

THE WORD OF TRUTH

Published Monthly

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"—Jno. 8:32.

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"Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18)

SET FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL

JESUS DON'T LET ME GO

Verse 1.

Jesus help me to see the light
I want my light to shine bright
Jesus I want to be like you
Before this life is through

Verse 2.

Jesus you are the world to me
Oh, Jesus can't you see
You're my life and my liberty
Jesus that's what you are to me

Verse 3.

Jesus though I may backslide
Still you're all to me
Jesus help me to run my race
Through your mercy and your grace

Chorus:

Jesus don't ever let me go
Keep me close to you
Jesus don't ever let me go
I want to abide with you

By Rochelle Faith Blakely
16 year old twin daughter of Editor

In This Issue ...

The Casting Out of Satan - Page 3

"When Shall These Things Be?" - Page 4

The Word of Truth

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Author and Editor: Given O. Blakely

Circulation Managers: Mr. and Mrs. Al Stoner

Publication Office: 78th and Independence St., Merrillville, Indiana. (Send no correspondence to this address.)

Business Office: 10701 W. 124th Ave.

Cedar Lake, Ind. 46303

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Cedar Lake, Ind. 46303

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THE CASTING OUT OF SATAN

"And the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceived the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels with him . . . neither was their place found any more in heaven"
—Revelation 12:8,9

We have it stated in Scripture that Satan **has** been cast out of heaven — **after** a war was wrought there because of his self-assertion (Rev. 12:7-9). It first occurs to the inquiring mind, that it is passingly strange that Satan was ever in heaven at all — that is almost, as it were, a foreign and offensive thought: and yet — it is the truth! I would conjecture at this point that **the offensiveness and strangeness of that truth is due to the fact that he has been, in truth, cast out of heaven! His absence makes it difficult to believe that he was ever there.** For the faithful, there is an inward association with reality when the words of the Lord are given. There is something about the regenerated spirit that senses reality; that immediately transports it into a fellowship of the mystery. However, when we come to this proclamation, there is no present reality that comports with Satan being in heaven — thus the thought becomes at once repugnant — not because it is not truth, but because it no longer is the case. We seem to sense in our souls that he is **NOT** there — and thus is it difficult to conceive of him ever being there! Ah, how clumsy the language of mortals at this point: I can only hope that the sense of this is conveyed to my readers! Satan was once in heaven-lamentable, but true. But wait — Satan did not always possess the same character (and least not manifestly so) as he does now. That makes the truth more readily within our grasp, does it not!

The precise origin of Satan is not known, but we are given bits and pieces of information that give us some degree of intelligent analysis of his earlier existence. We must rely, however, upon some passages which are, confessedly, a little ambiguous — and yet, there is sufficient clarity in them to enable us to see "through a glass darkly" upon this subject. Isaiah first alludes to our adversary in the fourteenth chapter of his book. Actually, Isaiah was addressing "the king of Babylon". However, he addresses him as one that is

possessed, as it were, of the Devil himself. Isaiah is given to see the "king of Babylon" as the immediate instrument of Satan, and thus he addresses, as it were, the Devil himself while speaking to the evil king. This is not a strange approach for believers, for we have read of the Lord Jesus addressing Peter by saying; "Get thee behind Me **Satan**, thou art offence unto Me . . ." (Matt. 16:23). With this principle in mind (that holy men of God, as well as the Son of God Himself, spoke apparently to mortals, while actually to Satan) let us pursue the text in Isaiah. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cast down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isa. 14:12-15). Now, keep in mind that this is not **basically** a commentary on Satan, but on the "king of Babylon". However, it is a scathing condemnation **because** he had taken unto himself the very attributes of Satan: in fact, there was little, if any, difference between the old serpent and the wicked king at this point! You observe here that **the nature of Satan is self-exaltation.** He aspires to exalt himself, and those that do the same partake of his evil character. However, rather than experiencing exaltation, he shall be brought down, even to the sides of the pit! Now the truth of the matter is this: **Satan seeks to exalt himself, but his experience is ever downward!** God has and shall yet bring him down, visiting upon him the precise and exact opposite of what he desires! The reason for Satan's fall is "PRIDE" — that wretched trait which God so hates and loathes (I Sam. 2:3; Psa. 12:3; 18:27; 101:5; Prov. 6:16-19; 8:13; 11:2; 16:5; 16:18). His very attitude caused "war in heaven" because "only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10). Whatever his area of responsibility in heaven — and we are not sure of what it was — he proved to be unfaithful rather than faithful!

