

THE WORD OF TRUTH

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Table of Contents

- * The Shepard Psalm
- * The Unfolding of The Secret
- * The Epistle to Titus
- * The Epistle to The Philippians
- * Let Us Now Go to Bethlehem
- * Getting a Blessing

THE SHEPHERD PSALM

The twenty-third Psalm has been a favorite portion of Scripture among God's people throughout the entire Christian era. It is a Psalm that could be fulfilled to the letter in the life and experience of an Israelite. Among Christians some of the most spiritual have suffered want, and even today our lives vary between green pastures and barren fields, still waters and roaring floods. However, this passage has sustained many believers in the most trying experiences of life. None would care to surrender this precious portion, but there are some who feel that we lose all claim upon it unless we can believe that we are sheep and Christ is our Shepherd.

The transcendent truth concerning Head and Body is so far reaching and sublime that it is simply a step downward to bring in along with it the relationship of shepherd and sheep. We must insist that we are not sheep, and that the figure of shepherd and sheep is not a true figure of the relationship that exists between the Lord *Jesus* as Head and the members of the Church, which is His body. He has been made Head over all to us. This is the only relationship He bears to us. All that He ever does for us He does for us as our Head. How then can we find any consolation in a Psalm that speaks of shepherd and sheep.

The problem is not a difficult one. It is solved the moment we enter into the realization of the truth that all the Shepherd of Israel did for Israel, His sheep, *Jesus* Christ our Head will do for the members of His body. And we insist, He will do even more.

Our Lord is our Head. We may experience want, but our Head can supply every need. He may cause us to find rest in a green pasture, or we may find ourselves in a parched and barren field, but we will know it is His plan. He may lead us beside still waters, or plunge us into the roaring torrent, but we will not doubt the leadership of our Head. He is sufficient for every experience. If we need restoration it will be provided, and He has promised to lead us in right paths. We will not fear the valley of the shadow of death, for our life is hid with Christ in God. Our Head will supply our needs, shield us from our enemies, cause us to enter into the very fullness of joy. His goodness and mercy has ever been our lot, and we read in the past what our future shall be.

Is there anyone who cares to say we make too much of Christ our Head, that we have too much confidence in Him? If not, then what can we lose when we exalt Him as our Head?

The End

THE UNFOLDING OF THE SECRET

(Continued from Vol. III, No. 7)

In the previous article under this title we stated that the pronouncement recorded in Acts 28:28 brought about a radical change of administration, and those who were believers found themselves living under vastly changed conditions. This forced upon them the necessity of rearranging their spiritual affairs.

Let the reader imagine himself living as a believer under the conditions that existed during the Acts period, when the Church of God existed as visible local assemblies; when men actually possessed such gifts as healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues; when angels spoke to men and dead men were restored to life; when miracles were commonplace and wonders never ceased; when there was apostolic authority, gifts of government, and the authority and government of men so gifted could be cheerfully accepted. Then let him imagine these things suddenly ceasing, and he will begin to realize the strange position in which those believers found themselves who lived at the close of the Acts period.

Before Acts 28:28, if one was sick the proper procedure was to search out the man to whom God had given the gift of healing. Failure to do this would be to despise the gifts of God. However, the pronouncement of Acts 28:28 brought about an abrupt cessation of this gift, and it has never since that day existed as it did in the Acts period. Having followed a certain pattern in sickness that could no longer be followed, they would naturally cry out, "What will we now do?" And God soon provided an answer. He uses Timothy's repeated infirmities and ailing stomach to emphasize the revelation. Timothy is directed to the wise and judicious use of means. In Philippians, prayer will be added to the means.

Thus it was that 1 Timothy and Titus were written to instruct the members of the Church of God in matters of walk and service under the altered conditions brought about by the salvation of God being sent to the Gentiles. From this viewpoint let us now examine certain features in Paul's epistle to Titus.

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS

1:1. The acknowledging of the truth. It is hard to acknowledge a thing to be the truth if it is contrary to the desires. It is easy to acknowledge anything to be true if we desire it to be true. He who would please God must ever be on guard against these tendencies. At the moment Paul wrote this epistle the truth to be acknowledged was not very pleasant. It was not natural for a gifted man to be willing to admit his gift was gone. Many would not admit a change since that change stripped them of their treasured gifts.

