Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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Principles of God's Law

The laws of God are not arbitrary. Neither are they each to handle one situation of life, but rather to encompass the underlying principles behind a multitude of ethical situations.

To illustrate this concept, we will examine the underlying code of God's legal structure, the "Ten Commandments:' found in Exodus 20. Each of these laws, which God etched on "tables of stone," outlines a definite background principle governing a number of actions.

REVERENCE - THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

"Thou shalt have no other Gods before me"-Exodus 20:3 In similar words, both David in Psa. 111:10 and Solomon in Prov. 9:10; 1:7 outline the same thought: "The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' " In a negative vein, Paul in Romans 1:21, condemns the heathen, "because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." They are not criticized for lack of worship, but for not recognizing God's position "as God."

It is one thing to recognize God, even as the Creator of the universe, but quite another matter to cede to him the total right to dictate the principles for the sustenance of life. However, it is this authority which forms the basis of moral and theological law.

THE FAITH PRINCIPLE

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." - Exodus 20:4

Images, idols and icons are made to respect the gods they venerate; to worship them. Yet Jehovah, the God of Israel, rejected the use of all such devices and actively punished his own people for such use.

The principle here is faith -the ability to accept and fully believe in the invisible. In the incident of the golden calf, we find that Israel felt no such need as long as they could visibly see Moses as their leader. It was only after his protracted absence [and presumed death] at Mt. Sinai that they urged Aaron to make the golden calf.

It is very human to believe only in that which we can directly relate to one of the five senses. For this reason, it has been said "Man has created God in his own image, rather than accept the fact that it was God who created man in His image." Note the similarity of this with Romans 1:22-25.

This was endemic to the nations around Israel. Pagan gods were the forces of nature. But the God of Israel was different. He was not a force, but the Creator of all force. He was to be comprehended by his characters perfect blend of wisdom, love, justice and power -more than by His awesomeness.

While His titles "El," "'Elohim" and "El Shaddai" did stress his mighty power, his special title to Israel, "Jehovah," stressed a personal and covenant relationship based more on character than on might or power.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SINCERITY

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."-Exodus 20:7

Frequently this commandment is taken as a ban against profane or blasphemous speech. While this is a valid principle, it is not the main thrust of this law.

The nation of Israel were uniquely "the people of God," God spoke of himself as "married" to Israel. (Jer. 3:14) As in marriages today, the wife takes the name of the husband. And with the new name comes the responsibility to assume the character which that name implies. To abdicate this responsibility is to defame that name, or "take it in vain"

If this was true of Israel, how much more of the Church, the Bride of Christ and "Sons of God " To accept the invitation to be part of the Christ [Anointed] class is to accept the challenge to live up to the conditions of its calling, and by our changed life to glorify our "new name" It is the challenge of a full and complete consecration of life and all its powers to God. Any thing less is "to take the name of the Lord our God in vain."

Taking God's name in vain is “nominal”-in name only. It is illustrated well by a class spoken of in Isa. 4:1: “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach”

This does not eliminate the concept that this command forbids profanity, but it redefines the word “profanity.” In Hebrews 12:16, Paul uses the word “profane” to describe Esau. Yet a careful study of Esau's entire life reveals a noble character. [Note especially Gen. 33; 36:6-8] He was not a bad man, but neither was he “a man of faith” - a religious man.

The English word “profane” is taken from two Latin roots - “profane” is taken from two Latin roots – “pro” and “fanos” - meaning “out of the temple Anything unrelated to the temple, to religious worship is profane. To claim to live within the Temple of God as his servant, but to actually live without is “profane” - profanity.

And so, the principle of the third commandment is honesty or sincerity. The word “sincerity” further illustrates this point. The English word is derived from the Latin words “*sin*,” without; and “*ceros*,” wax-”without wax.” In ancient market places it was not unusual for the maker of pottery to end up with a defect in his product. To maintain marketability of the product, he would cover up the defect with wax. Only a genuine article, without defect, was “sincere;' or without wax.

