

November 14

Take heed unto yourselves...[for] grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Acts 20:28-30

IT is necessary for the discipline, trial

(Joh 8:28 KJV) "Then said Jesus unto them...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."

(1Pe 4:11 KJV) "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."

(1 John 4:1 KJV) "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

F273-274 "Each congregation or *Ecclesia*--even if composed of only two or three--is to seek to recognize the will of the Head in respect to all of its affairs..."

All the members of the body united to the Head are to have confidence and to look for the fulfilment of his promises; but, nevertheless, are to "try the spirits"--to test the doctrines from whomsoever they emanate. The proving does not imply a lack of confidence in those recognized as divinely directed channels of the Truth; but it does imply a faithfulness to the Lord and to the

and final proving of the church of God that they should be subjected to these adverse influences: for to him that *overcometh* them is the promise of the great reward. If we would reign with Christ, we must prove our worthiness to reign by the same tests of loyalty to God, of faith in His Word, of zeal for the Truth, of patient endurance of re-

Truth as superior to all human teachers and their utterances; it implies also that they are not listening for the voice of man, but for the voice of the Chief Shepherd..."

F248 "Many are preaching themselves... From all such we should turn away..."

(Col 2:8 KJV) "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

R1475 "THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME.... It is an increasingly popular idea among religious journalists that such a journal should be a medium merely for the expression of all shades of human opinion upon all matters of divine revelation, and that each individual should abstract from them all what he conceives to be true, and reject the rest. But this is precisely what the readers, and often the editors, too, of such journals are unable to do, and the general confusion is only increased unto

R4458 (From Harvest Truth Database V8.0 2013)

"TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES AND THE FLOCK"

--ACTS 20:2-38--SEPTEMBER 5--

Golden Text:--"I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."--Phil. 4:13.

WHEN St. Paul fled from Ephesus, after the rioting, he made a tour of the European Churches which he had founded. Passing through Macedonia to the city of Corinth he came by vessel again to Miletus, about fifty miles south of Ephesus. He was accompanied by representatives of several of the churches of Asia Minor. He was en route for Jerusalem, for whose poor at his suggestion collections had been made in the four provinces in which he had been preaching. Seven delegates accompanied him, representatives of the Church at Thessalonica, Berea, Derbe and Ephesus. These visits are supposed to have consumed several months of time, and now, at Miletus, he would have his final opportunity of bidding goodby to the Elders of the Ephesus Church. The vessel on which the party were to go to the Jerusalem port was detained indefinitely at Miletus, so word was sent to the Elders at Ephesus and they came to Miletus.

Our lesson specially calls to our attention the Apostle's address to these Elders. We are not to understand this as a boastful statement, but rather as a plain rehearsal of matters which his hearers would fully concede and of which he boasted nothing. The rehearsal was given, not for his own sake, not as indicating personal vanity and self-praise, but with a view to quickening the recollection of his hearers and making the lesson of the hour more impressive upon them. He reminded them that for the space of three years they had known him intimately, the manner of his life, his devotion to the Lord, to the service of the Truth and to the service of the brethren. He reminded them of his humility of mind; that he had not been with them as a boaster; that his conduct had not been haughty and overbearing; that he had not sought to "lord it" over the Church, but on the contrary, he had endured amongst them many trials and difficulties with the Jews, with "false brethren."

They knew of his work, his endurance and of his holding back nothing from them that would be helpful to them; that he had taught them both publicly and privately as circumstances opened to him opportunities. He had testified both to Jews and to Greeks that there is only the one Gospel of Christ, to be accepted through faith and turning away from sin. By calling attention to these elements of his own character he was laying the foundation for his subsequent exhortation to them that they should copy his zeal, his fidelity. He had been a faithful overseer or bishop, watching over their interests. He had been a faithful pastor, guiding their welfare and seeing to their nourishment in spiritual things. Knowing the truthfulness of these

proach and persecution, even unto death, and of unwavering trust in the power and purpose of God to deliver and exalt His church in due time. To such faithful ones are the blessed consolations of Psalm 91. Z. '04-74 R3331:3

greater blindness and denser darkness, and thus the purpose of the adversary is accomplished...