1:2. The life that they possessed was not affected by any change. God had promised and He could not lie.

1:4. Titus was an uncircumcised Greek.. This represents the first time that a believing Gentile has been used by God as a channel of blessing to others. Titus becomes the recipient of an oracle from God, and the dispenser of the truth it contains.

1:5. There were always elders in Israel. The office of elder is mentioned twenty four times in the four gospels, and each time it is an office in the nation of Israel. In Acts 11:30 it is mentioned first in connection with the Church of God of the Acts period. It occurs ten times in Acts and eight of these references are to the elders of the Church in Jerusalem. These were men of importance, for their authority was not strictly local; it extended out to the other churches. See Acts 16:4. Outside of Jerusalem the office was somewhat unimportant. It is never mentioned once in any of Paul's epistles written before Acts 28:28. But it suddenly appears in 1 Timothy and Titus as an office of great importance. This office was not a new thing for it carried over from Israel of the Old Testament to the Israel of God in the Acts period. During this period the office was submerged because of gifted men in the assemblies and the far reaching authority of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. When these passed then the office became a very essential one of great importance, for the elders took over supervision of the members of the Church of God until it passes the earthly scene. There was never any such office as elder among the members of the Church, which is His body.

1:9-11. The circumcision made much sport of the believers because of the sudden cessation of outward signs. However, this may refer to believing Jews, for such as these would be more prejudiced against the truth of Acts 28:28 than the believing Gentiles. Their mouths had to be stopped by sound teaching.

2:2. The circumstances through which they were passing called for the greatest possible temperance, gravity, sober-mindedness, faith, love and patience. .

3:1. These saints had been called to reign; but they must take the place of subjection. It may have been that some held that they had not been sufficiently aggressive in the day of their great powers and, therefore, missed the opportunity to take over the governments.

3:9. The greater part of the difficulties, that existed among the members of the Church of God after Acts 28:28, were introduced by the believing Jews. They could not submerge themselves to the requirements of God's latest revelation.

These two epistles, 1 Timothy and Titus, shine with a new light when they are studied in the light of the condition and position of those to whom they were written - the members of the Church of God after Acts 28:28, They dealt with conduct and service, and no new doctrine is presented or developed. They tell the members of the Church of God what to do, and, to some extent, prepare them for the revelation of just what happened and just what they must face. This is the message that follows; it is the message set forth in Philippians.

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Foreword to Philippians

The salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles for a definite purpose. This was that God might save and call the members of the Church, which is His body. He is doing this while His work is centered among the Gentiles.

There are times when we are defeated in our desire to know the truth because of our concern with some detail concerning which there is no revelation. The things that are not revealed cannot be of major importance. We can enter into possession of all things that are revealed, and the things that are not revealed do not concern us.

One question for which many seek an answer is just when or where *or* with what event did the Church, which is His body begin. At times our critics demand that we place our finger on some definite event that marks the beginning of this new out-calling. We readily confess that we do not know just when or where it began, and we are convinced that no recorded event marks its beginning. This may disappoint some who are so enamored with the spectacular that they cannot conceive of the present out-calling beginning unless it is marked by some event that compares to the sound of a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues like as of fire.

During the Acts period God was saving men in connection with a certain purpose, and He added all whom He saved to the Church of God. He did not cease saving men after Acts 28:28 for He continued the work of salvation but added those whom He saved to a new outcalling, the Church which is His body. Those saved after Acts 28:28 may not have understood the nature of their calling, for a full understanding would have to await God's revelation. In due time it came, and Paul reveals to them how they were saved, why they were saved, and the calling in which they were called. In other words he revealed to them the Church of which they were members.

The truth may be illustrated from the following historical incident. Before the world war, our country had a small regular army that grew, or maintained its number, by constant enlistments, Each man who enlisted was placed in the regular army. When our country entered the conflict, the government felt the need of a large temporary army and purposed to form it. Enlistments in the regular army came to an end, and enlistments after that time were to the American Expeditionary forces for the duration of the war.

