

November 18

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them. Psalm 34:7

HOW it enlarges the confidence of a Christian to realize that whilst earthly powers may be in opposition, and whilst he may

be really of himself powerless to resist adversaries, and whilst in addition to the flesh and blood adversaries he may realize that he battles also with spiritual wickedness in exalted places -- against Satan and his minions of darkness -- yet that, on the other hand, "greater is He that is on our part than

all that be against us," and that all the heavenly hosts are subject to the divine will and may be employed for the advancement of the divine cause according to divine wisdom. Z. '97-120 R2140:6

R3004 "CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES OF THE SAINTS *"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."*-- Psalm 34:7...

It is comparatively easy for us to associate our Golden Text with Peter and his deliverance, and with ourselves in instances of peculiar assistance from the Lord in our affairs, temporal or spiritual; but it is much more difficult for us to associate it with the experiences of the Apostle James and with our own experiences, in which disasters, difficulties and fiery trials are permitted to come upon us. Such experiences are doubtless sent of the Lord for the development and testing of our faith. The Lord's providential care was none the less in the case of James, and we may be sure that nothing happened to him contrary to divine intention and permission; and so with ourselves; we may be sure, not only that the Lord knoweth them that are his, but sure also that "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," and that he "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation provide also a way of escape." In James' case the "escape" was final and decisive, in Peter's it was temporary.

Our trials and difficulties are not, therefore, to be esteemed as the results of divine carelessness in respect to our interests, but as the outworkings of divine providence for our good. Those who are able to view the matter from this standpoint are thus enabled to learn some of the very best and most helpful of life's lessons, and are thereby prepared for the glorious things coming; whereas those who allow faith to falter in times of trial, and who will walk with the Lord and have confidence in him only when they are the recipients of miraculous favors, are correspondingly weak, and correspondingly unprepared for the Kingdom. And as these lessons are necessary to the individual, so they are necessary also to the Church as a whole, as in the case of James and the Church in our lesson. So far as James was concerned, it could matter little to him which way the Lord effected his "escape" if, in the Lord's wisdom, he had finished his course, perfected his character and stood the test. As for the Church, it could learn an important lesson; viz., that God, while pleased to use the Apostles and various agencies in the prosecution of his work, was not at all dependent upon them, but that one or all of them could be dropped out, and yet

the Lord be thoroughly competent to manage his own work and to accomplish all the gracious promises of his Word.

"THY WILL BE DONE!"

My Lord, thy will not mine be done:
Whatever path thy love shall choose for me,
Through desert sands, or if beside the sea,--
Thy will be done!

Oh, may thy will in me be done!
Should "harvest" labor be for me thy will,
Or if I may but suffer and be still,--
Thy will be done!

My Father, let thy will be done:
If *sweet* the Cup thou pourest for me to drink,
I'll praise thee; but, if *bitter*, I'll not shrink,--
Thy will be done!

Forever may thy will be done:
I would not choose, I leave it all with thee,--
The pilgrimage, if short or long it be,--
Thy will be done!

--G. W. Seibert.

R2139 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0) PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON

--APRIL 25.--ACTS 12:5-17.--

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."--Psa. 34:7.

FOLLOWING the history of the early Church, we now come upon another period of persecution. The former persecution seems to have passed by the principal ones of the Church entirely. It manifested itself against ordinary believers rather than against the apostles and public ministers. The result, as we have seen, was the spread of the gospel by those who were "scattered abroad everywhere." The persecution now considered was directed against the apostles. Both persecutions were from the adversary and his faithful, but were such only as God saw best to permit, and such as would work out some good in connection with his plan.

