

# The Sabbath Watchman

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Vol. 94, No. 4 - Beacon of hope, faith, and truth in a confused world

*Commit your works to the Lord,  
and your thoughts will be established.*

*Proverbs 16:3*

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Beacon of hope, faith, and truth in a confused world.

We believe:

- The all-wise, loving God created all things in the universe by His Son, Jesus Christ; He is its Owner and Sustainer.
- He met the challenge to His loving leadership and authority by reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Word made flesh.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus' representative on earth, convicts of sin, guides into truth, and, when abiding in man, overcomes all unrighteousness.
- The Bible is the record of God's dealings with mankind and the standard of all doctrine; the Ten Commandments are the transcript of His character and the foundation of all enduring reform.
- His people, in harmony with God's Word and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, call all men everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.
- Bible prophecy reveals that earth's history will soon close with the visible return of Jesus Christ as King to claim all who have accepted Him as the world's only Redeemer and their Lord.

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*Commit your works to the Lord,  
and your thoughts will be established. Proverbs 16:3.*

**L**et us feel thankful that we have the privilege of committing our works to God. We are to remember that we are not pieces of inanimate mechanism, but intelligent beings, able to choose the right and refuse the wrong, with a clear conscience and a pure purpose. We are to aim at consistency in all our works.

We are to commit our way to the Lord, testing it by His searching laws. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5). We cannot commit our way to God if we are working out deeds of injustice. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," the psalmist declares, "the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). When we commit our way to the Lord we are to search the heart through and through, casting out all evil, that Christ may fill it with His righteousness. We are to seek the Lord in prayer, putting at the beginning of our petitions repentance for sin....

God's law is the test of our actions. His eye sees every act, searches every chamber of the mind, detecting all lurking self-deception and all hypocrisy. All things are naked and open to the sight of Him with whom we have to do. But He will receive all who come to Him with contrite hearts and a true purpose to forsake every wrong....

In all our business transactions, in every word and deed, we are to maintain a pure purpose and a clear conscience. We are to commit our works to God and then leave them in His hands. Our work is to be done in the strictest integrity. Nothing is to be cherished that we cannot carry into the heavenly courts. As we labor let us ask God's help, realizing that this is the only thing that can keep our work free from selfishness. *Letter 406, 1906.*

*Ellen G. White.*

# The Greatest Blessing

By José Vicente Giner

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3.

What a beautiful text! In it is contained a wonderful teaching—that all the good that we possess comes from God through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

Yes, everything we have, everything we are, everything we have lived, our desires, our actions, all things, to the extent that they are good and have benefited us and our neighbors, are blessings from God. And even the bad moments must be seen as blessings for the formation of character.

## The greatest blessing

In the life of Jesus, our Redeemer, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, there was unbelief among His own, the contempt of those He came to save, a crown of thorns, and a bloody death on the cross where He gave His life.

But Jesus ascended into heaven and, as our elder Brother, pleads for us before the Father. 1 John 2:1. In presenting His atoning blood, we are pardoned, even though we do not deserve it. This is the greatest spiritual blessing that we receive from God in the heavenly places in Christ.

The introductory text mentions that the blessings are given “in heavenly places,” meaning that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary and from there blesses us with His ministry. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16.

The blessing is immense, especially when we consider our real condition: “All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned every one to his own way;...” “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” Isaiah 53:6; 1:5, 6.

Although we deserve to die, we receive complete cleansing; by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we are declared innocent. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,...” Romans 8:1. And even more, not only do we escape eternal death, thanks to God’s mercy, but the Lord invites us to come confidently to the throne of grace to receive power to resist the temptations of the enemy; that is, He is willing to be in us and give us everything needed to overcome the sin that once ruled over us. Philippians 2:13.

On one hand, God forgives us—justifies us—and on the other hand He transforms us—sanctifies us. There is no greater blessing than this! That is why the apostle Paul stated that God “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

It is true that, as weak, fallible, mortal human beings, we are naturally inclined to ask and seek for material blessings—a house, a car, a good job, etc. And perhaps many have come to the conclusion that an individual’s faithfulness is reflected in the things that he possesses. We cannot deny this categorically, but neither can we it as an absolute truth. In fact, there are thousands of sincere Christians around the world who live on the brink of poverty; yet, in the circumstances in which they have to live, they can have the greatest blessing, which is far above material goods—the grace of Christ that is accepted into the heart, transforms the life, and produces true happiness, independent of external factors.

The Lord Jesus urges His followers to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; then “these things”—job, house, clothing, and food, in short, what they need to live—will be added to them. Luke 12:25-34. This is the divine promise. But it does not mean that one who accepts Jesus as his personal Saviour will be so blessed that



he will never be touched by any difficulty or that he will be rich. No. Although it could be in some cases that God gives people the talent of wealth, this is generally not the case. “(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Matthew 6:32, 34.

We should not embrace faith as if it were a profitable investment on a material level; although it may be for some, this is generally not the way things are. What was the concept of the early Christians who lived in the catacombs of Rome, deprived of the sunlight and earthly possessions and threatened with death? How did they see God’s blessings? Did they embrace a gospel of material prosperity? And what about the Waldenses and the Albigenses? In 1211, one hundred thousand Albigenses were killed in a single day in Lavaur, France. Many were burned alive, and many others were killed with the sword. The executioners who carried out this massacre thanked God for the church’s victory. In 1487, a crusade was waged against the Waldenses in France, and the forgiveness of all sins was promised to those who killed a heretic. Thousands perished at the hands of heartless people led by the devil. In 1572, men who claimed to be led by God killed 70,000 Huguenots in Paris. This terrible event was known as the “St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.”