The Greeks had another word for the concept of sincerity, but drawn from the other side of the same marketplace illustration. Their word was “*helionkronis*;” meaning “judged by the sun.” The buyer in the market could determine the presence of the covering wax most easily by holding the pottery to the sun, for it would reveal any wax-covered defects.

Our consecrations must be honest and sincere. They must be exposed to the full sunlight of the gospel to test their genuineness. Only those who live such lives will exemplify the principle of “not taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain”

THE PRINCIPLE OF SELFLESSNESS

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” -Exodus 20:8

Perhaps no commandment was more abused by Israel than this one. The letter of the law became the great debate. The definition of what work, if any, was permissible on the Sabbath became a fetish. Witness the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning the shucking of grain by the disciples as they passed through the fields on Sabbath, and Jesus' answer, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27)

The Bible says that God “rested” on the Sabbath. On the other hand, Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work . ' (John 5:17) And God's Sabbath work included creative work, for He created the New Creation on the Sabbath. Is God inconsistent with his own laws? Impossible, for God “cannot deny himself.” (2 Tim. 2:13)

The harmony to this problem is in a discussion Jesus had with the Pharisees in which he asked them, “What farmer, having an ox fall into the ditch on the Sabbath, will not pull him out?” God's

ox, mankind, fell into the ditch of sin and death early on God's Sabbath of rest, and God has spent the entire day removing him -the New Creation being but a device he creates for this project.

By such discussions the Jews were showing their real ignorance of the purpose and function of the Sabbath commandment. Similarly today, Christian groups that hold to the literal Sabbath requirements make the same error of emphasis. But, since the abstinence of work is so specifically mentioned in the Sabbath commandment, what is the central point of this law, if it is not the refraining from work?

We have a specific statement of the principle of this commandment in Isaiah 58:13, 14:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

"Not doing thine own ways." This is the point of Sabbath observance -to leave aside our preferences, our ways of doing things, and accept God's ways and methods.

DIVISION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Moses with the Commandments

The Ten Commandments may be divided into two sections-the first four covering the relationship between God and man, and the last six the relationships between man and man.

The principles of the first four concern the authority of the commandments, and the next six cover guidelines for dealing with each other. The first five of the latter group involve different facets of one basic principle-RESPECT. The final commandment, dealing with thoughts instead of actions, reveals a different principle.

RESPECT FOR AGE

"Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Exodus 20:12

In Ephesians 6:2, 3 the Apostle Paul calls this "the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

This is fitting since this is the first of the laws dealing with human relationships. The primary responsibility for passing the laws of God from generation to generation lies with the parents. However, for this to be effective, it is essential that the child have respect for his parents.

But the principle of this command goes beyond parents to older, more experienced ones in general. Leviticus 19:32 reads: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord.”

Another restatement of this principle is found in Lamentations 3:27: “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”

An excellent example of one who applied the principle of this commandment was the young man Elihu, in the book of Job. We read his words in Job 32:6-14:

“And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old: wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged [always] understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me: I also will show mine opinion. Behold I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. Yea, I attended unto you, and behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words: Lest ye should say, we have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man. Now he hath not directed his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches.”

This passage not only illustrates the principle involved, but its limitations, the correct method of handling them, and the reason for them.

Though Elihu was very deferential to the seniority of the three comforters, he nevertheless ended up with a contrary opinion. To “honor” ones elders, does not necessarily mean to agree with them; nor even that that disagreement may not be vocalized. However, he was careful to see that he did not utter his disagreement until he had listened -”waited for your words”-and also analyzed them-”I gave ear to your reasons” - and analyzed their effect - “there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words' “

In this case, Elihu spotted the two main reasons why the comforters did not have the answers to Job's predicament. The first was pride: “Lest ye should say, we have found out wisdom:'and the second was personal hurt, “Now he [job] hath not directed his words against me.” As a result, Elihu was resolved not to answer Job “with your speeches.”

The principle of “honoring” is not synonymous with “obedience,” but with “respect” for the opinions of the older generation. Due to higher education or new information, the young may feel better qualified to provide answers for the questions of changing times. But the subject of these commands is not technological advancements nor situa- tional ethics. It is comprehension of the laws of God -and these are ancient, not modern.

RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUALITY

“Thou shalt not kill.”-Exodus 20:13

Jesus himself elaborates on the scope of this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21, 22:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, [vain fellow] shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire"

Causeless anger, the accusation of vain or empty reasoning or the foolishness of unbelief are all incorporated as part of the principle embodied in this commandment.

The acceptance of individuality, especially with diversity of opinions, is difficult for us as humans. This is often due more to insecurity in our beliefs than to a fully convicted, well-grounded viewpoint. The inability to convince another can lead to the frustration of anger.

Yet diversity, particularly within the body of Christ, forms the basis for two New Testament illustrations of that bodythe Temple and the human body. When Paul describes the Church as "the temple of God" (I Cor. 3:16) he is referring back to the Temple of Solomon, where each stone was so perfectly and indivdually quarried that they fit together without the sound of a hammer. (1 Kings 6:7)

Even more specific is Paul's illustration of the body in I Cor. 12:14-27:

"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye-, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be honored, all members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"

Respect for individuality is the foundation principle of all inter-human relationships.

RESPECT FOR CONTRACTS

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."-Exodus 20:14 Once again we have Jesus'own commentary concerning the deeper meaning of this commandment. It is fo,ind in Matthew 5:27, 28: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That

whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart”

By this statement, Jesus broadened the impact of this law from the realm of action to that of thought.

The obvious function of this seventh commandment was to establish the relationships between males and females. It was a later statement of the principle given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh ' “ (Gen. 2:24)

However, beyond these statements the Old Testament record becomes more cloudy, for other types of sexual liaisons were permitted, and sometimes even blessed by God. Examples include bigamy (as in God's blessing of the children of Bathsheba), concubines (as Keturah, 1 Chron. 1:32), surrogates (as with Hagar, and the handmaidens of Leah and Rachel), and the Levirate law whereby God required the nearest of kin to raise up seed to his brother's widow, if she had been childless. (Dent. 25:5-10)

On the other hand, such sexual unions as adultery, fornication and incest were punishable by death. Since it is axiomatic that God “changes not:'though his expectations for different classes may vary, the student must look for the similarities between those actions which God permitted under his moral code and those he found punishable.

The common thread appears to be contractual arrangements. All of the relationships between man and woman which were permitted were bound by contract, assuring a life-long commitment. Concubines were considered the husband's property, but protected for life; handmaids or surrogates were the same, except they were the possession of the wife; and, of course, bigamous marriages carried the same contractual arrangements as did the first marriages. On the other hand, the forbidden liaisons of adultery and fornication involved no commitments.

Thus, the principle of this commandment, while intended to ensure the sanctity of the marriage relationship between husband and wife, is broad enough to cover respect for all contractual relationships (2 Cor. 6:14-16) and the need in inter-personal relationships for commitment.

RESPECT FOR PROPERTY

“Thou shalt not steal.”-Exodus 20:15

The recognition of private possessions is here considered an inherent right. Thus, the principle of this command seems very simple to comprehend, and so it is.

Yet, even here there is a broader dimension, when we begin to define the word “property.” We often limit this com- mandment to material goods. However, man has other possessions that are every bit as important to him.

Who has not heard the saying, “He who steals my wallet takes that which costs me little; but he who steals my good name takes that which costs me all and benefits him little' “ The use of innuendo, slander or unsupported accusation against another is certainly included within the principle of this eighth commandment.

Another very personal possession is time. To impose uninvited on the time of another is also theft. The same is true of the right of privacy, or any of the other rights of man.

Therefore, the principle of “Thou shalt not steal” covers a broad spectrum of possessions, not only material objects, but personal rights and reputation as well.

RESPECT FOR TRUTH

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”-Exodus 20:16

The determination of what constitutes a “false” witness has stymied the mind of man for centuries, and filled the world with massive court systems and numberless lawyers. Even under the Mosaic code, it was necessary for 70 judges to be appointed to adjudicate disputes.

The science of jurisprudence has developed a large body of evidential procedures to assist in the search for truth between two opposing viewpoints, but these may represent human, rather than spiritual, reasoning.

