God alone.

The only question which should have concerned them was whether or not they were doing the will of God themselves. Instead of trying to control the results accruing from Paul's faithful performance of God's general and specific orders, they should have given him every encouragement to continue his work with fearlessness and fortitude. It was their responsibility to support him with their prayers and means, while courageously sharing with him whatever persecutions and trials came from his work.

When the members of God's church finally recognize and accept this principle in full, the work will speedily move on to completion. All too often, the believers have enthusiastically accept-

ed their work from their heavenly Father until they see a vast storm being generated by their activities. Apprehensive, they permit their attention to be transferred from God's orders and focused instead on the dangers threatening them. They then become preoccupied not with their responsibility to do



Pauls's Mistake 461

the work God has given them, but with solving the problems which arise as consequences of that work. No greater mistake could be made; no surer way of retarding the work.

No matter how terrifying the prospects, Christians have nothing to do with consequences. The only question which should concern us is, "What has God directed me to do?" It is not easy for human nature, because such a disciplined reaction comes only after much re-education, and it is retained only by guarding against the persistent danger of reversion.

The leaders in Jerusalem had not learned these lessons. They did not trust implicitly in God, but felt that He needed them to protect the church from disaster. So they gave Paul specific instructions on how to do this. They certainly had a problem, but they appointed themselves as problem solvers instead of leaving this work where it belonged—in God's capable hands. Thus they failed to respond to the pleadings of God's Spirit and instead placed themselves where, as far as the records show, they never again had an opportunity to change their evil ways.

Paul's Decision

When the Christian leaders in Jerusalem stifled the convictions of the Spirit, there was no way that they would abandon their wrong principles and unify with Paul and his God. But all was not yet lost, for Paul could resolutely refuse to compromise with them. It was his solemn duty before God to inform those men courteously, kindly, respectfully, but firmly, that as God alone was his Plan Maker, he could not do what they demanded of him.

The leaders had made their decision not to surrender their pride and self-will, so the full responsibility now rested on Paul to stand unflinchingly for the right. Should he fail to do this, the second option would be lost, he would be removed from his position as the bulwark against unrighteousness, and the church and the world would be doomed to oppressive darkness.

Tragically, that second option was indeed lost. Paul did not firmly inform the leaders that he could not accept them as his plan makers in God's place. He did not tell them that he would ask the Lord what to do, and then, upon receiving the divine instructions, obey them alone. That is what he should have done, but did not do. Instead, in his desire for harmony, he decided to accept their suggestion.

"The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them." *Acts* 21:26.

The performance of the vow in the temple was not in itself a great and significant act, but its implications were. By this act Paul gave a testimony that the ceremonial law was still binding, thereby contradicting the witness that God had given at the great council at Jerusalem.

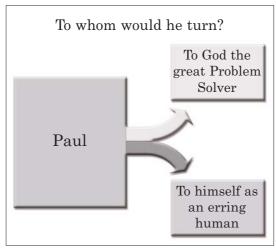
Paul's Compromise

It is illuminating to look at biblical stories from various aspects. When viewed from the angle of the Sabbath rest principles, we can see that Paul had a problem. This is summed up in the following paragraph:

"Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 405.1.

Whenever God sends a message through His chosen messenger, there are those who accept it to a point, but who are slow to follow all the way. Old prejudices still battle for the mastery and some, in their unwillingness to surrender the past, strive to marry the new and the old. Inevitably, this leads them to compromise present truth to avoid offending the church members of the old churches from whom they have become separated yet still desire to win.

Pauls's Mistake 463



This attitude. which was widespread in Paul's day, imposed a severe burden temptation on him. He longed for complete unity with the leading brethren, seeing in the achievement of this the removal of significant obstacles which barred the advancement of the

work. He no doubt tended to blame himself for the trouble and felt that he ought to do something towards meeting these men halfway. It was out of a deep and humble love for his brethren and the cause, that he felt compelled to make the concessions he did.

Admirable as Paul's motives were, there was an alternative and correct course available for him to follow. He could have carefully reviewed the Lord's dealings with him in the past and seen anew how he had done nothing other than what God had directed him to do. He was not responsible for the attitude of the leaders when their spirit resulted from resistance to present truth. Paul had no changes to make. The fault lay entirely with the leaders.

Yet it was the humble, loving, dedicated, Christ-like Paul who was prepared to change, while the leaders, who ought to have made the adjustment, showed no willingness to do so. On this one critical occasion, Paul who had so resolutely refused to accept any other head than Christ, departed from the pathway of strict principle and accepted the plans other men had made for him. Thus he surrendered his position as champion of the mystery of God and gave the advantage to the Lord's opponents.

In doing so, Paul's motive and spirit were unquestionably pure and noble. It is not our place to sit in judgment on either him or the leaders who caused him to stumble. But the nature of the decisions made and the courses followed must be analyzed carefully, so that the same mistakes can be avoided in these closing days. If we know the dangers that beset our pathway, we will have fought and won more than half the battle.

"When we think of Paul's great desire to be in harmony with his brethren, his tenderness toward the weak in the faith, his reverence for the apostles who had been with Christ, and for James, the brother of the Lord, and his purpose to become all things to all men so far as he could without sacrificing principle—when we think of all this, it is less surprising that he was constrained to deviate from the firm, decided course that he had hitherto followed." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 405.2.

The purity and righteousness of Paul's motives did not save him or the church from the dire consequences of his compromise. This is an important principle. Every believer needs to shake off the idea that good motives will sanctify wrong procedures, for they never can.

The plan advanced by the leaders and followed by Paul was as full of human devising as the one formed by Israel at Kadeshbarnea, and it was as doomed to failure. Neither Paul nor the leaders obtained their objectives. They only set into more vigorous motion those forces which were ultimately to reduce the church to total apostasy and separation from God.

"But instead of accomplishing the desired object, his efforts for conciliation only precipitated the crisis, hastened his predicted sufferings, and resulted in separating him from his brethren, depriving the church of one of its strongest pillars, and bringing sorrow to Christian hearts in every land." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 405.2.

The Consequences of Wrong-doing

When this crisis fell on the church, the people concerned had no concept of the evil that would result. Looking back from the vantage ground of hindsight, we can see, as they could not, the inevitable outworking of the wrong decisions made. We have the opportunity to read aright and learn the lessons thus provided, just as they could have read the lessons correctly from their past. If they had, they would have understood the sure outworking of the wrong course they were following and stopped before making so terrible a mistake.

Pauls's Mistake 465

Because those who fail to learn the lessons of history will be condemned to re-live them, we must ask ourselves the question: What were the fearful outworkings of the course followed in Jerusalem?

Paul's ministry abruptly ended

Firstly, Paul's error brought his ministry to an abrupt end. God's plan for this apostle and the church was that Paul continue in active service for a number of years beyond that time, but when he accepted the leaders' insistence on being his plan makers, the matter was taken out of God's hands. He could not work a miracle to countermand their errors.

"Had the leaders in the church fully surrendered their feeling of bitterness toward the apostle, and accepted him as one specially called of God to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord would have spared him to them. God had not ordained that Paul's labors should so soon end; but He did not work a miracle to counteract the train of circumstances to which the course of the leaders in the church at Jerusalem had given rise.

"The same spirit is still leading to the same results." *The Acts of the Apostles*, 417.2.

The mystery of iniquity encouraged

The premature ending of Paul's ministry was a major tragedy, but the worst was still to come. When we vacate our assigned post by deliberate choice or as the result of sin, it will always result in serious loss to the church, with the enemy gaining a significant advantage. The removal of Paul from his post of duty gave Satan a tremendous advantage. The devil was triumphant, for he knew that this confirmed the establishment of the papacy in place of the true church. He could see that time would be greatly extended, and the possibility of his gaining the victory in the great controversy markedly enhanced.

Paul's mistake not only took away God's major defense against the inroads of the mystery of iniquity it positively encouraged this evil. The church leaders had always maintained that Paul was in the wrong and with his arrest they would see confirmation of their convictions. They reasoned that God would have protected Paul from being taken by the Jews and delivered

to the Romans if he had been right all along. Therefore, to their way of thinking, his imprisonment was certain evidence that the displeasure of God was upon him.

On the other hand, none of their group had been apprehended or removed from office which, they believed, would have been the case if they, and not Paul, had been in the wrong.

These developments were accepted as a mandate to work with even greater determination to enforce their authority in the church, and this led to increased separation from God. As a result of such position thinking, the spirituality in the church declined, and the leaders' power over the people extended until the papacy came to full flower. Thus Satan succeeded in establishing the mystery of iniquity within the church, thereby condemning the world to the horror of the long reign of Babylonian supremacy. The transition did not take place overnight. It so subtly insinuated itself that few recognized its presence and peril.

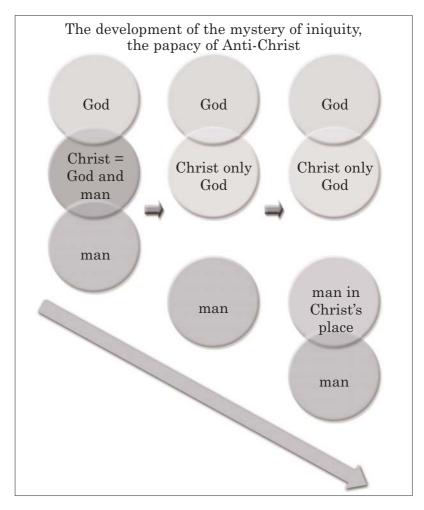
One of those who did, was the aging apostle John. After Paul's death he wrote, saying:

"This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." *1 John* 4:3.

