

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS: Merry Christmas

By B. HERBIN

There's a great deal of talk about the Vietnam War, where we Americans are concerned. Recently, announcements have gone out to march for PEACE there, in order that our soldiers, sailors, marines and Air-men may come home — the brave ones still fighting in light of those who have given already the SUPREME SACRIFICE. Moratoriums have been held throughout the Nation in this interest of patriotism and love for our fighting forces. There, I doubt, are any of us who wish this war to continue; and none loves peace more than I.

Hence, I pray for tranquility and happiness for all mankind in every corner of the globe; I, too, wish the war would cease. However, I am thinking that the wars on our own soil, in our own land is just as detrimental to domestic tranquility for Americans, here at home, as it is for those Americans who fight on foreign soil.

Recently, The Greensboro Daily News carried an editorial from one Soldier in Vietnam who stated his disappointment in American support for our position in the Vietnam crisis. He expressed disagreement with the moratorium saying that he, among other Americans, understands the purpose of their being there, and that they will stay there to see "it" through. It is right for us to sing... "The home of the brave." "The land of the free?" — Well, when citizens are led to live in fear because they dare speak out on issues closer to home, then our freedoms are denied. Not by Vietnamese, not by Germans, not by any other nation of people: these freedoms are ostracized by our own people.

Sure it's right and proper for "moderate, patriotic, responsible citizens to remain no longer silent; needful is it to "put THE PRINCE OF PEACE back into CHRISTMAS," by joining in the sentiments of BROTHERHOOD, but this can never be done — not merely by the stoppage of the war in Vietnam; not really by the dominance of one race over another, nor by class against class. CHRIST can not live in a declining society where the color of HIS skin becomes a fighting factor, or where selfishness, fear and sin trample HIS HOLINESS in the dust. The PRINCE OF PEACE will ride around the outskirts of this City and this Nation unless those who cry loudest for His coming, first let HIM in their hearts and into their lives.

How can we expect THE GRACES OF HIS COMPANY as long as we fight each other in our Land? I almost understand the fight in Vietnam, but the war between Americans themselves, I cannot comprehend.

We cannot stop the war in Vietnam; can we stop the one at home? It, indeed, would be a wonderful experience to not only dream of the Christmas we use to know; it would be a Blessing to have in reality a Christmas of PEACE AND JOY here at home. I know the boys in Vietnam would like that too, and have a reason to look Homeward to the days when they, too, shall return, not to a battle field as they now live each day, but return to God's greatest gift to us, and ours to them — The America of domestic tranquility — a never ending Christmas of happiness, peace and joy for all.

POET'S CORNER

"Lord, when Thou seest that my work is done,
Let me not linger on,
With failing powers,
Adown the weary hours,
A workless worker in a world of work.
But, with a word,
Just bid me home,
And I will come
Right gladly,
Yea, right gladly
Will I come."

This Week's Sunday School Lesson

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS Beginning Where You Are

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled." (Luke 2:1)

These words set in historical context the birth of Jesus. They and the words that follow inform the reader of the New Testament that Jesus was born in that era of the Roman Empire when Caesar Augustus was the ruler.

Though Malachi appears in the Old Testament as the "last book," it was not actually the last book to be written. Malachi was written in Jerusalem about 450 B.C. The events described in the opening verses of the Book of Matthew regarding the birth of Jesus took place (as nearly all scholars now agree) about 6 B.C. So nearly 450 years are skipped between the last chapter of Malachi and the first chapter of Matthew.

What happened during those 450 years? To help us understand the world into which Jesus was born, let us review Jewish history from the time the Jews returned from exile to the time of Jesus.

About 538 B.C., the exiles who had been living in Babylon were permitted by Cyrus to return to Jerusalem. The Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe many of the difficulties the people had in their attempt to rebuild their community in Palestine. A temple was finally completed. Jerusalem was still under the authority of the Persians, and this period is known as the "Persian period" of Jewish history.

About 333 B.C., the young Greek general, Alexander (the Great), conquered the Mediterranean ports north of Palestine. Jerusalem had first intended to resist the invasion, but, when the nearby cities fell, they came to terms with Alexander. Here, then, begins the "Greek period" of Jewish history, which was to last until the beginning of the "Roman period" in 63 B.C. (Jesus was born and served out his ministry during the Roman period of domination. Caesar Augustus was ruler from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14.)