Several scriptural principles speak directly to the issue. The first of these is a search for truth by: (1) an honest discussion between the opposing parties; (2) if not successful, a further discussion in the presence of at least one unbiased witness; and (3) a hearing, if necessary, before a larger body such as an ecclesia. This is the counsel of Jesus found in Matthew 18:15-17:

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” [Compare the three steps of Matthew 5:22.]

Three more principles are illustrated in the hearing of Paul's case by the Roman judge Festus, after Paul was accused by Jewish priests from Jerusalem. (1) A precise and accurate statement of the charges being leveled is required. “For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him” (Acts 25:27). (2) Hearsay evidence is not admissible. (3) The accused has a right to cross-examine his accusers. “It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.” (Acts 25:16)

Humans are inclined to use the process of dispute to prove the worth of an argument. The principle of the Ten Commandments is a sincere and unbiased respect for truth and an honest search for it.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTENTMENT

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's”- Exodus 20:17

This final commandment is unique from the others in that it deals with thoughts and intents rather than actions. Covetousness may not be expressed by the action of theft, but it is the thought basis for theft.

The specifics of this command also make it a fitting summary law for the four preceding statutes that define the relationships between human beings. (1) “Thy neighbor's house.” Considering how such actions led to murder in the instance of Ahab and Jezebel's acquisition of the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21), it details the command “Thou shalt not kill.” (2) “Thy neighbor's wife.” An obvious reference to “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (3) “Nor his manser- vant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass.” As personal possessions, a summary of “Thou shalt not steal.” (4) “Nor anything that is thy neighbor's.” This would include his reputation and good name, and the security of not being a “false witness:' respecting truth for personal victory in a dispute.

In Luke 10:27, citing a combination of Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18, Jesus summarized the two parts of the obligation to the Law in these words: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”

It was on the question “Who is my neighbor?” that Jesus was challenged by a lawyer. Jesus'answer was graphically given in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which he demonstrated that neighborliness is not a description of geographical nearness, but of the spirit of aid and assistance, even from such distant strangers as the despised Samaritans.

The grand principle, then, with which God closes the “tables of the law,” is that of being content with such things as one has, for the opposite trait, covetousness, will lead eventually to the breaking of all the other commandments.

SUMMARY

We have seen that the first four commands, relating to God, deal largely with the authority of the law itself. First, we must reverence God as both God and the right to be Lawgiver. Second, we must recognize that he wants us to deal with him by faith and belief, and not replace him with human or other instrumentalities. Third, our acceptance of his arrangements must be sincere and genuine, not only in name. Fourth, we must replace our ways and thoughts with his, not only on the Sabbath, but always, as illustrated by the unique arrangements for that special day.

In the next five we see the principle of respect governing five specific areas of life -respect for age; for individuality; for contractual relationships, especially for the sanctity of the marriage relationship between husband and wife; respect for personal property; and respect for truthfulness.

Finally, the tenth commandment governs the thought process behind the preceding four - contentment.

THE MYSTERIOUS FIFTH

In conclusion, we want to notice one final point concerning the fifth commandment, and its placement at the mid- point of the series. To the human mind it is logical to divide Ten Commandments into two equal parts of five, yet evidently the traditional division of four God-oriented and six man-oriented is the correct one.

But, this middle command serves a dual function. While defining God's laws for a specific group - parents and one's seniors -it also connects with the preceding four by showing the channel of communication for the law being passed on from generation to generation. It was the parents' responsibility to raise their young as “children of the law,” and this was to be accompanied by the children respecting the wisdom of the parents. (Note Exodus 10:1, 2; Prov. 22:6)

Therefore, the fifth commandment is most fittingly placed, for it forms the transition between the two sections.
- *Carl Hagensick*

Seventy Times Seven

It is commonly accepted that Matthew 18:21-22 is Peter's question about a reasonable limit of mercy. “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” Jesus' answer is essentially interpreted that forgiveness should be granted as often as it is sought with any manifestation whatsoever of sincerity. R3801. The lesson is that we are not to limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times.