The Spirit of the Antichrist

In this Scripture, John is making direct reference to the teaching which denies that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. "...and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God." 1 John 4:3 (NKJV). Although it may not be immediately obvious, there is a very close relationship between this falsehood and the issues which led to Paul's imprisonment. Those who deny that Christ came in the flesh remove Him from His place as the Connector between God and humanity, and thus from His rightful position as Head of the church. That done, the next inevitable step is to replace Him with human beings who are keen to have His position, and this is the spirit of antichrist. It is the same spirit that put the leaders of the apostolic church in Christ's place. And it is this spirit that built the papacy.

Pauls's Mistake 467



A fearful responsibility rested on the leaders of that early Christian church. God tried to show them that He is the great Problem Solver, the One who gives specific orders to His workers, and that He is the Teacher of His people. He also encouraged them to educate the people to look to God alone for guidance, and wanted them to recognize, appreciate, respect, and support His gift of Paul to the church.

On the apostle Paul, too, lay a great obligation to stand immovable against the pressures being exerted upon him.

Had all those concerned carefully followed God's way, a united, triumphal, victorious church would have accomplished her mission and the end would have come quickly. But the leaders of the apostolic church were determined to have their own way instead of God's, despite His loving efforts to save them from their foolishness.

When we discern the direct connection between the wrong decisions made in the early Christian church and the dreadful, long-lasting consequences which inevitably accrued, we are compelled to confess that the price of not following God's ways is simply not worth it.

How the Papacy was Built

It is imperative that we understand how the papacy was built. Craftily and successfully engineered by Satan's mastermind, it was an amalgamation between a fully developed Babvlonian system (the Jewish church) and those apostates in the apostolic church who had departed from the holy covenant (see Daniel 11:28–30) and thus came to practice the same procedures as were found in the parent organization. For his scheme to be successful. Satan must delude those in the church who were actually serving him, into thinking that they were Jehovah's true children. To achieve this, he diverted their attention away from their need to understand and follow God's ways. Instead he encouraged them to focus on their zeal for God, their spirit of sacrifice, their desire to promote the cause, their diligence in service, and the splendid results being obtained in increased membership, greater financial power, and extending influence in the world.

As the leaders considered these evidences, they were reassured that they were truly serving God and that the establishment of the kingdom would not be long delayed. Like so many others, they fell into the trap of permitting outward evidences to cancel the witness of God's Word, which states that the Lord blesses only those activities that are in accordance with His procedures. Irrespective of the sincerity and sacrifice associated with all their other practices, they were but builders of Babylon.

Pauls's Mistake 469

Through his deceptive tactics, Satan is able to use those who believe themselves dedicated to Babylon's destruction, to build her without even realizing it. The members of Christ's body today need to have a much greater awareness of Satan's abilities and his tireless application of them. Those who do develop a healthy respect for Satan's work by obtaining knowledge of his devices, will be far less likely to fall for his wiles.

The men through whom Satan established the mystery of iniquity in the early Christian church were men of deep piety, impeccable morality, and consuming zeal for God's work. There was nothing about their activities or appearance to suggest that they would become rebellious.

But their good intentions could save neither the leaders nor the church from the evil effects of their chosen course. As soon as people set themselves in the place of Christ the great Connector over other members of God's church, the seeds of the papacy have been sown. Vigorous growth follows, until eventually the apostates confederate with the visible man of sin. Those who forsake the holy covenant will always do this eventually, no matter how stoutly they disclaim the possibility. The confederation may not take place in the lifetimes of those who first deviate from the right principles, but succeeding generations will witness it.

Evil Principles

The principles have not changed. The same spirit is still leading to the same results today. Therefore, the success of the movement through which God will finally finish His work, depends on the utter refusal of its members to walk the pathway of the leaders in the early Christian church, or to compromise as Paul did in this incident. It must be remembered that once the mystery of iniquity has been established in a movement, no recovery is ever made. In the past, every such movement has had to be replaced by a new one. So it will ever be. Once human beings have usurped Christ's position as Head of His church, it can be His church no longer. Each of us must determine that we will not permit these evil principles to have any part in our lives or in our church. Safety and success lie in no other course.

In Conclusion

Chapter 36

The Jewish Tragedy

A careful prayer-filled reading of *John* chapter 6, together with *The Desire of Ages chapters 31, 40 and 41*can help to deepen the understanding of this chapter.

Rejection—Why?

One of the saddest and most extraordinary stories in history is the Jewish nation's rejection of their Messiah. For centuries, they had looked for His coming as the brightest hope in their future. The prophecies concerning this advent were the continual subject of study and teaching. From the earliest dawning of intelligence, the Jewish children learnt of the Promised One.

They knew the very year to expect Him, for the prophecies given to Daniel had stipulated that there would be sixty-nine weeks or four hundred and eighty-three years from the going forth of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto the Messiah's coming (see *Daniel* 9:25). It was a matter of simple calculation to determine the date from the beginning point of the prophecy in 457 BC.

It was no wonder then that when the Saviour and His disciples came preaching that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom

of God is at hand" (see *Mark* 1:15, KJV), an immediate interest was generated in their ministry. This was heightened by the amazing miracles Jesus performed and by the gospel message He brought. For a time He was well received and thousands upon thousands of Jews were convinced that He was the Messiah.

But there came a time when His popularity with the people suddenly died away, and the opposition against Him intensified until nearly the entire nation screamed for His crucifixion. That nation which God had called to be His peculiar people and through whom the most wonderful blessings were to be channeled to the world, lost their connection with heaven, their hope of eternal life, and their place in the world.

These things did not happen without good reason. Why did those people who had such strong faith that the Saviour would solve all their problems at His coming, who studied the Scriptures continuously and were prepared to make any sacrifice for the cause, become so utterly hostile to God's Son and His principles of righteousness?

In short, they had built up their own concepts of how He should solve their problems. They expected Him to add His miracle-working power to their plans and their solutions for the existing problems. In this way they deposed God from His place as the only successful Problem Solver. They lost sight of God's ways and so could not enter into His rest. Their faith became totally extinct, and they fell "after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 4:11, KJV) as their fathers in the wilderness.

An Assistant?

During the centuries preceding the first advent, the Jews had a terrible problem, and they knew it. They were in bondage to powerful foes, the last of whom were the Romans, and they correctly recognized this as their national problem. But they failed to see that the reason for this predicament was their insistence on displacing God as their Problem Solver. The problem began shortly after they left Egypt, when opposed to God's plans for them, they salvaged the weaponry from the dead Egyptians who were washed up on the shores of the Red Sea. At Kadesh-bar-

nea, they went a step further by appointing a human committee to search the land and plan the invasion. Later still, they called for a king like those from the nations around them, thus burrowing more deeply into trouble.

When the Israelites were confronted with the disaster of Nebuchadnezzar's onslaught, God offered them complete deliverance until the time they were finally subjugated, if only they would let Him handle their problems, but they proudly and stubbornly refused. Those who came back from the captivity showed that history had taught them nothing, for they subsequently put themselves under Roman domination. By their persistent refusal to let God have His rightful place among them, they continued to make their problems worse, for they never seemed to learn the lesson that if human works bring so much trouble, then more of the same will only add to their distress.

Unchanged and unrepentant, the Jews awaited the Messiah's advent. They did not think of Him as their Problem Solver, but as the One who would add His mighty power to the solutions they had already formed. They cast the loving Saviour in the role of their assistant, not recognizing that the positions should be reversed.

Naturally, they could think only in terms of a military solution, for this was their history. The victories gained by David over the Philistines were the model for their plans to overcome the Romans, but they were powerless to implement these schemes themselves, so they looked for the Messiah to use His mighty power to carry out what they had envisaged. They imagined the cruel slaughter of the Romans, the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the world, and themselves as the earth's most powerful and wealthy people. As it suited his purposes to perfection, Satan fostered these dreams until they became a fierce and undeniable obsession with the Jews.

When Christ finally appeared, the enthusiasm of the Jews was kindled because they recognized in Him the power they needed in order to accomplish their devisings. But they had no interest in Him as their Plan Maker or Problem Solver, nor did they have any disposition to accept Him as such because they had made their own solutions to the existing problems. Therefore, they did not know God's ways, could not enter into His rest,

and were not in fact the faithful Sabbath-keepers they proudly assumed themselves to be.

How contrary this was to the course they should have pursued! The witness of history should have told them that they could not make plans themselves which would successfully solve their problems. Deeply repentant for past mistakes, they should have emptied their minds of all schemes and submitted their difficulties to the Messiah, while being completely willing to accept whatever solution He might offer. Had they done this, their history would have been vastly different.

Instead, before Christ came, they had already made all the plans for Him. In their view, all He had to do was add His mighty power to their schemes and success was guaranteed. Pretended messiahs, only too willing to support the plans made by the people, had come and gone before He arrived, but none of them possessed the marvelous capacities displayed by Christ. The people were soon convinced that He could do all they required and they eagerly followed Him, demanding that He fill the role they had appointed Him.

