
Pilgrims Journal

“They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb 11:13–16)

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PSALM 911

We live in a day and age where terrorist acts are frequent and a sense of uncertainty for the future is often expressed. Christians witness Bible prophecy being retold daily in news broadcasts. There is a compelling sense of urgency in every awakened spirit. We are on “red alert” in the physical and spiritual worlds: forces of evil are out to destroy countries, and to a greater degree, the church. Where is a safe haven for the child of God in the midst of this turmoil?

Psalms 91 is a beautiful response for our troubled times. At a time when the dragon is waiting to devour the manchild, the message of this psalm is perhaps one of the most significant passages to be familiar with—for even the devil himself quoted from it when he tempted Christ. We will take this psalm and consider some secrets of the secret place.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The Highest Himself has a secret place, yet offers to share that privacy with us. Jesus told us that our Father is in secret (Mat 6:18); we are offered the privilege to abide there under His shadow. That phrase “shall abide” in

the Hebrew means “shall pass or spend the night.” How secure then must it be, to pass our darkest hours in such close proximity to the One Who possesses all might!

I will say of the Lord, “He is my Refuge and my Fortress: my God; in Him will I trust.” Here a beautiful progression in knowing the secret place is outlined. First we run to the Lord as a *refugee*, in some crisis situation, seeking a safe haven until the calamity be past. For most of us, this is how we initially discover that secret place. However, as our trials increase in frequency and intensity, we realize our need for a *fortress*—a place to be defended over a period of time, not simply for emergency use. As we abide in that fortified place, we slowly begin to realize: “Even if I don’t have an enemy breathing down my neck, even if there aren’t troubles on every side, I find this place of His presence a wonderful place to live!” Have you come to the place where you are no longer looking at your problems, for you have found beauty in His face that so distracts you, that you don’t feel the pressure of the problems in the same way anymore? He is not just a refuge or fortress; He is *my* God, Who can be trusted at all times.

Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. Here our enemy

is described as a one who hunts his game with patient deceit. To capture his prey, the bird hunter lays his snare secretly and baits it to draw the attention of the unsuspecting fowl. Thank God, *deliverance from hidden traps is sure for those who hide in the secret place*. If man has developed technology to know when an attack has been launched thousands of miles away, would not the spiritual weapons of our warfare be much more mighty through God? Before the enemy would attempt to ensnare us, the God in Whose shadow we abide, would He not let us know? Ah, but when we miss that secret time with Him, it is then all too easy to be ensnared. “Surely He shall deliver thee...from pestilence.” Lord Craven lived in London during the plague epidemic. He made the decision to seek refuge in a country home. Soon, his coach was at the door, and everything made ready for the journey. However, as he prepared to step into his carriage, he overheard one of his servants saying to another, in total innocence, “I suppose that his God lives in the country, and not in the city.” This statement struck Lord Craven. “My God lives everywhere,” he thought, “and can preserve me in town as well as in the country.” His thoughts turned to prayer: “Lord, pardon my distrust of Your providence, which made me think of running from

Your hand.” He then chose to remain in London and was remarkably useful among his sick neighbors—never catching the infection himself.

He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust. Deliverance from pestilence and disease can be *sure*: and an important part of this hidden life is to *learn to trust under His wings, where healing is* (Mal 4:2). Why should we run from that secret place under His wings to seek healing elsewhere? If we seek temporary help outside that divine protection, we would make ourselves vulnerable to so many other attacks. *His truth shall be thy shield and buckler*. How does one get under the safe protection of His wings, how does one take God to be a Shield about him? Believe the truth of His word: *being a lover of sound doctrine is a great part of that protection*.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. For those who trust what the Almighty says, there is no need to fear: “*Thou shalt not be afraid for terror...*” In your secret place of communion, fellowship with God, secret time of prayer, entering into thy closet and shutting the door—though arrows fly, pestilence

walks, destruction wastes—you need not fear but dwell in the secret place of the Most High.

“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.” In the last days, *there will be a great falling away*—but it shall not have to come near us. Yet, if it is at my right hand, and at my side, isn’t that near me? It may happen to those near you, *but it will not affect you, if you have learned to dwell in the secret place.* A church once in heavenly places (Rev 12) finally ends up in the wilderness, but the man-child hidden in the womb is not affected; he is caught up to the throne of God. *Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.* Those who are left behind will see the reign of that wicked one, the anti-christ (2Ths 2:8). Those who learned to hide with Christ will only return to see the antichrist’s reward: being cast alive into the lake of fire.

This psalm emphasizes the beauty and the protection of being hidden in Christ, but where is that hiding place? There is the devotional aspect of spending time in the secret place of prayer, yet there is an important doctrinal aspect to this as well. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye

also appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:3-4). Paul makes it clear that there is a *hiding* that is necessary to be taken at the rapture—to be hid with Christ in God. Earlier in the chapter, he speaks to those risen with Christ. **This experience of being hidden with Christ is for those who have been crucified with Him at salvation, buried with Him in water baptism, and raised with Him by the power of the Holy Ghost.** And we should continue in those experiences.

Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my Refuge, even the most High, thy Habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. Here it is as though the Old Testament psalmist (presumed to be Moses) speaks to the New Testament saint. Have you made the Lord your habitation? Have you taken the steps to be hid with Christ? There is a work which God is doing now to make us His habitation and there is a work which we are doing to make God our habitation. Where do you “live” today? Is your testimony “in Him I live and move and have my being”? Here is a tremendous promise: no evil will befall you. What is this evil? If you keep yourself hid in Christ, you will not have an evil heart in departing from the living God (Heb 3:12). *We can be kept safe even from backsliding when we abide*

in this secret place. Don't settle for a mediocre relationship with God—pursue the highest. We have made the Most High our habitation; and here in this experience in Christ, we are given something else to keep us safe...