However, Jesus used an interesting formula that produces a fixed number. “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven' “ It is also the only place Jesus mentions multiplying two numbers. The product is 490.

The only other place in Scripture where this formula is found is in Daniel 9:24. It is there stated as 70 weeks. A week being 7 days, the formula is also 70 x 7 = 490. Daniel says this period was determined to “finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins.”

Forgiveness was also the very subject of Peter's inquiry and Jesus' answer. Furthermore, Daniel's prophecy was to reach unto “Messiah the Prince' “ Here in Matthew we have Jesus addressing the subject of forgiveness during the last week of Daniel's prophecy. Could it be that Jesus was alluding to Daniel's prophecy in this single sentence answer to Peter in Matthew 18:22? Is Jesus suggesting that God has arranged to deal with Israel by the same rule he advocates for individual mercy?

The desire for mercy and favor were the basis of the 70 week prophecy, Daniel 9:18-19. Since the “going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:25), God was

forbearing with a wayward people for a period of 490 years. Jesus was “cut off” in the midst of the last week (7 years), in 33 C.E. Yet exclusive Gospel favor continued with the natural Jewish house for the last 31/2 years until 36 C.E., to fulfill the full extent of the period of mercy of 490 years. Then the Gospel was extended to the Gentiles. The first convert was Cornelius. God turned to the Gentiles to take out a people for his name. We here apply the beginning of Paul's lesson of breaking off Jewish olive branches and the first grafting in of wild Gentile branches.

However, this did not spell the complete end of favor to the natural house. Now that the 70 x 7 extent of special mercy was about to be reached, and a change in their exclusive relation to God was about to occur, those careful to note the spirit of Jesus' words could take hope. God does not limit his mercy to 490 times. Israel will yet be grafted back into their own olive tree (covenant favor). The Apostle Paul develops this theme in Romans 11, “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew” and “the receiving of them” will be “life from the dead.”

So the seventieth week of 70 x 7 reached unto the Messiah who provided the ransom price, which will in due time be effective toward the natural house and all mankind. This will provide forgiveness for all who seek it with any manifestation whatsoever of sincerity, for “whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Revelation 22:17
- *Jerry Leslie*

The Sundial of Ahaz

“*Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone dow in the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down*.”-Isa. 38:8

This is another of those Old Testament incidents which seem to set at defiance the known laws of Nature and hence receive more than the usual meed of criticism from sceptics and “modern” Bible scholars. In reaction to this, many studious Christians of the traditional school have sought to explain the account along lines of scientific explanations of the miracle, always on the basis of the Authorized Version translation.

It was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign that the apparently fatal illness gripped him, and the word of the prophet Isaiah came to him. “Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (Isa. 38:1) And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, for he was a devout man, and he had worked hard for the good of his people of Judah, and his work was not yet finished. There was more in Hezekiah's grief than appears on the surface, too, for as yet he had no son to continue the promised line. It seemed as though God intended to abandon His own purpose and the glory of Israel never come at all. So Hezekiah prayed that he might live.

His prayer was answered. He heard that fifteen years were to be added to his life. Isaiah was commissioned to give him a sign that the Lord would both heal his sickness and deliver the city from the army of Sennacherib, which was at the time threatening Judah, for this was before the celebrated destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem. (Isa. 38:6-7, 36:1, 37:36)

According to the parallel account in 2 Kings 20:8-11, Hezekiah was given the choice of two signs. Either the shadow of the "sundial of Ahaz" was to *go down* ten degrees, or it was to *return back* ten degrees. Hezekiah chose the latter. It was a light thing, said he, for it to go down ten degrees; it did that every day anyway; "nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees."

And the shadow went back!

This sounds like a most amazing happening. It would seem to the ordinary man that the only way in which the shadow on a sundial could return would be for the sun to reverse its course and appear to traverse the sky from west to east, which, since it is the earth that moves, and not the sun, would imply that the earth had changed its direction of rotation and was turning backwards. On this basis the commentators of the nineteenth century endeavored to demonstrate that such a thing did actually happen in the days of Hezekiah. A distinguished astronomer, E. W Maunder, in the early years of this century, produced elaborate calculations to support this view.