Now, Satan's pride did not end with the effort to exalt himself, nor was it employed only in the subverting of "the king of Babylon"! He used it on Eve in Eden's garden (Gen. 3), on Jesus in the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4), and among the sons of God today (I Pet. 5:8; I Jno. 2:15-17). You see, that little fragment of insight that Isaiah gives us concerning the **reason** for Satan's demise assists us in interpreting the situations and temptations of life. Well ought we to thank God that it does not always take a bushel of knowledge to give an adequate measure of understanding!

Ezekiel also gives us some degree of knowledge concerning Satan's earlier activities and traits. It is found in Ezekiel the twenty-eighth chapter: "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was they covering . . . the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountains of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. . . .

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness. . . Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick . . ." (verses 13-18). Once again, this proverb is taken up against a king — "the king of Tyrus". He too possessed the very spirit and nature of the Evil One, and thus was addressed just as though they were one and the same! Observe that we gain enough information here to conclude that the king himself did not fulfill all of the descriptions here given. Firstly, the "king of Tyrus" was never, in that capacity, in "Eden, the garden of God" — but Satan was. Secondly, "the king of Tyrus" was not created (the only mere man created was Adam, "the son of God" (Gen. 2:27; Lk. 3:38), but Satan was, not being one "without beginning or ending of days." Thirdly, the "king of Tyrus" was not an "anointed cherub" — he was a man, not a spirit; a mortal, not an angel. Fourthly, "the king of Tyrus", like all men, was not "perfect in his ways" from the "day that" he was "created", for men "go astray as soon as they be born" (Psa. 58:3). It is ever true of mere man; "the imagination of his heart is evil, from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). Mingled, then, in the fierce and scathing condemnation of "the king of Tyrus" are words addressed explicitly to our foe, Satan, the "old serpent"!

In this text we also observe several dark truths concerning the "dragon". 1. He was once highly exalted — an "anointed cherub". 2. He was noted for his "beauty". He was noted for comely adornment. 3. He was originally a picture of perfection. 4. He wrongly used, and thus corrupted, his cunning wisdom. He defiled his sanctuaries, apparently indicating that he was an unfaithful steward. 5. He became noted for "iniquity" rather than beauty; for "iniquities" rather than perfection; for "iniquity" rather than wisdom!

Now, we may draw some valuable observations from these things. Firstly, let us not trust in our position — even in our position in the Kingdom of God and in Christ Jesus. Satan trusted in his and was "cast out of heaven". Secondly, let us not glory in our stewardship — however large and apparent it may be. Satan gloried in his and was "cast out of heaven".

Thirdly, let us not glory in our beauty — even though it be imputed to us in Christ Jesus. Satan gloried in his beauty and was "cast out of heaven." Fourthly, let us not glory in our wisdom. Satan gloried in his wisdom and was "cast out of heaven." In summary, to this point: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer. 9:23-24).

We do behold Satan at least two times, in the prophets time, in the very presence of the Lord God. The first and, perhaps, the most prominent appearances are recorded in the book of Job; "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, AND SATAN CAME ALSO AMONG THEM". "Again, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, AND SATAN CAME ALSO AMONG THEM TO PRESENT HIMSELF

BEFORE THE LORD" (Job 1:6; 2:1). We learn that Satan's presence in heaven, therefore, was still one of accountability; he **did** come to "present himself before the Lord". While some do embrace the theory that Satan was cast out of heaven prior to the creation and habitation of the earth, we do have here an express account here of Satan's presence in heaven after the creation. I take this as at least a cloud which takes away from the apparent brightness of that theory. Again it is written; "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. AND THE LORD SAID UNTO SATAN, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire"? (Zech. 3:1-2). There he is again, in the presence of the Lord and standing before the angel of the Lord **with** Joshua — accusing him, seeking to resist him and hinder him in the accomplishment of his holy work!