For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. For those who have made the Lord their habitation by salvation, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there are gifts that Christ will give. He will give His angels. *He will give servants of God charge over you to keep you.* Stay under the angels who are appointed to rule over His house; obey them that have the rule over you for they have been charged with you to keep you. ***They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*** If we don't stay under the charge of the angels we may end up tripping over stones (often a type of doctrinal truths). Doctrines can become rocks of offense, rather than building blocks for our lives. We can end up fighting the very truths that were supposed to be our shield and buckler. "They bear thee in their hands" also speaks about the intercessory prayer of God's servants. Being thus upheld, we can find the doctrines to be stepping stones to higher heights, instead of being stumbled by them.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. The same feet which were kept by remaining within the angels' charge, those feet now tread upon and trample enemies. Being under authority authorizes us to live an overcoming life. There is a dragon that casts down stars with his tail, but there are a group of saints in this hiding place that have power to bring him down to size. Satan attacks both brazenly (as the lion and young lion: 1Pet 5:8) and in subtle fashion (as the adder and dragon: 2Cor 11:3). Some of Satan's attacks are outward trials, and some are inward battles. The child of God in the secret place has authority over both.

Now, we are brought to the climax of this psalm. What brings this psalm to its grand finale is the change of speaker: ***Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name.*** Now the Most High Himself is rejoicing over the one who found the secret place. Up until this time, a human author wrote of the blessedness of that place: now God says, "Let Me say what I will do."

"Because he has set his affections, his love, on Me, he will be delivered. Because he has known Me, dwelling with Me in the secret place, he shall sit with Me on My

throne, he will be set on high at the rapture.” Saints in the secret place do go through trials; yet their declaration is “nothing will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” As they pass through trials, they gain new knowledge of His name or His character. This is different from learning about God in a Bible study. *God boasts of the one who has learned to know Him in the secret place.* “He dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and now I will set him there permanently.”

He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. Saints in the secret place of the most High are not immune to problems. However, there is a beautiful way in which God answers the prayers of hidden saints in trouble.

When a child of God calls, first God says, “I will answer him,” or, *I will speak to him.* Hidden saints hear the voice of God in trouble. Those who are passing through their trials—flying arrows, walking pestilence—call upon the Lord and they hear His answer.

Holding on to His answer, the Word of God, is it not holding the hand of Jesus Himself, Who is the Word? Hence, *“I will be with you in trouble.”* When you hold on to His Word, He is there. And if God is with you in

trouble, then can troubles trouble you anymore? Where God is, we call that place “heaven”: and you can experience heaven in the midst of your trials because of His presence.

This was the case of the three Hebrew boys in the fire. The Lord was with them in the fire and they walked as free men. They could have walked out, but that furnace was like heaven because of the Lord’s presence. Against a saint in the secret place of the Most High, who dwells with the Lord in fiery trials, what can hell do? What weapon formed against a child of God could prosper?

Daniel was in the secret place in the midst of all those lions; Paul and Silas enjoyed the Lord in the innermost prison. When we learn to live in the secret place of the Most High, we will find a special way of escape in all of our trials (1Cor 10:13). This escape is the ability to bear: whether it’s the lion’s den of your workplace, or the fiery furnace of your own home. In every situation, learn this secret escape route to transport you to His presence.

For those in the secret place, He says, “I will deliver you *and honor you.*” The Hebrew boys had the option to run from the fire once freed; Daniel could have tried to flee while the lions’ mouths were closed; Paul and Silas might have escaped when the doors opened. Yet they

waited on God's time, and *their deliverances came with honor*. The God of the Hebrews was praised throughout those heathen kingdoms by the king himself. Paul and Silas were able to see the jailor's family saved and baptized that very night.

How do you want to come out of your trial—as a straggling survivor or more than a conqueror? Let the Lord say, “Come up, My beloved—let Me honor you!” What a blessed deliverance! Why should we run out from under His wings and seek the help of man? Why should we run out from under the charge of His angels, and then find no authority against the lions?

With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My Salvation. *When we find this secret place of the Most High, we will find true satisfaction in life.* We don't have to dread each new morning, we don't have to be bored with the routine: for those in the secret place have found the One Who gives life and that more abundantly. That word “salvation” in Hebrew is *Yeshua*: I will reveal Jesus to the ones who hide in My secret place. The answer to every human problem is the right revelation of God.

Take time to be still in the secret place where you can know your God. Knowing Him, you will be strong and do exploits. Grace and peace are not simply added,

but multiplied, by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The longer we abide in this secret place, the less we are troubled by the things outside that place.

“He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall *abide*”: what a blessed invitation the first verse of the ninety-first psalm gives us! In these troubled times, rest in the shadow of Omnipotence, hearkening to the call of Psalm **911**. □

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“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads.” (Rev 14:1)

In previous installments of our study of eternal Zion, we have seen that Mount Zion is the eternal dwelling place of God and the throne of His heavenly Kingdom. We are now seeking to answer the age-old question of **who** are the 144,000 that will be with God eternally in Zion (Ps 15:1, 24:3). In our last study we saw how “having His Father’s name written in their foreheads” conveys that the 144,000 have the rare nature and character of a father in their relationships with others. They manifest the selfless character of love, care, and leadership for others: an essential quality in those who are of the highest order in God’s eternal kingdom.