Why do we mention these heartbreaking cruelties? It is not for the purpose of accusing those who perpetrated these crimes, but to remember that being a Christian is not synonymous with material blessing or not having to face difficulty or trial. The martyrs demonstrated this. For them the most precious, valuable thing was to live in God’s grace. This was considered the greatest blessing for them and their children. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Matthew 16:26. Those believers were not masochistic fanatics who loved being cast into the arena of the Roman circuses or dying at the stake or on the scaffold. They loved life, as we all do. They did not want to die; but if because of their faith they had to give up their lives, they accepted the great pain and suffering. To the martyrs, to be blessed meant not to yield to the pressure of the enemy and to remain faithful by the grace of Christ to God’s commandments. What does it mean for us to be blessed?

Jesus taught that His followers will suffer affliction in this world (John 16:33), because it is ruled by the devil. 2

Corinthians 4:4. But the important thing is that, despite affliction, the Lord promises His children something extraordinary: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace.” John 16:33. This is where our spiritual eyes must focus!


Everyone has problems—including atheists—and such difficulties will always exist as long as this earth lasts, because, as we said, it is the devil who rules this world and his main objective is to destroy the sons and daughters of God. 1 Peter 5:8. The gospel offers, not the elimination of problems, but the grace to overcome them.

The greatest blessing is not to possess but to be—to be a son or daughter of God, to build a proven character amid fiery trials, to live in harmony with our fellow beings, to be happy with what we have, to value small things, to thank God every day for life and the many beautiful things that surround us, and to learn to share with others. We should not break down when everything is against us, but trust that God will provide an escape. The greatest blessing is to please God in the way we live, to center all our physical and mental energies on seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to make the world a better place by our presence. That is a happy life. It is the greatest thing that can exist in this world. The rest is temporary and corruptible. 1 John 2:17.

We need to remember this, because the world strongly influences people to believe that happiness is found in the possession of wealth, beauty, fame, and power—all things that will pass away. The world is advancing a huge lie. The greatest blessing is to live under God’s grace. “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” Philippians 3:8.

### **The blessing is always safe**

It should be emphasized that those who have few material goods experience the blessing mentioned by David in Psalm 37:25: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” God always provides, even in the worst circumstances, for our fellow believers who live in countries where there are few material resources, where there is political upheaval, or where natural calamities periodically strike the population. They have reported that “... the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” Psalm 34:8.



We do not know what tomorrow will bring. But what we can know with complete certainty is that so far God has blessed us "... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" and that even today we may "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16.

"The Lord will not leave His afflicted, tried children to be the sport of Satan's temptations. It is our privilege to trust in Jesus. The heavens are full of rich blessings, and it is our privilege to have the joy of Christ in us that our joy may be full." —*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 306.

We have many reasons to thank God for all the blessings He gives us. Whether we have much or little, let us remember that we have the greatest blessing—that Christ called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)—and the certainty that "whereas I was blind, now I see." John 9:25. You can also possess the greatest blessing. Do you want it? God grant it to you by His grace.





# Principles and Expectations in the Family

By Raquel Orce Sotomayor

“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” Psalm 78:5-7.

“Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you hanging my first painting on the wall, and that gave me the desire to paint another one.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you feeding my puppy, and I told myself it was good to be compassionate to animals.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you helping Mom make my favorite cake, and I thought that those moments in the family are special.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I heard you pray, and then I knew there is a God with whom I can speak when I need it.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, you kissed me when I was in bed, and I felt loved.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw a tear roll down your cheek, and I understood that certain things hurt us and it is okay to cry.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I saw you that you were happy with yourself, and I wanted to look like you.” “Daddy, when you thought I wasn’t looking, I wanted to thank God for all the things that I saw when you thought I wasn’t looking at you.” —*Author unknown.*

When we consider the values that each half of a couple brings to their relationship, we cannot ignore their projection into the future. The understanding of today and the way we live in the present is shaped by our imagination of what will transpire in the future. The founders of the home, the spouses, have their own collections of qualities that, when shared, multiply and go beyond themselves—faith, relationships with others, problem-solving skills, system of life, ideals, and dreams. Each of these elements forms the expectations that their home has shaped, consciously or unconsciously, for the future. This includes love for the truth.

“Consider the family institution a training school, preparatory for the performance of religious duties. Your children are to act a part in church capacity, and every power of the mind, every physical capacity is to be kept strong and active for the service of Christ. They are to be taught to love truth because it is truth;...”

The principles that the founders of the household consider their own and that they transmit to those who are added to the family—the children—must be clear, simple, and consistent. The example, practice, and teaching of goodness constitute principles that are effective in daily life only when accompanied by love, which comes from the giver (God), passes through the transmitters (parents), and reaches the reproducers (children). Thus, these principles become actual in the immediate generation.

## Life benefit

“Our time here is short. We can pass through this world but once; as we pass along, let us make the most of life. The work to which we are called does not require wealth or social position or great ability. It requires a kindly, self-sacrificing spirit and a steadfast purpose. A lamp, however small, if kept steadily burning, may be the means of lighting many other lamps. Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes. If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life, we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth.”<sup>2</sup>

Goodness, self-denial, and firmness of purpose are essential principles for the family to be a blessing that exceeds even its own members’ expectations, just as rivers generate life and beauty and abundance of goods flow out to society. In the small circle of the home, the seeds of truth are planted in the heart of each member simultaneously and reciprocally, both by precept and

example. Thus, the entire family is educated and receives the very best of life, which is not limited to today but also includes and determines tomorrow.