No table is fit for the household of faith to be summoned to that has not been spread by careful hands, fully submitted and obedient to the great Head of the house, whose directions are found in his Word."

F247 "Where we disregard the Word and Spirit of the Lord for the sake of peace it will be sure to result injuriously to a greater or less extent. It is well that all should have the docile, sheep-like nature; but it is necessary also that the sheep have *character*, else they cannot be overcomers; and if they have character they should remember the Chief Shepherd's words, "My sheep hear my voice [obey it]...and they follow me," "a *stranger* will they not follow...for they know not the voice of strangers." (John 10:5,27) It is the duty, therefore, of every sheep to take special notice of the message and the manner of every brother before they aid in putting him forward as an overseer, either local or general.

presentations and having the whole situation in mind, they would be the better prepared to receive from such an one his parting exhortation--the great lesson which he had to give them.

"BOUND IN THE SPIRIT"

He informed the brethren that although possessed of his physical liberty he felt a bondage or restraint upon his mind that he could not shake off; that he must go to Jerusalem; that this was the Lord's providence for him; and that at the same time he received assurances from others through the "gifts" that bonds and imprisonment awaited him at Jerusalem. Then he adds these courageous words: "But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." The Apostle had become apparently more intimately acquainted with the Ephesus Church than with any of the others. Apparently it was one of the most flourishing of them all. He had, by the Lord's providence, spent more time with them, and evidently the results procured justified the prolonged stay. Partings between friends are always grievous. And parting with no hope of seeing each other again this side the veil is a doubly severe ordeal.

"PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD"

Incidentally we note the message which the Apostle delivered and which he here particularly emphasizes as the Gospel of Christ--"preaching the Kingdom of God." It is right that we should recognize that this is the same Gospel which we are preaching today, or, if not, that we are not preaching aright. The grace of God was manifested in the gift of his Son, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man. The grace of God was further manifested in an outline of how the death of Christ was designed to bring blessings to our race:

(1) By ultimately establishing a Kingdom under the whole heavens for the rule of mankind; for the suppression of sin and death; for the uplifting of those bound by these enemies.

(2) As a precedent to that general blessing to the world, for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," the Divine proclamation first calls out the "little flock" to be joint-heirs with their dear Redeemer in that Kingdom. Thank God that these precious truths, respecting the grace of God

and the Kingdom of God, so long covered and hidden from our sight by the traditions of the dark ages, are now coming forward, are now being revealed by the enlightenment of our eyes by the Spirit--that we might know the things that are freely given us of God, and that thus we might be assisted in making our calling and our election sure!

No wonder the Apostle could add the forceful words, "I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." What he preached to the Church at Ephesus during his three years' stay amongst them is surely the same message which, by Divine arrangement, has come down to us in his epistles addressed to the various churches. We note that St. Paul's message contained not one word respecting eternal torment, which is no part of the Divine Plan. Surely from these epistles we now assent that St. Paul was very patient in reproofing, instructing, encouraging the Lord's dear people. He was much used of the Lord because he had given himself so thoroughly to the Lord.

Herein we note the difference between the operation of the holy Spirit of God and the operation of the unholy spirits, the fallen angels. In both cases the control increases in proportion as the individual relinquishes his own will. Fortunately for humanity we all possess an inherent dread of self-surrender. Had it not been for this natural tendency, this natural self-will, doubtless the whole world today would be obsessed by the evil angels, or, at least, more largely under their control. Even amongst spirit mediums there is generally only a partial yielding of the will and an urging by the spirits toward a full self-surrender. Spirit mediums, however, are freely warned through their journals and books that there is great danger in a complete surrender of the will, lest an evil spirit gain full possession--obscure the medium. Alas! poor mediums! They know not that all of the spirits which communicate through them are evil spirits, demons, fallen angels, who, at times, personate human beings and represent themselves as our dead friends.

Not even husbands and wives dare fully to surrender to each other their wills without danger of injury. Nor should parents seek to coerce their children to a condition of entire will-lessness. To whatever extent they do this they injure the child, detract from its personality and make it a more easy dupe for the fallen angels.