Writing On The Forehead

The Father’s name is written *specifically* **in their foreheads**, not in any other place. This may speak to us of other glorious things about this elite group. When you meet someone, that person’s face is generally **very** visible to you.

Something written in his or her forehead would immediately draw attention and send a message to everyone. One apparent thing about those on Mount Zion is that there is no doubt about their love and service for the Father. When a person accepts Jesus and follows Him, he may be criticized, rejected and even persecuted by friends or relatives who do not know Christ. Such peer pressure may cause some to hide their faith from public view (2Tim 1:8). But those on Mount Zion, like the Apostle Paul, are “a spectacle unto the world” (1Cor 4:9). They openly bear the cross of their Lord, even if humiliated or despised by the world (Heb 13:11-14)! Perhaps many of them would have been martyred for their witness in this world. But in that glorious place they stand with “Jesus Christ, Who is the **faithful Witness**” (Rev 1:5). Their sufferings are forever past in the fullness of joy of the presence of their Savior. May God help us to be such fearless witnesses in this world, so that we may have praise of Him on that day!

In addition, the forehead is symbolic of the place of one’s thoughts and decisions, or one’s **mind**. In this regard it is beautiful to consider that those on Mount Zion have the Father’s name imprinted there. This would indicate to us that their will is fully surrendered to the Father’s will. This writing on their foreheads may also remind us of the high

priest, attired with a golden plate on his forehead, engraved with “Holiness to the Lord” (Exo 28:36-38). We have seen that those on Mount Zion are a special possession of the Father, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Eph 1:7). They are also referred to as having two additional redemptions: being “redeemed from the earth” and “redeemed from among men” (Rev 14:3-4). Zion’s inhabitants have responded in kind to God’s heavenly calling, yielding their will to do the perfect will of God.

Mind To Do The Will Of God

Doing the perfect will of God is not easy, it’s not normal, it’s not natural. By our very nature we are all self-willed rebels and sinners, estranged from the “glory of God” and His plans for our lives (2Cor 2:14). It is only natural for us to seek our own will and plans. “For all **seek their own**, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Phil 2:21). It is only by the direct revelation and inspiration of God Himself to the human heart and mind, that one can be changed to have a mind to do the will of God. “For it is God which worketh in you both **to will** and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). This is especially accomplished by a revelation of Calvary’s love. “For the love of Christ constraineth us...” (2Cor 5:14-15).

We can see in Jesus’ earthly life that He exemplified this *nature* of having the Father’s name written in His forehead.

He had this rare state of mind to do the Father’s perfect will. If anyone had a “one-track mind,” it was Jesus. Even from His youth, scripture tells us that He was determined to be “about the Father’s business” (Lk 2:49). In obedience to God’s will, He submitted Himself to His earthly parents (Lk 2:50). Around the age of 30, He responded to the call of the Father, and took the controversial water baptism by immersion at the hands of John the Baptist. He was determined to “fulfill ALL righteousness” (Mat 3:15). The Psalmist prophesied of Him saying: “I **delight** to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:7-8). His prayer, which He also taught to His disciples was, “**Thy will** be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10). He openly testified to His disciples, “I came down from heaven, **not** to do Mine own will, **but the will of Him** that sent Me” (Jn 6:38). In His last hours on earth, as He approached the humiliating and incredibly agonizing sufferings of the cross, He nobly prayed, “Not My will, **but Thine be done**” (Lk 22:42). He was **obedient** unto the death of the cross (Phil 2:8).

There are likely many reasons that Christians fail to do the perfect will of God in their lives, and would therefore NOT be caught up in the rapture to dwell with Christ in Zion and New Jerusalem. *One reason is that many Christians are content to do a **portion** of God’s will, but are not concerned*

to truly aim for perfection. They may treat their Christian experience like a game of “horseshoes,” where **getting close** is good enough. Like the Israelites who picked their inheritance on the *other* side of Jordan, they may feel they have come close to God’s purpose and that is satisfactory to them (Num 32). Like Lot—who, when told to flee to the mountain, chose instead a small place—they are content with partial obedience (Gen 19:17-22). In the 144,000 on Mount Zion, however, we see a different spirit (Num 14:24)—a spirit that yearns to **fully** follow the Lord and reach that highest place. In this nature lies the “mind of Christ” (1Cor 2:16)!

Fanatics For Their God

In today’s world, it is fashionable to be called “open-minded” or “broad-minded.” Such individuals often have the respect of worldly people, since they will show favor to many different *mindsets*, most of which often oppose God’s word. Christians, on the other hand, are often called “brainwashed” or “narrow-minded” by the people of this world, if they are truly devoted to their Creator and Savior. Those on Mount Zion do not mind being called “fanatics” for their God, as the Apostle Paul said: “We are fools for Christ” (1Cor 4:10). May God help us to NOT be ashamed of Jesus and His truth “in this adulterous and sinful generation” (Mk 8:34-38).

Another cause for some Christians to not go on to perfection is comparing themselves to others! Instead of making Christ their goal and “measuring stick,” they compare and measure themselves with others, which is NOT wise (2Cor 10:12). Jesus sensed this attitude in Peter at one point, when Peter was concerned with what another apostle would do. Jesus wisely chose not to answer his inquiries, but commanded him, saying, “What is that to thee? Follow thou Me” (Jn 21:21-22). Other Christians may do things that God will **not** let you do! Do not get distracted by that. You follow Jesus and the leading of the Holy Spirit! It is to Him that we must answer on the day of judgment. May you hear His voice saying, “Well done!” on that day.

