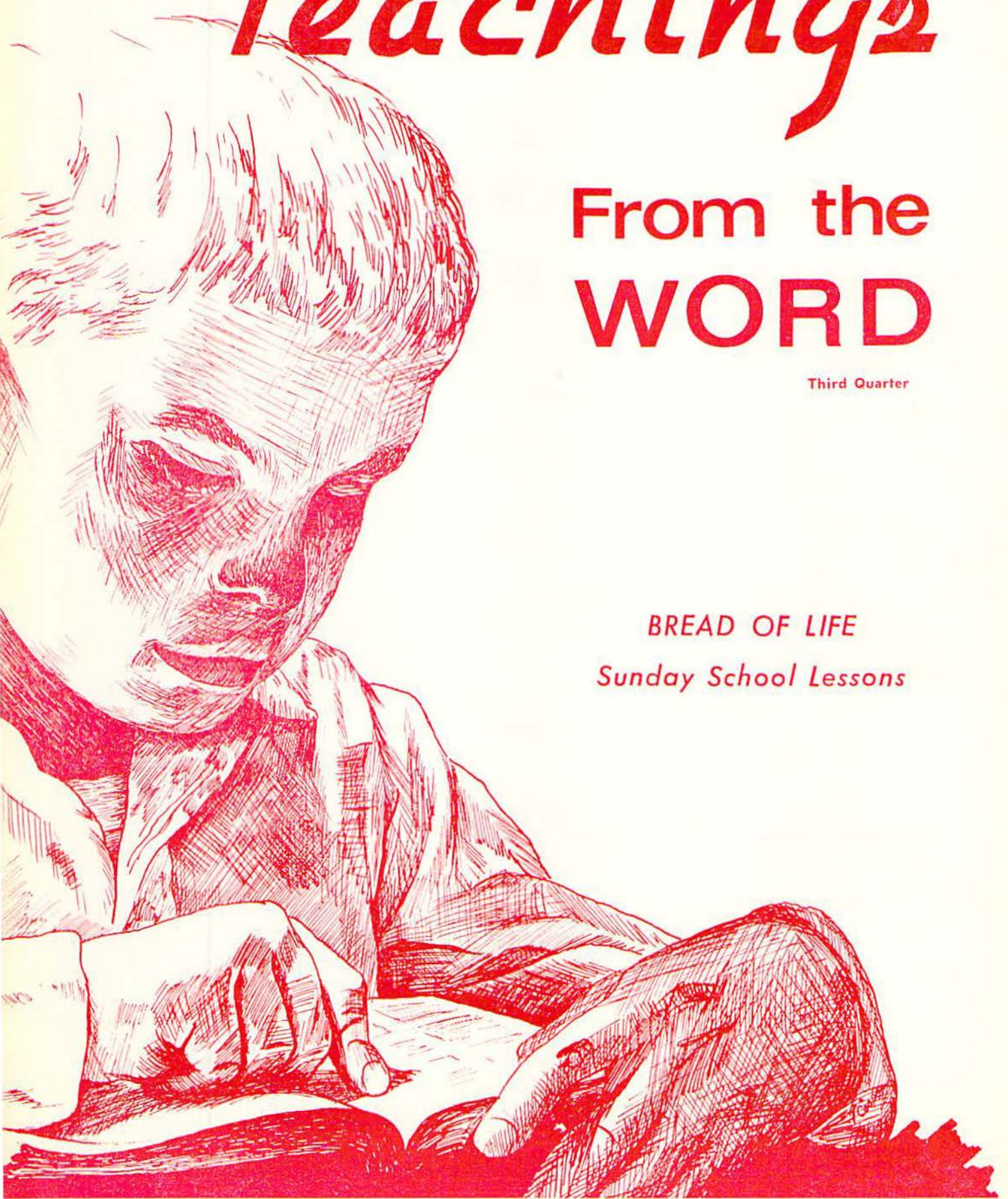


Teachings

From the
WORD

Third Quarter

BREAD OF LIFE
Sunday School Lessons



BREAD OF LIFE

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

TEACHINGS FROM THE WORD

THIS IS the third quarterly in the series of Bible studies called "Teachings From The Word." Covering the Bible in one year, this study emphasizes the doctrinal truths found in God's Word. It attempts to follow the historical narrative of the Bible and presents doctrines as they appear in that sequence.

Historically the lessons of this quarter are concentrated on the captivity and on the advent of the Holy Spirit. Following the first lesson, which is an Easter lesson, are four lessons on Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel, Cyrus, and Zerubbabel. Although two of these four are not godly men, their lives have been included in the Bible because of the significant roles they played in the history of God's people. A study of their actions and motives can be highly profitable.

The lesson on the "Godly Family" coincides with Mother's Day, a special day set aside in the continental United States to commemorate mothers. It is fitting that on such a day the very important topic of the home and the family as discussed in God's Word be emphasized.

The lesson on the "birth of the Spirit" is sequenced next so that it corresponds with Pentecost Sunday. This lesson is followed by six lessons of a doctrinal basis on the ministry of the Spirit. Wherever possible, great care was exercised to include in the daily readings of these doctrinal lessons material of an historical setting so as to provide a basis for instruction to all ages of the Sunday school.

Dwight L. Moody once said, "I never saw a useful Christian who was not a student of the Bible. If a man neglects his Bible, he may pray and ask God to use him, but there is not much for the Holy Spirit to work with. We must have the Word itself, which is sharper than any two-edged sword."

Moody himself experienced the power of the Word of God in his own life. Led to the Lord through his Sunday school teacher, he later, at the age of 23, gave himself entirely to Christian service. Although it was plain that God's hand was upon him, he sensed that something was lacking in his ministry. Finally, it was brought to his attention that instead of preaching the Word, he was preaching about the Word. He began to saturate himself with the Bible, studying it for hours each day, and immediately a great change was evident in his ministry. He then preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and was used to sweep thousands into the Kingdom. Small wonder that Moody became a great exponent of Bible study.

No workman ever learned his trade by an indifferent and uninspired approach to his work. The study of the Bible is no different. The results are in proportion to the effort expended.

EASTER

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Matthew 26:1-16
Tuesday:	Matthew 26:17-35
Wednesday:	Matthew 26:36-56
Thursday:	Matthew 26:57-75
Friday:	Matthew 27:1-53
Saturday:	Matthew 27:54-66
Sunday:	Matthew 28

MEMORY VERSE:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15: 20).

INTRODUCTION:

For about the last six months of His ministry Jesus had been preparing His disciples for His death. Though He repeatedly spoke of His burial and resurrection, they consistently refused to believe Him. Right up to two days prior to the crucifixion, Peter still did not understand the full import of the Lord's words concerning this matter (see Matt. 26:31-33). It wasn't until after the significant events of Pentecost that the disciples realized that the Lord's earthly ministry, from the *very beginning*, had been planned to culminate in His cruel death at the hands of those He came to save and was to triumph again in His resurrection from the dead.

LESSON NOTES:

Seized and Tried: The entire last week of the Lord's life is fully chronicled in the Gospels. From a human standpoint, it began in triumph and ended in disgrace. As part of redemption's plan, it began in triumph and ended in even greater triumph.

For some time the Jewish leaders sought a way to kill Jesus, for they were envious of His great popularity with the common people (John 11:53; Matt. 27:18). The triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His authoritative handling of the Jewish leaders in the temple debate two days later gave even greater reason for His extermination. His popularity at this time was at its peak, however, which made it even more difficult to kill Him. Jerusalem was fast filling up with worshippers for the feast. Many were coming in from Galilee, a province where Jesus was particularly popular. Knowing they had to dispose of Him, yet fearing a tumult, the leaders were troubled as to *how* they could accomplish their evil motives.

While the disciples were preparing what turned out to be the Lord's "last supper" with them, Judas was negotiating a price to betray the Lord. Judas' act was not one of identifying who the Lord was; everybody knew Him. It was that of giving the authorities cause to seize Him, for one of His *own* brought charges against Him. That one of His own should accuse Him evidently did much to influence the populace. Thirty silver shekels were worth less than \$25.00, the price of a slave on the open market. This price shows Judas' contempt for Jesus.

The trials before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and

before Herod were nothing compared to the trial at Gethsemane. (Gethsemane means oil press or olive vat in Hebrew.) It was here in agonizing prayer that the entire victory of Easter was won! Instinctively Jesus shrank from the bitter cup which was His death. In a great struggle He said, "Not My will, but Thine be done" (Matt. 26:39). It is possible that at this time His Father assured Him of His willingness to supply Jesus with twelve legions of angels if Jesus really wanted them but also waited for Him to make His own voluntary commitment and consecration (v. 53).