The One, the only One, to whom we dare submit our wills fully, completely, is the Lord. He invites this full submission of the will to him; and we, in his name and as his ambassadors, may freely invite our children, our friends, our neighbors, to this same full submission of their hearts to the Lord. The more fully consecrated the will the greater the submission, the more blessed should be the experience--the greater the usefulness in the Lord's service. This is the substance of St. Paul's exhortation, "Be ye filled with the Spirit," sanctified, set apart wholly unto the Lord. In proportion as this condition of consecration or will submission is attained--in such proportion we may be used of the Lord as his mouthpieces, his instruments, ready for his service, the service of the Truth, the service of the flock. St. Paul was a noble example of such a full self-consecration to the Lord; of such a filling with the Spirit; of such an emptying of self-will; of such a deadness to the world, its will, its plans, its service.

No wonder the Apostle was able to assure the brethren that they might follow him, as he was following Christ. Christ was filled with the Father's Spirit. St. Paul, a loyal follower in his footsteps, had a similar filling experience though of smaller capacity. And all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must similarly be filled with his Spirit, the will of Christ, the will of the Father--and be dead to earthly ambitions. The Apostle's thought in calling the elders was to impress upon them that, like himself, they not only were consecrated to the Lord, but, as teachers in the Church, they had a double responsibility--in respect to themselves and in respect to the Church of which the Lord had made them overseers.

Notice his words, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock in the which the holy Spirit hath made you overseers (bishops) to feed the Church of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own (Son)."--V. 28.

Several points in this are worthy of careful attention. The revised version, quoted above, says, "In the which the holy Spirit hath made you bishops," thus agreeing that the general Scripture statement that the elders of the Church are not *over* the Church in the sense of a superior, or "clergy," class, but *in* the Church--members of it--overseeing members, assisting members, by appointment of the Lord through the channel of the Church. Note the two points:

(1) They needed to take heed to themselves and to take heed to the flock. Whoever attempts to do shepherding in the Church will need, first of all, to watch himself lest he fall into temptation, for, as

the Apostle declares, Those who accept the position of Elders in the Church, pastors, overseers, are exposed to special trials, special difficulties. They need primarily to take heed to themselves, lest, having preached to others, they themselves become castaways.

(2) Those who accept the ministry or service of the Church as Elder-Brothers under the Divine regulation should realize that they have assumed a weighty responsibility respecting which they must "give an account to God." (Rom. 14:12.) This does not mean fault-finding with the brethren. It does not mean merely preaching to them; nor merely visiting the sick and counseling the troubled. It means an oversight, a care of all the interests of the congregation and the individuals of it in their every detail. Those who are over-charged with the cares of this life are not in a condition, in any sense of the word, to accept the responsibilities of this service in the Church of the living God and should not be invited to do so; should not be voted for as Elders. Only those who seek first the interests of the Lord's Kingdom and the righteousness which it represents are in any sense or degree properly suited to such service in the Church. They should consider it a part of their responsibility to notice how the dear brethren and sisters are progressing, especially in their spiritual interests. They should feel it a part of their duty to warn, to encourage, to assist all of these, as opportunity may offer.

It is not the prerogative of all the brethren and sisters in the Church to endeavor to set each other right, unless it be in some *personal* matter specially related to themselves; then Matt. 18:15 should be strictly followed. An Elder, however, by his very election, has been asked to take such an oversight of the affairs of the congregation, to give such advice, to give such reproofs, as the nature of the case may seem to demand--in meekness, remembering himself also, lest he should be tempted, if not along the same lines, then possibly along some other line of temptation. He, too, of course, should follow Matt. 18:15.

GRIEVOUS WOLVES AND PERVERSE TALKERS

The Apostle, by way of impressing this duty of oversight upon the elders, reminds them that the Lord purchased this flock with the precious blood of the Lamb of God and that this value in the Lord's sight should be so deeply impressed upon their minds that they would be willing to lay down their lives for the brethren in any service which they could render.