Even so it was at the close of the Acts period. The work of salvation did not cease for a day, and all whom God saved after Acts 28:28 were added to the Church which is His body in accord with God's purpose that had its beginning there, We will not be guilty of trying to tie the Lord down to one course of action only, and we do not hold that the gospel is the limit of God's dealings with man at the present, but we do believe that salvation at the present time is related to only one purpose, the calling out of the Church which is His body. All other purposes of God are in abeyance until a later day.

Therefore, we can say that the Church, which is His body began when God saved the first man after Paul pronounced that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles. We do not know his name, we do not know where he lived, for the Church, which is His body has no great heroes. It is well that God left it unrevealed. However, we are able to say that the event that marks the beginning of the Church, which is His body was the salvation of the first man that God saved in connection with His new purpose.

Some will ask who preached to him, but it is not essential that anyone preached to him. He was saved by the gift of faith. It may have been that God used some truth that he had heard years before. Some will be prone to ask how much he knew about his exalted calling and special blessings. We can answer this by saying that he probably knew just about as much as the average person knows about their calling and blessings when they are saved. Most of us must confess that we knew precious little.

We trust that our readers will keep the foregoing remarks in mind as we turn to the exposition of the Philippian epistle.

The Philippian Epistle

Reference to the chart that illustrates this series of studies will show that we designate the beginning of the Church which is His body at Acts 28 :28, and that from that point it is increasing while the Church of God is diminishing. When Paul wrote the Philippian epistle the Church which is His body was in existence and growing by the work of God in saving men by giving them faith and adding them to this new out-calling. At Acts 28:28 something happened which started the Church of God towards its end as far as a place on earth is concerned, and at the same time a new out-calling began. There was only one man who knew what had happened, what was happening, and what was to be. That man was Paul, and it is of these things that he writes in the Philippian epistle.

This epistle was written to a band of people who had lived on both sides of a dispensational dividing line. They had been saved and called as members of the Church of God, and we have designated them on the chart as members of the Church of God after Acts 28:28. The dispensational change placed them under a different administration, but it did not make them members of the Church, which is His body. These people had been saved when God was saving and calling the Church of. God, and they lived in a time when God was saving and calling the Church, which is His body. To them was held out the privilege of advancing to this new and higher calling. This truth we will find set forth in the Philippian epistle.

1:1 It is addressed to every saint in Christ Jesus at Philippi. The truth for them was the truth for all such saints at that time. These Philippians had believed and were saved during the Acts period. If this epistle had been written to them during that period it would probably have been addressed to "the Church of God in Philippi." However, the Church of God is no longer in the place of authority and responsibility so Paul directs his message to all the saints as individuals. The Church of God cannot act upon it, but each individual member can.

Bishops and deacons. This is the one and only time that bishops and deacons are mentioned in the salutation of an epistle. We have noted already how Paul insisted upon the importance of bishops and deacons in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Here he recognizes them in the salutation. The members of the Church of God had never been without some kind of God ordained human oversight. After Acts 28:28 oversight was established in the elders or bishops. Those who make up the Church, which is His body, never were placed under any human oversight. From the very inception of this calling the members were supposed to walk under the truth of "one Lord."

1:5 From the day that the gospel reached Philippi until the day Paul wrote this epistle he had enjoyed complete and mutual fellowship with the Philippians in the gospel.

1:6 In this passage we have a statement, which when properly translated, we believe to be one of the most important and far reaching in the New Testament, so far as dispensational truth is concerned.

This passage falls historically at that distressing and disheartening moment when members of the Church of God stood marking time, without those miraculous powers that had sustained their faith and authenticated their message since the day of Pentecost. Even Paul had left Trophimus sick at Miletus and had advised Timothy in the use of means for healing. The gifts had abated, and the miraculous powers they had enjoyed were gone. The questions on every lip were: What does this mean? Has Israel lost all? Will the gifts return? What now?

Paul answers these questions in one bold statement, which we set forth in a corrected translation of **Phil. 1:6**.

"Being persuaded of this very thing, that he who began a good work among you will be bringing it to a full end until the day of Jesus Christ."

The day of Pentecost saw, the beginning of events, which should have led up to and ended in the full establishment of the Messianic kingdom. God was saving the remnant out of Israel and later, in connection with the same purpose, began to take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name. Blessings related to the kingdom abounded. At Acts 28:28 God postponed His kingdom purposes. This is what Paul told the Philippians. The good work that God had begun among them would be brought to a full end until the day of Jesus Christ. At that time God will take it up again and bring it to its consummation. This passage sets forth, as no other, the great truth that we are now living in a parenthesis when God's kingdom purposes are postponed.