Dead and Alive: As predicted, the Lord was completely deserted by all His followers in His hour of need. Even boastful Peter failed miserably. As the Lord's victory can be traced to Gethsemane, so the disciples' failure can be likewise traced there. Jesus "prayed through" and was victor; Peter and the others slept through and were later disgraced. How quickly temptation comes upon us! In our self-confidence, we fail to pray as the Lord taught us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." It is the weakness of the flesh which we must ever be aware of and which should keep us on our knees in humble watchfulness and prayer. The willingness of the spirit is not sufficient to overcome the weakness of the flesh.

Despite the lack of convincing false witnesses and despite Pilate's own hesitancy, Jesus was ultimately sentenced to die. His honest admission that He was the Son of God was considered blasphemy. Crucifixion was a Roman method of death and disgrace. Both Jews and Romans, representatives of all mankind, entered into the mockery and abuse to which Jesus was subjected. Deep hatred for the righteous Son of God is seen in their treatment of Him.

Having buried Him in a rock-hewn tomb, guards were placed at the tomb and the entrance solidly sealed *specifically* for the purpose of preventing a "story" that Jesus was risen. Evidently the authorities were more impressed with the claims of Jesus' resurrection than the disciples. It should be remembered that when the resurrection became a fact, the soldiers were bribed to say they had been asleep — a serious admission for a highly disciplined Roman soldier. They were assured, however, that Pilate would be "satisfied" (Matt. 28: 12-14).

Among His disciples the resurrection was greeted with fear mingled with joy. Even some who saw Him had doubts of the reality of the resurrection (v. 17). It wasn't until fifty days later that it all began to make real sense to them.

The Lessons: The purpose that Jesus had in coming to this earth was to deliver us from sin, its power, and its effects — to destroy the works of the devil. His death on the cross was the basis for the forgiveness of sins. The shedding of blood was necessary to remove sin (see Matt. 26:28). As the first covenant was sealed by the blood of animals (Ex. 24:8), so the "new covenant" was sealed by the blood of the Lamb of God (see Heb. 8). The communion cup, symbolic of His blood, is to remind us of His death for our sins.

Just as Jesus knew of His death, so He knew beforehand that His gospel would be preached in the whole world (Matt. 26:13). This gospel was the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (or God) which Jesus proclaimed from the time of His very first public utterance (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18,19). It was also at the time of Mary's anointing that Jesus coupled His "gospel"

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NEBUCHADNEZZAR

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	2 Kings 24:1-7
Tuesday:	Daniel 2
Wednesday:	Daniel 3
Thursday:	2 Kings 24:8-20
Friday:	Jeremiah 52:1-30
Saturday:	Jeremiah 39:11-18
Sunday:	Daniel 4

MEMORY VERSE:

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase (Daniel 4:37).

INTRODUCTION:

As the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar ruled over one of the greatest empires this world has ever seen. None that followed matched the glory of the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar. Reigning for over forty years, Nebuchadnezzar is known in secular history for the splendor of his building operations as well as for the brilliance of his military exploits. The "hanging gardens" which he built for his wife are regarded by the Greeks as one of the seven wonders of the world. His armies brought every major power into subjection including the Assyrians and Egyptians.

LESSON NOTES:

In His Days: Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, was in the fourth year of his reign when Nebuchadnezzar (also called Nebuchadrezzar) was in his first (Jer. 25:1). This is an important date in the Bible, for it links secular and Biblical history. The year prior to this, Nebuchadnezzar ruled as co-ruler with his father, Nabopolassar, who twenty years earlier founded the Babylonian kingdom. During this year when father and son reigned together as kings, Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah to conquer it. The result of this campaign was the taking captive of Daniel and his friends and all the choice princes of Judah (2 Chron. 36:6; Dan. 1:1-7).

This westward thrust of conquest was interrupted when Nebuchadnezzar heard of his father's fatal sickness and had to return to Babylon. The following year, Nebuchadnezzar's first as sole king, several major events took place. This was the year in which he engaged the Egyptian army at the battle of Carchemish on the river Euphrates. Egypt was marching east to claim its share of the spoils from the fall of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Defeating the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar now held sway over every major power in the world (Jer. 46:2; 2 Kings 24:7). This was also the year in which Jeremiah prophesied the seventy years' captivity, a period reckoned from the prior year (see Jer. 25:3, 8-26; 27:6,7; Dan. 1:1).

Having been a vassal of Egypt, this defeat brought Judah completely under Babylonian rule. The next year, Nebuchadnezzar's second and Jehoiakim's fifth, Jehoiakim rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar allowed bands of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites to

come against Judah (2 Kings 24:1; Jer. 36:9,21-33). It was in this year, while on the threshold of greatness, that Nebuchadnezzar had his troubling dream of the great image of different metals (Daniel 2).

Another eighteen years were to pass before Jerusalem was completely destroyed. In Jehoiakim's last year, Nebuchadnezzar took 3,023 captives. The following year with Jehoiachin's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar took 10,000 captives, including Jehoiachin, Mordecai, and Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:8-16; Ezek. 1:1,2; Esth. 2:5,6). Nine years later, in Zedekiah's ninth year, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem (Jer. 39:1; 52:4; 2 Kings 25:1). Within three years, the city fell, and the temple was burned while everything of value was carried off to Babylon (Jer. 52). Nebuchadnezzar went on to reign another twenty-three years, during seven of which he was brought very low by the hand of God (Dan. 4).

His Dream: In his quest to build a magnificent empire, Nebuchadnezzar made it his practice to bring the best talent from all the nations he conquered to Babylon. Not only top brains but skilled craftsmen and magnificent materials were needed to build the splendid projects he had in mind for his capital city. Of all this vast talent, Daniel rose to the highest position of prominence. His rise was occasioned by the dream which troubled Nebuchadnezzar so that he couldn't sleep and which Daniel alone could interpret.

In order to assure a truthful interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar demanded to be told not only the interpretation but the dream itself. All the magicians acknowledged that a God whose dwelling was not with flesh was needed for such an impossible task (Dan. 2:11). Only Daniel, after interceding with his God, could pass the test. Daniel made absolutely certain that God Himself was acknowledged as the revealer of this mystery (see v. 28).

Perhaps because his kingdom was represented by the head of gold in the image, Nebuchadnezzar had an image of gold built which he wanted all his subjects to worship. Daniel's three friends refused, and through petty court intrigue they were condemned to the fiery furnace. Again Nebuchadnezzar received a great testimony to the power of Israel's God when the flames couldn't touch these three faithful ones (Dan. 3). Only after a seven-year humiliation does it appear as if Nebuchadnezzar finally learned to fully acknowledge the God of heaven. Whether his heart remained completely turned to God after such witnesses of His power is not known.

The Lessons: God rules in all the affairs of men. What happened to Judah was a result of the hand of the Lord. Those nations used in the judgment of His people were under the control of the Lord. Rulers held power at His pleasure. There is no reason to believe that the Lord is not ruling just as strongly over the affairs of men today as He did then. Just as He allowed godless rulers to hold power for a purpose then, so we can be sure there is a reason why certain leaders are in power today.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar told of three empires inferior to his which would follow his kingdom. These three empires would be in power from the time of the end of Babylonian empire until the rise and establishment of a totally new and different kingdom. The fulfillment of this prophecy has taken place. The Medo-Persian empire (represented by silver in the

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EZEKIEL

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Ezekiel 5
Tuesday:	Ezekiel 12
Wednesday:	Ezekiel 17
Thursday:	Ezekiel 34
Friday:	Ezekiel 36
Saturday:	Ezekiel 37
Sunday:	Ezekiel 47:1-12

MEMORY VERSE:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me (Ezek. 3:17).

INTRODUCTION:

Twenty years elapsed between the time when the first captives were taken by Nebuchadnezzar until Jerusalem and the temple were completely destroyed. Daniel and his companions were among the first ones taken to Babylon. Seven years later Ezekiel, Jehoiachin, and Mordecai were taken captive (Ezek. 1:1,2; Esth. 2:5,6). At this time Ezekiel had not as yet begun his prophetic ministry. It was about five years later that he began to prophesy (Ezek. 1:1,2; 4:4-6), in the thirtieth year of an unnamed era. Many believe this refers to his age at the time. All of Ezekiel's ministry took place among the captives in Babylon, his brethren in exile. His ministry lasted at least twenty-two years (Ezek. 29:17).

LESSON NOTES:

Jerusalem Destroyed: At the time Ezekiel's ministry began, Judah and Jerusalem were still intact. True, some choice princes had been removed, King Jehoiachin was in prison in Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar had control over the land. However, few believed the nation would be destroyed. While Jeremiah was warning of the city's destruction and being ridiculed, the majority of the people were believing the prophet Hananiah who said that within two years all would be restored (Jer. 28:1-3). Even those in captivity with Ezekiel were not convinced that their defeat was permanent.