Now, our text tells us that "there was war in heaven" (Rev. 12:7). It was there because of Satan, not because it was the nature of heaven or heavenly beings. He had inserted his own wicked ego into the dwelling place of God, and there was war because of it. We do not know when it started, or how long it lasted — but we do know that it terminated with Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven, having "prevailed not". The indications seem to point toward a long war; perhaps as many as four milleniums. We get a small peep into this war through Jude; "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee (the same rebuke the Lord Himself gave him in Zechariah 3) — Jude 9). The war appears to have been primarily one of wit and wisdom, not spear and sword, as men fight. Satan was noted for wisdom, not for strength; for beauty, not for fierceness. Even now he utilizes his perverse wisdom and cunning wiles to "deceive" — that is the chief weapon in his arsenal.

Thank God for Michael and his angels! It is written; "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" (Rev. 12:7). It is as though they initiated the war — they would not permit his pride to go unchecked, unchallenged! A true indication of holiness is a refusal to keep silence when the enemy rears his head. Thus did our Lord Jesus clear the Temple two times, rebuke fiercely the Pharisees, the Sadusees, and the Lawyers! He did not let iniquity go unchecked; and neither did the holy angels that are His servants! The utter wickedness of Satan is seen in these words, which describe his reaction to the holy opposition of Michael and his angels; "And the dragon fought and his angels"! They did not suffer the rebuke! They were not checked by holy resistance. But sought to sustain their wicked propositions of evil with militancy in heaven! Dreadful thought! How wicked our foe is; how perverse are his ways, that he would fight back — even in heaven! We certainly ought not to be surprised if he wages conflicts within the very church of God, resisting the truth, fomenting dissension, raising roots of bitterness, causing some to even

“oppose themselves”! **If he would fight in heaven, how much more upon earth!** This is a true indication of his perverseness! He has no sense of right at all—he hates and loathes righteousness. He entertains not the slightest vestige of respect for holy things, holy people, or holy wars! If he fought against prince Michael the archangel, do not be stunned or taken unawares when he wages war against you, dear reader!

“Neither was their place found any more in heaven.” Now that is the express statement of the Holy Spirit. It may be truly said here that **“The Spirit speaketh expressly”** (I Tim. 4:1). The words simply mean that Satan no longer was permitted in heaven; his stewardship was taken from him and his angels; their seats were vacated; they were no longer permitted to present themselves before the Lord. **They were in every sense of the word “cast out of heaven”!** Satan no longer accuses men before God as he did Job — there is no more place found for him in heaven! He is no longer accusing the brethren before the Lord of hosts. **He has been utterly and absolutely cast down in that accusing capacity** — blessed revelation; “for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10b). Observe that he “accused” (past tense), not “accuses” (present tense). He **“IS”** cast down, thereby indicating that the casting out of Satan was not a mere temporary measure, but a permanent one! Those that are in Christ Jesus may well rejoice that instead of an accuser before the Lord, we now have an Intercessor; a Mediator that faithfully “makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34b). What truth is this; **not an accuser, but an intercessor! Not an accuser, but a Mediator! Not one making accusations against us, but One making intercession for us!** Hallelujah!

It appears as though Satan’s ejection from heaven actually was about the approximate time that our Lord Jesus began to “accomplish” (Luke 9:31) His death. While upon earth, our Lord declared; “I beheld Satan as lightning **fall from heaven**” (Luke 10:18). This statement was made when the seventy disciples returned from their first preaching mission, when the very spirits were subject to them (Luke 10:1-7). It appears to this writer as though the culmination of the war in heaven, and the first great authority given to the disciples over Satan were simultaneous — like a pledge of the future superiority of the “everlasting Gospel” which every day makes inroads into Satan’s failing and deteriorating kingdom! About the same time, roughly, John reports the Savior to have said; “Now is the judgement of this world: now shall the prince of this world be **cast out**” (John 12:31). The victory of heaven became the judgement of earth! When Satan was cast out into the earth, the earth entered into a time of judgement and of trial that was never before paralleled. Satan came into the world following that heavenly ejection “having great wrath” (Rev. 12:12), because he “knoweth that he hath but a short time.” This language strongly indicates that Satan’s casting out did not precede the creation of man, but took place late in time (as men count time). In fact, it is the strong opinion of this writer that it happened “in