Having set forth this translation we will now proceed to explain and defend it. First of all, let us consider the context.

In verse seven we have an unmistakable apologetic note. This apologetic note has been erased in many versions, for translators must always make up their versions according to what they know or believe to be the truth. Seeing no reason for an apologetic note following the statement of verse six they have adjusted their versions so that verse seven becomes a message explanatory of Paul's great confidence in the Philippians. However, Paul's great confidence was in God and not in the Philippians so no explanatory note is required. As verse seven stands in the Authorized Version it contains a distinct apologetic note, and Paul even goes so far as to call God as a witness of his love for them. A more literal translation of **Philippians 1:7** would be:

"Even as it is right (or just) for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart (or, because I love you)."

Paul well knew that **"hope deferred maketh the heart sick"** (Prov. 12:13), and it was his duty as God's ambassador to say the thing that would make them sick at heart. He tells them that their hope has been postponed, and so that they will realize that he would never have spoken such words, except because of sheer necessity to speak the truth, he speaks of his great love and longing for them.

The word *perform* in Philippians 1:6 is the Greek word *epiteleo* (pronounced *ep-ee-tel-eh-o*). It is a combination of the words *epi* and *teleo*. The word *teleo* means *finish* or *end*, and *epi* is a prefix meaning *on*. When it is affixed before a word it does not change the meaning of the word, for it is an accelerative contribution which adds an emphatic note to the word. For example, *gnosis* means knowledge, and *epignosis* means exact and full knowledge. Therefore, since *teleo* means finish or end, *epiteleo* cannot mean continuance. Yet this is what we have in the translation of Philippians 1:7 as it stands in the Authorized Version. There we have the word *perform* followed by the word *until*. *Perform* means to do, and *until* sets a time limit. These two words together mean to continue doing a thing until the time limit is reached. In other words, "perform until" signifies continuance and violates the meaning of *teleo*.

Epiteleo is a flexible word, therefore, it can bear several meanings just as long as they carry within them the thought of termination. It can mean *complete*, such as completing a task, for when a task is completed, it is terminated or brought to an end. It can mean *perform*, for a duty performed is a duty finished or brought to an end. It can mean *perfect*, for a thing perfected is finished and no further labor can be spent upon it. Each of these words carry in them the thought of termination. The words *perfect* and *complete* cannot be used in Philippians 1:7 as they do not fit with the word *until*. We may speak of working on a task until it is complete, but we do not speak of completing a task until a certain time. If we use the word *perform* in Phil. 1:7, it denotes continuance and this violates the meaning of *teleo*.

As to the meaning of the word *epiteleo* the lexicons and other authorities are practically unanimous.

Thayer's definition is "to bring to an end:"

Bagster's Analytical Lexicon, "to bring to an end:"

Bullinger's Critical Lexicon, "to bring through to an end,"

Young's Analytical Concordance, "to make an end of:"

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, "to fulfill completely; by implication, to terminate,"

Mr. C. H. Welch, the able Editor of *The Berean Expositor* gives this interesting note in connection with *epiteleo*, as it appears in 2 Cor. 7:1. He states there that it means "to bring to a full end." (See Vol. 16, page 42, Berean Expositor). However, we do not wish to compromise the witness of Mr. Welch by implying that he concurs in our position on Phil. 1:6. We simply state his opinion as to the meaning of *epiteleo* as it occurs in another passage.

There are two cardinal principles that must be true before any translation can be accepted. It must be true to the Greek, and it must be true to the truth. We submit our translation of Philippians 1:6 as being in accord with both of these principles. It is true to the Greek, and it is true to the truth. For when Philippians was written, God was closing out the work that He was doing throughout the book of Acts. The great tribulation, the appearance of Antichrist and the second coming of Christ were all postponed. And they remain postponed until the day of Jesus Christ, when God will again resume His purposes to establish on earth His messianic kingdom.