Ezekiel began his ministry with a very plain sober declaration of judgment against Jerusalem. Many of his prophecies were acted out. In this way they were extremely graphic and quite plain. Object lessons, parables, and acting prophecy were all a part of his technique and gave vivid illustration to his message.

Picture the scene of Ezekiel shaving himself clean and dividing the hairs into three piles. One pile is burned by fire to designate the pestilence and famine which was to destroy one third of the populace. Another pile Ezekiel struck with the sword to show how a third of the citizens of the city would fall by the sword. The last pile Ezekiel scattered to the wind to show how the remaining ones would be removed from the land. All was literally fulfilled within eight years as almost twenty thousand of the approximately sixty thousand inhabitants died from starvation in the siege; another twenty thousand were slain defending the city,

and the remaining ones taken captive.

On another occasion, Ezekiel had to go through the motions of packing his bag and digging a hole in the wall and leaving the city as an exile (12:3-16). This prophecy was fulfilled to the last detail several years later when Zedekiah (the king) tried to escape Jerusalem through a hole in the wall and was blinded so that he never saw the land of his captivity, though he was in it (see v. 13).

The Captivity: Many had heard the prophecies of doom for so long that they took a cynical and unbelieving attitude (vv. 21-23). Scoffing was prevalent. Others felt it did not apply to them but to some far-off future generation (vv. 24-26). But God warned that the fulfillment of His Word would not be delayed. Does this not sound familiar to the attitudes of some towards the Word of God today?

The actual destruction of Jerusalem took place and brought grief to the exiles when the realization of the end of their beloved city struck them. In spite of this sore punishment, some hardened their hearts and in rebellion became even more obstinate and impenitent. Others wept at the thought of the temple's being razed to the ground. Their joy was gone and their song departed from them (see Psa. 137).

Ezekiel's message changed after the destruction of Jerusalem and became one of comfort. Now he began to prophesy of the restoration of the city. This restoration was to be *solely* for the glory of His Name (Ezek. 36:22-32). God's name had been defamed and disgraced by the way in which He was forced to deal with His people. Restoring His people was for the purpose of vindicating His great name. God would refill the holy land as a testimony to the nations!

Among the prophecies and promises on this subject was the promise of a new heart and a new spirit to be given which would cause those who received the new heart and new spirit to walk in His statutes (36:26,27). The vision of the dry bones showed how those who were dead would respond to life by the preaching of the Word. Finally, all of His prophecies focused on the ultimate glory of God which would fill the land. Whereas the glory of God left the temple upon the destruction of Jerusalem, this glory was to return in God Himself who would come to dwell among His people (Chap. 37). Chapters 40-48 tell of the ideal temple and city where the glory of God is, with its name being Jehovah-shammah, "The Lord is there." From the temple was to flow a river too deep to pass that was to bless all people (47:1-10).

The Lessons: Part of the attitude of scoffing at the warnings of destruction came from the feeling that God would somehow spare His chosen ones. It is strange how many times we feel that we are specially favored by God and that everybody but us is the object of God's displeasure. It was in regard to the teaching of Luke 21:36 where the Lord warns us to watch and pray always that we "may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass," that one of God's servants recently said, "It is a good thing not to think because I am I, I will escape." God will not countenance sin in *anybody's* life. What a man sows he will also reap. Note that the severity of judgment was related to their light of the truth (Ezek. 5:7-10).

The people of God are fortunate to have men like Ezekiel faithfully warning them and speaking the Word of God without compromise. Unpopular as it was,

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CYRUS

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Isaiah 44:21-28
Tuesday:	Isaiah 45
Wednesday:	Isaiah 46
Thursday:	Jeremiah 50:1-20, 41-46
Friday:	Jeremiah 51:1-58
Saturday:	Ezra 1:1-6
Sunday:	Ezra 6:1-12

MEMORY VERSE:

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have sur-named thee, though thou hast not known me (Isa. 45:4).

INTRODUCTION:

Just prior to the end of the seventy-year captivity, a major change took place in world government. The great Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire. On the very night of wicked Belshazzar's feast, during which he went out of his way to show his disrespect for the God of Israel, his entire kingdom fell into the hands of Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:1-6, 30). This event came as no surprise to the godly students of divine prophecy, for Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as Daniel, had foretold of its occurrence years before.

LESSON NOTES:

Cyrus: The change in government accomplished the fulfillment of the plan of God in two respects. First, it brought just retribution upon the nation (Babylon) that had destroyed the holy nation, and second, it brought into power the world leader who was instrumental in allowing the exiles to return to Judah when the seventy years expired. While this latter event was in fulfillment of prophecy, it was accomplished through the prayers of Daniel who understood the words of Jeremiah and prayed that God would fulfill His Word (Dan. 9:1-4).

Though Babylon fell into the hands of Darius the Mede, he was only acting as the civil ruler for Cyrus, the military leader of the Medo-Persian conquest. After two years, Darius died, and Cyrus was the undisputed "king" of Persia. It was in this first year of his sole reign that he made the proclamation allowing the Jews to return to Judah (Ezra 1:1-6).

Daniel held an extremely high position in the new kingdom as he had in the former empire. It is possible and more than probable that Cyrus became familiar with the prophecies relating to him by Daniel's showing him the sacred scrolls. The wording of Cyrus' proclamation would indicate that he was deeply impressed with God's call for him.

Cyrus in Prophecy: Isaiah's prophecy naming Cyrus as the "shepherd" who would accomplish God's will was given over two hundred years earlier. The precision with which this prophecy was fulfilled has been a major stumbling block to some so-called "higher critics" of the Bible. Their explanation for such a thing to happen is to say that Isaiah was written by two or more dif-

ferent people at widely different times and that the part which mentions Cyrus by name was written after the fact. It is alleged that this book was combined under a single author's name at a later date. Evidence refuting this charge is overwhelming. Only those who would deny that a supernatural God would act in the affairs of man would even hint that such a God was incapable of making known an event two hundred years before the fact took place.

As if to underscore the greatness of this prophecy, God had Isaiah include it among some grand reminders of His supernatural powers (Isa. 44:28). Note that he was to accomplish two specific things: the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple. The city and the house of God were the prime objects of His attention. Both of these items were mentioned in Cyrus' proclamation.

Jeremiah was a much-maligned prophet in his day, yet he accurately foretold the destruction of Babylon by a nation from the "north" (Jer. 50:1-3). This prophecy was given in the fourth year of Zedekiah when Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was at the peak of its glory (v. 17; 51:59-64). Its destruction and desolation was undreamed of in those days. Jeremiah goes so far as to mention the people who would destroy Babylon (vv. 11,28). Then *right on schedule*, the prophecies of the Lord were fulfilled in exactly the manner in which His servants had declared.

The Lessons: Even though God used the Babylonians to inflict punishment on His people, their actions in this regard and their general ungodliness did not escape His attention. The chastisement of Judah was to correct a very grievous sin. It was done in the love with which a father corrects a son, though of necessity his measures are harsh. Never again was Judah guilty of idolatry though she failed again in other ways. God's judgment of Babylon was just retribution for her sins. Her destruction was to be total; her fall was to be great in the land (Jer. 50:41-46). Babylon, like Egypt, is a type of the world. It represents the finest accomplishments of world riches and government. The best of the whole earth, the kingdom of the world, the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, this "praise of the whole earth was seized" and totally destroyed (Jer. 51:41). Those who were rich in earthly treasures lost everything in its destruction (v. 13). Babylon fell for the slain of Israel, as the slain of the earth fell for Babylon (v. 49).

Lest there be an over-emphasis on the judgment of God, mention must be made of God's great mercy and love. For the sake of His love for His children, He raised up Cyrus and called him by name (Isa. 45:4). In no way did they earn the right to return to their homeland. God pardoned His people (Jer. 50:20). Pardon means to release a person from punishment, to cancel a penalty. Only because of His great love did God grant pardon to Israel. Today, through His Son Jesus, God offers a pardon to all the world (John 3:16).

A final note of importance is the power of God as manifested on behalf of His people. The return to Jerusalem was an event greater and more powerful than the deliverance from Egypt (Jer. 16:14-16). Cyrus was made to know plainly that he was dealing with the Creator of the universe and was not to question His actions (Isa. 45:9-13). In this passage the whole world is admonished to recognize the power of the living God in accomplishing His purposes. What folly to trust in

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ZERUBBABEL

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Ezra 1:7; 2:1,61-70
Tuesday:	Ezra 3
Wednesday:	Ezra 5
Thursday:	Haggai 1
Friday:	Haggai 2:1-9
Saturday:	Haggai 2:10-23
Sunday:	Ezra 6:13-22

MEMORY VERSE:

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).