Because Christ was born a Jew, as they were, they expected Him to hate the Romans as intensely and implacably as they did. If endowed as Christ was, they knew what they would do to their enemies, and therefore they required Him, as a son of Abraham, to do the same. Had He not been sent by their God, who, they supposed, favored them exclusively? Failing to honor the national will could be regarded as no less a crime than treason. To fail to act as they had decreed that the One sent of God should act, was considered by them an even worse crime. For the first failure they condemned Him to death. For the second, they added the ignominy of crucifixion. It was as a traitor to the principle of human plan making in God's place, that Christ died.

Wrong Expectations

A careful study of the developments leading up to Christ's execution provides lessons of great value to every person who has any desire to serve God truly according to His ways and principles.

Prior to the Sermon on the Mount, a number of events had taken place which encouraged the belief that deliverance was at hand. Christ had turned the water into wine, gathered to Himself a small following of twelve disciples, cleansed the temple, performed some astonishing miracles of healing, challenged the authority of the Sanhedrin over His right to heal on the Sabbath day, and announced that the kingdom of God was at hand. It is no wonder then, that the disciples and people gathered for the Sermon on the Mount with great expectations of hearing an announcement in regard to a kingdom freed from Roman domination. The disciples took their place close to their Saviour, between Him and the vast multitude who eagerly awaited the declaration that a universal Jewish empire was about to be established.

"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them..." *Matthew* 5:1–2.

What was going on in the minds of Christ's listeners?

"With a feeling that something more than usual might be expected, the disciples had pressed about their Master. From the events of the morning they gathered assurance that some announcement was about to be made in regard to the kingdom which, as they fondly hoped, He was soon to establish. A feeling of expectancy pervaded the multitude also, and eager faces gave evidence of the deep interest.

"As they sat upon the green hillside, awaiting the words of the divine Teacher, their hearts were filled with thoughts of future glory. There were scribes and Pharisees who looked forward to the day when they should have dominion over the hated Romans and possess the riches and splendor of the world's great empire. The poor peasants and fishermen hoped to hear the assurance that their wretched hovels, the scanty food, the life of toil, and fear of want, were to be exchanged for mansions of plenty and days of ease. In place of the one coarse garment which was their covering by day and their blanket at night, they hoped that Christ would give them the rich and costly robes of their conquerors.

"All hearts thrilled with the proud hope that Israel was soon to be honored before the nations as the chosen of the Lord, and Jerusalem exalted as the head of a universal kingdom." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 4.4–5.2.

Christ had not come to give them sudden wealth and power. This would have been the worst thing He could do for them. What they really needed was a character change. Only when they had been transformed in heart so that they truly loved even their worst enemies, could they be safely entrusted with wealth and power. Unfortunately, their only dream was of a sudden projection from poverty to riches, and they were confident that this would bring them unlimited happiness.

People today seek the same objective by investing continually in lotteries, football pools, and other "get rich quick" schemes. Occasionally, the deliriously happy prizewinners are featured on the news, to the envy of those who have not been so "lucky". But those who have been subjected to poverty are often unable to cope with the problems and responsibilities associated with the sudden acquisition of wealth and power, and some have come to curse the day when they were "blessed" with immediate wealth.

So with Israel, everything at first would have looked most promising as they advanced unitedly against their common enemy, the Romans. During this phase, they would have been too preoccupied to worry about the distribution of wealth and power, but as soon as the enemy was vanquished, they would have begun to fight among themselves over the spoils. Every evil trait—greed, lust, jealousy, pride, hatred, and so on—would have been stimulated to a terrible degree. Corruption, violence, and trouble would have cursed the land and people as they fought against each other for gain. The Israelites were quite unable to foresee the fearful outworking of their plans, but the Saviour could, and He loved them far too dearly to permit His power to be used to bring such dreadful results.

Wrong Concepts

This was not the only reason why Christ found it impossible to accept and execute their plans. The Jews had no concept of God's true character. To them, as to most, He was a destroyer who mercilessly slaughtered His enemies using force to solve problems. Cherishing the idea that they were the favorites of heaven, they were certain that God hated the Romans as much as they did and

would annihilate them on their behalf. They did not know that He loved the Romans as much as He loved the Jews, and that He would never exterminate one nation to please another with whom His affections were as equally bound. Christ had come to save the entire world, not just the Israelites. This was beyond their comprehension, because of their preconceptions.

These factors placed Christ in the position where He could not accept or implement the Jewish plans. Furthermore, He did not need their faulty plans, because His Father had already devised perfect solutions for every problem. Had Christ deviated in any way from the divine arrangements, there would have been no point in His coming to earth. But, fortunately, despite the interminable pressure placed upon Him by the people among whom He lived and worked, He utterly refused to operate outside the Father's purposes.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." *John* 5:19 (NKJV).

The Sermon on the Mount

The nature and principles of the kingdom the Father had sent His Son to establish were spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount (see *Matthew* chapter 5). It was a beautiful and glorious revelation of divine light and power, but it was not what the people had come to hear. Yet Christ did not at this point of time openly attack their wrong concept.

"Christ disappointed the hope of worldly greatness. In the Sermon on the Mount He sought to undo the work that had been wrought by false education, and to give His hearers a right conception of His kingdom and of His own character. Yet He did not make a direct attack on the errors of the people. He saw the misery of the world on account of sin, yet He did not present before them a vivid delineation of their wretchedness. He taught them of something infinitely better than they had known. Without combating their ideas of the kingdom of God, He told them the conditions of entrance therein, leaving them to draw their own conclusions as to its nature. The truths He taught are no less

important to us than to the multitude that followed Him. We no less than they need to learn the foundation principles of the kingdom of God." *The Desire of Ages*, 299.3.

The people were puzzled. They had come to hear a vindictive discourse against the Romans with the promise that very soon the "holy war" would be initiated, the enemy vanquished, and the Jews exalted to world dominion. Instead, they heard beautiful ideals of love, peace, and purity, which they found difficult to reconcile with their preconceived expectations.

It would have been interesting to hear the talk at the evening meals that night. Fathers would have been the recipients of searching questions from other family members asking how this man could be the Messiah when He said nothing about the Messiah's "real" mission. Some would have answered by pointing out that such a Deliverer would have to exercise extreme caution because of the spies and Roman soldiers present who were sent to report back to the authorities every word He spoke. Thus Jesus obviously could not tell them the things He would like to have said, so the real intent of His mission was carefully hidden behind the harmless and beautiful expressions they had heard that day. It would be most unfortunate for the cause if the Romans should become prematurely aware of the real purpose of the Saviour's advent, these men would have solemnly declared.

Such rationalizations would have satisfied the people for the time being, so they still followed Christ with the continuing expectation that He would soon assert His authority, exercise His amazing powers, and put their plans into action. In every miracle performed, they saw the assurance that the long-desired moment was fast approaching. Meanwhile, Christ pursued His unvarying course of faithfulness to God's plans, unmoved by the mounting pressure of the people who clung to their dream with unyielding determination.

The Feeding of the 5000

This untenable situation could not continue forever. A time had to come when the truth would at last dawn upon the minds of the Jews, and the shocking disappointment that Christ would not do as they expected and demanded of Him, would overwhelm them. This time came at the feeding of the five thousand. Throughout that long day, Christ had spoken the living word which so charmed and thrilled the people that they had not even noticed the passing mealtimes. The setting sun indicated the day's end and the awareness of physical hunger asserted itself. In His great love and mercy, Christ would not send them away hungry, so taking what food was offered—five barley loaves and two small fishes—He multiplied the meager supply until the entire populace was fed (see *Matthew* 14:13–21).

The multitude and the disciples were now convinced that Christ was the Messiah. Every doubt had been removed and their faith in Christ was unblemished at that moment. Like a fresh breeze from the ocean sweeping over the land on a parched day, conviction and enthusiasm spread across that vast throng. With intense and eager excitement the words were breathed from their lips, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." *John* 6:14. Behind this true statement, selfish thoughts lurked in the minds of the people.

"All day the conviction has strengthened. That crowning act is assurance that the long-looked-for Deliverer is among them. The hopes of the people rise higher and higher. This is He who will make Judea an earthly paradise, a land flowing with milk and honey. He can satisfy every desire. He can break the power of the hated Romans. He can deliver Judah and Jerusalem. He can heal the soldiers who are wounded in battle. He can supply whole armies with food. He can conquer the nations, and give to Israel the long-sought dominion." *The Desire of Ages*, 377.2.

Christ certainly possessed the physical might to fulfill every one of these hopes, but His character of infinite love, righteousness, and justice prevented Him from implementing most of them. For instance, He could have healed the soldiers wounded in battle, provided they had the requisite faith and did not wish for the healing in order merely to return to slaughtering their foes. From a humanitarian viewpoint, He could have healed troops from both sides with equal impartiality, but He certainly could not have gone forth at the head of a Jewish army to conquer the nations.

The people did not comprehend this. In their minds, Christ's responsibility as a child of Abraham was to use that wonderful

power as they would have deployed it, if it had been in their possession. Not to do so could be regarded only as a betrayal of national, and therefore sacred trust; a crime warranting the death penalty. They were sure that Christ would not disappoint them, and looked for signs from Him that the time was near.

Forcing the Issue

But Christ showed no disposition to claim national leadership for Himself, or to slay the Romans, and the people concluded that He was so humble, gentle, and unassuming that He would never fulfill His "commission."