1:9-11 Paul prays for the Philippians, and his requests concern things that are imperative and essential for them in view of their position. He prays that their love may be accompanied by clear knowledge and keen perception, that they may be sincere and without offence for the day of Christ that they may test the things that differ. It is evident that the most essential difference for them to recognize was the difference between their calling and the Church, which is His body.

1:12-18 Paul is in Rome as a prisoner of the Romans. Even though a man may be arrested on false charges, his enemies can always use the fact of his arrest to hinder the gospel. He informs the Philippians that his latest arrest had turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. It had become evident in Caesar's court that Paul was a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ. It was probably a common topic of conversation, bringing forth the inevitable question, "Who is this Christ for which this Paul is a prisoner?" And it seems that the arrest of Paul had caused the Roman government to relax its campaign against the Christians so that the less prominent men were more bold to preach the gospel.

Those who preached the gospel were divided into three groups, and apparently these divisions were based upon their attitude toward Paul. Some were envious of him and carried their envy into their messages. Some contended against him and their proclamations were colored by their contentions. Some manifested good will toward him, and this good will dominated their labors for Christ. Those who preached Christ in love for Paul knew that he was in prison for the defense of the gospel. Those who preached Christ in envy and contention were not sincere. They did it supposing they could add bitterness to Paul's bonds. However, whether Christ was preached in pretense or in truth, Paul could rejoice. This passage gives an inkling of the confusion that existed at the time the Philippian letter was written.

2:1-4 Paul here appeals to the Philippians, on the ground of all that they have and are in Christ, to preserve peace and unity. Nothing is to be done in a spirit of strife or vain glory, but with deep humility of mind.

2:5-9 The gifted believer of the Acts period was the outstanding man in the assembly. The sudden loss of their gifts naturally brought bewilderment, chagrin and disappointment. Their great hope was that God would soon restore their gifts. Their honest pride stood in the way of them accepting the truth of a new administration, and of seeking a place in a new calling where gifts had no place. These gifted men had become men of great reputation, and this reputation was quickly passing away. Just imagine the great healer Paul confessing that he had left Trophimus at Miletum sick. Such a statement required deep humility and honesty.

In order to bring about the proper state of mind among the Philippians Paul points to the example of Christ. **He was in the form of God and did not consider it robbery to be equal to God. But He made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant and became a man. Being found in the fashion of man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. In consequence of this God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every other.**

The force and purpose of this statement cannot be mistaken. They dread to lose the gifts, distinctions and positions they have enjoyed, and are prejudiced against accepting any message as truth that says these are gone. But if they will consider the example of Christ they will discover that a higher exaltation than they ever enjoyed can be theirs. This statement is just what they needed to prepare them for the presentation of the glorious truth of the Secret.

2:12-13 The situation of the Philippians demands that they work out their own deliverance with fear and trembling. God was operating in them to accomplish His will and good pleasure and they must exercise the greatest possible care not to hinder His work in them.

Continued, Vol. III, No. 9

LET US NOW GO TO BETHLEHEM

There is no record of the birth of Christ save that one which is in the Word of God. Secular history knows nothing of this important event. All that can ever be known concerning it is contained in the opening chapters of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Anything that man believes concerning the birth of Christ that is not found in these records is without foundation and is sheer imagination.

Those who study carefully and meditate long upon the inspired record of the birth of the Savior will soon discover that the scriptural history of this event is somewhat different from that which is generally believed and accepted. It soon becomes evident that the popular concept is a garbled corruption of this record and has been taken from the paintings of the old masters rather than the Word of God. The birth of the Savior has been put on canvas by painters who tried to group in one scene events widely separated in time as if these events were simultaneous. The picture is familiar to our readers: a stable, a manger, Mary and Joseph. domestic animals, a bright star shining over the building,

shepherds with their staffs, three gaudily attired persons on their knees, glittering crowns upon their heads, and in their extended hands a casket containing jewels upon which the eye of a babe, very precocious for one new born is resting. Such a picture is incorrect. It falsifies the Word of God, and it has usurped the Biblical revelation, dethroning the record that God has given concerning the birth of His Son.

It seems that every year at the Christmas season, someone with strong imagination and little regard for the truth comes forth with some new story in which they try to add some new detail to the record of the birth of Christ. Some of these stories take hold of the popular fancy and are repeated from year to year until, like barnacles to a ship, they attach themselves to the sacred record.