Enduring Sound Doctrine

Another way that one can fail to do God’s perfect will is by neglecting to obey certain Biblical counsels and truths. The Bible tells us that many Christians will turn away from the truth. “For the time will come when they will *not endure sound doctrine*; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2Tim3:3-4). In today’s world, we can find a veritable “smorgasbord” of doctrines taught by different churches. One can easily pick a church that **they like** to attend, that

teaches what *they like* to hear. For many Christians, it is enough that they just attend church on Sunday! It is not always important to them if their church is preaching or practicing the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Many “mega-churches” are large because they avoid controversial doctrines that might offend people (See Lk 14:25-35, Jn 6:60-71). That is a good way to have a “big” church, but it is NOT the right way to prepare the Bride of Christ! Jesus taught that our place in the heavenly kingdom would be determined by our obedience NOW, to even the least commandment in the Word of God (Mat 5:19). Some examples of areas that the Word of God counsels us in, and that are controversial amongst Christians are: the proper way to take water baptism, the use of alcohol, the use of jewelry, the use of headcoverings for Christian women, and divorce and remarriage.

Believing, Loving, Obeying

The Lord advises us to “**buy the truth**, and sell it not” (Pro 23:23). Paul warns us to receive a “**love of the truth**” so that we would not be deceived (2Ths 2:10-15). Jesus advised us to live “by **EVERY WORD** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4). Those on Mount Zion apparently get there by believing, loving, and obeying ALL of God’s will, expressed through His counsels in the

Word of God! May we also do the same! May God help each of us to reach out to give our utmost, for His highest (Phil 3:12-15). May we truly aim for the perfection that God Himself calls us to! The more we adopt the mind of Christ, the closer we are to reaching the goal! □

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Encounters
WITH Jesus

Part 3 — The Newborn King

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord’” (Lk 2:7-11).

This account of the birth of Christ is probably among some of the most beloved verses of Scripture for all people. Even people who do not think much of God are familiar with these words. Very significant are the words, “**GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH SHALL BE TO**

ALL PEOPLE.” By sending His only begotten Son into the world, God reached out to all of humanity to offer this great joy of salvation. Sadly though, many people have not experienced it. Some have never even heard it. Some have merely rejected this message, while others have restricted that joy by closing their hearts to what God has for them. They love God a little. They serve God a little. They surrender to God a little. Through Christ, God is offering every man, woman, and child on the planet this great joy without measure. If we open our hearts, and let God have His way, it will be ours.

God chose to reveal the birth of the Savior to men who were “only shepherds.” He passed by the great and the powerful. Can you imagine what it must have been like for these shepherds out in the field at night, as the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them? Then after the angel delivered the good news, a multitude of the heavenly host appeared. It must have been like a glimpse into heaven for those shepherds as they heard the angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk 2:13-14).

Notice their response. As soon as the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let us

now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us” (Lk 2:15). They did not only want to hear about it, they wanted to *see* it for themselves. And *how* did they go? “And they came *with haste*, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (Lk 2:16). The shepherds were not disappointed, for they found everything to be just as the angel had told them.

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Lk 2:20). What they heard and saw caused them to keep on praising and glorifying God for some time. The same thing happens to any person who tastes and sees that the Lord is good. God’s invitation is made available to us; all we are required to do is respond to it. When we come to Jesus, and when we see Him by faith, we will experience more than we had anticipated. It exceeds anything that we have heard. His presence in our lives is greater than we could imagine. Similarly, when we get to heaven, it will be far greater than we have dreamed of—for the half has not been told.

These shepherds are some of the best known men in history, not because of their earthly greatness, but because of the One they saw at His birth. Any lasting heritage we

have is not of this earth, but because of Jesus. If we see Him and believe in Him, we will have a name in eternity. We will have a new name, an everlasting name. “I will give them an everlasting name...” (Isa 56:5). “To him that overcometh will I give...a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev 2:17). “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name” (Rev 3:12). Like these shepherds, our names may never be remembered in this world, but if we are faithful to God, we will be given a new name, an everlasting name. His new name will be written upon us. We will abide forever in the presence of God in that holy city. Could we ask for anything better?

All that the shepherds experienced that night would not have been possible without Mary’s co-operation. When the angel Gabriel brought her the divine message, how did she react? The angel said to her, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lk

1:35). “And Mary said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word’” (Lk 1:38). Mary considered herself to be a handmaid, the servant of the Lord. Whatever the Lord required of her, she was willing and ready to fulfill. She went on to say, “Be it unto me according to thy word.” She said “yes” to the Lord. The thought of refusing or negotiating with the Lord never entered her mind. Her instant obedience was truly a gift of God. If she had allowed her mind to reason, she could have found many reasons to say “not so, Lord.” One can see her total surrender to God’s will, for although she understood the ramifications of such events, she remained obedient.

Are we willing to say “yes” to God? Our life can only be a channel of blessing if we are willing to obey. The prophet Isaiah cries out, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isa 1:19-20). Even John the Baptist leaped for joy in his mother’s womb at the voice of Mary when she greeted Elizabeth. There was a blessing in her voice because she believed. Can you see how blessed Mary was. “And Mary said, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior’” (Lk 1:46-47). If we

refuse the will of God in our lives we cannot experience the “great joy which shall be to all people.”