INTRODUCTION:

Over forty thousand devout Jews responded to the offer which Cyrus made allowing them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and its temple. Included among these and appointed as their leader or governor by Cyrus was Zerubbabel, also known as Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8,11). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last legitimate king of the line of David, Zerubbabel was the rightful heir to the throne of David and the logical choice for their leader (see Ezra 3:2; Matt. 1:12). That he was also well qualified from the standpoint of his interests and attitude is evident from the care with which he organized and selected those who would accompany him. Particularly with regard to the priesthood, careful search was made in the genealogies to assure that only those who were truly descendants of the priestly line would minister. Those who were not found registered were expelled. Purity was rigidly maintained.

LESSON NOTES:

The Effort: The prime objective of the returning Jews was the rebuilding of the city and the temple. To this end Cyrus donated the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had removed seventy years previously. He also made arrangements for the Jews to be provided with whatever materials were needed for the work. These materials were to come from the countries surrounding Judah over which Cyrus also ruled.

Those who joined Zerubbabel in the effort were those Jews who had been unwilling to compromise their faith and who were willing to give up all their possessions in Babylon to see the house of God rebuilt. Babylon was not their home, and they eagerly responded to the opportunity to remove themselves from this pagan society to serve their God. Devout and committed to purity, this godly remnant set out on a difficult journey but one in which each had freely volunteered because of their zeal for the Lord. It is, incidentally, from this group of "separatists" or "puritans" that the Pharisees later sprang.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, the altar of God was immediately constructed (Ezra 3:2). Since it was the seventh month of the year, they also kept the feast of tabernacles, an appropriate celebration for this "ingathering" of those who loved the Lord (v.4). It is

explicitly stated that at this point in time the "foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid" (v.6). Not until the second year of their coming did they "set forward the work of the house of the Lord" (v.8). There is good reason to believe that it was not until fifteen years later than the foundation was actually completed. Verse 10 of Ezra 3 refers to this time "when" the builders finished the foundation. Note it does not say "then," but, "when." Chapter 4 of Ezra explains why there was this fifteen-year delay.

The Opposition: The returning Jews were not without their adversaries. Even as the altar was being built, fear was upon them "because of the people of those countries" (3:3). Quickly these adversaries challenged the work of Zerubbabel (4:3). By many different means they "troubled" the builders, "weakened" the spirit and will of the people, and "frustrated" their purpose (vv. 4,5). Thus the work ceased until "the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia," which was fifteen years later (v. 24).

During this interval, the Jewish pioneers settled back to build houses for themselves. Apparently little opposition was given them as they built their own homes. It was construction of the house of God which stirred their enemies to wrath (see 4:12,13)! Very little was spared in the way of materials and energy in building houses for themselves. The "cield" houses referred to in Haggai 1:4 conjure up the image of large houses with high ceilings and lavishly decorated. In the Amplified Version this verse reads, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in paneled houses, while this house of the Lord lies in ruins?" (Hag. 1:4).

It was this prophesying of Haggai, along with Zechariah, that made the people renew their efforts on behalf of the temple. Both prophets were moved to speak in the second year of Darius (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Ezra 5:1). Their preaching stirred up Zerubbabel, who had given up the construction of the temple fifteen years earlier, so that the work was resumed (Ezra 5:2). As could be expected as soon as they began again, the enemy immediately attempted to hinder the work (v.3). This time, through the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the work prospered (Ezra 6:14). Zerubbabel and the people stuck to their work despite the opposition, and the dedication of the finished house was celebrated with great joy (v.22).

The Lessons: Opposition to the work of the Lord should be expected. There is no effort which will go unnoticed or uncontested by our "adversary." Whether in the personal desire for victory over some failing in the life or in an effort by a group of believers to advance the kingdom of God, there will be opposition. At such times, it must be remembered that "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Zerubbabel proved the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). God does not want us to give up at the sign of difficulty. He wants us to press on and trust Him for victory.

As soon as the Jews diverted their energies from the temple to their own needs, their work went for naught. They worked hard but had little to show for it (Hag. 1:9). Much was planted but little brought in. Wages that were earned never seemed adequate to cover their needs (v.6). Whenever we fail to put God first, our efforts never satisfy. But when we seek first

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THE GODLY FAMILY

DAILY READINGS:

<i>Monday:</i>	Exodus 1:15-22
<i>Tuesday:</i>	Exodus 2:1-10
<i>Wednesday:</i>	Exodus 12:24-27; 13:5-16
<i>Thursday:</i>	Deuteronomy 6:1-13
<i>Friday:</i>	Deuteronomy 6:14-25
<i>Saturday:</i>	Deuteronomy 11:13-21
<i>Sunday:</i>	Colossians 3:12-25

MEMORY VERSE:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deuteronomy 6:7).

INTRODUCTION:

One of the more obvious distinctions between man and the rest of God's created beings is his organization into a family unit. Every society in every nation is built around the family made up of husband and wife and their offspring. Such order was ordained by God from the very beginning in the establishment of Adam and Eve as an integral unit upon which mankind would advance. History has repeatedly shown that a society's prosperity or failure is related directly to the strength or weakness of its family structure.

LESSON NOTES:

Faith: The godly family is first and foremost built around godly concepts. At the very root of these concepts is faith in God Himself. This faith believes that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It further believes that He not only has a vital concern over His children but that He intercedes on their behalf. Without such a basic building block the godly family may as well cease to attempt a godly existence.

One wonders, as he reads the story of Moses' early days when his life was in constant jeopardy, what prompted his mother to hide him three months. Did she think the sentence of death would pass? What thoughts were in her mind when she placed him in the ark and put him in the river? Would he not have been safer in her custody? Did she actually think he could survive very long in that ark? What was her purpose, and what was her hope?

One further wonders if she knew that this part of the river was the customary bathing spot of Pharaoh's daughter. Did she anticipate what might happen when the daughter of the very man who issued the decree of death would look into the face of a three-month-old child and see helplessness, fear, and trustfulness mingled in his eyes? Perhaps not. Perhaps she was simply acting on an inner impulse directing her to take this step at this time. Whatever her reasons, thoughts, and motives, we know for certain that she

acted in *faith* (Heb. 11:23). She believed that God would accomplish His purposes despite the strength of the king's command.

Practice: Mingled with faith was Jochebed's practice of godly instruction. We can be sure that in the few years in which she, by the providence of God, was permitted to train her son, she taught him diligently in the things of God. Moses was not raised to live in Pharaoh's court as a godless Egyptian even though his mother knew he would become Pharaoh's daughter's son. She trained him to live in this environment as a child of God.

Teaching was a hallmark of the early Jewish families. By the command of God, each generation was to be taught in the things of God by its elders. It was for the express purpose of *teaching* future generations that many of the Jewish ordinances were established! For example, the passover was a reminder of God's help and power that was to be indelibly impressed on each youngster's mind by the yearly observance (Ex. 12:24). To this day, Jewish children are taught the *meaning* of this service as part of its celebration. Likewise the redemption of the first-born was an ordinance intended to demonstrate vividly the mercy and goodness of the Lord (13:15). The act of redemption was further taught by the slaying of a lamb in place of an ass. If it was not redeemed in this manner, the ass was to be slain.

The important point to note is that God arranged for this instruction to be *the parent's* responsibility. It was their job to teach their children the commandments of God to the end that their children might do them and live prosperously (Deut. 6:2,3).

The Lessons: Loving the Lord with all the heart, soul, and might was the essence of the instruction which was to be diligently given. The Lord was to be presented as the first love in the heart and life of every child. Serving Him alone and fully was the concept which was to be constantly presented to the children. Nothing in life was more important than this concept. They were even given the reminder to serve Him and love Him as fully when they would abound in external goods as in their hour of relative poverty. Blessings, by their very nature, have the danger of causing the love of many to wax cold (Deut. 6:5-12).

Complete love for God was to be *diligently* taught to the children. A half-hearted effort would not do. No opportunity was to go by without this instruction. The home was to be saturated with reminders of God's commandments. Each meal, each conversation, each journey together was to be an occasion for promoting a love for God. Careless, casual, or half-hearted stabs at instruction in righteousness will not impress children with its importance. They must see how much their own parents are impressed with what they teach.

In this connection two points could be noted. It is of interest that in the preparations for the passover, leaven was not to be *seen* in their quarters. What is seen is as important as what is said, if not more so (Ex. 13:7). The second point is that God's words were to be laid up first in the parent's heart and then taught to the children. It is futile to instruct the child to serve God alone and fully when the parent does neither. When the Word of Christ dwells richly in the parents and their instruction and admonishments are done in the wisdom of that Word, then the matter of a godly family will resolve itself.