In their thinking it was an easy matter. They were confident that they had the successful plans for deliverance from the Romans and that He had the power to implement them. They had expected Him to rise to the occasion and assert Himself as their military leader, but it became increasingly evident that He was not going to do so. A serious problem now confronted them. They felt that at any cost Christ must add His power to their plans, so the pressure was on them to take matters into their own hands and force Christ to accept kingship.

There was only one correct course that the Jews should have taken after the feeding of the five thousand. They should have recognized that Christ was under the personal direction of His Father and must be left to carry out those directives. They should have accepted whatever plans the Lord made for them and not clung to their cherished determination to wipe out the Romans.

But the Jewish people were operating on different principles, for they had no intention of letting such a wonderful opportunity slip by, being of one mind that something must be done. So they approached the problem in typical human fashion by taking advantage of this mass meeting, and swiftly reached the unanimous decision that, for "the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom," they must take Christ by force and compel Him to be king. If He was too shy, then they would help Him. But the Saviour, who read their hearts as an open book, destroyed their highest expectations.

"Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself." *John* 6:15.

In the people's scheme, designed to guarantee that their plans for worldly aggrandizement would be carried out, there was not one thread of divine devising. Christ knew it was contrary to God's intentions, so He could not possibly comply with their directives without destroying His entire mission. He refused to accept people in God's place as His Plan Maker. To do so would be to forsake the holy covenant and align Himself with the mystery of iniquity, thus surrendering the complete victory to Satan and his angels. What fiendish screams of exultation would have echoed throughout the satanic kingdom had Christ made such a fatal blunder.

The Jews and the apostles could not have adopted a worse course. They were doing just what the devil would have them do, and it especially pleased him to see them so thoroughly deceived that they imagined they were serving God totally.

An Illogical Stand?

It was most fortunate for the fate of humanity and the outcome of the great controversy that Christ did not yield. Had the Saviour made any concession to the demands worked out in that hastily-convened committee meeting, He would have sacrificed His commission and destroyed all hope of salvation for the human race. Satan would have triumphed, not on a passing and limited scale but in totality. The consuming cancer of sin would have spread its destructive tentacles in ever-widening circles towards the ultimate envelopment and annihilation of the universe. The prevention of this terrible outcome hinged on Christ's utter refusal that day to allow anyone but God to be His Plan Maker. If Paul had done likewise in Jerusalem, what a different history the church would have had!

While the multitude and the disciples eagerly moved out to do what they had decided to do, Christ recognized with crystal clarity the principles they were violating and the grim consequences which would follow their actions. He therefore refused to be party to any of their scheming.

That day, Christ stood completely alone. Not even the disciples, who had received the direct benefit of His ministry, shared His awareness of the conflict between the mystery of God and the mystery of iniquity. The least they could have done for Him was to take a neutral position, and at best they could have pointed out to the multitude the exact nature of their transgressions and advised them of the correct course to follow. But instead, the disciples took the worst position of encouraging the multitude to enforce kingship on their Master. They did this, not because they were evil at heart or desired to destroy Christ's work, but because they did not understand the nature of the controversy in which they were involved.

The fact that Christ stood completely alone did not influence Him to compromise at all. What concerned Him was His Father's will. He would carry out God's plans even though He alone saw and understood them, and to do so He must withstand the determined efforts of the entire world, face the apparent failure of His mission, and be brought to an unjust and cruel death. But Christ, being a true servant of the Most High, did not concern Himself with consequences. He faithfully performed His duty and left all the results with God. There was no factor, pressure, or argument in heaven or on earth that would induce Him to modify His principles in any way.

To the disciples, Christ's stand, although admittedly idealistic, seemed to border on insanity. There was nothing logical about it, for they could see the dawn of a day pregnant with opportunity, slipping away with no advantage being taken of it, and no fruit being borne. This was an awful thought to them, as they could not see any logic in Christ's ways. The fact that God's ways appear illogical to us is so little appreciated, that people tend to reject divine directives which they cannot comprehend. Instead they follow their own devisings which they feel they can understand and which to them seem logical and practical. If they but realized that they were rejecting the only successful ways for those that could not possibly succeed, they would surely have changed their position.

Christ would not deny the people their freedom to do what they wished with their own lives, but He would not give them the right to direct His. He was not to receive specific orders from anyone except His heavenly Father who was His sole Plan Maker. For this reason He instructed His disciples to embark for Capernaum while He dispersed the multitude. For their own good, it was essential that the disciples be separated from the scene. So Christ sent them away first, which left Him free to deal with the crowd alone.

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd." *Matthew* 14:22.

Separation from Christ

As the people sadly and angrily left, they recognized that there was little hope of their plans receiving Christ's endorsement. Their experience is a further illustration of the truth that "faith without deeds is useless." *James* 2:20.

As we have seen, faith mixed with human works is faith without God's works, and as such is faith without works as defined by James in the above Scripture. The only outcome for this combination of faith and human works is a dying faith, which is dark unbelief. The surest way to destroy a living, vibrant faith experience is to mix human works, plans, and solutions with it. Such a combination is guaranteed to destroy even the strongest faith, which is demonstrated forcibly in this story.

When the five thousand had been miraculously fed, their faith in Christ as the Messiah was very strong. No doubts dimmed their vision and they felt assured that the Promised One was truly among them. They were enthusiastic and confident, excited and happy. The future seemed filled with the brightest of prospects. They had no doubts about Christ's marvelous capabilities and they were sure He could more than carry out the "splendid" plans they had formed on His behalf.

If they had only accepted God's works at this point and combined them with their faith, the results would have been very wonderful. But they did not. In the plans they formed that day, there was not a single thread of divine participation. It was all of them and none of God. Worse still, even though they

did not know it—for they truly thought they were doing great things for God—their plans were in direct opposition to His purposes. The natural outcome of this could only be death to their faith.

Sending them away did not immediately solve the problem within the disciples, although it did defuse the general situation. They had in no sense been delivered from their disposition to take Christ by force and make Him king against His and the Father's will. Their course was building unbelief in them, and separating them from their Master who could rejoin them only when, with truly repentant hearts, they realized their need and returned to God's ways.

The lesson contained in Christ's separation from His disciples at this time must not be overlooked. The substitution of human ways for God's will always separate individuals and movements from their Maker. Satan knows this better than we do and is therefore always working to institute human procedures in place of the divine. Whenever we feel a sense of separation from God, we would do well to check our procedures to see if they are according to God's ways. If they are not, they will build an ever-widening gulf between us and our Maker. Similarly, as the disciples pulled away from the shore with unbelief building in their hearts, they became separated further and further from Christ.

They naturally viewed themselves as the ones who loved God and Israel and who were zealous for the establishment of the kingdom, while Christ seemed totally indifferent to these interests. They began to ask whose side He was on and whether He was an impostor. While full recognition must be given to the disciples' zeal for God's cause, it is evident that they did not understand the nature of His kingdom or the procedures by which it was to be built. This ignorance did not save them from the evil consequences of their course, even though the Lord was watching over them and doing His best to protect them from themselves. We must learn this lesson well, for humans are prone to the feeling that, if their motives are sound and they have only the best intentions, this will compensate for, and even sanctify, wrong procedures. But that will never happen.

From Faith to Unbelief

For the disciples, the evil consequences of their unbelief were the destruction of their faith and separation from God. The final outworking is described in the following words:

"Unbelief was taking possession of their minds and hearts. Love of honor had blinded them. They knew that Jesus was hated by the Pharisees, and they were eager to see Him exalted as they thought He should be. To be united with a teacher who could work mighty miracles, and yet to be reviled as deceivers, was a trial they could ill endure. Were they always to be accounted followers of a false prophet? Would Christ never assert His authority as king? Why did not He who possessed such power reveal Himself in His true character, and make their way less painful? Why had He not saved John the Baptist from a violent death? Thus the disciples reasoned until they brought upon themselves great spiritual darkness. They questioned, Could Jesus be an impostor, as the Pharisees asserted?" *The Desire of Ages*, 380.1.

What a transition this was from the faith and enthusiasm exhibited only a few hours before! This is a striking demonstration of the deadly effect of mixing human works with living faith. Satan tempts us to destroy our faith by simply adding our own works to it. If we cooperate by doing this, our faith is guaranteed to die.

The disciples were deeply troubled because, in their eyes, Christ did not "... reveal Himself in His true character." But that was, in fact, just what He was doing. Their inability to see it was due to their erroneous views of the Saviour's character and work. Despite this, they had no excuse for slipping into the satanic trap prepared for them, for full protection was available in the simple principle of leaving Christ to do His Father's will completely free from any pressure or interference by them. When they could not succeed in influencing Him to execute their wills, they cherished and cultivated dark, complaining thoughts against Him, instead of dwelling upon the blessed truths they had learned that day.

The course those men should have taken is described in the following paragraph:

"The disciples had that day witnessed the wonderful works of Christ. It had seemed that heaven had come down to the earth. The memory of that precious, glorious day should have filled them with faith and hope. Had they, out of the abundance of their hearts, been conversing together in regard to these things, they would not have entered into temptation. But their disappointment had absorbed their thoughts. The words of Christ, 'Gather up the fragments, ... that nothing be lost,' were unheeded. Those were hours of large blessing to the disciples, but they had forgotten it all. They were in the midst of troubled waters. Their thoughts were stormy and unreasonable, and the Lord gave them something else to afflict their souls and occupy their minds. God often does this when men create burdens and troubles for themselves. The disciples had no need to make trouble. Already danger was fast approaching." The Desire of Ages, 380.2.