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Caligula the Jews were kept in a considerable ferment by reason of his repeated attempt to have his statue set up in the temple, with altars for the worship of himself. While the Jews were so busy in defending their own religious liberties, the infant Christian Church was left comparatively unmolested; but now Caligula was dead, and a very different personage was his successor, and the Jews having a respite from troubles of their own, had good opportunity to cultivate their animosity against the followers of the Nazarene. King Herod Agrippa, having been obliged to cooperate with the Emperor's plans, had made himself more or less obnoxious to his subjects, the Jews; and he now sought to conciliate them, by persecuting the Christians. This Herod Agrippa was a worthy successor to his uncle, who had murdered John the Baptist, and to his grandfather, Herod the Great, who murdered the infants at Bethlehem. His first object was personal aggrandizement and the perpetuation of his own family in the kingdom. His public acts, on the one hand, were intended to continue him in favor with the Emperor at Rome, and on the other hand, to gain as much favor as possible from the people whom he ruled as king,--as representative of the Emperor.

The persecution began with the killing of the Apostle James. Seeing that thereby he gained the favor of the Jews, Herod thought it

the cheapest method by which to regain popularity with his subjects and proceeded to take Peter also. What a sad blow this must have been to the early Church! James and Peter were apparently the principal leaders in the affairs of the Church at Jerusalem, as they two with John, the brother of James, were the most prominent amongst the apostles while our Lord lived. We can imagine the consternation --James already dead, Peter seized and imprisoned and his execution held over merely because it was the week of Passover, and because according to Jewish custom no one could be put to death during that week. The manifest, if not declared, intention of Herod was that Peter should be killed in some manner immediately after the close of the Passover week. Here we pause to notice a strange commingling of religious formalism with the spirit of murder: the spirit of murder was in Herod and in the Jews, yet both for the time restrained themselves in order to symbolize by the Passover ceremonial a cleansing of the heart and life, a purification toward God. There is a lesson here (for all who will take it) to be on guard lest the outward and formal observances be an utter contradiction of the real condition of the heart. While obedience to the Lord in outward observances is eminently proper, it is still more important that the thoughts be pure and good.

By this time the number of Christians in Jerusalem was evidently considerable, notwithstanding the number that had emigrated on account of persecution; and it does not at all surprise us that we are informed that these everywhere were praying to God on Peter's behalf. There were evidently no church buildings in use by the Christians up to this time: they gathered in convenient places, and quite probably there were several of these in Jerusalem. The earnestness of these prayers is evidenced by the fact that they were kept up *all night*, and evidently for the *entire week* of Peter's imprisonment; for he was not delivered until the very last night, and, when delivered, it was some time in the "fourth watch," which began at

three o'clock in the morning, and he was knocking at the "gate" of Mary's home, where prayer was being made, before sunrise.--Verse 13.

We cannot know just why the Lord permitted the death of James and spared the life of Peter; yet, doubtless, both events exercised a beneficial influence upon the Church. Possibly, indeed, there may have been growing in the Church a lack of appreciation of these apostles whom the Lord had so highly honored as his mouthpieces and channels for blessing the Church. The martyrdom of one would cause his loss to be seriously realized, the imprisonment of the other would and did draw forth the sympathy, love and appreciation of the whole company; and after they had prayed so earnestly for his deliverance, we may be sure that Peter was more than ever beloved by the Lord's flock. At all events, the death of one and the sparing of the other, we may be sure, were parts of the all things that worked together for good to those who loved the Lord.

Meantime, Peter had been delivered to four quaternions of soldiers (*i.e.*, four relief guards of four soldiers each): two of these watched in the outer courts of the prison, while two of them were chained to Peter in the cell. Thus, seemingly, every precaution had been taken against his escape. He had been delivered once before from the prison into which he had been thrust by the Sanhedrin, but now he was under military guard, probably in the Tower of Antonio, and chained to soldiers who knew that under Roman usage his escape would mean their death. The entire week had been spent in prayer on his behalf, yet the Lord had not delivered him, and each day seemed to add to the earnestness of the prayers, and to the necessity for the deliverance; yet knowing the circumstance it was difficult to judge in which way the Lord's providence would be interposed on Peter's behalf, if at all. Since the Lord had seen best to permit the death of James, they must have reasoned that they could not be at all certain that Peter would be delivered from death. How great and how far-reaching were the blessings of that week of trial and of prayer, of drawing near to the Lord and of realization of complete dependence upon him, we may surmise. The Lord was pleased in his providence to spare Peter to the Church, but he was also evidently pleased to be inquired of by the Church on this subject.