BIRTH OF THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	John 3:1-21
Tuesday:	2 Corinthians 5:10-21
Wednesday:	Ephesians 2:1-22
Thursday:	Titus 2:11-3:8
Friday:	1 Peter 1:3-25
Saturday:	1 John 3:1-24
Sunday:	1 John 5:1-21

MEMORY VERSE:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

INTRODUCTION:

One of the best-known stories of the life of Christ is His meeting with a Pharisee called Nicodemus. This ruler of the Jews came to Jesus by night and engaged Him in a conversation. It was from this meeting and conversation that the most familiar verse used in gospel witnessing is found (John 3:16). It is also from the words of Jesus on this occasion that we have the most sublime teaching on the basic fundamental cornerstone of the gospel.

LESSON NOTES:

The New Birth: Nowhere does it say that Nicodemus asked specifically "of salvation and light." His opening remark was simply an acknowledgment that Jesus was a "teacher" sent from God. This was the conclusion Nicodemus reached after he had seen what must have been several outstanding miracles (John 3:2). Jesus, who knows the secrets of every heart, picked up the conversation from this point and led it into the truth which Nicodemus was seeking.

As a religious leader of his day, Nicodemus was looking forward to the long-awaited kingdom. Every man "sent from God" would be intensely questioned on this point. Perhaps in anticipation of this thinking Jesus began by saying, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v.3).

This concept of a "new birth" as related to the kingdom of God was completely foreign to Nicodemus who was looking for a physical kingdom. The concept itself, however, was not foreign to him, for a Gentile who became converted to Judaism and so a "proselyte" was considered to have been "born again." Jesus made it plain that the matters of the kingdom had to do with the spirit and the soul (vv.4-6). To illustrate the spiritual and unseen aspects of the kingdom, the new birth was likened to the wind which cannot be seen by the eye. It has no physical substance though its effect is real and can very definitely be felt (v.8).

The New Life: Just as an apple tree is known by the apples which grow on it, so a truly "born-again" person is known by the fruits of his new life. All through the New Testament the emphasis is on the new life resultant from the new birth. Old things, that is, the former way of living, are passed away, and all

things are become new. New interests and new desires, different from the old way of life, take the place of these former things.

One of the things which the Christian community debates endlessly is the relation of "works" to "faith." The Bible is very clear as to the relationship between the two. Grace alone saves us. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation (see Titus 3:1-8). Salvation is by grace through faith. This means that we believe in His gracious provision and accept His offer. However, we are created unto good works, to walk in them once we have been born again (see Eph. 2:10). Without exception, this theme recurs in *all* the teachings of the New Testament. Peter tells us not to be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance (1 Peter 1:14). John tells us that every one who has the hope of salvation in him purifies himself as He is pure. Obviously there is an effort required of us beyond simply believing and then going our own way.

The Lessons: Being "born again" simply means that we begin life again with a new nature and a new character. It is a fresh start. It is the embodiment of a new spirit different from the old. When we entered the world the first time, we bore the likeness and spirit of the world just as we inherited certain physical traits from our parents. Being born again is a birth of the Spirit of God which stamps His image upon us and thus makes us His children and heirs to His blessings in life. It is a miraculous birth in which the former things pass away and all things become new. We don't know how it happens, but we know it does.

The *only* way in which this new birth can be obtained is through believing on Jesus. There is no way in which the wisdom of this world can accept or describe this procedure. Read Numbers 21:4-9 to obtain an illustration of what is meant by "looking" at Jesus. Note that an image of that which brought the plague was sufficient to overcome the effects of these serpents. So Christ was made a curse for us, and simply looking to Him provides salvation.

The purpose of salvation is that we might become the "righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Accepting His death as a substitution for our death means we no longer live unto ourselves but for Him (v.15). The mark of the child of God is his life (1 John 3:10). For example, love, as well as other good works, is to be in deed, not in word or speech. In other words, action, not talk, is the sign of him that is born of the Spirit.

The birth of the Spirit is but the *beginning* of a new life. The kingdom of God goes far beyond this entry point. However, in order to "see" or "enter" this kingdom, we must begin with the new birth.. This is the thing which all the prophets prophesied and which was ordained from the foundation of the earth (1 Peter 1:19,20). This is the door by which all, Jew and Gentile alike, enter into the kingdom of God (Eph. 2:14-28). It is a gift of God given through His love for us. Only through this birth of the Spirit can all the promises of the kingdom be realized in our lives.

Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently (Psalm 119:4).

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

<i>Monday:</i>	John 14:15-31
<i>Tuesday:</i>	John 16:7-33
<i>Wednesday:</i>	Acts 1:1-14
<i>Thursday:</i>	Acts 2:1-21
<i>Friday:</i>	Acts 8:1-25
<i>Saturday:</i>	Acts 11:1-18
<i>Sunday:</i>	Acts 19:1-12

MEMORY VERSE:

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:5).

INTRODUCTION:

In the days immediately following the death and resurrection of the Lord, the disciples were quite bewildered. It is understandable that joy, doubt, curiosity, and uncertainty were mingled in their minds. So little did they comprehend what had already taken place, it would be normal for them to wonder what would happen next. Were the crucifixion and resurrection the end of the Lord's ministry or was there more to come? From all that the Lord had previously taught, it was certain that they were just at the beginning of what God had intended to do for them.

LESSON NOTES:

The Comforter: If it confused the disciples to hear the Lord speak of His suffering and dying prior to the crucifixion, to say nothing of His rising again, one can imagine what talk of "coming again" or of "another Comforter" did to them. The Apostle John records at length a teaching which Jesus gave them regarding His future ministry and the questions which this teaching raised in their minds.

Several basic points were made in this regard. The first is that He was going to be leaving them in one sense, but in another sense, He at the same time would become more powerfully present with them. No longer would they see Him as flesh and blood, yet His presence would be as real and as pleasant as His bodily presence had been. This is the meaning of sending "another Comforter" (John 14:16). Note that this "other" Comforter would be the Spirit of truth which only those who know Him can receive. He would abide forever (v.6), make His abode with us (v.23), teach us all things (v.27), and glorify the Son (16:13). At the same time His presence in the world would reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:10).

A second basic point was that though He was sending "another" Comforter, it was Jesus Himself who was actually returning to His disciples in another form (14:18). Another, yet not another, for the Son and the Spirit are one as the Father and the Son are one. It is important to establish that the Holy Spirit, another name for this other Comforter, is a person in the same sense as the Father and Son are persons. As such we should speak of Him as a person, referring to "Him" instead of "it," as if speaking of some vague

force.

The Baptism: Further teaching by the Lord on this subject no doubt took place during those forty days in which Jesus spoke of those things pertaining to the kingdom of God following His resurrection (Acts 1:3). Then that famous event in church history familiar to all of us, took place on the Day of Pentecost.

This is not the only event of the "baptism of the Spirit" recorded in the New Testament though as the first it has the most interest. It was this event to which the others were compared. Changes in ability and vision occurred on that day which were to revolutionize the body of Christ. It was this event which illuminated many of the teachings of Jesus and firmly connected His ministry to the "promise of the Father" and those wonderful fulfillments of prophecy which the Jewish people expected.

In all the documented events of the baptism of the Spirit, one point is clear throughout. The experience was a separate stage of a work of God, and its occurrence was evident not only to those who experienced it but to those who were in their company at the time. In several of the cases, believers were baptized some days after their conversion, while in the case of Cornelius, it appears to have happened within moments or in conjunction with his acceptance of Jesus as His Lord (Acts 10:44,45). In all cases it depended first upon repentance and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lessons: One of the major signs, but by no means the only sign, of the baptism was the experience of speaking in other tongues. On the day of Pentecost these "tongues" were recognizable by those of other countries who happened to be in the city at the time for the great feast of Pentecost. In all cases the tongues magnified and glorified God and bore witness to the work of Jesus (Acts 2:11; 10:46).

The word "baptism" as used in connection with this experience comes from John the Baptist's prophecy that "He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:16). As the body is totally immersed in water during water baptism, so it is completely surrounded and immersed in the Spirit of God during the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Other terms are "endowment with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), "receiving" the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:2), being "filled," etc. All of these describe the same experience and are instructive as to its operation.

In the early days of the church one's experience was considered incomplete if he had not received the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience. Repentance and faith were but the door-openers to the full measure of blessing that God sent through Jesus Christ. When Paul reached a city and found out that the believers had not as yet so much as heard about the Holy Spirit, he refused to consider anything else but labored and taught until they were filled (Acts 19:1-12).