Blind Determination

As for the multitude, they went home equally unhappy. The next day they followed Jesus to Capernaum where they debated with Him in order to determine once and for all whether He would ever come under their command. It was a direct confrontation between the mystery of God and the mystery of iniquity. The Scriptural record of it is found in *John* 6:22–65. As the people talked with Christ, He renewed His efforts to open their minds to a realization of the true spiritual nature of His kingdom, the essential qualification for which was the possession of a God-like character rather than material, military, or physical power.

But the Jews had made their own plans for Christ and were determined to assert their authority over Him. They stubbornly refused to change their ways to God's, and it was settled in their minds that if Christ would not use His wonderful power according to their specifications, then they would have nothing more to do with Him.

So the issue between Christ and the Jews was simply a question of whether the head of the church was divine or human. Was Christ to accept directions from His omniscient Father, or from the Jews whose history showed they could do nothing right? Who was to be the Plan Maker, Problem Solver, and Bur-

den Bearer in the church? In short, who was to be the Source and who the dependent receivers?

So far as Christ was concerned, there was no question. He understood the structure of God's kingdom, the relationship every created being must sustain to the Infinite, and the reason why this arrangement must not be interfered with in any way. Therefore, He was utterly and eternally committed to His Father's ways. By no other procedure could He successfully accomplish His mission.

There was similarly no question in the minds of the stubborn, foolish Jews who lived in Palestine. In their determination to be plan makers in God's place they classified themselves as Babylonians, and they were totally unwilling to give God's rightful position back to Him. By maintaining their entrenched position, the Jews were confirming their eternal separation from their Maker and guaranteeing their doom as a people. They wanted salvation on their own terms or they would not have it at all. They despised and rejected the beautiful and totally effective solution, which had been worked out in God's infinite love and wisdom and sent to them by the most auspicious of all messengers—Christ, His only begotten Son.

The eye-opening speech which took place the next day and is recorded in *John* 6:22–66 brought the matter to a decision. Christ clearly revealed that He was not willing to accept their plans and solutions under any circumstances, and He refused to add His power to their scheming. He definitely stated that He was mostly concerned for their spiritual welfare, thus destroying their remaining hopes.

"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." *John* 6:27.

"For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." John~6:33.

"At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven." *John* 6:41.

"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?" John 6:60–61.

The resulting attitude of the people is well summarized in the following paragraph:

"The test was too great. The enthusiasm of those who had sought to take Him by force and make Him king grew cold. This discourse in the synagogue, they declared, had opened their eyes. Now they were undeceived. In their minds His words were a direct confession that He was not the Messiah, and that no earthly rewards were to be realized from connection with Him. They had welcomed His miracle-working power; they were eager to be freed from disease and suffering; but they would not come into sympathy with His self-sacrificing life. They cared not for the mysterious spiritual kingdom of which He spoke. The insincere, the selfish, who had sought Him, no longer desired Him. If He would not devote His power and influence to obtaining their freedom from the Romans, they would have nothing to do with Him." The Desire of Ages, 391.3.

Revenge

Israel's troubles began at the point where they established themselves as plan makers in God's place, but they could never see this. Consequently, they became more and more confirmed in their rejection of God's ways until they had turned their backs on the only One who could help them.

They justified their rejection of Christ on the grounds that His ways would never deliver Israel, but their nation which they thought to save by this decision, was destroyed because of it. Their objective was to obtain complete deliverance from the Romans and be exalted to the pinnacle of worldly greatness. Instead, the Romans destroyed them and razed their beloved city to the ground. They became a scattered and persecuted people. Worst of all, they totally disconnected themselves from heaven and lost the priceless gift of eternal life. It was far too high a price to pay for the doubtful honor of being plan makers in God's place.

When the Jews usurped God's role as Plan Maker, they became so obsessed with the thought of exercising authority over Christ that they were not content merely to reject Him. Once they realized that He would not serve them in the way they

wanted, the deadly fear filled them that if He were allowed to live, He would eventually destroy all their hopes and aspirations. Therefore they found that it was just as necessary to dominate Him when He was of no further use to them, as when they thought He would do their bidding. If they could not force Him into being king, they would compel Him to die instead. The new situation called for a new set of plans, but in making them, there was no change in their determination to be Christ's plan makers.

Here, once again, they found themselves destitute of power to carry out their plans. As they were no longer a sovereign state, they could not sentence the loving Saviour to death and carry out His execution. Therefore they had to look for some source of power, which when added to their schemes, would enable them to destroy Christ.

The only place such power could be acquired was from the hated Romans. At this time Rome ruled the earth and therefore held the sword of power in its hands. Because the Jews were dedicated to exterminating the Romans, they ought to have rejected the idea of using Roman power to accomplish their aims as a matter of principle.

But principle and honor were not even considered. Expediency was all that mattered. To the Jews, the end to be achieved was so important that any means was justified, no matter how unscrupulous. Their actions were a revelation of the depths of inconsistency and iniquity to which they were prepared to go in their determination to have their own way.

But even more than expediency was driving the Jews to crucify Christ. They were thirsting for revenge. They had pitted all their hopes in Him. He was born a Jew as were they; He possessed all the power necessary to accomplish the mission they had assigned Him; He came at the promised time; and He claimed to be the Messiah. But He had not fulfilled their expectations. They felt the intense pain of bitter disappointment, betrayal, and mockery. For this, they would see that He paid. With deep satisfaction they would watch Him die a lingering, agonizing death, rejected and hated by all. They would mock Him as they upheld the "failure" of His ways and the "superiority" of their own. Concentrated in what they did to Christ in His final suffering and death, was all the evil that is the natural out-

growth of the satanic and human disposition to occupy God's place and rule over others. Calvary testifies to the enormity of this evil by showing to what lengths it will lead God's children if they ever let it take hold of them.

Joining Forces Against the Common Threat

The Jews were successful in acquiring Roman power to condemn and crucify the Saviour, but in view of the deep hostility between the two races, how were they able to achieve this? One would expect the Romans to have nothing to do with the Jews' private vendetta against Christ, tending instead to protect and honor Him because of His steadfast refusal to side with the Jews in their scheme to destroy their overlords. But there was a good reason for the Roman decision to share with the Jews in condemning Christ.

While in many places these two nations could find no common ground, they were united in one basic area. They both shared the same determination that human beings should replace the Almighty as rulers on this earth. Both kingdoms were manifestations of the mystery of iniquity. Satan does not particularly care what people believe and do, provided they are thereby building the mystery of iniquity. Thus he did not work to unite the Jews and Romans on doctrine, but in the common purpose of warring against God's system of government.

The mystery of God, which Christ had come to establish, found no common ground with either Jew or Roman, nor would it compromise with or accommodate them in any way. Christ's message required as the prerequisite for receiving Him, a complete rejection of the procedures they had so long cherished. He warned in unequivocal terms that new wine could not be placed in old bottles; that there could be no marriage between the two systems. These were conditions and changes neither Jew nor Roman was willing to accept. At first the Romans left the Jews to fight it out with Christ, but when it proved too much for them, the Romans were prepared to add their power to the struggle.

The Jews would have gladly received Christ as their king if He had been prepared to replace the Roman Empire with another of the same kind and organization, the difference being that the Jews would now be the class in power. When earthly despotisms are overthrown, the incoming rulers are no different from the kings they have overthrown, for they operate by the same methods, are just as despotic, cruel, and unforgiving, and just as determined to establish the principle of humanity being the plan and policy maker in God's place. The path to worldly power is always slippery with the blood of others.

It was Christ's determination to build a kingdom different from those of this world, that fired the hatred of the Jews and caused them to reject Him with such vehemence. They did not merely repudiate Him as a person. It was the system He represented and the procedures He advocated, that they were rejecting. They chose to turn their backs on the wonderful, soul-saving mystery of God, in favor of the mystery of iniquity. Christ was the tangible, visible representative of God's ways, and Caesar, on Rome's glittering throne, was the living symbol of human ways. When the Jews utterly rejected God's ways in favor of their own, they chose the system of which Caesar was the head. For once, they spoke the truth when they said, "We have no king but Caesar." John 19:15.

Having successfully solicited Roman power, the Jewish plan to crucify Christ was made possible. They were not content just to execute Jesus. He must be humiliated to the utmost degree by being crucified upon the cross, the specifically chosen symbol of the Babylonian system. His death would be their statement proclaimed for all future generations, that the system Christ represented could never withstand the superior way of the world. This demonstration should show that God's procedures ended only in failure, while the Israelites' way was the only one to glory and happiness.

As their bleeding victim expired in agony, the Jews, in their madness and undisguised inconsistency, gleefully congratulated themselves on the seeming conclusiveness of their argument. It appeared forever confirmed that Christ's ways were a failure and theirs a success. Otherwise, they reasoned, how could the seeming victory over Christ have been so absolute that they had been able to extract the ultimate sacrifice from Him? Better still, from their point of view, they had exterminated the leading exponent

of His system. In His passing, He had apparently left none to carry on His work, for He had died alone, rejected by most and forsaken by all. They were confident that never again would they be troubled by the proposition of being delivered from sin by following Christ's ways. Even if they were prepared to admit that this was beautiful and idealistic, it was far too impractical to work, so there was no place for it in the earthly order of things.