the end of the world,” when our Lord Jesus Christ “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). In this view, it appears quite possible and plausible that the death of our Lord Jesus (from Satan’s perspective) was his first great malicious act as a thoroughly fallen and rejected being. However, rather, than turning to his good and causing an increase of his kingdom and influence, it actually spelled his doom. As it is written; “. . . that **THROUGH DEATH HE MIGHT DESTROY HIM THAT HAD THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS, THE DEVIL; AND DELIVER THEM WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE ALL THEIR LIFETIME SUBJECT TO BONDAGE**” (Heb. 2:14-15). O, what a marvelous display of the majesty, the wisdom, the grace and the strength of our God and of His Christ! Satan was, then, not only cast out of heaven, but his influence — even upon earth, his new domain — was reduced so greatly that he was said to have been **“DESTROYED”!** Praise God! I tell you brethren, it was as though our heavenly Father would not loose the adversary upon the earth until first there was a Mediator in heaven!

There as an immediate heavenly response to Satan’s eviction from heaven: “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). Observe precisely what is immediately associated with Satan’s absence from heaven: 1. Salvation. 2. Strength. 3. The Kingdom of God. 4. The power of Christ. Permit me to reason for a moment upon the magnitude of these truths! Salvation (the state of “no condemnation” —Rom. 8:1) is the immediate outflow, therefore, of Satan being cast out of heaven. “There is therefore now **no condemnation** to them that are in Christ Jesus” because there is therefore now no accuser which accuses our brethren before God day and night! Sin has been so thoroughly dealt with, so completely placed behind the back of God that an accuser in heaven can no longer be permitted! The war in heaven — the battle angels behind the capable leadership of archangel Michael — these were but a providential and simultaneous working of God which were expressly designed to assist in the implementation of the salvation of our God. **With sin put away, what need or place for an accuser** — yea, what justice in having an accuser at all”! Praise God! Salvation now becomes truly experiential because accusation no longer exists in heaven! Secondly, the real strength of the Lord was here manifested — not so much in Satan being cast out of heaven, as in sinners being reconciled to God, the Father “not imputing their trespasses to them” (II Cor. 5:16ff). **The strength consisted in the removal of a reason for accusation; of the absence of a cause for condemnation.** With the cause for condemnation removed, and the reason for accusation destroyed, Satan HAD to leave heaven. The incidents that were associated with it were merely incidental, from this point of view. **Strength consisted of salvation being manifested in the putting away of sin and the author of sin, Satan** — not in the overthrow of empires and kingdoms; not in the decline and fall of Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Rome: but rather, in the reconciliation of sinners

to God — a reconciliation so real, so effectual, that an accuser could no longer be permitted in God's presence!

Thirdly, the casting out of Satan brought, in the sense of our text, "The Kingdom of God"! That is what the great voice in heaven declared: "Now is come . . . the Kingdom of God." This is that for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Thy kingdom come . . ." (Matt. 6:10). The rule of God was, then, chiefly manifested not in the expulsion of the heathen from Canaan; not in the overthrow of Nebuchadnezzar, that "head of gold" (Dan. 2:38), but in the "end of transgression" and the consequent expulsion of Satan from heaven. The Kingdom of God came in this sense, as I see it: The Lord God was now legally freed to bestow favor and love upon His people. There no longer existed any reason for accusation. There had been a thorough justification, a complete forgiveness of sin! The Kingdom, then, immediately expanded to immeasurable proportions as men became "kings and priests unto God", participating in the rule of heaven, as well as being joyfully and willingly ruled over by the very One they worshipped and adored — and to Whom they submitted themselves out of love and thanksgiving, not out of fear!

Fourthly, the incident here described revealed "the power of Christ". That great voice announced: "now is come . . . the power of Christ"! When did it come? When was His rule, His authority, His power, His Kingship made known? At His second coming? No! At the rapture of the church? No! At the day of judgement? No! **The "power of Christ" came when sin was put away and Satan was cast out of heaven!** The power of Christ was manifested, firstly, in the completeness of His redemption. There was nothing which could be laid to the charge of God's elect! There was no one that could effectually, honestly, or correctly, condemn the people of God (Rom. 8:33-34). Secondly, the strength of Christ was made known when He "triumphed over" the forces of evil in the cross, "spoiling" them, and "making a show of them openly" (Col. 2:15). The "strength of Christ is plainly declared; "Angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him" (I Pet. 3:22). But even if it were not declared (which it is, abundantly and plainly), the heart of the believer tells him so! He has experienced the expulsion of fear, the inflood of the love of God, an affinity with the very commandments of God which once he hated, and a fervent desire to seek a "better country," "that is, an heavenly"!