As soon as Peter and the others experienced the baptism, they realized that this was what Joel had foretold (Acts 2:16). It was an experience for men and women alike, for the old as well as the young (v.17). Singled out for particular mention are the "servants" and "handmaidens," male and female slaves, the humblest class of people (v.18). Finally it was for all who were afar off, that is, the Gentile (v.39). Peter was to face a test of his own words, later at the home of Cornelius and see them fulfilled (Acts 11:15-18). It is an experience promised to *all* flesh and God's promises have never yet been proven false.

WITNESSING BY THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Acts 2
Tuesday:	Acts 3
Wednesday:	Acts 4
Thursday:	Acts 5:12-32
Friday:	Acts 10
Saturday:	Acts 22
Sunday:	Acts 23:1-11; 28:16-31

MEMORY VERSE:

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

INTRODUCTION:

There is no doubt that a primary purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to produce a people who will bear witness to the power of God. Witnesses are not only those who speak freely of the things of God but those whose lives show forth His glory. It is in this sense that the entire work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to produce a life which will glorify God. There was almost no witnessing done prior to the day of Pentecost. However, beginning with that day the Word of God was declared with power and boldness.

LESSON NOTES:

They Shall Prophesy: It is well to remember that the word "prophesy" means to "bring a message." A prophet of God in the Bible was one who brought a message from God. He was a public proclaimer of the Word of God. Therefore, when in connection with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, we are told that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17), it means that they will declare the message of God to their own generation.

It goes without saying that Peter was a different man following his baptism in the Holy Ghost. The words he spoke were exceedingly effective in declaring God's message, causing three thousand to see their need and repent. To have people "call on the name of the Lord" to be saved is a primary purpose of prophesying (v.21).

Examining Peter's words we find the emphasis was on the resurrection of Jesus. Peter used this as the proof that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, the fulfillment of prophecy and the Savior of mankind (v. 36; 4:2,33). In these sermons we do not find Peter stressing the judgment to come on those who refuse to believe. Rather, we see him declaring the blessings of the new life to be found in having our sins remitted. Jesus came to "bless" (see 3:26). Repentance and forgiveness of sins were the foundation stones of a new life of blessing (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43). It was the words of "this life" which the disciples were commanded to preach (5:20).

His Witnesses: A witness is one who has either observed something firsthand or who has been personally involved in an event. What made Peter such an effective witness was his experience of the power of

God in his own life. Not only did he experience something, he possessed something worth talking about. He was able to say "such as I have I give thee" (3:6). We might note in passing that this first healing at the hands of the apostles following Pentecost produced "perfect soundness" (v.16). Such is ever the case when the power of God is manifested.

A person speaks with boldness and authority when he has experienced something. Nobody can gainsay the testimony of a person who has experienced reality.

Despite the many unusual and prominent blessings attending his witnessing, Peter remained humble and glorified God (3:12). He never attracted attention to himself or spoke about himself; he always glorified Jesus (4:10). So much of our witnessing and testifying centers about ourselves. Instead, it should center about Jesus and cause people to desire Him. True witnessing will cause men to glorify God (v.21).

The Lessons: No witnessing for the Lord can be effective and convincing unless it comes from a life which has experienced the reality of salvation. Note that the disciples were not sent out immediately to witness, although they knew that that was to be their mission (Matt. 28:20). Rather they were told to tarry, that is to wait, until they were endued with power from on high, and only after that were they to witness. In fact, from the reading of the first several chapters in Acts, it is apparent that the witnessing was an automatic outgrowth of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. No one had to tell the disciples to talk about the Lord; they were so full of the reality of Jesus it just flowed out. Not even the threat of man could stop them (4:19).

Boldness was a result of the infilling of the Holy Ghost. Whenever the Holy Spirit was upon them, they spoke the word with boldness (4:13,31). Note that they prayed specifically that they might speak the Word "with all boldness" (v.30). This prayer was answered with another mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.

Many signs and wonders were wrought by the apostles (5:12). God was confirming His Word with signs following. Believers were added to the Lord as Jerusalem was filled with their doctrine (5:14,28). The Lord is depending on us to be His witnesses and to fill the world with His doctrine. This cannot be done by our own initiative no matter how well intentioned or highly motivated we are. It is the Spirit of God which convicts the world of sin, of unrighteousness and of judgment. It is also the Spirit of God which must provide the push and impetus to make our witnessing effective. We are His witnesses and so is the Holy Ghost (5:32). He has commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead (10:42). His witnesses will speak of that which they have seen and heard (22:15).

Open thou mine eyes,
that I may behold wondrous
things out of Thy law
(Psalm 119:18).

LED BY THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

<i>Monday:</i>	Acts 8:26-40
<i>Tuesday:</i>	Acts 10:1-24
<i>Wednesday:</i>	Acts 13
<i>Thursday:</i>	Acts 15:1-32
<i>Friday:</i>	Acts 16:1-18
<i>Saturday:</i>	Acts 17:16-34
<i>Sunday:</i>	Acts 18:1-18

MEMORY VERSE:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14).

INTRODUCTION:

Comparisons are often made between the early church and the church of today. It is almost generally agreed that the "dynamic" of the early church does not presently exist as it did then. Many varying theories have been advanced to support this charge. Certainly it is true that few, if any, groups of believers are having the kind of impact upon their city or society as Peter, Philip and the others had in the days following Pentecost and up until the end of the New Testament era. Several reasons exist for this difference not the least of which is the manner in which the Apostles were led by the Spirit.

LESSON NOTES:

Jerusalem and Samaria: One of the hallmarks of the early church was its absolute reliance not only on the power of the Holy Spirit but on the leading of the Holy Spirit. In connection with this, it must be pointed out that the leadings of the Holy Spirit and *obedience* to these leadings constituted the strength of their mission. As they followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit they always had fruitful results.

A variety of methods were used by the Spirit to lead His church. First, it was an "angel" who told Philip to go to the middle of a desert (Acts 8:36). However illogical this may have seemed to the natural man, Philip went. Then the Spirit prompted him to join himself to the chariot (v.29). From that point on, it was a matter of explaining that which he knew to be the truth to one who was seeking an answer (v.35). In the case of the Cornelius, he saw an "angel" in his vision (10:3). Peter fell into a trance and saw a vision whose symbolic meaning he didn't understand. Three times the vision had to be repeated before his natural resistance subsided (10:10,17). Finally, the Spirit communicated to Peter specific knowledge and instruction which he followed. Here is a perfect example of the gift of knowledge, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12, in operation.

Uttermost Parts of the Earth: Very few steps were taken by the early church without the definite leading of the Holy Ghost. The fulfillment of the command to carry the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth did not take place until the Holy Ghost explicitly directed the church at Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas forth to the work to which they had been previously called. We are not told exactly how this knowledge was com-

municated to the church. We do know that it was a Spirit-filled church and a Spirit-directed church that spent much time in waiting before the Lord (13:2). Whatever leadings Paul and Barnabas had as to the specifics of what they were separated unto, it is clear that they judged all leadings in light of the Scriptures (v.47).

A very significant role was played by the Holy Spirit in the First Church Council. Note that even though these men were Spirit-filled and Spirit-led they did not always have perfect knowledge just automatically. Ingrained prejudices and feelings are not wiped away in one broad sweep. Observe, however, how they leaned on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Peter used his experience of being led by the Holy Spirit as an argument in favor of agreeing that salvation for the Gentiles was through faith alone. Paul showed how his Holy Spirit-inspired journey was confirmed by its results. Lastly, James' decree was based on the Scripture and given in Holy Ghost wisdom, for we read how "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," etc. (15:28).

On Paul's second missionary journey we have an interesting example of how the Spirit led Paul. His own inclination was to go to Asia but the Spirit somehow prevented this (16:6). When he then thought to go to Bithynia we read the "Spirit of Jesus" forbade him (v.7 RSV). This is the only use of this expression in the New Testament. Finally, it was a vision which he and Luke felt was the call of God which took him into Europe.

The Lessons: All of the visions and dreams of the apostles had very practical effects. This method of leading has come into much disrepute in these days because of some of the foolishness which people have attributed to visions and other revelations. The fact that there has been so much error and confusion on account of purported visions and dreams does not mean that all visions and dreams are in error. God still speaks to people that way today. One is impressed by reading the accounts in Acts how the visions and dreams did not become the essence of their life and a sign of superior spirituality. They kept their visions to themselves and acted in response to the leading thus given. This action and its results attest to the genuineness of the leading.

Without doubt the secret of the power of the early church was its desire to know God's will and acting upon this knowledge only after this had been revealed. Once they knew God's will, they obeyed explicitly. Much of the time they were led just one step at a time. Obedience to each step resulted in knowledge of what to do next. They didn't try to out-guess God or plan ahead for Him. They allowed Him to lead, and they maintained the simple faith of just following. It takes a great deal of faith, self-control, humility, abandonment, and obedience to live this way. Very few of us are content with such a mode. We do have examples today, however, of the results which those who have endeavored to walk in this way have had.