But this was not all the Jews had to say at the cross. They gave Christ a personal demonstration of what they had expected Him to do to the Romans. In their bitter disappointment, feelings of betrayal, and lust for revenge, they wreaked vengeance on Him for His refusal to come under their control and fulfill their plans to crush the Romans.

The cross on Calvary said much more than they intended, although they did not see the additional light shining from that "tree of torture" any more than they understood the true implications of what they were doing. They were acting out the enraged passions of their evil natures, for the most part unconscious of what they were declaring and certainly oblivious to what God was saying.

Jewish Fallout

Calvary is the ultimate revelation of the lengths to which human plan making will take people, especially when they set out to build God's kingdom for Him using those procedures. Every religionist solemnly asserts that the only course for any believer to follow is the will of God. However, in practical terms, this usually means that the church will determine how God's work is to be carried forward and then appoint themselves executors of the plan. As this is all done for the Lord and in His name, the church members are confident they are doing God's will, when in fact they are carrying out their own. There is nothing to compare with the frustrated rage of this class when they discover that God will neither recognize nor accept their works. The display of infuriated passion at Calvary is the demonstration, for all those who see it, of the reaction to be expected from religionists when this unwelcome rejection is brought home to them.

It was the religionist Jews, thinking they were serving God by making plans for building up His kingdom, who instigated Christ's crucifixion, not the Romans or the heathen. The Jews thought to rid themselves of the One who troubled them because they imagined He was depriving them of the peace they sought, but they only compounded their problems and shut themselves away from God's peace forever. The reason they did not enter into God's rest was because they refused to learn God's ways. Christ came to teach them to accept the Almighty as their Plan Maker, but they refused to relinquish their self-appointed role of making plans for God to execute.

What a night of woe the Jews ushered in upon themselves. Hunted, hated, and persecuted since then, they have died by the millions at the hands of those who have gained power over them. Over a million Jews perished in the fall of Jerusalem alone. Various persecutions in England and Europe have taken millions more, to say nothing of those who perished at Hitler's hands during World War II. The on-going strife with the Arabs confirms that they still have not experienced God's rest, for the simple reason that they have refused to learn God's ways.

The Ultimate Price for What?

There is no greater tragedy than that of the Jewish nation. The Messiah's advent promised total emancipation from the forces of sin within them, as well as from the Romans over them. It offered complete liberation from all disease, and promised them the certainty of eternal life. There was nothing more they could have desired.

All this would certainly have been theirs if they had met two vital conditions. Firstly, they needed implicit faith in God's power to fulfill His promises, and secondly, they had to leave the plan making entirely to Him. Had they met these two requirements, they could have received the fullness of His promises. But by failing to meet the conditions, they lost everything.

Never in history, has the outworking of human plan making shown more clearly the awesome cost to be paid by those who insist on following it. The magnitude of the Jewish loss can be appreciated only when assessed in the light of what might have been. If we ponder the glory of the Jews as a nation fully committed to righteousness, overspreading the entire world and continuing as the channel through which all light and blessing was to be imparted to the needy world, we will see them not as the tail, but as the head, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, the apple of God's eye. How differently history would have unfolded without the horror of the Dark Ages, the rivers of blood flowing from the martyred, or the ignorance and superstition which has plagued every generation since Calvary. What wasted potential!

The Jews threw all that away by fighting for the right to manage God's, their own, and other people's affairs. The natural stubbornness of the human heart prevailed against God's repeated efforts to channel them into safe paths and they paid the full price for the choice made. No one could pay more for less—eternal life for the right to do what they did not have the capacity to do anyway. In reality, Israel paid everything for nothing.

Our Opportunity

The Jewish experience would have been a total waste, but for one redeeming feature. The present generation can profit from the lessons contained in the mistakes they made. The principles have not changed. The same choices today will lead to the same results. Nothing can change that fact.

The people through whom God will finally finish His work are those who have thoroughly studied the Jewish disaster. As a result, they will understand exactly what procedures to follow and which to avoid in order to see the work speedily and successfully completed. Since the collapse of the Jewish opportunity, God has extended the invitation to fill their place to generation after generation of "gentiles", but none has yet learned the way and gained the victory. It remains to be seen whether the Lord can find among those who count themselves His people today, a goodly company who will "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (*Revelation* 14:4), instead of insisting that He follow them wherever they would have Him go.

Chapter 37

A Final Opportunity

God's and our ways are so different, that it is seldom possible for human principles of operation to be used to illustrate the divine. To a certain extent, however, the procedures followed by architects, builders and other workers in relationship to one another can be considered as an example. This is because, for their own protection, society has invested an authority in architects which few other classes share. They are allowed to prepare plans for complex building structures, earning this unique position by becoming highly qualified for their work.

An Illustration

Let us imagine that a father and his son, both experienced architects, have won a contract to plan a complex building such as a hospital. The building site lies in a foreign country where there is a desperate need for such a hospital to be erected. Those professional men spare no effort to design the specific details and layout of the structure so that the building will serve its purpose to the best possible advantage. There is already a long waiting list of sick people needing a place where they can be treated, so the architects are under pressure to complete the plan quickly.

Next, a responsible builder is selected who promises to construct the building according to the plan given. His team of workers commences operations with the clear understanding that the architect's word is absolute law on the building site. Every detail of construction must be carried out according to his plans, and no modifications can be effected without his authorization. To ensure that the system works, the head builder is paid progressively as each stage is completed to the architect's satisfaction. This system appears to work very well. The builder with his crew is careful to build in strict accordance to the plan given.

But then, only a short time later, the workers call for a change in the order of things. Assembling a general meeting, they discard the architect's plans, and appoint a committee to form new ones for the remainder of the structure. All members of the committee have seen the sick people around them waiting for help and are moved with compassion. They decide to follow what seems to them a quicker course calling for a change of the methods to be used and the materials which are to be built into the structure. Let us imagine that either the head builder is far away at this time with no idea of what is going on, or else that the workers exert such pressure on him that he gives way and promises to submit to their demands. Whatever the case might be, they succeed and begin to carry out their own plans.

All those chosen for the committee are only builders, not trained architects. Therefore, none of them has the qualifications to be the plan maker for the project. And even if they were competent, their efforts would be a wasteful duplication, for a perfectly satisfactory set of drawings already exists.

Despite the continual dissension that divides the workers, they resolutely persist with their scheme. Eventually, because of the faulty design and cheap materials, the building partially collapses, killing some of the workers and injuring others. After such obvious evidence that their plan has failed, the architects at last become aware of what is going on. They make it quite clear that they can never accept this behavior and as the court case begins, the architects explain that such procedures can never hasten the work but only delay it considerably. The hospital will never serve its purpose if it is not built according to the well-formed plans of the two experienced architects.

But, despite the prosecution of the workers, as strange as it may seem in face of their obvious failure, they are too proud to submit. They claim to understand and some even promise to build safe structures in future, but their persistent refusal to change procedures shows that they are not actually willing to give up their own plans.

No architect would tolerate such behavior in worldly business. He would immediately dismiss every one of those workers, and assemble a fresh team to replace them. Those unfaithful workers would have been guilty not only of insubordination and grievous lack of respect for the architects and their position, but they would also be responsible for the expensive misuse of materials and finally for the needless suffering and death of their fellow workers, as well as those sick people who would have received help in time if the building had been completed earlier.

The long-suffering architects now have to train the new workers thoroughly to follow their plans to the letter, in order to avoid a repetition of the drama. We can imagine how frustrated the architects would be if the next and every successive team of workers were to repeat the same performance! The hospital that should have taken but a short time to be ready, would still be incomplete many years later.

The Application

Generally speaking, these days, such procedures are not permitted, and buildings usually advance to completion in reasonable time, except when industrial unrest delays or even stops the work. But, while architects and the civil law will not permit

Architects: God the Father and the Son

Plan: God's gospel plan to solve the sin problem

and finish the work

Hospital: Movement/Church giving service to sick and

lost humankind

Head builder: Messenger

Workers: Believers within the movement/church

workers to operate in this fashion, that is exactly how people often treat the heavenly Master-Architect and His Son. These are the Designers whose competence is unparalleled. There is no problem that is too great for Them. Things which we cannot even begin to cope with are simplicity to God and His Son.

Anticipating the sin problem even before it arose, God carefully formulated a plan for its immediate solution, in full agreement with His Son. In due time the heavenly Architects called a messenger and a team of workers until they had built up quite a movement. The object of this crew of workers was not to serve themselves, but the spiritually sick world around them. During the early stage of the church's development, the believers were careful to follow the plans made for them by the Master Architects, but invariably the time came when they called for a different order of things. Discarding God's plan, they appointed human committees to devise schemes for the continuation of the work. Human wisdom took the place of divine foresight and the outcome was disastrous.

God was fully aware of His workers' activities, for unlike the architects and head builder in our illustration, He was not preoccupied with other work in some distant location. He did not instantly dismiss those who had usurped His position, for God
does not use physical force to solve problems. He gives everyone
complete freedom to follow either His perfect plan or their own
faulty ones. He can accept only that obedience which comes from
a willing and sincere desire to follow the Lord in everything.