Fall To Rise

When Jesus was an infant His parents took Him into the temple to present Him to the Lord. At that time, there was a righteous man named Simeon who was led by the Spirit to go into the temple. He had been informed by the Holy Ghost that he would have the privilege of seeing the long-awaited Messiah of Israel before his death. Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as the “salvation” which God said He would send to the world for all people. He spoke some very significant words that day such as, “Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:35-36). Many would fall and rise again because of the newborn King. If we fall before Him, worship Him, and give our lives in submission to Him as our King, He will raise us up to live in His sight. Before He can raise us, we need to fall before Him. If we don’t fall on this Stone to be broken in heart with true repentance, we cannot be raised up. If we don’t voluntarily fall on the chief Cornerstone to be broken by His love, one day we will face His fiery

judgment. Jesus said, “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Mat 21:44).

Now, His Word is a sharp two-edged sword to pierce our souls to show us what is inside us. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts of the heart” (Heb 4:12). What is in your heart? Empty your heart before the Lord; get rid of the evil things that take His place. Let Him put within your heart what He wants to be there. Let Him give you a vision of His eternal kingdom. Let Him put a love in your heart for the house of God. Let Him put in your heart an earnest care for the brethren. Let Him put the saints in your heart. Let Him put His wisdom in your heart. Let Him put His love in your heart. Let Him put gladness into your heart. Let Him give you a new heart, for only then your heart shall live forever!

Good News From A Far Country

The wise men from the east saw the star of the young king and came many miles, traveling a long time through difficult terrain to worship Him. They didn't need much coaxing or prodding. They didn't need any

special outreach to touch them. They were reaching out to God. They wanted to see the King. When they saw the star standing over the place where Jesus was, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. When they came into the house they fell down and worshiped Him. The rest is history.

Let's fall down before Him and worship Him. “O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!” □

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The workmanship of His hands

SUPER-TERRESTRIAL EVIDENCES OF CREATION

Those who do not accept the truth of Genesis are reminded by the Apostle Paul that “the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20).

The Sun

The earth is not by any means a self-sustaining body. The internal heat at its core, whatever its explanation or origin, has no power to warm its surface. Nor is its illumination a product of its own chemical action or energy of any kind. It is a dependent body in every way. It is inherently desolate apart from external influences which act upon it: notably the sun.

This heavenly body, which is approximately ninety-three million miles away from the earth, is at exactly the right distance to perform the countless miracles advantageous to our planet and the life it bears. This cannot be said

of any other solar body. It is now recognized that none of the other planets could sustain life as we know it: either because they are too near the sun and, therefore, too hot, or too far away and therefore too cold.

Many relationships existing between the earth and the sun are of vital consequence. The sun is just the right size and the right distance away in order to give and maintain its truly amazing service to our planet. It provides light, power, warmth, and many other blessings, all in serviceable quantities, subject only to terrestrial variations; such as latitude, elevation, and proximity to ocean, mountains or desert. It is the power of the sun which provides the winds of the world and these, in turn, carry the rain clouds over the land. What would happen if the sun were suddenly extinguished? In three days there likely wouldn't be a vestige of animal or vegetable life on the globe. The first 48 hours would suffice to precipitate every atom of moisture from the air in deluges of rain and piles of snow, and from that time there would set in a universal frost such as Siberia, or the highest peak in the Himalayas, never felt: a temperature of two or three hundred degrees below zero.

These are some of the more direct calculable effects of the sun's vital contribution to our existence. There are many others, ranging from the beneficial influence which

we personally experience, to the mysterious chemical process induced by sunlight which occurs in vegetation. This is known as photosynthesis: a process by which a plant is enabled to build up in its chlorophyll cells carbohydrates from the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and from the hydrogen of water in the soil.

Animals live on the organic food manufactured by the plants in this way. It follows that all living creatures, either directly or indirectly, not only depend on the sun for light and warmth, but in a miraculous way for all the food they eat. This profound truth was revealed to Adam in words which we can only now begin to understand: “And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; and to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth on the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (Gen 1:29-30).

It may be argued that the carnivores are flesh-eaters. Even so, were it not for vegetation, both they as well as every other living creature, would die off. The diet of the carnivores comprises sheep, cattle, antelopes, and lesser creatures which ultimately are vegetarians themselves.

The Moon

Apart from the reflected light from the sun which the moon sheds upon our planet—adding a rare beauty to the night—it has other functions which have an important effect on the earth. We refer of course to the ocean tides.

As with the sun, it is the size and distance of the moon which makes it our good servant; for if the moon were only half its distance away, or if its size were doubled, the rise and fall of the tides would submerge and destroy all harbours in the world as they exist today. Many islands would disappear, together with all coastal plains, and the tidal waves would drive inland for great distances twice every day. The disastrous consequences can barely be imagined.

If the moon were much smaller, or further away, the almost tideless seas would lose their effectiveness in cleansing our harbours. This would apply also to narrow seas and converging coastlines, because a speedier flow of water helps to carry away impurities in heavily populated areas, and, incidentally, improves fishing prospects.

The Earth

When we come to consider our own planet, it is not surprising to find that similar precise conditions are necessary for the initiation and maintenance of its present fruitful condition. It has been estimated that if the Earth’s diameter were


increased by a little over one-sixth, the weight of the atmosphere would be doubled. With twice as much oxygen, scientists tell us, the amount of water would be greatly increased, so that the surface of the planet would be covered by ocean.

The glaciers and polar ice would melt and that in turn would raise the ocean level by 150 feet. This would inundate hundreds of thousands of square miles of our most fertile lands. Or, if the average mean temperature were only a few degrees colder than now, the great increase of ice and snow in the low latitudes and on the more elevated land would rob the oceans of much of their water. This, again, would result in a greatly decreased rainfall and a consequent extension of desert lands, giving a poor prospect for our food supplies. So little, it would seem, is necessary to put fear into the hearts of men, but the delicate balance is preserved by divine decree: "Who shut up the sea with doors?" Who, but the great Creator, can say to the oceans: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shalt thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:8, 11).