Before discussing the nature of the miracle, however, let us examine the story itself, and particularly the language used, and let us try to reconstruct for ourselves the scene of which Hezekiah's sick-bed formed the center-piece on that memorable day.

Hezekiah lay sick in his palace. There is still much that is not known about the Jerusalem of his day, but the position of the palace of the Kings of Judah is definitely established. It lay a little to the south of the Temple, facing the Mount of Olives, which rises from the opposite side of the deep valley of the Kedron. From where Hezekiah reclined he could see the Mount directly before him and the Temple towards his left. Somewhere nearby, near enough for him to witness the "sign," was the "sundial of Ahaz"

Nowhere else in the Bible is there any mention of an instrument for measuring time. Until the days of Daniel, over a century later, there are no indications that the children of Israel divided the day into hours. One is justified there- fore in looking a little more carefully at this expression, "the sundial of Ahaz."

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a great admirer of foreign innovations, as is evidenced by the account in 2 Kings 16, and he might very well have acquired a sundial for his palace grounds were such things in existence in his day. The earliest known sundials are of Greek manufacture and date back only so far as the sixth century B.C., two hundred years later than the time of Ahaz. The Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius, the author of a celebrated work on architecture and mechanical inventions, written in the time of Augustus Caesar, a few years before Jesus was born, says that the sundial was invented by Berosus, the Chaldean priest (Arch. 9.-9); and Berosus lived only about 250 B.C. Herodotus, the Greek historian (440 B.C.), states that the sundial was invented by the Babylonians (*Hist. 2:109*), whilst in Homer's "*Odyssey*"(900 B.C.) there is an obscure reference to a means of observing the revolutions of the sun in use in Syria (*Odyssey 15:402*). It is just possible therefore that Ahaz could have possessed a sundial.

It is when the word "sundial" is examined that a totally different complexion is put upon the account. The Hebrew is *maalah*, which denotes an ascent by means of steps or stages, and is used for "steps" or "stairs" in the Old Testament. The *steps* of the altar in Exod. 20:26, and of

Solomon's throne in 1 Kings 10:19-20, and the stairs of 2 Kings 9:13 and Ezek. 40:6 are "*maalah*."So, likewise, are the majestic words in Amos 9:6. "It is he that buildeth his *stories* in the heavens" where "stories" refer to the stages or terraces of the Babylonian *ziggurats* or temple towers, reared up into the heavens. And this word "maalah" is also translated degrees in the accounts of the miracle. The A.V. translators are guilty of an inconsistency here, for both "degrees" and "sundial" are from the same Hebrew word. Rotherham translates 2 Kings 20:11, "*And he caused the shadow on the steps, by which it had gone down the steps of Ahaz, to go back ten steps,*" and Isa. 28:8, "*Behold me; causing the shadow on the steps, which hath come down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, to return backwards ten steps*."

The "sun-dial" of Ahaz, therefore, was in reality the "steps" or stairs of Ahaz. What stairs were these?

Nehemiah (3:15 and 12:37) speaks of "stairs that go down from the city of David " Jerusalem was built on several hills with two deep valleys-those of the Kedron, and GayHinnom (Gehenna), intersecting them, and there were var- ious flights of stone steps built up the sides of these valleys. It is known that one such staircase descended the slope from the King's Palace eastward down to the Horse Gate in the city wall (Neh. 3:28; 2 Chron. 23:15; jer. 31:40) and another ascended from the Horse Gate up to the south side of the Temple. By means of these two stairways the King possessed what amounted to a private way to the Temple, and there is one rather obscure passage in 2 Kings 16:18 which indicates that Ahaz made some alteration to one of these stairways. It seems then that the stairs leading down from the Palace to the Horse Gate are those to which reference is made in Isaiah.