However, even on the last night of his imprisonment, though he expected that the next morning Herod would call for him to deliver him up to death, notwithstanding all this, "Peter slept." His noble, courageous heart was fixed upon the Lord, he trusted in divine wisdom and divine power and divine love, and was assured that nothing would be permitted to happen that would not be in some manner overruled for good. Hence, committing his all to the Lord, he was able to rest sweetly in sleep. Here was the appropriate order of things: the one directly involved so sweetly resting in the Lord's grace and love that he was free from trouble and fear, while the Church in general, though not so directly and personally concerned, were so full of loving interest on behalf of a brother that they prayed without ceasing day and night on his behalf. What they asked we are not told, but what they should ask under such circumstances we may well know from our Lord's own prayer (Matt. 26:39-42): whatever they asked, in propriety must have included the thought and the expression--Thy will, not ours, O Lord, be done.

When the angel awakened Peter, loosed his fetters, opened the strongly barred gates of the prison and brought him forth into the street, he left him, having accomplished his mission. Peter, amazed and bewildered, could scarcely realize at first whether it was a reality or a vision; but as he got his senses collected he comprehended

that God had wrought for him another wonderful deliverance from the hands of his enemies-- Herod and the Jews. But he neither went back to taunt the soldiers, nor was he filled with self-admiration and self-confidence, so as to shout his deliverance on the way; but considering the matter carefully he concluded that his proper course would be flight to some other city, as the Lord had directed, saying, "When they shall persecute you in one city flee to another." But as a true under-shepherd he had too deep an interest in the Lord's people who were so earnestly praying for him, to leave them without some explanation: so, going to the house of one of the friends of the cause, he communicated to them the fact of his release, sent word to the leaders of the cause in the city-- "James, and the brethren"--and then fled to another place. This James was the brother of our Lord, while the James who had been killed was the Apostle, the brother of John. The fact that James and the prominent brethren were not at the house of Mary and her son John-Mark would seem to corroborate the thought that the meeting at the latter place was only one of many in Jerusalem.

The narrative of Peter's knocking at the door and the interruption of the prayer meeting, with the announcement of the answer of the prayers in a most remarkable manner, is all told with a beautiful simplicity, and indicates to us the loving spirit of fellowship and brotherhood which existed in the early Church.

The Golden Text carries a great lesson of its own in connection with Peter's deliverance. The Scriptures give us clearly to understand that the angels of God are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:14.) Very seldom have they been manifested to any as in this recorded instance; yet they are present as the representatives of the Lord to do any needed work for us according to his will. But we are to understand that the angel of the Lord was with James who was killed, as truly as with Peter who was delivered; and that the deliverance of God's people is not always such as can be appreciated by the natural senses. Sometimes the angel of the Lord is present with us and grants sustaining strength to endure a trial from which we are not delivered. Such was our Lord's case: we read that an angel appeared unto him and strengthened him. Such was probably the ministration of angels to James in his time of sore distress, when his life was yielded up to a murderer. Such also have been the experiences of many: the angel of the Lord has stood with them and has strengthened where he was not authorized to deliver. It is recorded that many Christian martyrs were so upheld and blessed, that even in the midst of persecution, torture and flames, they were able to sing praises to the Lord. It is related of Bishop Latimer that when bound to the stake he said to Bishop Ridley, speaking with great equanimity respecting his own suffering, "We shall light such a candle, by God's grace, in England this day, as I trust shall never be put out again."

^[1]How it enlarges the confidence of a Christian to realize that whilst earthly powers may be in opposition, and whilst he may be really of himself powerless to resist adversaries, and whilst in addition to the flesh and blood adversaries he may realize that he battles also with spiritual wickedness in exalted places--against Satan and his minions of darkness--yet that, on the other hand, "greater is he that is on our part than all that be against us," and that all the heavenly hosts are subject to the divine will and may be employed for the advancement of the divine cause according to divine wisdom.