In all facets of their lives the Holy Spirit led these early disciples. One of the most marvelous things to behold was the manner in which He guided them into all truths just as Jesus had promised He would. A Spirit-filled life does not invest one with completeness or perfection. Each day as the Spirit is allowed to lead, new light is given. The decision of the First Church Council is an example of how the Spirit gave light in

(Continued on last page)

MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	1 Corinthians 12:1-13
Tuesday:	1 Corinthians 12:14-31
Wednesday:	1 Corinthians 13
Thursday:	1 Corinthians 14:1-20
Friday:	1 Corinthians 14:21-40
Saturday:	Romans 12
Sunday:	Ephesians 4:1-16

MEMORY VERSE:

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will (1 Corinthians 12:11).

INTRODUCTION:

If the Comforter, who is to abide forever, is to be as powerful as Jesus was among His disciples, it is necessary that He have a ministry which is precisely ordered and effective. By this is meant that He must be able to communicate truth, strength, and direction to the body He indwells. He must be able to teach, instruct, encourage, and correct just as Jesus did. Much of this ministry comes through the "gifts of the Spirit," called "spiritual gifts" in 1 Corinthians 12:1. In addition, it is through these gifts in human beings that the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit is manifested to the world.

LESSON NOTES:

The Gifts of the Spirit: The Holy Spirit is a person who works in the life of every believer, for without the Spirit of God, no man can turn from dumb idols to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 12:2,3). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been promised to all believers in the form of the baptism of the Spirit as discussed in a previous lesson. In addition to this, the Holy Spirit gives different ones special abilities in the body of Christ; these are called "spiritual gifts" or "gifts of the Spirit" (vv. 1,4). These gifts are similar to those abilities Jesus gave His disciples when He sent them forth (Matt. 10:1,8).

Nine gifts are listed here by Paul. These are: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation (vv. 4-11). All these gifts are given by the selfsame Spirit; therefore, there is unity in their purpose. They are bestowed as it pleases Him, that is, to whom He pleases and in what measure He pleases. Operated by the Spirit, these gifts provide all the necessary ministration in the church of God.

Paul places particular emphasis on the diversity of the gifts, the sovereignty of the Giver, and the

fact that they all work together for one central purpose — to profit all.

The Purpose of the Gifts: Apparently the Corinthians had fallen into the error of esteeming certain gifts more highly than others and attaching status to particular gifts. Needless to say, this was divisive, breaking the intended unity of the Spirit. Perhaps it was the more spectacular gifts, such as the gift of tongues, which caught their fancy and took them a bit off the track. In any event, Paul devotes much space to teaching regarding prophecy (1 Cor. 14).

Again, let it be understood that to prophesy is to speak the word of God for the occasion. Prophecy consists of words that edify, exhort, and comfort spoken directly by the Spirit Himself. They should be words "easy to be understood" (vv. 3,9). True prophecy will pierce hearts, making manifest its secrets and causing people to worship God (v. 25).

The purpose of all prophecy and the other gifts of the Spirit is to perfect the saints, perform the work of the ministry, and to edify the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). All of these are wrapped up in the ultimate goal of perfection, so that all of God's children might attain to a growth reaching the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (v. 13). It is the whole body of Christ, made up of all the various individual believers, that must grow up into Him in all things in order to attain to perfection (vv. 15,16). All gifts are not only subservient to this purpose, but given that this purpose might be reached.

The Lessons: Sandwiched between the doctrinal teachings on the gifts of the Spirit is the exquisite chapter known as "the love chapter" (1 Cor. 13). It is no accident that Paul places this topic here, for it is the real "meat" of the entire subject. The gifts of the Spirit are temporary, while love abides forever. (Incidentally, some have used verse 8 as an argument that the gifts of the Spirit were only for the early church and these gifts have "ended" long since. Unless we assume that that which is perfect is already come (v. 10), such an interpretation distorts the teaching.)

All gifts are eclipsed by love. Love is that "more excellent way" by which unity is maintained, the means whereby the gifts are operated effectively. It is so essential to recognize the oneness of the body of Christ. Paul labors over this point, stressing that the bestowal of gifts is not a sign of favor of one member over another. Different ones receive different gifts from God, and each has a particular function in the body of Christ. No one member, no matter what his gift, has any more honor in God's sight than any other. All need to find their place and to function harmoniously.

Having recognized the purpose and goal of gifts, it is essential that each one present his body "a living sacrifice unto God," that He may fit it into His body as it pleases Him. In other words, we are to offer ourselves to Him, willing to be used as He sees fit, not concerning ourselves with how we are used or how our call matches someone else's call, and certainly not comparing spiritual progress by either the presence or absence of a gift. It is the Spirit of God who wants to minister among His people. As they present themselves wholly and acceptable as part of their reasonable service, conformable to God and not the world, His ministry will reach its ultimate perfection.

WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

<i>Monday:</i>	John 4:1-26
<i>Tuesday:</i>	1 Corinthians 14
<i>Wednesday:</i>	Ephesians 5:18-33
<i>Thursday:</i>	1 Chronicles 16:7-36
<i>Friday:</i>	Psalm 100
<i>Saturday:</i>	Psalm 149
<i>Sunday:</i>	Psalm 150

MEMORY VERSE:

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

INTRODUCTION:

Worship had always been a central feature of the Jewish life. Altars were continually set up by the patriarchs for the worship of God. Next to the law, the receiving of the plans for the tabernacle occupied most of Moses' time on the mount. Erected as a place where God would meet with His people, the tabernacle literally became the hub around which the Jews lived. Solomon later built a more splendid temple, and his father before him had prepared a book of hymns for worship. In Jesus' day, the temple rebuilt by Herod was still the focal point of all Jewish worship.

LESSON NOTES:

In Spirit and Truth: The Samaritans had their roots in the Jewish nation and thus had a similar knowledge of the worship of God. As descendants of the northern kingdom (Israel) who had intermarried with heathen nations at the time of their captivity, they were half-Jews. Naturally, hard and fast boundaries of prejudice were drawn between the "pure" Jews and the "impure" Samaritans. Piously excluding each other from their society, the Jews worshipped at Jerusalem and the Samaritans in Samaria. So great were the feelings between Jew and Samaritan that Jesus once used the illustration of a Samaritan helping a beaten Jew as the ultimate of brotherly love, and the woman at the well wondered why a Jew would ask a Samaritan for water, seeing "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9).

The heart's cry for reality knows no human boundary. Worship and church services may seem to answer the heart's inner cry for peace but only serve to stimulate the desire further when such worship does not have reality. Perhaps it was the knowledge of the inner longing of her heart which made Jesus speak to this Samaritan of low reputation. Quickly the conversation turned to their differences of worship as so often happens, even today. Jesus cut through the difficulty by defining the true worshipper as one who was not confined to time or place or ritual in his worship but who worshipped in spirit and in truth (vv. 21-24).

Praise and Thanksgiving: Both the Old and New

Testament exhort the worshipper to give thanks. Living in a state of perpetual thanksgiving and joyfulness regardless of the circumstances is what Paul expected of the Ephesians (5:18-20). Paul was not so naive as to think that circumstances would always be cause for people to rejoice naturally. Yet he told them to give "thanks always for all things unto God." Worshipping the Lord is enjoying His presence. Being filled with the Spirit should cause us to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord.

When David brought the ark to Jerusalem, he taught his people how to worship (1 Chron. 16:7-36). A partial list of some of the ways he included in his worship are "give thanks," "sing unto Him," "glory in His name," "rejoice," "tell of His wondrous works," "be mindful of His covenant," etc. None of these suggest at all the mournful and sad ritual which we sometimes think is very religious. Joy and peace are to be the trademark of the true worshipper. How we need to learn more to come before His presence with singing, making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Over and over again, David's psalms tell us to serve Him with gladness, to enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.

The Lessons: God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Often we think that we must take the initiative and strain to get God's attention, when all the time He is seeking us. Making contact with God is a matter of putting our whole spirit into the exercise of worship. Ritual, form, church services, or other devices of worship are not the essence of worship. In some cases they may help, but the true worshipper is one who worships the Lord with his innermost being. Such worship can take place anytime and anywhere, and indeed should take place all the time and everywhere.

Praise and thanksgiving are not natural functions. Unfortunately, we all prove to be unthankful. It takes a specific effort to be joyful at all times. Down through the pages of church history up to the present day, we have examples of the great triumphs which came to those who lived a life of praising the Lord. Many of them had to train themselves to simply say, "Praise the Lord," when trials came. (Anyone can say, "Praise the Lord," when they are basking in the sunshine of victory!) Why would Paul and David and others continually urge us to praise the Lord unless there was a great lesson to be learned here?