Adding up these few precise conditions concerning the earth, sun and moon, which are found to be necessary for the maintenance of living creatures on our planet, the possibility that all these happy conjunctions happened by mere chance is so remote as to warrant immediate rejection. In arriving at this conclusion, we have taken the widest view of the matter.

The super-terrestrial evidences of a divine Providence supplying the conditions necessary for our terrestrial existence cannot be divorced from the idea of Creation. It is certainly beyond the capabilities of our scientists to explain how the sun, moon, and earth came to be so intimately and advantageously associated, yet many are intent on rejecting the clear Biblical answer to this mystery. A super-human Providence is everywhere in evidence and, where this exists, intelligent purpose cannot be denied, nor can initial creation be discounted.

Extreme evolutionists often ridicule the idea of creation, and some are anxious to dismiss the Deity as a figment of the imagination. They presume to think that, given unlimited time, there is nothing that cannot be explained by the processes of nature. If the public were fully aware that so many of the statements by scientists are mere surmises, there might now be much to complain about.

So we return to the words of Paul: "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom 1:20). 

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Stress Management

A lecturer, while explaining stress management to an audience, raised a glass of water and asked, “How heavy is this glass of water?” Answers called out ranged from 20g to 500g. The lecturer replied, “the absolute weight doesn’t matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that’s not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I’ll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you’ll have to call an ambulance. In each case, it’s the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes to me.”

He continued, “and that’s the way it is with stress management. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won’t be able to carry on. We need to put them down and be refreshed.”

Jesus gives us the simple solution to all our burdens, cares and problems: come to Him and be refreshed. Jesus said, “come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mat 11:28-30 NIV). Many times we try to hold onto our burdens like that cup of water, but as we do our burdens just get heavier and heavier. We must learn to put those burdens down and be refreshed in His presence. He will carry us and help us in our time of need. All we have to do is cast everything upon Him because He cares for us!

Human Error

PART 3 — DID GOD MAKE A MISTAKE?



The previous two articles in this series have focused on the contentions and contradictions that the Son of God had to bear while living on this earth as the Son of Man. We studied some of our Lord's "troubled trips" and "messed up meals" in order to be better able to endure and benefit from the frustrations and failures that we too will be forced to face. In this installment, we will be looking at how to escape error, including what appears to be the biggest error of all: humanity itself. In other words, anyone born of a woman will be continually surrounded by and subject to error—both the mistakes of others around them and those of their own making.

His Eternal Purpose

Fallen man is destined to fail. If we were to judge by the record of history and the evidence of our own experience, we could come to the erroneous conclusion that the Creator Himself made a mistake in making man and that all of humanity is human error. Even angels may wonder

what the point is to so much sorrow and suffering, sufferings that the incarnate Christ shared along with mankind right up to His passion on the cross of Calvary. Yet when our understanding is enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God we discover that what appears to be failure or foolishness on God's part in allowing men to fall and fail will be used to fulfill His eternal purpose and plan (Rom 5:15; 8:28; 1Cor 1:25). After man fell, becoming dead in sin and trespass, God by His grace saved and made us alive together with the crucified Christ. In eternity this salvation will continue to bring God ever increasing praise and glory (Rom 11:33; Eph 1:6,12,14; 2:5-7; 3:10-11). Through ages to come we will be discovering the depths of God's love and wisdom (Rev 5:9-14). During our earthly pilgrimage we too will be accompanied by fault and failure from without and within. Let us follow in the footsteps of our Savior and discover how He makes every wrong turn right and how every stumbling block becomes a stepping stone toward His Kingdom. Let us also follow the Master's counsel on how to be kept from error.

"I'm Only Human"

The wicked condition of men's hearts grieves the heart of God, but in His presence there is always fullness of joy (Gen 6:5-6; Psa 16:11). Our rebellion vexes even the Holy

Spirit, yet in Himself He remains and reigns the King of Peace (Isa 63:10; Heb 7:2). Just imagine how painful it was for the Son of God to leave the perfection of heaven and physically dwell on earth among erring mankind. Jesus did not stay enthroned in heaven, far away from “real-world” everyday problems that are part of life here below. The Lord came down, visited and lived with men in their low estate (Psa 136:23). He chose to dwell in the midst of trouble, people of unclean lips, and in a rebellious house (Psa 138:7; Isa 6:5; Eze 12:2). When confronted with their faults many people often say, “I’m only human” to defend their failings. Jesus removed this excuse for error forever. When He took on flesh, God became fully human and has made a way for men to be children of God. We are called to be more than mere men; we are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus and can now live overcoming lives in this world and the world to come.

Faithful In Failures

Without even taking into account the opposition He faced from demonic and human enemies, it is amazing to see how consistently Jesus’ disciples messed up and caused Him grief and hardship because of their errors. It would seem that the Apostles could have gotten something right once in awhile, even if by accident. Yet the only thing they

never seemed to fail at was failure. They were reaching perfection in misunderstanding and mistake. In an earlier study we noted how the disciples were crying out while Jesus was sleeping, yet when the Lord told them to watch and pray with Him in the garden they all fell asleep. We also studied how the disciples had brought nothing for their picnic in the desert, but after the Master fed over five thousand uninvited guests, they left back all the leftovers Jesus had commanded them to collect. At various times they tried to send souls away from Jesus: the young children brought to him, the hungry, the foreigner, the blind who cried, etc. They even wanted to call down fire from heaven on others! They promised to stay with Jesus unto death and then all ran away a few hours later when He was betrayed by a kiss from a “friend.” As the old adage goes, “with friends like these who needs enemies!” In spite of all these mistakes, the Lord was able to reach and teach them by His grace because His chosen disciples were willing to repent, believe and receive from Him.