### Fairness

The acceptance of the truth, its practice, and the development of its principles in each family member are included in the constant process of divine work combined with human effort and the unwavering decision to conform to that which is good.

“The precious graces of the Holy Spirit are not developed in a moment. Courage, fortitude, meekness, faith, unwavering trust in God’s power to save, are acquired by the experience of years. By a life of holy endeavor and firm adherence to the right the children of God are to seal their destiny.”<sup>3</sup> Family life is shaped by every action, word, thought, principle, and expectation of its members as they respond to the process of spiritual development as Heaven works in their hearts. The fruit of the Spirit is thus produced—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Galatians 5:22, 23.

### Shaping circumstances

“There are evils which man may lessen but can never remove. He is to overcome obstacles and make his surroundings instead of being molded by them. He has room to exercise his talents in bringing order and harmony out of confusion. In this work he may have divine aid if



he will claim it. He is not left to battle with temptations and trials in his own strength. Help has been laid upon One who is mighty. Jesus left the royal courts of heaven and suffered and died in a world degraded by sin, that He might teach man how to pass through the trials of life and overcome its temptations. Here is a pattern for us.”<sup>4</sup>

The environment, the circumstances, the time in which one lives, and the people who are closest cannot be chosen or changed, but they can be transformed in a practical, visible way. Obstacles, tests, temptations, and difficulties cannot be easily eliminated. However, through the grace of Christ, one can understand, accept, and assess them so that such adversities are overcome and learned from.

The way one thinks, his spiritual foundation, his motives, and his attitude determine the results.

### Other provisions

In the home circle, unity in diversity will unite its members. Nature reflects the divine reasoning of its Author, for one sees a beautiful diversity of colors, shapes, purpose, location, and size in the plant kingdom, even as everything is an integral part of a whole—an ecosystem.

“In all the Lord’s arrangements, there is nothing more beautiful than His plan of giving to men and women a diversity of gifts. The church is His garden, adorned with a variety of trees, plants, and flowers. He does not expect the hyssop to assume the proportions of the cedar, nor the olive to reach the height of the stately palm.”<sup>5</sup>

Individuality in the family unit encompasses tolerance, respect, and encouragement for each member. The qualities and gifts of each one enrich and widen the action and efficiency of the home as a unit. Furthermore, the needs of each one are met through the special treatment, attention, and development that promote both personal growth and mutual happiness.

### Character formation

“The home that is beautified by love, sympathy, and tenderness is a place that angels love to visit, and where God is glorified. The influence of a carefully guarded Christian home in the years of childhood and youth is the surest safeguard against the corruptions of the world. In the atmosphere of such a home the children will learn to love both their earthly parents and their heavenly Father.”<sup>6</sup>

The development of habits based on heavenly principles allows the family to function efficiently, both



internally and externally, to shape each person's character every day. Divine influence and parental care harmonize in the formation of good, positive characters. Character is the result of behavior, Aristotle declared, and is made up of the principles that compose it.

"The family relationship should be sanctifying in its influence. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are a wonderful help in forming Christian character.... Parents and children should unite in offering loving service to Him who alone can keep human love pure and noble."<sup>7</sup>

## Overcoming and succeeding

"We need minds that can see difficulties and go through with them with the wisdom that comes from God, that can wrestle with hard problems and conquer them. The hardest problem is to crucify self, to endure hardness in spiritual experiences, training the soul by severe discipline. This will not, perhaps, bring the very best satisfaction at the first, but the aftereffect will be peace and happiness."<sup>8</sup>

"Despite his talent and fame, [George Frederic] Handel faced considerable adversity. The competition with rival English composers was tough. The public was fickle and sometimes did not attend their presentations. In addition to that, he was a frequent victim of the changing political winds of those times. Several times he found himself without a penny in his pocket and on the verge of bankruptcy. It was difficult for him to master the pain caused by rejection and failures, especially after such a successful past.

"Then his problems were complicated by the breakdown of his health. He suffered a spill that left him with his right arm without movement, which meant the loss of the use of four fingers of his right hand. Although he recovered, he was dejected. In 1741, he decided it was time to retire, even though he was only fifty-six years old. He felt discouraged and miserable and was deeply in debt. He believed his creditors would send him to prison. On April 8 of that same year, he offered what was interpreted as his farewell concert. Sad and full of self-pity, he gave up.

"But in August of that year, something incredible happened. A wealthy friend named Charles Jennings visited Handel and handed him a script based on the life of Christ. The work intrigued Handel enough to put it into action. He started writing. And immediately the floodgates of inspiration opened. His cycle of inactivity had been broken. For twenty-one days, he wrote almost without stopping. Then he spent another two

days working on the orchestration. In twenty-four days, he completed the manuscript of two hundred and sixty pages. He called that work *The Messiah*. Today, Handel's *Messiah* is considered a masterpiece and the culmination of the composer's work. In fact, Sir Newman Flower, one of Handel's biographers, said of the preparation of *The Messiah*: 'Considering the immensity of the work and the short time he took, it will remain, perhaps forever, as the greatest feat in the whole history of musical composition.' Let Christ be our motivation for life, the principle that governs it, and the expectation of victory."<sup>9</sup>

- 1 Child Guidance, p. 482.
- 2 The Ministry of Healing, p. 356.
- 3 Ibid., p. 454.
- 4 Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 312.
- 5 Evangelism, pp. 98, 99.
- 6 The Adventist Home, p. 19.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 (Letter 43, 1899) Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 1, p. 13.
- 9 John Maxwell, *Failing Forward*, re-translated.