So after God had made it abundantly clear that He was not involved in this change of procedures, in contrast to our parable, He let the determined workers build after their own ideas. Every time this happened, the workers who dismissed God from His rightful place were not willing to see that the fault lay with themselves and absolutely refused to cooperate with Him. In their stubborn pride they continued their work, claiming to be God's chosen people who had started in the correct way and would complete the work in what they also insisted was the right way. They did not deem the changes in procedure to be as important as their honest desire and dedicated determination to persevere even though enough evidence proved that their plans were bound for failure.

Through their blindness and insistence on discarding God's ways in favor of their own, they in fact dismissed themselves as His true workers. Instead, the Lord had to call an alternative team to start afresh with His original plan. These new workers made a good beginning, but once again it did not take long before they repeated the performance of their predecessors.

If these occasions were the only times in history when such a rebellion had happened, the matter would be serious enough, but it is a recurring problem. History tells us that many movements have ended in such a deplorable condition. Each time this took place, the work was delayed by decades and even centuries. Vast amounts of money and materials were wasted, and still, after almost six thousand years, the work remains unfinished. And so it will continue until God has a team of workers who know that He alone is the Architect of the plan of salvation. They will accept their role as faithful, dedicated workers who never turn aside to appoint a committee of plan makers in God's place.

God's Suffering

We are unable to comprehend what this unnecessary delay does to God. Centuries have passed by without the plan of salvation reaching its fulfillment. This has brought untold anguish to the heart of our loving Creator who suffers with everyone tortured by the effects of sin.

"In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." *Isaiah* 63:9.

"And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." $Judges~10:16~(\mathrm{KJV}).$

"... for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them." *Judges* 2:18.

"Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's

agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him...

"His Spirit 'maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' As the 'whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together' (Romans 8:26, 22), the heart of the infinite Father is pained in sympathy. Our world is a vast lazar house, a scene of misery that we dare not allow even our thoughts to dwell upon. Did we realize it as it is, the burden would be too terrible. Yet God feels it all. In order to destroy sin and its results He gave His best Beloved, and He has put it in our power, through co-operation with Him, to bring this scene of misery to an end. 'This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' Matthew 24:14." Education, 263.1–263.2.

Yet instead of being concerned for Himself in His suffering, God's concern is for His creatures. He is infinitely patient in order to give us every opportunity to repent.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." *2 Peter* 3:9.

Repeated Opportunities

When we look back through the annals of history and see the ever-repeating pattern of a promising beginning ending in another departure from the ways of the Lord, we could easily become disheartened. If we count carefully, we will find that God has made six attempts in the past to initiate a movement in order to finish His work on this sin-filled earth. But every single one of those movements has stumbled over the same point and drifted into apostasy.

Once the Israelites reached Canaan in Joshua's time, they made an excellent beginning. Following God's instructions, they started to drive out the heathen. But the time came when they decided that they could defer God's work while they attended to their own. They put their plans in the place of God's. The great Architect was set aside and His work ground to a halt. For a time all seemed to go well, but it was only the lull before the storm, during which the enemy took full advantage of the chance to regroup and rearm. The Israelites were then driven from their fine homes and productive farms by the surrounding heathen, to become miserable and hungry cave-dwellers and fugitives. God's work was retarded by centuries, and the patient, heavenly Architect had to reconstruct another day of opportunity.

It was during David's illustrious reign that Israel was restored to a position where she was poised to accomplish her Godgiven responsibilities. Once more in David's time, He appointed another day during which He pleaded with the people not to harden their hearts in unbelief as their forefathers had done. The Lord placed them on the cross-roads of travel in order to reach the people from all corners of the world with the gospel message. But this golden opportunity they misused for making money in order to enrich themselves. Absorbed in selfish pursuits they spoiled the plan of the heavenly plan-maker until they found themselves in Babylonian captivity as a consequence of their departure from the righteous way.

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah God provided another opportunity for his people. That it was indeed the third day of opportunity is proved by the message Gabriel conveyed to Daniel the prophet. Speaking of the future of the Jewish people, the angel said: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." *Daniel* 9:24.

The Jewish nation were appointed four hundred and ninety years of probationary time in which to accomplish the purpose for which they had been called. God brought the remnant of the Jews back to their own land and provided them with the opportunity to have this mighty work done in and through them. But, like their forefathers, after making an excellent beginning they came desperately short of entering into God's rest. Discarding God as their Architect, they turned to their own devising. Once

they had made this fatal mistake, only one outcome was possible—fearful apostasy attended by deepening weaknesses which left them so exposed to the might of the heathen that they had no choice but to come under Rome's iron-fisted dominion.

Thus the "day of opportunity" passed to the apostolic church. How well those Spirit-filled, dedicated people began. Free from any political affiliation, divested of the sword, charged with the power of God, and radiant with His selfless love, they went forth conquering and to conquer. Swiftly, the gospel was conveyed to every nation on earth and the church was poised to decimate the last strongholds of human and satanic rebellion. But, within her ranks were leaders determined to control their fellow-workers despite the lessons the Lord had worked so hard to teach them. When their course effected the untimely removal of Paul, and they were able to establish their wills as the ruling power in the church, the world was doomed to suffer the galling oppression of the Dark Ages. Another day of opportunity was lost.

But God, the patient though frustrated Architect, set to work to provide yet another day of opportunity. It took a very long time for Him to accomplish it. Centuries passed during which the apostolic church departed further and further from the truth until the papacy had wrapped the world in midnight darkness. During these desperate years, the truth was barely upheld by faithful souls who often paid for their loyalty with their lives.

Finally the tide turned. One reformer after another arose in the Holy Spirit's power to attack the bastions of antichrist, and the long climb back into the full light of truth began. With the breaking of the papal power in 1798, the stage was finally set for another day of opportunity. The three angels began to sound, and a people were gathered to rebuild the lost treasures of the sanctuary message.

By 1844, the church was again standing on the threshold of the eternal world. They had the truth, they were free from the controlling Babylonian power of the papacy, the Spirit of Prophecy was restored to them, and it required only a short work to initiate them into the eternal rest of the Lord's finished work. After centuries of effort, the Lord had appointed yet another day, pleading, as ever, that they harden not their hearts in unbelief. But unbelievable as it is, Satan succeeded again in diverting God's people from the task and they fell into the Laodicean condition. Without the righteousness of Christ (white raiment), the faith which works by love (gold) and the necessary spiritual discernment (eye salve), they were unable to finish the work. (See *Revelation* 3:18.)

- "... If all who had labored unitedly in the work in 1844, had received the third angel's message and proclaimed it in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts. A flood of light would have been shed upon the world. Years ago the inhabitants of the earth would have been warned, the closing work completed, and Christ would have come for the redemption of His people.
- "... In like manner, it was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be so long delayed, and His people should remain so many years in this world of sin and sorrow. But unbelief separated them from God. As they refused to do the work which He had appointed them, others were raised up to proclaim the message." *The Great Controversy*, 458. Thus another day of opportunity, the fifth, passed into history without being appropriated.

Before things went too far, the Lord was able to provide another day of opportunity for His people. In 1888, He called to Minneapolis, Minnesota, two dedicated messengers, Elders Waggoner and Jones, through whom He presented the third angel's message in verity, the gospel message divinely designed to quickly finish the work. Had God's people recognized the message for what it was and accepted it, laying aside all their own plans and placing themselves under the direction of the Master Architect, they would have seen the work finished very quickly and, long before this, would have entered into the rest of God's finished work.

"In Minneapolis God gave precious gems of truth to His people in new settings. This light from heaven by some was rejected with all the stubbornness the Jews manifested in rejecting Christ, and there was much talk about standing by the old landmarks. But there was evidence they knew not what the old landmarks were. There was evidence and there was reasoning from the word that commended itself to the

conscience; but the minds of men were fixed, sealed against the entrance of light, because they had decided it was a dangerous error removing the 'old landmarks' when it was not moving a peg of the old landmarks, but they had perverted ideas of what constituted the old landmarks." *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 30.

What was the basic problem in 1888? Why did those well-meaning, dedicated, industrious people who professed great love for God and who had made large sacrifices in support of what they believed to be the Lord's work, act in direct contradiction to God's will when it was so clearly and audibly expressed through both prophet and messengers?

The basic issue at Minneapolis was over who should be the real head of the church. For decades, God's people, then formed into the Seventh-day Adventist church, had refused to respond to the warnings that they were slipping into the Laodicean condition, and had built up a tremendous program of their own works. They were working after the manner of Abram and Sarai when, in their efforts to fulfill God's promise themselves, they brought forth the child Ishmael.

Just as God finally came to Abraham and advised him that His covenant would never be with Ishmael, so, in 1888, the message informed the Adventists that they had to sacrifice their own works and turn to God's instead. But this required large faith, and in their unbelief, they spurned God's loving appeal and rejected the message. Thus for the sixth time, the people of God came short of the promise of a finished work.

- 1. The Israelites in Canaan
- 2. In David's time
- 3. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah
- 4. In the time of the apostolic church
- 5. In the advent awakening circa 1844
- 6. At the revival of the message in 1888 through Waggoner and Jones
- 7. In the 1950s when the gospel message again was preached and the Sabbath Rest Advent Church arose under F.T. Wright's leadership

Despite these repeated failures, God's promise that some will enter into His rest still remains today. Paul makes this clear in the book of *Hebrews*. By Paul's day, the church had failed to appropriate God's offerings, but while the recurring failure suggested that none would ever enter in, the guarantee remains that some will finally achieve what might have been experienced by all. Paul states this in very positive terms:

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it." *Hebrews* 4:1.