Now these steps, running roughly eastward down the slope, with the lofty buildings of the Palace at the top between them and the afternoon sun, were shrouded in shadow every afternoon. As soon as the sun had passed the zenith at midday, the shadow of the Palace roof would fall upon the topmost step, and thereafter as the sun sank towards the west, so the shadow would grow longer and creep down the stairs to the end. That is the shadow that had gone down ten of the steps ("degrees" in the A.V.) at the time of the sign. It must have been about the middle of the afternoon. Hezekiah had lain there many afternoons watching the shadow of his father's house creep down those stairs until at length, as it reached the Horse Gate at the bottom, the sun sank below the horizon behind his palace, the daylight rapidly faded and the short Palestinian twilight gave way to black night. So is the fate of my father's house, he must have thought bitterly; I am to die childless; there will be none of my line to reign after me on the throne of the Lord of Judah; all the promises made to the fathers will fail; there can never be a son of David to become David's Lord. God hath forgotten to be gracious.

And then he saw the sign! Josephus makes it plain in his account of the circumstances (Ant. 10:2:1) that the shadow had gone down ten steps of the staircase and then returned. What had happened? What was it in this inexplicable phenomenon that convinced Hezekiah that God was with him and would heal him?

It is not necessary to suppose that God interfered so much with the normal course of Nature as to halt and reverse the onward progression of the sun through the sky. Less spectacular and unlikely causes would have produced the effect. Under certain climatic conditions clouds of minute ice

crystals can form at a great height in the upper reaches of the air; the apparent result as seen from the earth is the appearance of a band of light passing through the sun, and two additional suns, one on either side of the true sun. This effect, which is known as *parhelia*, or "mock sun:' is due to the refraction of the sun's light as it passes through the prismatic ice crystals on its way to the earth. If now a cloud, at a much lower altitude, should obscure real sun and the western "mock sun" over a certain district, the only light reaching that district is from the eastern "mock sun;' and the effect is as if the sun had receded eastwards by a certain fixed amount (always equal to one and a half hours of our time). Two occasions when this actually happened are on record; one was on 27th March, 1703, at Metz, in France, when the shadow on the sundial of the Prior of Metz was displaced by one and a half hours. The other occasion was on the 28th March, 1848, over parts of Hampshire when the same effect was observed.

Now this is a perfectly logical scientific explanation and the miracle could very well have been due to this cause, except for one consideration. Hezekiah had been at great pains to put down Baal worship, the constant curse of Israel, and to restore the worship of Jehovah. The sun was the visible symbol of Baal. Such a phenomenon as is described above would be probably interpreted by those who witnessed it as a manifestation of the power and interest of Baal. The credit for the sign, and consequently for the cure of Hezekiah's sickness, would have been given, not to the God of Israel, but to Baal. Much of Hezekiah's own good work would have been undone. For this reason it is unlikely that God would use the sun as an instrument for effecting the "sign."

Is there then another possible means by which the miracle could have been performed, more in keeping with the majesty and power of God and more indisputably attributable to Him? The fact that as Hezekiah looked down his staircase the Temple of the Lord was in full view upon his left, at the summit of Mount Moriah, suggests that there is.

The shadow of the palace lay ten steps down the staircase. Only the return of the sunlight could remove it - *or a light brighter than sunlight*! Every Israelite knew that there was such a light; the holy "*Shekinah*" that supernatural light that shone from between the cherubim in the Most Holy, that had been the guide of Israel in the wilderness in those long ago Exodus days, a "fire by night," one that had been seen on rare occasions when God had cause to manifest His majesty and power in visible form. That fierce light, brighter than the sun at noonday, had flashed out from the Tabernacle to slay Nadab and Abihu when they offered "strange fire" before the Lord (Lev. 10:2); it had flooded the camp at the time of Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:42-45); it had filled Solomon's Temple at its dedication. Isaiah saw it once in vision when he received his commission of service. (Isa. 6:1) Is it possible that as Hezekiah gazed still upon the staircase, waiting for the sign that the Lord had promised him, the wondrous glory of the Shekinah did indeed blaze out from that sanctuary on the hill, blotting out the brightness of the sun itself, lighting all Jerusalem with its radiance? The shadow on the steps would have vanished in an instant, and the whole scene, the Palace Gardens, the stairs themselves, the city wall and the Horse Gate far below, the Mount of Olives on the opposite side of the valley, stand out in sharp relief vividly delineated in that blinding white light. If this is indeed what happened on that memorable day, what possible doubt could remain in Hezekiah's mind? More convincing by far than any natural celestial phenomenon, this message from the sanctuary was as the appearance of God Himself.