[1] Nov 18 Manna, Psa. 34:7

R3440 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0)

OUR UNSEEN GUARDIANS

--2 KINGS 6:8-23.--OCTOBER 30.--

Golden Text:--"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."--Psa. 34:7.

OUR LESSON is based upon a miracle which the Lord wrought through Elisha the Prophet. As already noted, the kingdom of Syria lay to the north and east of the kingdom of Israel, and the two were not separated by natural boundaries, such as mountains, seas, etc. Consequently wars between the two countries were not

infrequent. We recall that in one of these raids of the Syrians upon the Israelites, Naaman's wife's maid was taken captive. We recall that when Naaman came to the king of Israel the latter thought his coming merely a pretext for another war. Our lesson calls our attention to a later determination upon the part of the king of Syria to

invade Israel, get spoil, etc. Several plans of attack were devised to raid one city or another, but each time these raids were frustrated, for the Syrian army found the cities they attacked freshly prepared for defence. The king concluded there was a traitor in his court or camp who disclosed his secret plans and arrangements to the king of Israel, and instituted a search for the traitor. His counsellors, however, had heard of Elisha--perhaps through Naaman or those who accompanied him at the time of his healing. These explained to the king of Syria that a more likely interpretation of the matter was that the Prophet Elisha revealed to Israel's king all plots and schemes against the interests of the nation.

Although the king was evidently a man of force, he was not wise in his determination to ascertain the location of Elisha and to capture him first, and thus to secure a free hand in looting the cities of Israel. He might have known that if Elisha could inform the king, he could be equally well informed in matters respecting himself. But thus it is with all who leave the wisdom of God out of their calculations. The Apostle sums up the matter for them, saying, The wisdom of man is as foolishness with God, for the world by its wisdom knows not God and does not take into consideration the boundlessness of his wisdom and power. The Christian, on the contrary, recognizing divine power and wisdom and coming into accord with the same, is thereby blessed. Whatever was the measure of his wisdom and prudence as a natural man, this would be certainly intensified by his participation in the wisdom which cometh from above--"the spirit of a sound mind," the Spirit of the Lord.

As soon as the king learned that Elisha was at the little town of Dothan he sent an army, including horses and chariots, to surround the city and to make sure of capturing the Prophet. The latter doubtless understood in advance, but working in harmony with the Lord's arrangement he did not flee the city. He was entirely restful in mind respecting the matter, but his servant was greatly alarmed--he thought of the Prophet and himself being carried prisoners to Syria to thenceforth be bondmen, etc. Elisha, however, comforted him with assurances respecting the divine power which encompassed them, much greater than the power of their enemies. Then, not only as a lesson to the servant, but also doubtless intended of the Lord as a lesson for his people all the way down through the ages, Elisha prayed that the young man's eyes might be opened that he might see and realize the true situation. At once the servant perceived that all around the city the entire hill was amply protected against the surrounding hosts-- "horses and chariots of fire" around and about Elisha and himself. We must assume that the horses and chariots of fire were in the nature of a vision granted to the servant and to us, as illustrative of the divine power and protection given. Thus viewed, what the servant saw was an active parable, a picture similar to the symbolic pictures of Revelation--serving the intended purpose most thoroughly, most completely, and giving to the eyes of his understanding a proper conception of the divine power present with the Prophet.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE ALL ABOUT US

This is the center of our lesson and is in full accord with other Scripture statements, as, for instance, the Golden Text, the latter giving a picture, not of horses and chariots representing power, but an encampment representing a continued and abiding presence of the divine representatives, safely guarding all the interests of the Lord's faithful ones. The Apostle assures us that the angels of God are ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto and to serve those who shall be heirs of salvation, the saved ones of this Gospel Age--not only the overcomers of the little flock, but also the overcomers of the great multitude. All of these, because believers in Christ, because at heart faithful, because fully consecrated to the Lord and begotten of his Spirit, are the special and happy objects of his grace, ministered to and served by the invisible messengers. Our Lord Jesus sets forth practically the same thought in his declaration, "Their angels do always behold [have access to] the face of my Father." (Matt. 18:10.) The Master's words seem to imply at least one or more angels having charge over the consecrated ones, the very elect. He uses a still different figure of speech in illustrating the matter, as though he would assure us that these messengers would not be delayed in caring for our interests, would not be hindered by more

important heavenly business, but would at once have direct access to the divine presence and attention, so that our interests would have all needed consideration.