Emphasizing the caution already given, the Apostle prophetically declared that there would be great need of their taking heed to themselves, because of *their ownelves*, of the flock itself, and especially amongst the Elders, men would arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them; desirous of being leaders, they would not hesitate to produce a schism or division in the Church to help along their ambition. The word *perverse* (here) in the original signified *distorted*, *twisted*. The thought is that those who begin to lose the Spirit of the Lord, begin to lose their clearness of appreciation of the Truth. As personal and selfish ambitions cloud their vision they see the Scriptures more vaguely and feel free to twist or distort them to make them support their ambitious sentiments. How true the Apostle's words; how great a danger there is along these lines, especially to the Elders, the overseers of the flock! Evidently selfish ambition is one of the greatest of foes with which they must contend.

Nor do these ambitions suddenly germinate, bloom and bear fruit; the process is a gradual one and hence the more dangerous, the more deceptive, the less likely to have our notice. How important then that all of the Lord's flock, and especially the elders, take heed to themselves and scrutinize their conduct, and, above all, the motives lying behind their deeds! Let us remember that absolute purity of the will is essential. Every admixture of selfishness, however little, is a poisonous virus which, if unchecked, would lead to the Second Death. "Take heed to yourselves," is the admonition, for, the Apostle goes on to say, that of their own selves should men arise telling truths in a distorted fashion, for the purpose of drawing away disciples after them; for the purpose of being leaders in the flock; for the purpose of having praise and honor of men. Ah, how dear the price--the loss of Divine favor and of eternal life!

"Grievous wolves" are ferocious wolves. For a time they may deceive the sheep by an outward manner and outward profession, covering their wolfish nature. They and the outward conduct by which they deceive are Scripturally designated, "Wolves in sheep's clothing." The Shepherd certainly knows their character before it becomes manifest to the sheep; but the docile, innocent sheep are deceived until these wolves begin biting and devouring and scattering the flock. The howls of anger, malice, hatred, envy and strife are noted in the Scriptures as "works of the flesh and of the devil"--not works of righteousness and peace and love, the Spirit of the Lord.

The wolf does injury with his mouth and so do these-- slandering, backbiting and doing every evil work.

St. Paul warned the Elders of the Ephesus Ecclesia what to expect, and his words are true. Hymenaeus and Alexander, Phygellus and Hermogenes, and Philetus are mentioned by name. (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17.) The same principles are still at work. The same warning still needs to be heeded. Indeed, the Scriptures in general imply that the severest experiences along these same lines are due to come upon the Church in "the evil day" with which this Gospel dispensation will close.

"NIGHT AND DAY WITH TEARS"

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Here are two points set before us; first, the duty of the Elders of the Church to watch against these evils so graphically portrayed; to watch for the interests of the flock as against the wolves; to watch to give the wolves as little opportunity as possible to tear the flock and backbite them, and to warn the sheep lest any of them, becoming inoculated with the rabies of the wolves, should display signs of hydrophobia and begin backbiting one another, with the usual symptoms of hydrophobia--with an apparent thirst for water (Truth) yet a refusal to drink it.

Second, the elders are to watch also against those sure to arise "of your own selves." Proper watching will begin with our own hearts, saying, Lord, is it I? And proper watching will in time discern such characters as Hymenaeus and Philetus and, following the Apostle's example, will expose them--not from any feeling of bitterness towards them, but in the interests of and for the protection of the flock. St. Paul reminds the brethren that such was his own course--one of great watchfulness, interest, care, over them and over all the Churches of Asia Minor. The expression, "Night and day with tears," shows us clearly that the great Apostle felt properly the weight of responsibility resting upon him as a servant of God and an ambassador of the King of kings and an over-shepherd and overseer of the Lord's flock--as a "minister of the New Covenant," delegated by the Great Head to assist in calling out those who will be the members of his Body, for their instruction and building up in the "most holy faith," that eventually they might all come to the full measure of the stature of manhood in the Body of Christ, as the great Mediator, Prophet, Priest and King of the world.