Let men, therefore, seek to propagate their religious systems that tell of a future kingdom, a future reign, a future Gospel, a future defeat, a future "power of Christ"! As for me and my house, we rejoice in this forthright revelation of Christ through His angel to His servant John: that when Satan was cast out of heaven, salvation, the Kingdom of God, strength, and the power of Christ came! We joy in it; we know it to be true! Satan's head has been bruised, with only a bruised heel being the result, and the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from death and bondage being the fruitage. Will you, dear reader, glory in this truth with us. Praise the Lord!

"WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?"

Our Lord stood that lamentable day over against Jerusalem and wept. He saw the holy city in a perspective that broke His heart and caused Him to say: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth until ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:37-39). A short time later, being found in the temple, He departed from it. At that time His disciples came to Him and began to "show Him the buildings of the temple" (Matt. 24:1). Of the incident, Luke apprises us that they "spake of the temple, how it was adorned with stones and gifts" (Luke 21:5), as though to say "these buildings cannot be maintained with widow's mites (Luke 21:1-4)! How glorious and illustrious they are! Master — you have not taken into consideration the glory of the place in which you stand!" Well, our Lord Jesus, recalling, as it were, His perception of the rebellion and rejection of the prophets which prompted Him to weep over the ancient city, said: "as for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:6). What startling words were these to those once naive disciples. **The temple was not the source of excitement to the Lord Jesus — it was, rather, the acceptance of the prophets and the Son of God Himself by His own people!** When that was not present, no amount of temple glory, beautiful stones, or gracious gifts could stir His heart. He saw the temple as something that would be violently torn down because of the hardness of His people. The disciples quickly grasping the fact that their temple was to be removed from their vision said: "Master, but **when shall these things be?** And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Luke 21:7), or, as Matthew records it: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming? And of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:4). These were questions prompted by an honest curiosity — but that does not mean that they were altogether proper questions. It is ever true that **"It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His Own power"** (Acts 1:7). Notwithstanding, our gracious Lord did devote considerable time to the answering of these questions — but He did not answer them in the form desired by the disciples. It would have been good to them to have spelled out a date — or at least to have surrounded the event with some explicit signs which would have served as positive identification of the time. But that is not what the Lord did. He spoke with some degree of generality: "Wars, rumours of wars . . . nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places . . . many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many . . . the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:6-12). **Now there is hardly a time in the last 1500 years when these signs were not abundantly present in the world.** There have been godly men

of all ages that have supposed that they were living in the time of which the Lord spoke — and we have some today that emphatically declare that these times perfectly fit that description. Well, we are certainly not set to deny that postulation, for it appears equally the same to us. However, I believe that such a view misses the real point of our Lord's answer. **Specificity did not seem to be the objective of His answer.** It rather seemed to be one that would serve to **prepare** the disciples for coming hardship and spiritual stress. He did say the them: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations (not men) for my name's sake: and then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" (Matt. 24:9-10). True, speaking of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, our Lord did speak of the "abomination of desolation" which consisted of the defilement of the holy of holies by the heathen (Matt. 24:15, Luke 21:20). That did carry with it a very definite degree of specificity — but the burden of His answer was not given there. Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew are devoted to answering those original questions by the disciples, and a perusal of that answer will serve to give us some very valuable instruction — instruction that reveals very poignantly to us that **signs were not the vital matter, but the readiness of the inquirers!**