# A Leader as a Reformer and Builder

By Siegmund Gutknecht

What was the reason why the southern kingdom of Judah was able to survive the Babylonian invasion? Why did it not collapse, as did the northern kingdom? A small number of people that was established in Jerusalem expanded to become a city that survived for two and a half centuries, and today that small number still plays an important role in world events. Nehemiah's leadership contributed greatly to this. Despite being known as the one who rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem, this leader's true importance is the fact that he laid the foundation of a nation. Construction had begun before he arrived in Jerusalem, when, under the first decree, given by Darius, some of those who were in Babylonian captivity returned to Jerusalem. Then came the second order, given by Cyrus; and the last order was given by Artaxerxes Longimanus. The first people who returned rebuilt the temple altar. Ezra 3:3. The reconstruction of the temple was completed in B.C. 520. Fifty-eight years after the rebuilding of the temple and thirteen years before Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, Ezra the scribe began to carry out the responsibilities of his priestly office.

Among the returning captives there was an urgent need of reform. Through the life and teachings of Ezra and the leadership of Nehemiah, this reform took place. The books bearing their names document the struggles that were faced by God's people. Nehemiah 8 presents the spiritual reformation that took place among the people. Today we ask ourselves, What was this revival? How did it take place? What example does it give us that we may follow?

The people gathered in front of the Water Gate, because they wanted Ezra to explain the Scriptures to them. This was not an organized meeting but a spontaneous assembly. The record contains no formal reason for this meeting. It was the work of the Holy Spirit. Every such revival is brought about by the Holy Spirit, who fills those who have consecrated their lives to God and are willing to make sacrifices for God. Individuals who have consecrated their lives to Him and through whom His power can be revealed are needed today. These characteristics were found in two very different people, the scribe Ezra and Nehemiah, the great leader. Example speaks more eloquently than many words, and Ezra and Nehemiah's lives demonstrated what God's power will do for those who are truly consecrated.

Do we understand what we read? In Nehemiah 8, it is mentioned a number of times that the people who gathered in front of the Water Gate could understand what was read to them. Later, it is actually reported that they understood what was read. Nehemiah 8:2, 3, 8. This is very important.

## The group

The people who had gathered reacted spontaneously and emotionally to what they heard. They were deeply grieved and began to weep. The book of the law of God was read clearly, the meaning was explained, and the people were helped to understand what was read. When Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest, and the Levites who taught the people saw that everyone was crying when they heard the words of the law, they said: "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep." Nehemiah 8:9.

What great example of a spiritual revival is found here? Can we imagine a modern preacher, one who is trying to bring about a revival, responding as did Nehemiah? When someone's preaching causes people to cry, it is typical for him to consider that he has accomplished his purpose. The reason for this is that more importance is given to outward, visible manifestations than to a change of heart.

Unfortunately, today's evangelists often use psychological manipulation to make people cry. But after such meetings, very often—and very quickly—indifference reigns in the hearts of those who heard the word. The reason for this is that what happened was not the result of God's work but of psychological manipulation. Such manifestations cannot produce a revival, for this can come about only through God's Holy Spirit. It will happen only when people truly understand what God is saying in His holy word.

Usually, preachers use such methods because they no longer believe in the power of God's word. However, as with Ezra and Nehemiah, it is the minister's responsibility to make God's word plain. If we get to the point where the greatest importance is attached to external emotions, we will begin to disregard our responsibility to God and trust in our own strength.

A genuine revival took place in Jerusalem when men and women burst into tears as they recognized their disobedience. Then all the people longed for a revival. The results were significant. A reformation took place after a spiritual revival. Repentance and revival result in true spiritual change.

### **Perseverance in accepting one's responsibility**

Everyone who walks a lot knows that the last stretch is the most difficult. Thus, the end is the most important and requires the greatest effort and strength. The last stage of life is old age. Sooner or later everyone reaches that point. As children of God, we must consider age differently than does society. Even though a person's physical and spiritual strength falters, we must continue to strive for the goal. Every child of God, and especially every missionary worker, should be inspired by the words of Caleb in the time of Joshua: "And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." Joshua 14:10, 11.

Caleb lived and worked through the power of God. Likewise Nehemiah remained faithful to his principles even in advanced age. He showed courage when the high priest prepared an apartment in the sanctuary for Tobias, Nehemiah's avowed enemy. People who bear responsibilities for God must endure opposition from outside and from within—from within their own ranks. Indeed, it is especially painful to be attacked by brethren in the faith. In Psalm 41:9, David wrote: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."

Nehemiah resisted the efforts of Tobias, who desecrated the sanctuary, even though those who demonstrated false mercy were not pleased. But consider God's Son, the world's Redeemer; when He saw that the house of prayer had become a place of commerce and a den of thieves, He made a whip out of cords and drove the traffickers out of His Father's house. In unpleasant situations, a cowardly attitude can be much more harmful than the resolute actions of a Christian leader, expressed primarily in words. Christian churches have become weak, inconsistent, and prone to compromise. Discipline must always be constructive and applied with love, but it must be very plain. In this regard, Nehemiah was very conscious of his responsibilities. He remained a strong leader until the end and took unpopular measures when it was necessary.