Sinners By Nature

As for enemies, when the Son of God was living upon this earth He had the most problems with those who thought they had the least problems with God: the self-righteous priests, scribes and Pharisees. He reserved His

worst scorn and woe, not for open sinners, but for those religious and educated fools that thought they were okay (Mat 23). The Light of the World condemned as blind those who said they could see (Jn 9:41). Men do not make mistakes because of lack of education or intelligence. It is in their very nature to do so. The biblical word “err” is usually defined as to go astray, be deceived or to wander out of the way. This description is closely related to the most common term for “sin” in the scriptures, which is described as missing the mark. We do not miss the target because we cannot hit it but because we choose not to. Human beings are not sinners because of the sins they do, they do sins because they are sinners by nature. We are prone to wander away, like sheep that always go astray (Isa 53:6; Psa 95:10). But God has put our sin on Him who knew no sin. If we confess our sin and believe in Him who died and rose again for us, we become right with God (2Cor 5:21; 1Pet 2:25). Often those who outwardly appear the most wise and righteous are the most wrong because they are unwilling to admit their ignorance and error. Like Adam and Eve in the beginning, the self righteous will even blame God rather than take the blame and admit their fault. Man’s wrong is to think that he is right.

Because the human race is so helplessly lost and error prone, throughout history some well-meaning “so called” saints and holy men have tried to escape from being subjected to frustration and temptation by fleeing from mankind into deserts, caves and monasteries. Nevertheless, when we try to flee vanity and failure we take the worst problems along with us, which are our own deceitful hearts and minds. As long as we live on this earth we will be forced to face fools. Artificial separation from adversity is not the example that Jesus set for us. He was willing to live, work and move among sinners and men of low degree. Jesus sends His disciples out into the world to live and witness for Him in the same way. He overcame all things and by His life in us we can do the same today. Wise businessmen expect and prepare for a principle named “Murphy’s Law.” This maxim states that if anything can possibly go wrong, it will. There is no place on earth where one can escape error except in Christ. So let us expect the unexpected and not be disappointed by disappointment.

The Antidote

It is a mystery that brings God glory to discover that a child of God is made holy even while surrounded by uncleanness. Jesus uses wrongs to make us right. By bearing the contentious and erring, we learn His answers

and share in His character. When surrounded by contradiction we are forced closer to him. The Lord rules “in the midst of His enemies” and He calls us to overcome and reign in life the same way.

Finally we will examine the Lord’s antidote for human error. Once when the Lord was being questioned by religious leaders, who were not trying to learn but to trap Him with His words, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God” (Mat 22:29). We greatly err when we do not have the guidance of the Bible and the Spirit of God. To be delivered and preserved from spiritual error, errors that have eternal consequences, we need revelation from the written word of God and from personal experience with the Holy Spirit. This is the same Holy Spirit that powerfully raised the Son of God from the dead.

Knowing The Truth

It is said that the way that bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit currency is not to study fraudulent bills but to be made thoroughly acquainted with real money. Then when the wrong comes along they will immediately recognize it. This principle has its counterpart in recognizing the difference between spiritual truth and error. False teachers are continually upgrading their lies

and trying to introduce new doctrines of devils into the church and world (1Tim 4:1). What we need to thoroughly know is that doctrine once and for all delivered to the apostles (Jude 1:3). We also need a continuous revelation of the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to keep us from being led astray in these last days, by either men or devils. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth and reveal Christ to us and in us (Jn 16:13). Let us follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Thus we will surely be kept from error and be ready for the rapture by “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1Cor 1:24). □

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Few men would give up all the luxuries they enjoyed at home in order to evangelize the Dark Continent of Africa. Yet at a time when missionaries were few, the Lord raised up a godly young woman with a burden and passion for the lost, to take His word to places that had never even heard of Jesus Christ. Her example, devotion, and boldness are all a testimony to the wonderful grace of God that inspires and leads one to do His will, even in the midst of great opposition and hardship. Against what would have been considered “normal” during that time, Mary Slessor stepped out into unknown places to bring light to a dark land. Her life is an inspiration to many young women and men alike to overcome the natural hurdles of life and accomplish the beautiful plan and purpose that God has for each one of us.

Mary Slessor was born in 1848 and grew up in a difficult family environment. From the young age of eleven, she began working in factories in order to help her family. Her life was consumed by the rigors of factory work and her only outside interest was church. Going to church became her joy as she got involved in many activities and teaching ministries. She took going to church so seriously that she wrote:

“we would as soon have thought of going to the moon as of being absent from a service!”

Church was a great influence in her life but more than that was the Bible. Once someone asked her for something to read to which she responded with the Bible and said, *“Take that; it has made me a changed lassie.”* The greatest part of the Bible for her was the story of Christ and His love for mankind. Christ’s love filled her heart to overflowing that her only response was to love Him whole-heartedly in return. She felt that she could not do enough for the Lord who had done so much for her. Because of this passionate love for God she was able to surrender to anything that the Lord required of her.

The church she attended was in the midst of the slums in Scotland, and when the church began a mission outreach to the poor boys and girls, Mary volunteered as a teacher. During that time, holding open air meetings was dangerous, but Mary, along with a few others, had the boldness to attempt it. One night, a gang who did not appreciate the mission came to the meeting. The leader had a lead weight attached to a chord and he swung it around threateningly. He approached Mary and kept swinging. The weight narrowly missed her head yet Mary didn’t flinch. The leader was impressed and took his whole gang to the meeting where their lives were soon changed forever. The Lord was preparing Mary for greater and more dangerous trials ahead.