DIVINE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

The exhortation closed thus, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." The Apostle's thought seems to have been that his words, his earnest exhortation, might not only awaken them, but have them to inquire as to what defences could be depended upon for the crisis thus pointed out. He draws attention to the fact that God, the great Center of all our blessings, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, is on our part, is on the part of all those who are seeking to cooperate with his arrangements. By way of further explanation he mentions the Scriptures, the Word of God's grace, the Gospel message. He tells them that they, and we also, may be assured that the Word of God is able to build us up, to give us the necessary development of character, of heart and head, and to give us ultimately a share in the great inheritance which God has in reservation for all those who are sanctified by this message.

Let us lay this well to heart: neglect of God's Word of grace, neglect of his promises means a deficiency of strength to bear the trial which is our portion. It means also the opening of the door for Satan to put light for darkness and darkness for light for our confusion. It means that those who will not give strict heed in following might be unable to distinguish between the bleating of the sheep and "the midnight howl" of the wolf; might be unable to distinguish between those who are holding fast and blowing on the trumpets of the Lord's Word and those who are seeking to cause divisions amongst the sheep and speaking perverse things--misrepresenting

facts, that they might divide the flock and draw some after themselves.

Let us make no mistake. It is a question of *inheritance* or *no inheritance*, amongst them which are sanctified. He who is faithful in that which is least, acknowledges the Lord and his provisions in connection with all of his blessings, temporal and spiritual, will be prepared to look forward with continued zeal and will receive the Shepherd's care accordingly. On the other hand, those who do not appreciate the "meat in due season" and the special provisions of this Harvest time--these will not be prepared; these will quite likely be deceived by those who endeavor to deceive them and draw them aside to themselves.

AS AN EXAMPLE TO THE FLOCK

St. Paul had already pointed out that the lesson of the law was that the ox that threshed the corn should be allowed to have a share of it for his nourishment; and that similarly those who minister to the Church in spiritual things legally, justly, should have a share in the temporal blessings of those whom they serve. He had also pointed out that if he had served the Church spiritual things of immeasurably more value to them than earthly things, it would be a small thing indeed for the Church to minister to his temporal needs. But, while noting these as points of equity, which should be observed by the Church, he did not require these things of them. It would be to their advantage to see these matters in their proper light and to act accordingly. But if they did not see their privileges in serving him and other ministers of the Truth in temporal matters, he perceived that this offered him a still larger opportunity for self-sacrifice, self-denial in the service of the Truth. Their neglect he did not resent, saying, You have refused me temporal necessities, I will refuse you spiritual comforts. On the contrary, his reasoning was this: These dear sheep need the spiritual blessings and I am so glad that I am privileged by the Lord to be his servant in dispensing them. The more it may cost me in the way of self-sacrifice, self-denial, the more it will evidence to the Lord my love for him, for his Truth, for his flock, and the more I will have of the Great Shepherd's favor, because I will be more like the great Redeemer, who bought the sheep by the sacrifice of himself.

On these lines the Apostle proceeds to call attention to his course--not boasting, but for their advantage, that they might be the better able to discern what would be the proper character of an under-shepherd of the Lord. He says, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." He was not serving them for the accumulation of wealth, nor to secure the comforts of the present life. He coveted their hearts. He coveted the pleasure of bringing them into relationship with the great Head of the Church as members of his Body. He appreciated his privileges as a minister of the New Covenant along these lines--preparing the members of the Body of Christ, the Mediator, and helping them to make their calling and election sure to the glorious things promised in the Word.

He continues, "Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Apparently some of those who were of St. Paul's company had no trade or could find no profitable employment, while the Apostle's trade of sail-making, tent-making, was apparently a lucrative one, furnishing employment in the various seacoast cities visited. Apparently the others were largely dependent upon this leader for things temporal, as well as things spiritual. He had never complained. He did not now complain. He merely drew their attention to the proper course which he believed he had followed, which he believed was pleasing in the sight of the Lord. He commended to them a similar spirit of love for the Lord and love for the flock and love for the Truth--to the self-sacrificing degree. Thus they might be faithful stewards of God's mercy, faithful overseers of his flock. His own form of stating the message is summed up thus, "I have showed you an example, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

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"UNDER HIS WINGS!"

"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou find shelter."--Psa. 91:4.--Leeser.