Normally, Eliashib the high priest should have fulfilled his responsibilities and taken action, since the temple

was under his jurisdiction. But a frictionless service made transgression acceptable to the people. Nehemiah did not seek any personal benefit, because he was not guided by greed or selfishness. His principles were those of God. At a time when there was discouragement and matters were not properly cared for, he took the initiative and put everything in order. He worked according to divine principles and did not pay attention to public opinion or even his own. One who works according to God's will is not popular and does not seek to be popular; rather, he will faithfully fulfill his responsibilities to God and the people.

### **God's Sabbath**

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment, the memorial of God's creation, was desecrated in those days by commercial interests. Nehemiah 13:15-18. The people did not rest from their work in the wineries or in loading their donkeys. On the holy day, agricultural products were even transported to Jerusalem for sale. Merchants came from Tyre with their caravans to sell fish and other products.

Mammon was an implacable god in the time of Nehemiah, and the same thing is true today for many Christians. A change was brought about by Nehemiah when he ordered that the city gates be closed on the Sabbath and remain shut until the next morning. To make sure that this order was carried out, he stationed his servants at the gates. He met personally with the merchants. "Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath." Nehemiah 13:21.

Again, Nehemiah showed that he was a man of action. An important characteristic of leaders is their decisiveness, which should not be overestimated or used in useless activities. The work that counts is that which agrees with God's holy will.

### **A delicate matter**

After he initiated a reformation in Sabbath observance, Nehemiah became aware of a problem concerning marriage and the family. Sometimes church leaders must take care of difficulties that are not at all pleasant, including family matters, sexual issues, and the education of children. In this regard, Nehemiah also initiated a reformation and established a solid foundation for his people and the nation. All the steps that he took showed clearly that he was an exemplary leader, and that was possible only because he had given his heart completely to God, who blessed him with wisdom, strength, perseverance, and great grace.





# The life plan

By Teresa Corti

When the people of Israel were taken out of Egyptian slavery, the Lord fed them with manna, the “bread from heaven” that fell in abundance throughout the camp. Each person was instructed to collect as much as he needed, and Moses said: “This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.” Exodus 16:15.

The bread that fell from heaven in the form of flakes and was very high in nutritional value symbolized the Son of God, who would come from heaven to feed the world with His word and give His body in death. In His words, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” John 6:51.

Bread is nutritious and provides the body with what it needs to be healthy. Similarly, Jesus Christ, the living bread, nourishes our soul and helps us to grow spiritually. Just as we eat our daily bread, we also feed daily on His word to grow spiritually and to be able to share the bread of life with others.

When Jesus performed the miracle of multiplying the loaves to feed the multitude, He gave the bread to His disciples to distribute to the people. Likewise He generously imparts His word so that all who receive it can share it with those they meet, without discrimination or prejudice. The word tells us: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” Ecclesiastes 11:1. It is not up to us to judge the results of our work of proclaiming the gospel. That will be seen in eternity.

“I am the bread of life.” Jesus came with a specific purpose and fulfilled it to the letter. The day before He was crucified, as He was eating the last supper with His disciples, He took the bread, “And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.” 1 Corinthians 11:24. Jesus instituted this ordinance as a

commemoration of His death for the world. Every time one participates in it, he thinks of the body of Christ, torn and bruised for the sin of the world. After three days, Christ returned to life without a trace of suffering or death. The same will happen with all who are sleeping in the Lord. All the redeemed, when they hear the voice of the Master calling them to eternal life, will rise from their graves with eternal vigor, healthy and joyful, without any trace of the disease that put them there.

“I am the bread of life,” and whoever eats this bread will not be hungry. Before the Israelites left Egypt, they were instructed to kill a lamb, put its blood on the doorpost of their houses, and eat the flesh quickly with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, yeast being a symbol of sin, even a small amount of which “leaveneth the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9.

Eastern countries eat unleavened bread; the Israelites, Persians, and Arabs make bread as thin as paper and fold it. Then they tear it and wrap their food in it. Such bread is very light. The complaint of the Israelites in the desert was, “our soul loatheth this light bread.” Numbers 21:5. Manna is the symbol of the health reform that God wanted His people to learn before entering Canaan. He wanted them to abandon the use of meat and adopt a plant-based diet that would sharpen their intellects and help them to grow spiritually; but many refused to abandon the strong flavors of Egypt where their palate had been greatly corrupted. They refused to fight against a perverted appetite, and many died on the way to freedom.

As we march toward the heavenly Canaan, we are called to make a total change not only in our lifestyle, but also in our eating habits, setting aside whatever is harmful to the body and tends to shorten life rather than prolong it. This change is not easy, for it requires a battle against our tastes. Perseverance is necessary, for eternal life depends on one’s embracing all the light that Heaven has given.

Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert and conquered every appetite for man. Today, as we pass through the desert of this world, He offers us His power to triumph over everything that in ancient times prevented many from entering the promised land.

Let us wholeheartedly accept Jesus as the bread of life that came down from heaven, with all that that implies, and be nourished by Him daily!





# The 144,000: A Symbolic Number?

By Antonino Di Franca

Part 2

## THE 144,000 IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

### The 144,000 form a perfect square

In *Early Writings*, we find a description of the 144,000, standing on the sea of glass in perfect order by number. What do they form? A perfect square!