The church she was brought up in sent missionaries to foreign countries and Mary always had a desire for mission work. When missionaries from far away would come home and testify of their adventures, crowds of people would gather to hear these home town heroes. In 1874, when the news of the death of David Livingstone spread, enthusiasm to reach the lost in Africa escalated as many were inspired by his life. Mary Slessor was one of them. She submitted her application and was accepted to be a teacher in the Calabar region of Africa.

This Calabar region of Africa was not the best place to be. In fact, it was one of the worst places for man to venture, filled with sickness, disease and death. The natives of that place were considered to be the worst in all of Africa for their living conditions. It was hard to describe the people living in those conditions, but some of the words used were savage, treacherous, devilish, cannibals, murderers, etc. Calabar was called the "White Man's Grave" and for many entering, that place meant death. Slavery was common and killing a woman or a slave meant nothing. In these harsh circumstances Mary Slessor travelled to Calabar, Africa—the only woman on board the boat that arrived in September 1876. She was only 28 years old.

The missionaries that had been there before Mary had a good deal of success in the coastal regions: they had a school, hospital, orphanage and church already set up with hundreds of natives attending the meetings. Mary started to learn the language and she travelled in the coastal regions visiting the

various villages nearby. Because of her boldness, once she learned the language she began travelling without a translator even though she was warned that it was dangerous. Yet she began to see the great need of the people, especially as she travelled further from the main mission station. She would teach them the Word of God and help them to leave their vain traditions and follow the true and living way.

Mary's burden, however, extended far beyond just the coastal regions. She prayed, *"I thank Thee that I can bring these people Thy Word. But Lord, there are other villages back in the jungle where no white man has gone. They need Jesus, too. Help me reach them!"* However, whenever she asked other missionaries about going inland she always received a negative response: *"No. You would be killed. They cannot be reached."* Yet Mary Slessor did not give up hope because the burden placed by the Lord continued to burn inside of her.

In 1888, Mary Slessor decided to go up the river to the remote inland villages where missionaries had not dared to go before. They warned her that she would die yet she went with the peace of heart and mind that she was fully in the will of God. She had befriended a chief of one of the coastal villages and he told her that if she must go then he would send his best boat with people to paddle for her. As they travelled even the native paddlers wanted to turn back fearing the danger ahead. The Lord had already prepared the heart of the chief of the first village they came to and Mary was allowed to live there

as the first outsider ever and was even granted permission to build a school. These people were more savage than anyone Mary had seen before but she brought the love of Christ to a people that had only known cruelty and murder. Little by little the Lord helped Mary to help these tribal people: many received salvation and several churches were established. She also brought a system of law and order to their lives and helped them to trade with villages in the coastal area.

Yet her desire was to still go further inland. They pleaded with her again not to go but yet she pressed on. She had a reputation of being a great and wise woman and a fair and honest judge and that reputation preceded her as she travelled. She came to a cannibalistic tribe and as she labored there many received salvation.

Mary Slessor continued to do all that she could for the Lord—to reach the unsaved and unreached tribes in inland Africa. Although opposition was great, the grace of God was greater. With a fervent zeal and desire to pour out her life for the Lord, Mary faithfully labored in Africa until the day the Lord called her to her heavenly home in January 1915. May we all be motivated by the love of God, just as Mary Slessor was, to give our lives for His service in these last days. ◻

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Through The Storm

I did not know His love before,
the way I know it now.
I could not see my need for Him,
my pride would not allow.
I had it all, without a care,
the “self-sufficient” lie.
My path was smooth, my sea was still,
not a cloud was in my sky.

I thought I knew His love for me,
I thought I’d seen His grace;
I thought I did not need to grow,
I thought I’d found my place.
But then the way grew rough and dark,
the storm clouds quickly rolled;
The waves began to rock my ship,
my anchor would not hold.

The ship that I had built myself
was made of foolish pride.
It fell apart and left me bare,
with nowhere else to hide.
I had no strength or faith to face
the trials that lay ahead.
And so I simply prayed to Him
and bowed my weary head.

His loving arms enveloped me,
and then He helped me stand.
He said, “You still must face this storm,
but I will hold your hand.”
So through the dark and lonely night
He guided me through pain.
I could not see the light of day
or when the storm might wane.

Yet through the aches and endless tears,
my faith began to grow.
I could not see it at the time,
but my light began to glow.
I saw God’s love in brand new light,
His grace and mercy, too.
For only when all self was gone
could Jesus’ love shine through.

It was not easy in the storm,
I sometimes wondered, “Why?”
At times I thought, “I can’t go on.”
I’d hurt, and doubt, and cry.
But Jesus never left my side,
He guided me each day.
Through pain and strife,
through fire and flood,
He helped me all the way.

And now I see as never before
how great His love can be.
How in my weakness He is strong,
how Jesus cares for me!
He worked it all out for my good,
although the way was rough.
He only sent what I could bear,
and then He cried, “Enough!”

He raised His hand and said, “Be still!”
He made the storm clouds cease.
He opened up the gates of joy
and flooded me with peace.
I see His face now clearer still,
I felt His presence strong.
I found anew His faithfulness,
He never did me wrong.

Now I know more storms will come,
but only for my good;
For pain and tears have helped me grow
as naught else ever could.
I still have so much more to learn
as Jesus works in me.
If in the storm I’ll love Him more,
that’s where I want to be.