IN the midst of the "perilous times" of this "evil day," and of the warning voices of prophets and apostles pointing out snares and pestilences and subtle dangers on every hand--and in the midst, too, of a realizing sense of the actual existence of such evil besetments and perils--how precious to the saints are the assurances of divine protection and care and personal love!

We call to mind the gracious promises of our Lord --"The Father himself loveth you;" "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's

good pleasure to give you the Kingdom;" and "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him;...and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." --John 16:27;14:21,23,27; Luke 12:32.

But warning voices and wholesome counsel are also necessary; and he is not wise who turns a deaf ear to them, and takes cogni-

zance alone of the comforting assurances which are designed only for those who faithfully "watch and pray lest they enter into temptation." Every soldier of the cross needs to heed the Apostle's warnings--"Take unto you the whole armor of God, *that ye may be able to withstand* in the evil day, and having done all, to stand;" and again, "Let us *fear* lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it;" and fear also "lest, as the serpent [Satan] *beguiled* Eve, through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ;" "for *grievous wolves* shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." "Behold," said our Lord, "I send you forth as *sheep in the midst of wolves*: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves."-- Eph. 6:13; Heb. 4:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Acts 20:29,30; Matt. 10:16.

⁽¹⁾It is necessary for the discipline, trial and final proving of the Church of God that they should be subjected to these adverse influences; for to him that *overcometh* them is the promise of the great reward. If we would reign with Christ, we must prove our worthiness to reign by the same tests of loyalty to God, of faith in his Word, of zeal for the Truth, of patient endurance of reproach and persecution, even unto death, and of unwavering trust in the power and purpose of God to deliver and exalt his Church in due time. To such faithful ones are the blessed consolations of Psa. 91. Hearken--

Verse 1. "He who abideth in the secret place of the Most High [typified by the Most Holy or Sanctuary] shall rest under the shadow of the Almighty." We thus place ourselves under the divine protection when, having come to a knowledge of God's willingness to accept us as his children, we gratefully accept the invitation and approach in his appointed way, through Christ our Redeemer, and consecrate ourselves fully to his service. Such may sweetly rest in the precious promises of God, all of which are "yea and amen in Christ Jesus." (2 Cor. 1:20.) The world does not see the overshadowing wings of divine protection, but the faithful have a blessed secret realization of it. Praise the Lord!

Verse 2. "I [Christ Jesus, whom David here, as elsewhere, personifies, and who thus addresses his body, his Church] will say of Jehovah, who is my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I ever trust" (John 20:17)--

Verse 3. "That he will surely deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, [from the deceptions of Satan, in which all those not protected shall stumble; for our Lord said that so subtle and deceptive will they be that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. But this is not possible, for those who are making their calling and election sure abide under the protection of the Almighty] and from the pestilence of destruction." [Not from the destructive pestilences of physical disease, but from the moral and spiritual pestilences of destruction--from the sinful propensities of the old nature, which, in unguarded moments, are liable to assert their mastery and overwhelm the souls of those who are not *abiding* under the secret protection of the Most High; and from the spiritual pestilences of false doctrine which, with subtle sophistry, destroy the faith of the unwatchful. Such pestilences are already abroad in the shape of so-called Christian Science, Spiritualism and the various no-ransom theories which take the name of The Larger Hope, and which bid fair, both from present prospects and from the prophetic outlook, ere long to become epidemic. From all these pestilences the Lord's elect shall be protected, resting sweetly under the shadow of the Almighty.]

Verse 4. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou find shelter. [So close to his heart does Jehovah gather his loyal and faithful children that they feel the warmth of his love, and the responsive language of their hearts is, "I will abide in thy tabernacle"--under thy protection --"forever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings; for thou hast been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy; for thou hast heard my vows"--my consecration--"thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name."--Psa. 61:4,3,5] His truth shall be thy shield and buckler"--thy protection. Yes, his Truth--that grand system of truth comprised in the divine Plan of the Ages--is an ample shield and buckler to all who in simplicity of heart receive it and prove faithful to it. It is the armor of God which the Apostle urges all the faithful to put on--to appropriate, to meditate upon and to store up the Truth in mind and heart--that they may be able, by its use, to withstand error and evil in every form presented to them in this evil day.