“We all entered the cloud together, and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory. Here on the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square. Some of them had very bright crowns, others not so bright. Some crowns appeared heavy with stars, while others had but few. All were perfectly satisfied with their crowns. And they were all clothed with a glorious white mantle from their shoulders to their feet. Angels were all about us as we marched over the sea of glass to the gate of the city. Jesus raised His mighty, glorious arm, laid hold of the pearly gate, swung it back on its glittering hinges, and said to us, ‘You have washed your robes in My blood, stood stiffly for My truth, enter in.’ We all marched in and felt that we had a perfect right in the city.” —*Early Writings*, pp. 16, 17.

This information that they stood in a perfect square is helpful for our research. How? They were not just some random number, for in such a case they would be unable to form a perfect square. To form a perfect square, all four sides must have the same length and contain the same number of people. Well, 144,000 is exactly such a number that permits a perfect square to be formed! Therefore, the number must be literal, not symbolic.

### Only the 144,000 enter the temple

In the same vision, the 144,000 are seen near the heavenly temple, and it is written that they alone would be privileged to enter there. “Mount Zion was just before us, and on the mount was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies. And I saw the little ones climb, or, if they chose, use their little wings and fly, to the top of the mountains and pluck the never-fading flowers. There were all kinds of trees around the temple to beautify the place: the box, the pine, the fir, the oil, the myrtle, the pomegranate, and the fig tree bowed down with the weight of its timely figs—these made the place all over glorious. And as we were

about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised His lovely voice and said, ‘Only the 144,000 enter this place,’ and we shouted, ‘Alleluia.’” —*Early Writings*, p. 19.

This means that the 144,000 do not represent all of the redeemed but only a portion of them. By contrast, Revelation 7:9 describes a great, innumerable multitude, made up of all nations, people, and tongues, in addition to the 144,000. Therefore, the 144,000 cannot be synonymous with the great multitude, because they are privileged to enter the temple, while the others are not. They are a specific group with specific privileges.

### The names of the 144,000 are engraved in letters of gold

The same vision presents other interesting points. Inside the temple, the names of the 144,000 are seen engraved in letters of gold. “This temple was supported by seven pillars, all of transparent gold, set with pearls most glorious. The wonderful things I there saw I cannot describe. Oh, that I could talk in the language of Canaan, then could I tell a little of the glory of the better world. I saw there tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 were engraved in letters of gold. After we beheld the glory of the temple, we went out, and Jesus left us and went to the city.” —*Early Writings*, p. 19.

Note that in the tables of stone are engraved the very names of the 144,000. If this number were indefinite, it could not have been presented in this very definite way. The fact that it is given as a definite number is another evidence that the figure is not symbolic.

### Visiting other worlds with the 144,000

“I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, ‘You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.’” —*Early Writings*, p. 39.

This is the eighth time that Sister Ellen G. White refers to the definite number of the 144,000; there was more than enough opportunity for the writer to associate it with something symbolic or to define it as such, but this is not done. If the Lord had given this number as indefinite or figurative, in all or in at least one of these statements Sister



White could have mentioned it, but this never happens. So, the idea that the number 144,000 is symbolic has no support, not in the Holy Scriptures, and not in the Spirit of prophecy.

### Summary

In summary, the number 144,000 is mentioned twice in the Bible, along with specific characteristics of this group of saints; there is no indication that the number is symbolic. In Revelation 7, two groups are presented—the 144,000 and the great multitude, each group with its own description. The differences show that they are not two reports describing the same group but present two different groups. One report uses a definite number, while the other presents a broad, indefinite grouping. Thus, the evidence shows that the number 144,000 is literal, while the great multitude is an indefinite, innumerable group.

In the eight quotations above, the 144,000 are mentioned but never with even a hint of an idea that the number is symbolic. On the contrary, they are referred to in all cases as being an exact, definite number. In the one case, it is said that they formed a perfect square, and this gives the idea that the number 144,000 is to be considered literal, and in another place they are presented as “the living saints, 144,000 in number,” expressions that still mean a literal number. May the Lord help us to understand the inspired texts and to explain them correctly!

### Let us strive to be among the 144,000

It is written that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16, 17. The Lord “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4.

Today the gospel is being preached, and the message will be carried to the furthest corner of the earth to give everyone the opportunity to choose eternal life for himself. But salvation does not depend solely on the gospel message, for “that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” John 3:19. Therefore, in answer to the question: “Lord, are there few that be saved?” Jesus said: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Luke 13:23, 24.

Referring to the spiritual condition of the church, Sister White wrote in 1893: “It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner.” —*Christian Service*, p. 41 (1893); *Last Day Events*, p. 172.

A few years later, the same condition still existed, and the same message was given: “It is a solemn statement that I make to the church, that not one in twenty whose names are registered upon the church books are prepared to close their earthly history, and would be as verily without God and without hope in the world as the common sinner. They are professedly serving God, but they are more earnestly serving mammon.” —*General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1900.

Referring to the day of God, the following inspired messages were written: “The great mass of professing Christians will meet with bitter disappointment in the day of God. They have not upon their foreheads the seal of the living God. Lukewarm and halfhearted, they dishonor God far more than the avowed unbeliever. They grope in darkness, when they might be walking in the noonday light of the Word, under the guidance of One who never errs.” —(Letter 121, 1903) *Maranatha*, p. 241; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.