Gathering together these various pictures, we have as a whole before our minds something like this: Our great all-wise, all-powerful heavenly Father has numberless messengers at his command, and has deputized and appointed many of these to care for the interests of his cause on earth--especially to watch over and minister unto the very elect. Nothing can by any means, therefore, harm these, except as the heavenly Father sees that the earthly injury or disadvantage would prove profitable either to the individual new creature or to the Lord's general cause. This is in full accord with his general assurance that all things shall work together for good to them that love him.

Such a use of the heavenly messengers by no means invalidates the thought that the Lord's earthly children are frequently used of him as ministers, servants, the one to the other. Indeed we may be assured that the invisible messengers or servants, generally if not always, are required to act through human instrumentalities--preferably through the very elect. Of this kind of service done by the brethren one for the other under the supervision of divine power and messengers, we have illustrations in the harvest work: for instance, supervised by our present Lord and his heavenly hosts, yet in the main carried on by the members of his body still in the flesh. Again we have illustrations of the same in the declaration of Psa. 91:11,12, "He shall give his messengers charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Doubtless the heavenly messengers are connected with this work, yet nevertheless the work itself is apparently, we may say surely, done through human instrumentalities--the Church in the flesh. For instance, the Lord in this present harvest time has given his messengers, the leaders of his consecrated people, "a charge," a message, a word of warning, counsel, advice,--an opening of the Word of Truth, an enlightenment of their understandings,--that they should bear up all the members of the "feet" class, all of the very elect in this time of serious trial, testing and stumbling, lest at any time any of this class should stumble through the peculiar trials of the present time. How manifestly this is fulfilled: the harvest message in its various features, bearing on every phase of Truth now due and every phase of error now being brought forward, is God's keeping power by which, according to his guarantee, we know that nothing shall by any means hurt the "feet" members of the true "body of Christ."

It is for us to rejoice in these blessings and favors of the Lord and to increase our faith; and the lesson under consideration is a help in this connection, as showing us how even before the house of sons was organized, the Lord had power and exercised it in the house of servants in a way that illustrates to us the abundance of that power.

With the morning light the Syrian soldiers drew near to the village of Dothan, making inquiry for the Prophet, who, by prayer, brought upon them "blindness." The original word, however, does not signify total blindness, but rather a visual indistinctness, somewhat akin perhaps to mesmeric or hypnotic conditions as they are known today. The Prophet proposes to lead them to Elisha and his home, the latter being in the city of Samaria and thither he led them. When they were within the walls of the city and completely, therefore, at the mercy of the king of Israel and his warriors, the Prophet dispelled the illusion, and, opening the eyes of their understanding, made himself known to them and introduced them to the king of Israel, etc. The latter inquired of the prophet whether he had led them there to be smitten, to be destroyed as the enemies of the Lord and of the kingdom, but his answer was, No; that he should set a feast before them of royal bounties and send them back to their king and friends--in a word, that he should figuratively "heap coals of fire on their heads." This was done, and the result is given us in a few words, "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

The closing incident of our lesson is worthy of appropriation by spiritual Israelites. So long as we are the Lord's we may have absolute confidence respecting the results in all of life's affairs, and this confidence in God should tend to make us more generous and kind toward our enemies--to all those who would despitefully use us or

persecute us. So far from seeking to do them injury in return or to speak evil of them in return, the admonition of the Lord is, "If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." "A soft answer turneth

away wrath." A return of good for evil may not at once make a friend of an enemy, but it will at least bring blessing to our own hearts, and is much more likely to bring blessing to the enemy than if we should return him evil for evil.