Our Lord taught the disciples, and us, that rather than a mere sign, we ought to be prepared to endure. Endurance! That was more important than signs! "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure to the end the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13). How different from present day instruction by the religious sophists! Men are taught in the name of the Lord today that a great tribulation is coming from which the saints shall be silently and secretly delivered — and that there is no need to even be concerned about that tribulation. But the Lord of the church spoke quite differently. He spoke of iniquity abounding and prevailing, and of the love of very many diminishing and waxing cold. But He also declared that those that **endured** this time of abounding iniquity would surely be saved — "the same", said He, "shall be saved". And, incidently, **there is salvation promised to none but overcomings and endurers!** Forever wipe out of your mind the concept that believers will not be called upon to pass through grievous and difficult ways. God shall not deny His own Word! If He has declared that those that **endure** shall be saved, you may be sure that **He shall lead us through waters, fires, and other varied tests which will demand the presence of endurance in our lives.** You see, then, that the issue is not signs, but readiness — **be ye also ready!**

Rather than concerning themselves with signs, the Lord's people are to concern themselves with wisdom and initiative during temporal judgements. There will be things to endure — fires and floods through which the Lord will call us to pass. We must not faint at these things but rather arm ourselves with sound minds and with wisdom. Speaking specifically of the temporal judgement of Jerusalem's destruction, our Lord

said: "Then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!" (Matt. 24:16-19). To react wisely and discreetly — that is what you should be concerned with! Our Lord very graciously called our minds to the execution of very practical things during the time of Trial. He does want us to glorify Him in **reactions** as well as in action! Let us not submit ourselves to **unnecessary** trial and affliction — it seems that the Lord mercifully is saying that it is as though He said: "It will be difficult enough in those days without you doing foolish things that will bring greater hardship upon you."

Jesus taught His disciples to concern themselves with prayer rather than signs. "But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: for there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, No, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:20-21). This does not sound to me as though our Lord was anticipating a miraculous deliverance of His people from calamity. Rather, He taught them to **expect it**, and to pray that they would not be overly inconvenienced by it. I thank the Lord for the practicality of the faith — for the fact that he takes us into consideration in these ways. A flight in the winter would exert a hardship upon His people, as well as a flight on the Sabbath day. This would be no time to be plodding through snow or counting and measuring distances, of course, there are those who would think nothing at all of taking a flight on the Sabbath day — but the Lord considered it, and so do I! "Lord, teach us to take into consideration practical measures when we are caused to pass through the fire and the water!"

Signs were not to be the issue, but rather a careful evaluation of all messages coming in the name of the Lord, lest deception result. "Then if any man shall say unto you, lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christ's, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (verses 23-24). **It is quite possible to become so enamored with an expectation of signs, that we are deceived by false prophets.** Let us be careful to take heed **what we hear.** Our Lord taught us explicitly here that very strong delusions, **with accompanying signs,** will pervade the world. There will be those that will associate the Lord Jesus with earthly locations — and legion is the name of the cults that so teach. The injunction of the Lord is "believe it not!" Anyone that associates the presence of the Lord with a specific location on earth — a wilderness, a conference, a building, etc., is not to be believed. Our Lord and His glory fills the whole earth. **It is not where He is that is the issue, but where we are!** That has always been the case since Pentecost. "Where art thou" — that is the question, not where is Christ! Concern yourself, reader, with this matter of false prophets. Be careful that you are not deceived. **When Jesus comes is not the issue — it is whether or not you will be deceived!**

Our lives are to be characterized by a certain alertness which will ready us for the Lord's appearing. Theological speculations, philosophical probings, and intellectual analyses can never take the place of spiritual alertness, readiness, sobriety. To be cognizant of the times, our own spiritual state, and the general religious climate about us is of the most vital importance! Hear the words of our Lord: "Watch, therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42). That settles once and for all the intellectual curiosity of men. "When shall these things be"?, asked the disciples, and our Lord declared simply that they did not, nor would they ever, know the day nor the hour when the Son of Man shall descend from heaven with a shout and the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. But they were to "watch" — keep their hearts and lives in a state of readiness! "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). This is living in an awareness of the fact that **the Lord will come again**. It is doing whatever our hand finds to do with all of our might, as unto the Lord! It is walking by faith, and not by sight. It is not looking at things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen (Eccl. 9:10; II Cor. 5:7; II Cor. 4:18).