“Many will not receive the seal of God because they do not keep His commandments or bear the fruits of righteousness.” —*Maranatha*, p. 241.

Therefore, let us trust completely in the Lord and ask Him to guide our lives. “Let us strive earnestly and untiringly to fulfill God’s purpose for us ‘till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,’ unto perfect men and women, ‘unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’” —*Pacific Union Recorder*, March 26, 1903.

“For Christ’s sake do not speak or think evil. May the Lord help us not only to read the Bible, but to practice its teachings. The human agent who is faithful in His work, who unites gentleness with His power, justice with His love, causes rejoicing among the heavenly intelligences, and glorifies God. Let us strive earnestly to be good and to do good, and we shall receive the crown of life that fadeth not away.” —(MS 116, 1898) *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 439.

“Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand. And let us do all that we can to help others to gain heaven. We are to have an intense interest in Christ Jesus; for He is our Saviour. He came to this world to be tempted in all points as we are, to prove to the universe that in this world of sin human beings can live lives that God will approve.” —(Review and Herald, March 9, 1905) *Maranatha*, p. 241; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.





## MARTYRS

### *God's Ways (Romans 11:33)*

On September 16, 2019, Spiegel Online published a story about Jehovah's Witnesses in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany. Eighty years ago, August Dickmann was one of the inmates in the camp who were executed as conscientious objectors. Our brother in the faith, Friedrich Bradtka, was there and witnessed the execution.<sup>1</sup> The report appeared in *Der Spiegel* (The Mirror) in Hamburg, which has a paid weekly circulation of approximately 700,000<sup>2</sup> and is not known for a Christian orientation. It is considered a secular magazine, and every year at Christmastime, for example, the birth of Christ is questioned and Christianity is presented as being unreliable.

The section in which the above story appeared, called "A Certain Day," publishes and archives historical topics and eyewitness accounts. The title of the article was "Conscientious Objectors in the Third Reich: Jehovah's Witnesses Despair of the Nazis."<sup>3</sup>

Christian Friedrich Bradtka (1886-1959) was a widower who lived in Kannwiesen, East Prussia, with his six children. On April 25, 1939, he was arrested following allegations made against him by Seventh-day Adventists who were his former brethren in the faith and was transported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp on May 26 of the same year. He was tattooed with prisoner number 000441 and was registered in block 65.<sup>4</sup> The document of record regarding his detention<sup>5</sup> under the most difficult conditions tells about the execution of August Dickmann.

Friedrich Bradtka saw firsthand what happened and gave the following description: "On the night of September 15, 1939, the work was completed an hour earlier. The columns of prisoners, coming from their work areas, were all lined up in

the main square—8,500 prisoners in all. Suddenly we heard the voice of the camp commander, Baranowski, coming through the speakers that were attached to the lampposts. He said, among other things: 'There are Bible adherents in the field who refuse military service and say that Jehovah is their King and to Him alone they have sworn allegiance. Such elements must be made harmless, according to the law of war. And as long as I am in the field, the Lord has nothing to say.' A command was given, and we heard shots; August Dickmann fell, shot through.<sup>6</sup> At a signal from Baranowski, his assistant, Rudolf Hess, who would later become commander at Auschwitz, shot the man lying on the ground in the head. A man in the front row, one of August's brothers, Heinrich Dickmann, was ordered to put the body in a coffin and take it away.<sup>7</sup>

"After Dickmann's body had been carried away, Baranowski, the camp commander, according to witnesses, shouted that those in the parade ground would suffer the same fate if they did not sign the pledge, including Jehovah's Witnesses. Whoever did not want to be shot was commanded to step forward. After a long pause, two men stepped forward to say that considering what they had just witnessed, they withdrew their signatures. Baranowski left the place in a rage."<sup>8</sup>

Toward the end of this article in *Der Spiegel*, "A Certain Day" mentioned the Reform Movement: "In addition to Jehovah's Witnesses, a much smaller community of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reform Movement, appealed to its members not to participate in the war."<sup>9</sup>

The article contained a gallery of 16 photographs. In addition to the three Conscientious Objectors—August Dickmann (Jehovah's Witness), Franz Jagerstatter (Austrian Catholic), and Herrmann Stöhr (Evangelical Theologist)—four members of the Reform Movement were pictured, with a brief description below their images: Anton Brugger, Alfred Münch, Günter Pietz, and Viktor Pacha.

Our brother in the faith, Friedrich Bradtka, survived 1,068 brutal days in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He was "punished" by being impaled, in addition to other tortures. Then he was picked up by a [maton—



*Spiegel Nr. 17 / 20.4.19*



*Friedrich Bradtka*





WHAT IS THIS?] from the SS. Near death in a ditch where the execution was to be carried out, with his head against the wall and seemingly at his last hour, Friedrich Bradtka courageously told the SS men, 'If you shoot me, I want to look you in the eye.' But even the hardened SS were unable to do so and sent our faithful brother back to his quarters."<sup>10</sup>