HEZEKIAH STRIPPED GOLD & SILVER
FROM THE TEMPLE TO APPEASE
SENNACHERIB

R2381 "We should beware how at any time we lose sight of the Lord's power on our behalf, no matter how threatening or great or dark the evil which assails us... How many, on the contrary, are disposed to do as Hezekiah did, purchase peace with things consecrated to the Lord, -- to compromise the truth: for instance, if threatened with the disfavor of friends or neighbors or employers, how many are willing to conciliate such adversaries by a more worldly course, by subtracting from the time, influence, means, etc., consecrated to the Lord, considerable portions to be given to worldly service, or to secure domestic peace or social advancement, or commercial prosperity. So surely as the Lord's consecrated people do this, we may expect that the Lord will permit to come upon them the very difficulties which they dread and seek to avert by unholy compromise."

HEZEKIAH GAINED THE NEEDED
FAITH AND THE VICTORY

(2 Chr 32:7-8 KJV) "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: {8} With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles..."

(2 Ki 19:35 KJV) "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." Sennacherib then fled back to Nineveh."

(Psa 121:2 KJV) "My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. "

(Rom 8:31 KJV) "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

SEPT 14 SONGS IN THE NIGHT "With us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. `II Chronicles 32:8`

WHAT a lesson is here for all of the Lord's people of spiritual Israel today! When our proudest, strongest foes seem triumphing over us the most, when they are loudest in their denunciations of the Lord and his promises, is the very time when we should lay hold on the Lord's promises with the greatest confidence. Indeed, we give it as our experience that those who are most thoroughly rooted and grounded, whose hopes are most surely anchored within the veil, are those who have been attested very trying experiences, and have had occasion to call mightily upon the Lord for help, when there was no earthly arm to lean upon. How many have found that the breaking of earthly ties has meant the strengthening of the heavenly ones, that the opposition of the world and the Adversary has meant increase of spiritual favor, because "greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us. Z05-191` R3582:6` (Hymn 301)"

R3655 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0)

HIS VEILED ANGELS GUARD THEE

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."--`Psa. 34:7`.

"He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways."--`Psa. 91:11`.

"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation?"--`Heb. 1:14`.

Often when thou'rt faint and weary in the struggle and the strife,
And thy heart nigh sinks within thee, 'neath the strain and stress of life:
When thou'rt tempted, tried and fearful, and thou can'st not see the way,
And each night looms black with shadows from thy sorrows in the day;
I would ask thee still to trust Him, He who sees all in the light,
For he guards thee by his angels, though they're veiled from thy sight,
Yea, he guards thee by his angels though they're veiled from thy sight.

Oh, be watchful, oh, be sober, for the Adversary tries,
To allure us to destruction by his subtly fashioned lies.
He would sift us, he would tempt us, he would claim us for his prey,
And his legions ever watch us as we tread the Narrow Way:
But we know of his devices, and we trust Jehovah's Might,
For he guards us by his angels, though they're veiled from our sight,
Yea, he guards us by his angels though they're veiled from our sight.

There is One who knows thy weakness, and thy failings, and thy tears,
Thy burdens and thy sorrows, and thy tremblings and thy fears,
And thy heart-cries always reach him, and are answered in his way,
Though thou can'st not see his workings as they shape thy path each day.
Sad disaster had o'erwhelmed thee had he not put forth his might,
Through his angels that surround thee, but are veiled from thy sight,
Guardian angels that surround thee, but are veiled from thy sight.

Ah, believe me, when the Day breaks, and we know as we are known,
In the sunlight of the glory that surrounds our Father's Throne,
He will tell us how he led us: we shall see the pathway clear,
The way we trod that led to God through failing, fault and fear.
And we'll see those guardian angels who were veiled from our sight,
We shall understand the workings of the Power put forth in might:
Yea, and with those guardian angels who were veiled from our sight,
We shall see our Saviour, and our God, in Heaven's Eternal Light.

--Sidney Smith.