Verse 5. "Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night [the dark night of which the Prophet Isaiah and also the Lord spoke,

saying, "The morning" --the Millennial morning--"cometh, and also the night"--the great time of trouble which shall immediately precede it, the night "wherein no man can labor" for the dissemination of divine truth: so great will be "the terror," the tumult and trouble and persecution of that night.--Isa. 21:12; John 9:4; nor for the arrow ["even bitter words" of the opponents of the Truth--Psa. 64:3] that flieth by day" [at the present time, which, in comparison with the dark night that is coming, is called day].

Verse 6. "Nor for the pestilence [moral and spiritual] that walketh in darkness [that spreads and makes its victims among those who are ignorant of the Truth, or who are unfaithful to it and hence unworthy of it, and who therefore lack the divine protection and are subject to the "strong delusions" of error--2 Thes. 2:11]; nor for the destruction [caused by these pestilences] that wasteth at noon-day" [that subverts the faith and hope of many, just when the light of divine Truth is shining clearest upon the faithful, as it is shining upon us today.]

Verse 7. "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand [so great will be the falling away from the Truth, even among those who, like ourselves, received it once with joy and who did for a time run well]; but it shall not come nigh thee." --Because of thy loyalty and uncompromising faithfulness and because of the ample armor of truth and righteousness, thou shalt stand and not fall.

Verse 8. "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the recompense of the wrongdoers"-- who reject the Truth or who prove unfaithful to it.

Verses 9,10. "Because thou hast said, 'The Lord is my protection;' because the Most High thou hast made thy refuge, no evil shall befall thee" [no evils of the kind above referred to; and any other seeming evils shall, under divine providence, work together for your good--Rom. 8:28].

Verse 11. "For he shall give his angels [messengers] a charge concerning thee, to guard thee in all thy ways. [⁽²⁾That is, God will raise up some faithful pastors and teachers who will "watch for your souls as they that must give an account." True, there shall arise false teachers, perverting the Word of the Lord and seeking by cunning sophistries to subvert your souls; but if in simplicity of heart God's children require a "Thus saith the Lord" for every element of their faith, and carefully prove all things by the Word, they will be able to distinguish readily the true from the false. And having done so, the Apostle Paul (Heb. 13:17) counsels us to have confidence. The Lord, our Shepherd, will care for the true sheep.]

Verse 12. "They shall bear thee [all the members of the body of Christ, individually and collectively] up in their hands [using their strength], lest thou dash thy foot against a stone"--any stumbling stone of false doctrine, and especially that great fundamental rock-dogma of the redemption through the precious blood of Christ;--that "rock of offense and stone of stumbling" to both the houses of nominal Israel (fleshly and spiritual). (Isa. 8:14.) The "feet" of the body are its last members; the saints now living are members of the "feet of him" (Christ), the ones who are now in danger of being stumbled, as the feet of the Jewish house of servants were in danger in the end or harvest of the Jewish age.

How do such messengers of the Lord bear up the feet of Christ? By helping them to a clear understanding of the Truth, and teaching and encouraging them by word and example how to be faithful to the Truth, and how to run so as to attain to the mark for the prize of our high calling.

Verse 13. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."--Thus borne up in the hands of the Lord's faithful messengers and guarded by their vigilant watchfulness, and under the constant protection of the Most High, God's trusting, faithful children shall triumph over every device of Satan either to overpower or beguile them--whether he boisterously goes about as a roaring lion, or whether, serpent-like, he stealthily lurks about to insert his venomous poison.

Verse 14. "Because he hath set his love upon me [saith Jehovah], therefore will I deliver him [from the pestilence, etc.]: I will set him on high [exalt him to joint-heirship with Christ, make him a member of the "Royal Priesthood," and a "partaker of the divine nature"], because he hath known [appreciated] my name."

Verses 15,16. "He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life [eternal life--John 10:28,29; Rom. 2:1] will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation"--make him understand my plan.

Praise the Lord for such assurances of his loving care! "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

⁽¹⁾ Nov. 14 Manna, Acts 20:29-30

⁽²⁾ Nov. 17 Manna, Psa. 91:11