If it were possible to turn back the hands of time two thousand years so that we could be in Bethlehem as witnesses and observers of all that happened when Christ was born we would witness an entirely different scene than the one painted by the old masters, and we would return to the twentieth century as earnest warriors against all the traditions concerning His birth that have made void the Word of God. However, we cannot turn back the hands of time and be in Bethlehem on the night of His birth, but we can turn to that which is even more accurate than human observation. We can go to the inspired record, which God has given concerning the birth of His Son. No Christian can feel that this is a matter of small importance.

"He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son." 1 John 5:10.

Those who love God and His Word feel that belief of the record demands defense of the record. They will not deny it and they will not permit it to become fouled. Therefore, led by the Spirit of God, let us by means of the sacred scriptures go to Bethlehem on the night when Christ was born. Let us discover anew the true record that God has given of the birth of His Son.

The Witness of Luke

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Gyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born 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 around 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

Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all that heard it wondered at these things, which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen, at .it was told unto them. Luke 2:1-20.

This is the faithful record as we have it from the inspired pen of Luke. Stripped of all the gaudy tinsel of sentimentalities that men have attached to it, the record is plain and simple. It concerns only those events that happened the night when Christ was born.

A drastic edict had been issued by Caesar Augustus for the registration (a first step towards taxing) of all in the Roman Empire, and all went to be registered, everyone to the city to which he belonged. Joseph, being of the house and kindred of David, went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, taking with him his betrothed wife Mary who was with child. While they were there, the child was born, and since there was no room in the inn she laid him in a manger.

His birth was not unusual, it was accompanied by no unusual sights or sounds. There was nothing in Bethlehem to mark it as being an exceptional birth. It is evident that the populace and visitors as a whole paid no attention to it.

However, at the same time, and in the same locality, certain shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks at night in the open fields. To them, and to them alone, was given a positive witness that this was not the commonplace birth of a commonplace babe. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone around about them, filling them with terror. But the angel bade them not to fear, saying that he brought a glad message of great joy – a Savior had been born in the city of David who was Christ the Lord. The identifying sign of this child was that He would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. As the angel spoke these words there suddenly appeared with him a multitude of the heavenly host **speaking** their now familiar message:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. "

The shepherds departed immediately for Bethlehem where they found Joseph and Mary in a stable, and the babe lying in a manger. When they saw the child they told what had been said about him by the angel. All who heard them were astonished, but Mary treasured up all these things, often dwelling on them in her mind.

Certain facts stand out in this record. As far as the events in Bethlehem are concerned there was nothing unusual about His birth except that He was cradled in a manger. No one saw the angel or heard his message except the shepherds. No star appeared in the sky and the shepherds went to Bethlehem because they were told to go there by the angel - not because they followed the star. The heavenly host did not sing for they spoke their message. No star appeared over the stable to identify the new born Savior to the shepherds. They had one sign only - the babe was to be found wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. No wise men were present, for the scripture demonstrates that the wise men did not arrive until the Lord was at least one year of age. This leads us to further consideration of the sacred records. .

The Witness of Matthew

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto Him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah: art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed to their own country another way.

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.

When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he

had diligently enquired of the wise men. Matthew 2:1-16.

From the inspired pen of Matthew we learn that on the night when Christ was born an extraordinary star had made its appearance, not in Jerusalem or Bethlehem, but in a locality designated only as "the East." There it was seen by certain wise men who evidently were earnest seekers after the truth. This star spoke to them of something exceptional. By some revelation from God in addition to the star, their steps were directed toward Jerusalem where one had been born King of the Jews. There is nothing to show how many came. That only three came, or that they were oriental kings has no foundation in the Word of God. In all probability it was a larger number accompanied by a large train of attendants. They did not follow the star to Jerusalem. They saw it in the East, and after some time for necessary preparation, they took their slow journey to Jerusalem.

When they arrived in Jerusalem they asked one question - "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They explained that they had seen His star in the East and had come to worship Him. If they had been following the star they would not have asked this question. There is no truth in the belief that they followed a shining star day and night over "moor and mountain" until it brought them at last to Jerusalem.