We are to devote ourselves to preparation and readiness, as our Lord specifically taught in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). Do not overlook the fact that this parable was a direct answer to the disciples question: "When shall these things be"! The parable teaches us that **when the Lord appears is not the real issue** — it is **whether or not we will be ready**. Recall that the parable states that **all ten** of the individuals were "virgins": **all ten** "took their lamps": **All ten** "went forth to meet the bridegroom". **All ten** had "lamps". **All ten** "slumbered and slept". **All ten** of "those virgins arose". **All ten** "trimmed their lamps". But there the similarity ended! There were five of the virgins that were "wise", and five that were "foolish". The wisdom of the first set of virgins consisted in the fact that they "**took oil in their vessels with their lamps**." The foolishness of the second set of virgins consisted in the fact that they "took no oil with them." Stripped of its imagery, this parable simply means this: **Some stood the test of time, and some did not. Some were prepared for a long vigil and wait, and some were not.** And that, dear reader, is the separation point among disciples — among those that profess the Name of the Lord: **The test of time!** If the Lord were to have come immediately, all ten of the virgins would have been ushered into the presence of the Lord. But He did not. He "tarried", providing ample time for true discipleship to show itself — to surface amidst the menace of mediocrity. Well, what of you? Will you stand the test of time? Are you determined to run a long race, if need be, or are your provisions only for a short run? The test of time! It has already revealed the hearts of many men, and shall yet reveal more. You see, **signs really are not the issue, it is whether or not you personally will stand the test of time — the test of the tarrying Bridegroom!** (Matt. 25:1-13).

We are to devote ourselves to the faithful maintenance of our stewardship. To show His disciples that their attention was wrongly directed to signs and "when shall these things be", our

Lord taught concerning the matter of stewardship. It is found in the parable of the talents, given in direct answer to their earlier inquiry concerning His coming and the time of "these things." (Matt. 25:14-30) Here we are apprized of the Kingdom of God likened unto a man traveling into a far country, who first distributed his goods to his servants. In particular, one of them received five talents (a monetary denomination), another received two talents, and another received one talent. The difference was due to their ability, for he made distribution "to every man according to his several ability." Their job was to be a good steward over their masters goods. Immediately, we are told, two of them went to work, increasing the amount of substance that was given them, while the third buried his talent in the earth. When the master returned, the man with five talents had ten, the man with two talents had four, and the man with one talent still had the one. For the sake of brevity, the two that increased their amount were richly rewarded, while the one that hid his talent in the earth had the one talent removed from him, and he himself was cast into "outer darkness." **The purpose of this parable is to divest us of merely scholastical religion and jar us into a realization of this fact: when the Lord comes again, He does expect more out of us than was given to us!** He expects His gifts and graces to have grown, increased, and borne fruitage within our lives. When shall the Lord come? What shall be the signs of his coming? I am not able to answer those questions with any degree of accuracy at all! But I can make this observation: When He does come each one of us will be called into account. What the Lord has given us will be returned to him, and it had better be returned in larger proportion than it was received! The Lord will expect glory to His name to be found in us. His investment of grace within us had better yield fruit to His name, and not thorns and thistles! Well, dear reader, are you devoting yourself to your stewardship? What has the Lord given you to do? Are you doing it faithfully? Have you put your hand to the plow? Or are you turning back?

The matter of ministering to the Lord's people is more vital than a knowledge of the precise time our Lord shall come. This is taught in our Lord's proclamation of His own coming, when He "shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: And He shall separate them . . ." (Matt. 25:31-46). The basis of that separation shall be the reaction of men to the Lord Jesus Christ's people! "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (verse 40) shall be the divine pronouncement of blessing upon the faithful. On the other hand, "inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto Me", shall be the curse pronounced upon the wicked! Well, what is your reaction to the people of God — to those that live by faith, to those that have an aspiration to be fully delivered from this present evil world, to those that confess that they are strangers and pilgrims in the earth, to those that "abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul and "perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord."

What is your attitude toward them? How have you ministered unto them? Listen, reader, there are multitudes in this world that profess to be "Christians" that do not even think enough of God's people to meet with them on the Lord's Day, to encourage those that preach the Word of God, or that labor in other ways in the vineyard of the Lord. Where is your life being expended, your money, your time, your energy. Precisely what part do the saints of the Most High God play in your life? You will do well to take heed unto these things, for the Lord will someday judge you upon the basis of them!