All Jerusalem must have seen it. All Jerusalem must have interpreted it aright. The *Shekinah* came forth only for destruction or blessing. Hezekiah was a good king, a God fearing man. It could only mean that he would recover, that he would live to play his part in the fulfillment of Divine promise, that there would yet be a son to sit upon the throne of the Lord after him, that the destiny of Israel would yet be achieved. The news would travel quickly, and before long all Judea would know what had happened, and that the king's life had been prolonged for fifteen years.

So the wonderful story concludes with Hezekiah going up to the Temple to sing his songs of praise to the stringed instruments, all the days of his life, for his deliverance and for the marvelous happenings. (Isa. 38:20) Fifteen songs did he compose and named them "songs of the steps." They appear today in the Book of Psalms as Psalms 120 to 134, and they are headed "songs of degrees" by the A.V. translators. (The ascription of some of them to David is incorrect.) For ever afterwards they were used in the Temple ceremonies, and today we use them still, a memorial of that day when the Lord turned back the shadow that was over the house of Israel, and His glory was seen in Jerusalem.
- *Albert Hudson, England*

The Books of Life

The NIV version of the Bible has many passages that are worded differently from the K.J., and usually they are easier to understand. But since the translators did not understand the Plan of God as we see it, it is not surprising that some of these changes bring out a thought that is not in harmony with that Plan. We call attention to Rev. 20:12, in the NIV, which reads:

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books."

Notice that although this rendering is ambiguous, it does give the clear impression, in the last sentence, that the people of the world will be judged by the record of their deeds in the books. (What books?) So, even though earlier in this verse, "books" are distinguished from "the book of life," the reader gets the idea that the book of life is a recording of the acts of each individual. This is radically different from other translations, and the interpretation given by Bro. Russell, which is that "books" in this verse refer to the books of the Bible, and the "book of life" is merely a listing of the names of those worthy of life -this one the names of those worthy of life on earth, and the one mentioned in Rev. 3:5, and elsewhere, the names of those worthy of life on the spiritual plane. The people will be judged by their works, and the judging will be based on the laws given in the books of the Bible. This thought is supported by the KJ, RSV, NW, Roth., Diag., Philips, Weymouth and Luther translations. Luther states: "The Scriptures in the books" But Weymouth has it: "The record in the books," which is rather ambiguous.

Now let us apply the idea suggested in the NIV version (that the "book of life" is a recording of every deed of each person) to the restitution work, and see how it compares with the Plan. Remember that "recorded in a book" is symbolic, and means that the record is public and will be

used as a basis of judging. The people of the world, in coming up the highway of holiness during the Mediatorial reign, will make many mistakes. If they come up to perfection, and then pass the Little Season test, will their many mistakes be held against them, as this NIV Scripture suggests? Note what Ezek. 18:21, 22, states:

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live" (Also, Ezek. 18:2 7, and 33:15, 16.)

So, we see that the mistakes they made during the Mediatorial reign will *not* be held against them. If they were, no one would be counted worthy of life. As stated in R5234p3: "The future judgment of the world will take note of the condition of men's hearts at the time, rather than take note of their wrong condition of the previous time"

How does the idea suggested in this NIV version harmonize with the call of the Church? We know that we all make many mistakes and often come short of perfection. Are these mistakes held against us, as this Scripture suggests? *No*, the merit of Christ covers us, as a robe, and these mistakes are *not* counted against us as long as our heart attitude is right. If every act of our life were recorded and held against us, none of us would attain to life.

The Plan which God has arranged for calling out the Church in this Gospel Age, and for bringing the willing of mankind up to perfection in the Millennial Age, does not harmonize with the idea of having every act of each in- dividual recorded during the training period. Rather it is a matter of what kind of character they are at the end of the training period that will determine their worthiness of life. (See Ex. 32:32, 33; Psa. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; and Comments).
- *Marion Schrock*