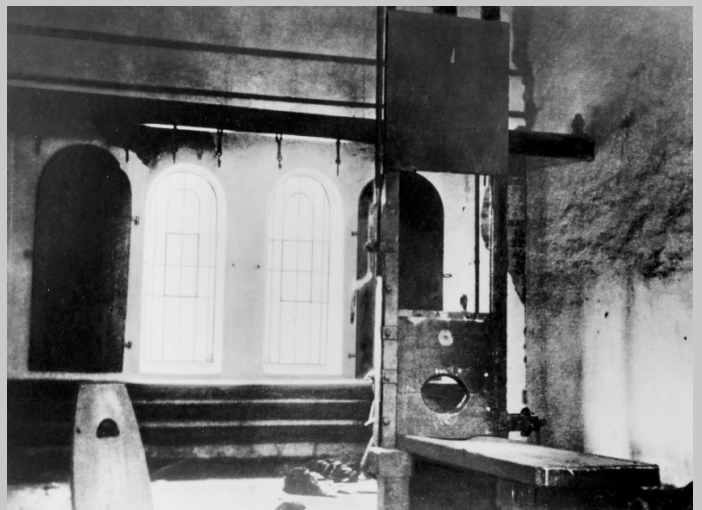
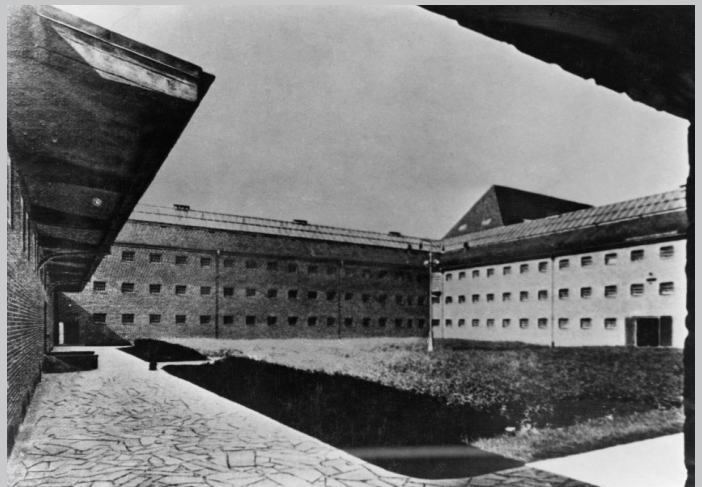
Friedrich Bradtka was allowed to return to Kannwiesen in East Prussia in 1942. After the war, he was expelled from East Prussia on May 13, 1946. He found a place to stay in Schleswig-Holstein, in the western area. He later moved close to his daughters Marta Bohlmann and Emma Lange on Lake Constance. He died on July 18, 1959, at the age of 73, and was buried by Elder Otto Welker in Stockach-Zizenhausen.

As a result of the publication of the above article about conscientious objectors, the entry in Wikipedia, "International Missionary Society of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reform Movement" received three times as many views as normal over the course of several days. It has been rewarding and encouraging to see a secular magazine correctly present information about the Reform Movement, as well as an important part of our history, which showed that our people believed the Bible and upheld it as binding, even in times of war. Through the faithfulness of the witnesses of our small community, many more people now know about us. This fills us with gratitude.

"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time:..."  
*Ecclesiastes 3:11.*

We can be sure that God's ways are deep and will prevail.

*Helmut Welker*





# World in Brief

Spiegel Online–Photo Gallery

<https://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/kriegsdienstverweigerer-im-nationalsozialismus-fotostrecke-170654-16.html>



“Adventist Günter Pietz of Upper Silesia was only 17 years old when he refused military service in April 1943. All attempts to change his mind after his imprisonment failed. He wrote to his parents that he did not worry about the death penalty, ‘because I know that God is by my side, and I have a peace and tranquility of heart that I have not had in these last days.’ In September, the sentence was carried out with the guillotine. The death certificate includes the words, ‘sudden death, respiratory arrest.’”



“Born in Silesia, Victor Pacha, at the age of 18, resigned from the Catholic Church to become an Adventist. In the late 1940s, he received the order to report for military service. However, when the weapons were issued, he told his superiors that he would not touch a firearm. At the age of 25, Pacha was executed in 1943 in Brandenburg prison.”



“Elder Alfred Münch was part of the small group of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement. In addition to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, it was the only denomination that represented conscientious objection in its entirety. He spent the entire time of the war in prisons and concentration camps, the last being in Alderney Island Canal, where prisoners were forced to build bunkers. Shortly before the war ended, he died.”



“Anton Brugger was one of the Reform Adventists who refused to participate in the war during World War II. Having been excluded from his mother church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, after the start of World War II, he fled from Austria went to Italy but was arrested in Milan, then went through various labor camps and was taken as a prisoner by the army in 1942. When he refused to serve in the army, he was convicted of ‘desertion’ and executed in February 1943 in the Brandenburg-Görden Prison.”

- 1 Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Abt. 761, Nr. 16590.
- 2 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/164386/umfrage/verkaufte-auflagen-von-spiegel-stern-und-focus/> - Download am 13.10.2019.
- 3 <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/kriegsdienstverweigerer-hinrichtung-von-august-dickmann-zeugen-jehovas-a-1286598.html>.
- 4 Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten, Häftlingsauskunft Sachsenhausen vom 10.02.2016.
- 5 Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Abt. 761, Nr. 16590.
- 6 ebd. Foto: E. Mattick
- 7 Spiegel, einestages, : „Kriegsdienstverweigerer im „Dritten Reich“: An den Zeugen Jehovas verzweifelten die Nazis“ – Download 3.10.2019.
- 8 ebd.
- 9 Spiegel, einestages, : „Kriegsdienstverweigerer im „Dritten Reich“: An den Zeugen Jehovas verzweifelten die Nazis“ – Download 13.10.2019.
- 10 Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Abt. 761, Nr. 16590.