Alexander the Great died soon after his conquest of Palestine, and his kingdom was divided. Later the Jews revolted against their Greek ruler when he attempted to hinder their worship. This period is known as the Maccabean (MACK-ah-BEE-an) revolt. Following this time, the Jews were practically free for about one hundred years. The Old Testament Book of Daniel has as its background this period of conflict. In time, the house of which Herod was a descendant got control of the land. The house of Herod ruled during the Roman period mentioned above.

During this Roman period, the features of Jewish life that are familiar to us in the New Testament arose, in large part as a response to the deep spiritual yearnings of the people. It was during this period that the parties of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees came into

prominence in Jewish religious life.

The scribes were the Jewish scholars whose origin goes back to the time of the return of the exiles in 538 B.C. By the second century before Christ, the scribes had developed a contest with the Pharisees. The Pharisees trying to adapt the law to changing situations in life. Their intention was to try to make the will of God plainer to the Jews. Some Pharisees were hypocrites and fell under the condemnation of Jesus. But scholars tell us that we should not think that all Pharisees were like those Jesus condemned.

Another major group was the Sadducees. Sadducees saw little need for change; they opposed the attempt of the Pharisees to find new ways of understanding the old law.

It is also important to remember that all three of these groups were laymen and that the titles refer to their religious beliefs.

This period immediately prior to the birth of Jesus was also a time of renewed interest in the law. Morton S. Enslin explains: "Keeping the law stood as man's paramount obligation. But it was no hardship for the Jew. He did it with no ulterior end in view; he did it because he loved God and wished to do God's will. It was God, not venial and self-seeking men, who had framed the law. His motives were entirely pure and beneficent. Failure to obey God's revealed will, heedless or deliberate violation — these spelled disaster."

Searching The Scriptures

The Scripture for this lesson is Psalms 1; 119:1-16; Luke 1:57 through 2:3. Selected verses are printed below.

Psalms 119:1-8

- 1 Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!
- 2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart,
- 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
- 4 Thou hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently.
- 5 O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes!
- 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all thy commandments.
- 7 I will praise thee with an upright heart, when I learn thy righteous ordinances.
- 8 I will observe thy statutes! O forsake me not utterly.

Luke 2:1-3

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. 2 This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city.

Memory Selection:

I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. —Psalms 119:11

Exploring The Questions

Psalms 1 and 119 both express the deep devotion to the Law which developed during the period between the Testaments.

Psalms 119 has an unusual form. Its 176 verses are divided into twenty-two sections of eight

verses each. Verses 1-8, printed with this lesson, are the first section or stanza. The first word in each of its eight verses begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse of the second stanza (verses 9-16) begins with the second letter, and so on through the psalm. (The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters.)

The purpose of the psalmist was to describe the delight he felt in the law. Many different words are used (in both Hebrew and English) for law: ordinances, judgments, testimonies, words, precepts, statutes, commandments, word, promise, and ways. Several of these are found in the first eight verses of the psalm.

When the Jew of the period between the Old and New Testaments used the Hebrew word for "law," he did not mean what an American today would mean by "law". The Hebrew word had a broader meaning: it meant either oral or written teaching or instruction based on the revelation from God.

The Jew thought the law contained all man needed to know about God's will for him. Obedience to the law guaranteed that one would find the blessed (happy or satisfied) life. Disobedience meant unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and disaster. The law was God's greatest gift to man.

Jewish thought as we find it in many psalms is concerned about two possible ways of life. One way is that of the righteous person whose delight is in the law of God. (The Hebrew word for "delight in" also means "to take pleasure in," "to want to do.")

The second way of life was that of the wicked person who lived in the shadow of divine judgment.

What do these verses of Psalms 119 tell us who live in this century about where to find our happiness? What is the source of hope for the Christian? Can it be found in the law, even though Christians are supposed to be living under grace? Can we accept for our day the division used by the psalmist into one group who is blessed because persons obey God's law and another group of those who are punished because they do not?

Finding Help

With Your Questions

As in all times of change, people today look to the leaders of the time to make some sense out of the confusion and to give direction in life. People are seeking specific answers.

Most Christians would not argue about the necessity for the believer to keep God's law. But what is God's law? Is God's law the same now as it was in the Old Testament? For the Christian, is the law to be regarded as (1) the Ten Commandments; (2) the Sermon on the Mount; (3) the Gospels; (4) the entire New Testament; (5) the whole Bible; or (6) none of these?

In Jesus' day, several groups of persons were certain they knew the will of God. These groups have already been mentioned: the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. All three of these groups fell under

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