"It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." *Hebrews* 4:6, 7.

These Scriptures declare that, no matter how many failures may occur in the meantime, or how long it takes for the vital lessons to be learned and the correct procedures adopted, some will at last be found who will enter into God's rest.

Meanwhile, in His forbearance, the Lord has arranged another, seventh opportunity. In the 1950's He gave His plans to another messenger, gradually building up a new movement. The early stages of strict obedience to His plans and learning His ways of working began auspiciously. For over 50 years the work has grown, the main workers clinging to His general and specific orders. Some have died meanwhile; others taken their places. How vitally important is it that they never depart from strict adherence to God's procedures in the future!

It is essential that we grasp the simple truth that the reason why every movement in the past has failed is because its members permitted Satan to divert them from following their divine Head in all things. The enemy was able to induce them to attempt the building of God's kingdom through human plans and procedures. Through this means, while imagining that they were rendering acceptable service to God, His people were actually building antichrist—the fruitless effort to do God's work man's way. This cannot happen among the Lord's last army if it is to finish the work.

The Coming Conflict

In the near future the final conflict will be waged between the forces of light and darkness. Satan will re-use all the tactics he has employed so successfully in the past, by which he has thus far prevented God's people from entering into the rest of a finished work. He will skillfully isolate every believer from the comfort and support that is found in fellowship with those of like faith, and surround each with powerful impressions that God's cause has failed. He will make it appear that God has separated Himself from His people in total abdication of His role as Problem Solver, leaving them no option but to assume this position themselves. Tremendous pressure will in this way be exerted on all of God's people to take matters into their own hands.

Only those who are thoroughly established in the Sabbath rest principles at that time will be able to resist the masterful delusions of the enemy. They will succeed where so many of their spiritual forebears have failed only because, through the revelations of Scripture, they are able to recognize exactly what Satan is doing.

They have the lessons of history:

- They will remember how, in Eden, the misery of sin was extended to this earth because the archfiend was able to persuade Eve that God had created a problem which He had no intention of solving for her, implying that she had no choice but to solve it herself.
- They will recall that Adam joined his wife in rebellion because he was not prepared to give the problem to his Creator.
- They will have the picture portrayed vividly before their eyes of how Abraham and Sarah, pressured by advancing years and no apparent effort on God's part to keep His word, sought to fulfill the Lord's promise of a son for Him.
- They will be encouraged as they meditate on the perfection and success of Jehovah's plans when He led the Israelites from Egypt across the Red Sea, and through the great and terrible wilderness to Kadesh-barnea. As they review the disaster that resulted when the Israelites made their own

- specific orders by sending the twelve spies into the land of Canaan, their resolve will be strengthened. They will know they must not make that mistake.
- As they remember Joshua's reversions, they will realize that they, too, are in danger of miserable defeat following a great victory.
- They will see again how close Elijah came to final victory in Israel, and read in his situation a type of their own. His story and its sad outworking will guide them to take the correct stand.
- The glorious example of their Saviour, who steadfastly maintained a correct relationship to His heavenly Father no matter how far away God seemed to be, nor how great the pressure Satan was able to bring to bear upon Him, will be the surest guide in that trying hour. They will remember how Christ trod the same pathway before them, and how He obtained the victory by unbroken submission to His Father's will. They will know that there is not a single instance when Christ undertook the role of Plan Maker for Himself. They will know that what He did, they too must do, for the one hundred and forty-four thousand "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Revelation 14:4.
- The Jewish tragedy will convince them of what happens to a person or a nation which persists in requiring God to add His power to their plans.
- Paul's concession to the leaders in Jerusalem and the evil consequences which followed, will strengthen their resolve to accept only their heavenly Father's solutions to any problem.

In order to be successful in their purpose, those who are dedicated to the vindication of God's holy character and the triumph of the divine cause, must have a very clear, accurate, thorough, and ever-increasing knowledge of the way in which Christ relates to His Father. As they grasp the divine principles, they must accept and assimilate them into the established practice of their lives. As surely as this course is followed, their souls will be safeguarded from the ruin which has befallen so many individuals and movements in the past, and be guaranteed instead, the success which will bring the desired termination of the long-standing struggle between Christ and Satan.

The above and many more examples which they have studied, will show the believers the necessity of adhering strictly to the principle that the Almighty alone must be their Problem Solver, Plan Maker and Burden Bearer. The true achievement of God's work is not measured by the numbers, financial power, and global penetration of the church, nor can it be assumed that His cause is being advanced simply because of a commission given to the movement at its inception. Those people who truly have learned these lessons will be blessed by seeing it brought to a very speedy conclusion.

Victory at Last

Through a deep study of the Sabbath-rest principles the true church will understand the real nature of the issues being fought out in the final struggle in which they are personally involved. They will see that Satan has pushed the world into a desperate situation, in response to which people will unite in a frantic effort to devise solutions to the existing problems. Everyone will feel compelled to join in these schemes to ensure their success, but God's true children will find it impossible to support a program which they know is based on human plan making and in consequence can only bring the world to final ruin.

Therefore, in the Holy Spirit's almighty power, the church will protest this course of action. So powerfully will they present the arguments supporting the principles of entering into God's Sabbath rest, that tremendous inroads will be made into Satan's cause. Multitudes will cast in their lot with God's people, including influential leaders and ministers.

But the enemy will not give up the struggle. When things are at their very worst, Satan will fight the hardest. Having received the full support of the civil authorities, the churches under his direct command will enforce the buy and sell decree (see *Revelation* 13:17), and eventually the death decree (see *Revelation* 13:15). Under this increasing pressure, the majority of those who have taken their stand for the truth will bow to the powers that be, and a massive shaking will thin the ranks of those on the Lord's side.

The ones who remain steadfast will grow stronger in their determination to see the struggle through. It will be an agonizing experience, for it will seem that they have been forsaken by both God and humanity. Every circumstance will support Satan's assertions that they must resort to their own devices to help themselves, for there is no one else, least of all God, who will help them. They will have to cling to their convictions that God alone is their Problem Solver no matter what happens, even though this has proved too much for His people in the past. They must do what no other church in history has achieved. And they will do it, thus enabling Christ to achieve through mortal, sinful humanity, a victory so marvelous and complete that only the triumph gained at Calvary can match it.

To gain this final objective, the church will have to be brought to a high state of readiness—a condition achieved only through diligent and earnest preparation and practice. When the day of battle finally arrives, it will be too late then to learn the correct principles and the proper application of them. That knowledge and the proficient use of it, must be gained and built into the lives of God's people now.

Each person's daily experiences are revealing how far the work has gone. Obviously, if we have not learned to trust God as our Problem Solver in the present when the trials are very light, we will have no hope of doing so in the future when tribulation is severe. We would be wise, therefore, to recognize that the tests of today are but opportunities to train for tomorrow.

Are We That People?

None of God's systems involving humanity can work unless the element of a strong and living faith is present in the believers. Therefore Paul declared, "For we which have believed do enter into rest..." *Hebrews* 4:1.

No unbeliever will ever experience God's Sabbath rest. That is impossible. Therefore, those who are determined not to come short of His rest, need to concentrate on developing faith. They will learn to trust in God instead of self as their Problem Solver and Plan Maker. They must realize that in this work no one

is an instant virtuoso, that success is the product of long, disciplined, consistent effort. Once this is understood, they will devote themselves to building a vigorous and deep faith which will provide the power to grasp and experience the mighty promises of God.

God is waiting with inexpressible desire for the formation of a people upon whom He can fully rely to build His kingdom His way. A movement of workers is needed who absolutely refuses to build in any other way than according to the plans of the Master-Architects. With a confidence based on past experience they will ask: What is God's plan and solution to this problem? What is He directing me to do? Without worrying about the consequences of strict obedience to the Sabbath-rest principles, they must cling to the promises of divine help at the critical time.

Not before He finally has such an army will God be able "finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness". The work which might have ended centuries ago, will then be speedily finished "... because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." *Romans* 9:28.

For too long, people have assumed the position of plan makers, problem solvers and burden bearers in God's place. Surely now, after almost six thousand years of frustration and failure, we should be convinced that it is time Jehovah had a team of workers possessed by living faith in His promises. He needs a people whom He can trust never to bring out their own drawing boards, but instead to rest in His perfect wisdom forever and let Him provide the plan of how to finish His work!

"A sabbath rest still remains for the people of God....

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it."

Hebrews 4:9.1. NRSV.

Humans have lived with chronic unsolved problems for so long that we have come to accept their unwanted companionship as being the norm rather than the abnormal. Decisions, though confidently made, have instead generated disappointing and frustrating outcomes until we are plagued with uncertainty and doubt about which way to turn next.

This was never God's intended lot for us. He understands exactly why we are denied rest, and the fault does not lie with Him. He has made every provision for us to enjoy lives in which there is no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility or defeat. In His word, He has outlined the simple procedures to be followed, but has to lament again and again that His people have not known His ways, so they could not enter into His rest.

Entering into God's Sabbath Rest reveals the cause of all failure on the one hand, and the way into perfect rest on the other. No one who reads these pages and follows the principles outlined therein will ever be the same person again. The result that will follow will seem too good to be true. When God has a people at last who live out the Sabbath Rest principles, He will be able to finish His work very speedily.

We pray that this book will turn many feet into the pathway of life.