The appearance of these foreign visitors startled the inhabitants of Jerusalem and troubled the heart of the wicked king. While the wise men waited upon him for directions, directions that he could not give, he assembled the priests and the scribes, demanding to know of them where Christ should be born. Knowing the Scriptures they told him that it would be in Bethlehem of Judea.

After securing this information, Herod called in the wise men secretly and enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. We do not know what answer they gave, but we can conclude from verse sixteen that Herod received a very definite answer by which he knew that the child was not over two years and not under one year of age.

The king told them to go to Bethlehem and search for the young child, and upon finding Him to bring him word so that he might worship Him. When they departed from the king's presence, to their great surprise and joy, the star, which they saw in the East went before them until it stood over where the young child (not a babe) was. Their joy at seeing the star shows that for a time it had not been seen. The star led them to where the young child was. It does not say that they were led to Bethlehem. Christ *was* born in Bethlehem. The scribes knew He was to be born there. Herod told the wise men to go there, but there is no evidence that the star led them there. Luke 2:39 states that the child was in Nazareth, therefore, this must have been where the star led them.

When they arrived where the child was they went into the house (not a stable), and there in the presence of Mary (no shepherds) they opened their treasures and presented gifts to the king. Then the same God who spoke to them in the East spoke to them again warning them not to return to Herod. So they went home another way.

When Herod discovered that the wise men had trifled with him he was furious, and ordered that all children under two years of age in Bethlehem and its environs should be massacred according to the time he had so diligently ascertained from the wise men.

This is the true story, this is the record that God gave of the birth of His Son. Those who believe this can trace their beliefs back to a sure foundation. Those who believe otherwise cannot say from whence their beliefs came.

There is one fact in the faithful record that is probably more ignored than any other. It is always treated lightly and never emphasized, It is that there was born that day a Savior which is Christ the Lord. There was born that day just what the sinner needs, for the sinner needs a Savior. The weak may need a helper, the hungry may need bread, the thirsty may need water, but the sinner needs a Savior. A sinner without the Savior is a lost sinner. A sinner with the Savior is a saved sinner. He who has the Savior is saved.

GETTING A BLESSING

Throughout our entire Christian experience we have been shut up to testing all things by the Word of God. It has ever been and is still the only scale God has given us for weighing principles, practices, and that which claims to be the truth. We are convinced that God would have us to be shut up to the Word alone, for He has said:

"To the law and the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20.

While we are dependent upon the Word to guide us concerning all things, yet we find that others claim they have something in addition to the Word. It is another scale by which they weigh things, and it is a scale we do not possess. We refer to that indefinable, indefinite, ephemeral something or other which they call "getting a blessing." This has become for many professing Christians a standard by which messages, practices and principles are judged. Did they get a blessing out of it? Then it was a message from God. Did they get a blessing out of doing it? Then it was God's will for them.

A preacher, who makes great claim to being a *Berean*, stated recently that they received a great blessing every time they partook of the Lord's supper, and this convinced him that the practice was of the Lord.

We have made definite inquiry of those who speak of "getting a blessing" to see if we could discover just what it is they "get" when they "get a blessing." None of them seem to know and the nearest we have come to finding out is that the Spirit is supposed to witness to the flesh that a thing is or is not the will of God. If any reader can inform us just what it is to "get a blessing" we will be glad to publish this information in our pages. If any expect us to believe that it is simply the personal satisfaction one enjoys who has done the will of God, we reply that we have found this satisfaction among Christian Scientists, Spiritists, Catholics and Oxford Groupers. They too speak in eloquent terms of blessings received from their religious beliefs and acts.

Our inquiries into this matter has convinced us that all this talk about "getting a blessing" is just so much stuff and nonsense. Some claim they have been blessed from hearing a song or a message, others from being baptized, others from going to church on

Easter Sunday. We have urged these to be more explicit as to just what they received, but they cannot do so. It is evident that all there is to this matter of "getting a blessing" is that those who claim it passed through some kind of an emotional experience in which they were bathed for a moment in good feelings, or reveled for a moment in sweet sensations. The tragedy is that this is demanding a place alongside of the Word of God.

We who believe in the supremacy of the Word of God will never give such things a place. We will rejoice as He loads us each day with His benefits. We will praise Him for the spiritual and material blessings He gives us. But we will never judge His Word, His work or His ways by our feelings.

End, Vol. III, No. 8