In these grand two chapters (Matt. 24 and 25), then, the real issues concerning temporal judgments, our Lord's coming, and the end of the world are seen! They do not concern knowing times and seasons, or being knowledgeable of specific signs. Rather, we are to devote ourselves to: 1. Determination to endure. 2. The appropriation of wisdom and discretion in handling ourselves in time of crisis. 3. Devoting ourselves to prayer. 4. Not being deceived by false prophets. 5. Being ready and prepared for the coming of the Lord. 6. Watching faithfully for His appearing. 7. Devoting ourselves to the matter of faithful stewardship, striving to be ready to give a good and acceptable account for our handling of the Lord's goods. 8. Ministering to the people of God, knowing that inasmuch as we do it even unto the least of His brethren, we are doing it as unto Him — showing our real attitude toward Him, and our love for Him.

PUNGENT POINTS

The things of God do not always come easy. They are to be "labored" for, "hungered" for, and "thirsted" after! They are to be diligently sought as a treasure in a field; eagerly consumed as that which causes the soul to live. We are to "buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). We are not expected to obtain these things through a casual and convenient religious life: they will fly quickly from us. Those spirits that eagerly, zealously, and whole-heartedly, seek after the Truth, devour the Scriptures, and hold fast that which is good, will not be dissappointed. God will richly reward such efforts, for they are a compliment to the Truth, and glorify the God of truth!

To me, it is a strange phenomenon that confronts us in the matter of punitive action taken against criminals today. We are told leniencies that transcend the fondest imagination — murderers, thieves, rapists, etc., being turned loose on "bail". Hardened criminals being given psychiatric examinations, and then being treated as though they were ill instead of as though they were criminals. The dietary abuses of criminals are brought to

our attention; the uncleanness of their quarters, the type of clothing they are required to wear, and the type of training they ought to receive in order to be properly funneled back into society. Now we do want it to be known that we are not against the humane treatment of men, of compassion upon them, or upon equitable judgement being exacted against them. However, it is passingly strange to this editor that these sudden "prison reforms" are being brought to our attention during the rapid and phenomenal spread of crime, incest, and brutality in our country. During the time when Christians were persecuted, thrown into rat-infested dungeons, and fed with water and stale bread, there were no such reforms. However, the world loving its own, they seek to treat with much respect those that have admittedly abused their right to social involvement, while treating contemptuously those that have served the Lord's Christ. Such men as Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy, and later saints such as John Bunyan, etc., were totally deprived of justice, compassion, and mercy by the laws of their time. Incidentally, we have heard no voice of protest concerning the world's treatment of the saints. No one has marched with signs, or demonstrated concerning the past abuse of the Apostles, the prophets, the early Christian martyrs, or those of more recent times. It would seem to me that those that are genuinely concerned about the humane treatment of those that are incarcerated would appeal to men's hearts concerning those abuses.

The Bible relates to men the origin of all things, the beginning of nations, the fall of nations, the reason for the fall of nations, and the inferiority of earthly governments. It declares the entrance of sin, the origin of sin, the penalty for sin, the atonement for sin, and the forgiveness of sin. It identifies for us precisely what sin is, what God thinks of sin, and how men naturally love sin. It was written by HOLY MEN that spake only as they were "moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21), and is not in any instance the interpretation of any man concerning that he thought God meant, or what He thought he saw. The Bible has withstood any and all attacks against it by skeptics, whether violent or philosophical. There is not a single word of it that has been revoked, proven false, or brought into question by its most infamous opposers. The people of God still cleave to it, feed upon it, are nourished by it, instructed by it, corrected by it, exhorted by it, and comforted by it. It was truly given by the inspiration of God and was, and remains to be, profitable in all things. It places a proper value on all things, interprets life in general and in specific. It takes us to a period before the world giving us few but choice glimpses, and projects to a time when the world shall be no more and informs us of that coming glory. It is a demonstration of God's love for man, hatred for sin, and compassionate purpose concerning man. It outlines the source of evil and the ultimate fall and subjugation of it, as well as the inevitable triumph of righteousness. It is both old and new, bitter and sweet, comforting and convicting. It can lift you up or bring you down, give you hope or cause you to tremble. It is ultimate truth reduced to language — the language of men. Thank God for the Bible!