Part of the difficulty in praising the Lord is the self-consciousness of rejoicing before an unseen Person. Yet we must remember that God is unseen and being a Spirit wants us to enter into worship with our whole spirit. "In truth" means giving ourselves completely, not as a form but as an honest experience. Another hindrance to praising the Lord is the consciousness of our own mistakes. Remember, we don't praise the Lord for what we are, we praise Him for what He is. As a well-known motto reads, "Praise the Lord — anyhow."

I will bless the Lord
at all times: His praise
shall continually be in
my mouth (Psalm 34:1).

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

DAILY READINGS:

Monday:	Romans 8:1-17
Tuesday:	Galatians 5:13-26
Wednesday:	Ephesians 5:1-14
Thursday:	Ephesians 5:15-33
Friday:	Ephesians 6:1-18
Saturday:	Colossians 3:1-11
Sunday:	1 John 1:1-10

MEMORY VERSE:

This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

INTRODUCTION:

Once a person is born of the Spirit, it should be inevitable that his life be lived in the Spirit. As birth is followed by life, the birth of the Spirit must be followed by growth and development into the maturity of a walk in the Spirit.

This walk in the Spirit will affect all aspects of the life, whether it be business, social, or in the home. Situations arise daily in which the flesh in its natural state reacts in a way which displeases God. The walk in the Spirit is a life in which each action is in accordance with God's will, thus fulfilling the law of righteousness.

LESSON NOTES:

After The Spirit: The person who has truly become a new creature in Christ will seek a walk which is "after the Spirit." Clearly, a distinction is made in Romans 8 between those who choose to walk "after the flesh" and those who choose to walk "after the Spirit" (v.1). Those who have received the Spirit of Christ should become "spiritually minded." That is, they will mind those things which are above rather than the things of the flesh (vv.5,6).

The walk after the Spirit is both the responsibility of the believer and the heritage of being in Christ. It is without question the believer's responsibility to make the choice of yielding his members as instruments of righteousness. Even the regenerate mind will be tempted towards carnality. This carnal mind is enmity against God and cannot please Him (vv.7,8). Yet while the choice is up to us to walk after the Spirit, our own energy will prove inadequate. Only as the Spirit becomes life will we be able to live after the Spirit.

This latter point deserves emphasis, for it declares one of the grand truths of the believer's walk. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, we have God's emphatic promise that this Spirit *will quicken* our mortal bodies. In a very real sense, this can apply to the healing of our bodies if that be a need. In an even larger sense, it applies to our daily walk and conduct before God (v.11). As heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, being children of the heavenly Father, we have the privilege and opportunity of sharing in the glories of

heaven by yielding ourselves as vessels to the Spirit of God and allowing the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled in us.

Fruits of the Spirit: Being heavenly minded and caring for those things which are above — walking in the Spirit — produce positive and concrete results in this life. It enables us to live in these bodies in a way which honors and pleases God.

Foremost on the list of the fruit of the Spirit is love. Listed as being above faith and hope and that element without which the gifts of the Spirit are a sham, love demands a change in our natural instincts. For example, it means kindness to all, no matter how unkind they may be to us. It means esteeming the other person better than ourselves. Can there be anything more contrary to the natural man than this? Yet this is what the life of the Spirit is about, and unless it is applied to the most difficult circumstances, it has no value.

Another example is joy. It is easy to rejoice when things go well. Even the world shouts and rejoices when it strikes good fortune. But the Bible calls for Christians to rejoice *always*. It is to be a way of life where in the most trying of times and the most grating of situations the natural instincts are mortified and the heart given to rejoicing.

The matter of inward purity is a further fruit of the Spirit. Keeping our minds set on those things which are true, honest, pure, and lovely, and rejecting the impure thoughts and suggestions which constantly come our way is the responsibility of the child of God. What a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

The Lessons: The fact that the Christian finds himself in a warfare is everywhere acknowledged in the Bible. That this warfare is a conflict between the works of the flesh or the "natural" man and the fruits of the Spirit or the spiritual man is also acknowledged. The flesh and the Spirit are contrary the one to the other and fight against each other. Keep in mind that Paul was writing his instructions to regenerate people. There is nothing automatic about conversion, therefore, which will bring a halt to this conflict. In fact, once a person becomes a child of God, the battle lines are drawn and this conflict begins in earnest. Conversion should bring with it the *desire* for a life walked in the Spirit (Gal. 5:17).

There is a definite step on the part of the Christian which must be taken in this warfare. That is, he must see to it that his heart is set on walking in the Spirit. Repeatedly, Paul exhorts Christian believers to "Walk as children of light"; "Mortify your members"; "Seek those things above," etc. In a sense, we control the degree of the life lived in the Spirit by the degree to which we give place to the flesh or Spirit. Paul warned that if a person continued to allow the works of the flesh to rule and have the mastery in his life, the life of God would be stifled. As we constantly maintain our guard and seek to walk in the Spirit rather than giving place to the flesh, we find that the Spirit Himself comes to take fuller control so that the fruits of the Spirit become a natural outgrowth of our lives.

People frequently credit computers with being brilliant. They are not; they are controlled by a program which meticulously guides it to perform even its minutest tasks. Its brilliance lies in its failure to be able to do anything on its own and giving place to the program. So it must be in the Christian's life — we give place to the Spirit of God to live and walk in us.

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with His "burial." Note how Mary's action was opposite to that of Judas. Where Mary spent freely in love, Judas sold his Master for money.

The resurrection is the greatest event of mankind. No other person has ever been able to claim or prove such a feat. It lent credence to the Lord's claims and proved He was the Son of God. His power over death demonstrated His complete mastery over sin and all its effects.

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dream) was in power when the Jews returned from exile. This empire overthrew the Babylonian empire. Likewise, Alexander the Great and his Greek empire (represented by bronze) succeeded the Medo-Persian empire. Finally, the Roman empire (iron, and later, iron and clay) controlled the world until the establishment of the Kingdom of God (see Dan. 2:39, 40). Truly the army of the Roman empire was as strong as iron as it subdued all nations and crushed them (see Dan. 7:7,23). Later this strong kingdom, while still maintaining a strong army, became brittle and broken because of its moral decadence.

The smooth "stone" that was cut from the mountain without human hands represented the birth of Jesus. He came to establish a kingdom which would never be destroyed (Luke 1:31-33). We see today how all of the great empires of the past lie in ruins so that not a trace of them can be found. This came about partly through the enlightenment resulting from the preaching of the kingdom of God. The stone that smote the image is becoming a great mountain and is filling all the earth (Dan. 2:35; Rev. 11:15; 19:16).

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Ezekiel lived up to his call of being a watchman. His name means "God strengthens." So close were the actual events of his life bound to his ministry that on the day when the final siege of Jerusalem began, his wife became sick and died (Ezek. 24:1-18). Blame for the failure of the people is laid at the feet of those "shepherds," the leaders of the people, who were *not* faithful to minister to God's people as they ought (34:1-12).

God's chief complaint against His people was their idolatry. Worldliness is idolatry. It is loving, going

after, and seeking the gods which the world worships. In many cases, the people of Judah also sought God, but *not with their whole heart*; they were taken up with other gods. God is working to develop a people who are wholly His, whose eyes are single. All of the things He has provided, such as a new heart and a new spirit, are designed to gather a people who will serve Him completely and do His will. The glories to be received by those who make this choice is beyond description. God's glory is going to fill all the earth without question, and He offers us the privilege of being a part of this glory and of being filled with this glory.

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the arm of flesh (vv. 14-25; Isa. 46)! God is powerful enough to accomplish His will, and His power has been manifested frequently on behalf of His people and will again be displayed in the lives of those who will trust in Him. His purposes will be accomplished regardless of what we think.

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the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all the things we have need of will be added to us, and our lives will be rich and full (Matt. 6:33).

In outward appearance the new temple failed to match the splendor of Solomon's. Many wept at this inferior product. God was not interested in the outward appearance or its size. He was looking for a place prepared for His glory. It must be remembered that the glory of God was so great in Solomon's temple the priests could not minister. God promised an even greater glory for the latter temple, the "great temple of God," the church of which this rebuilt temple was a type (Eph. 2:30). The goal of God's work is to fill this house with glory. This He has promised and the glory is beyond description.

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a matter of greater importance. Also both Peter and Paul illustrate how the Spirit led them daily into fuller light regarding the kingdom of God. We miss a great deal of blessing when we fail to enter into the place of living a Spirit-led life. Complete sonship entitles us to the knowledge of what the Father would have us do and to the mysteries of His kingdom (Acts 8:14).

