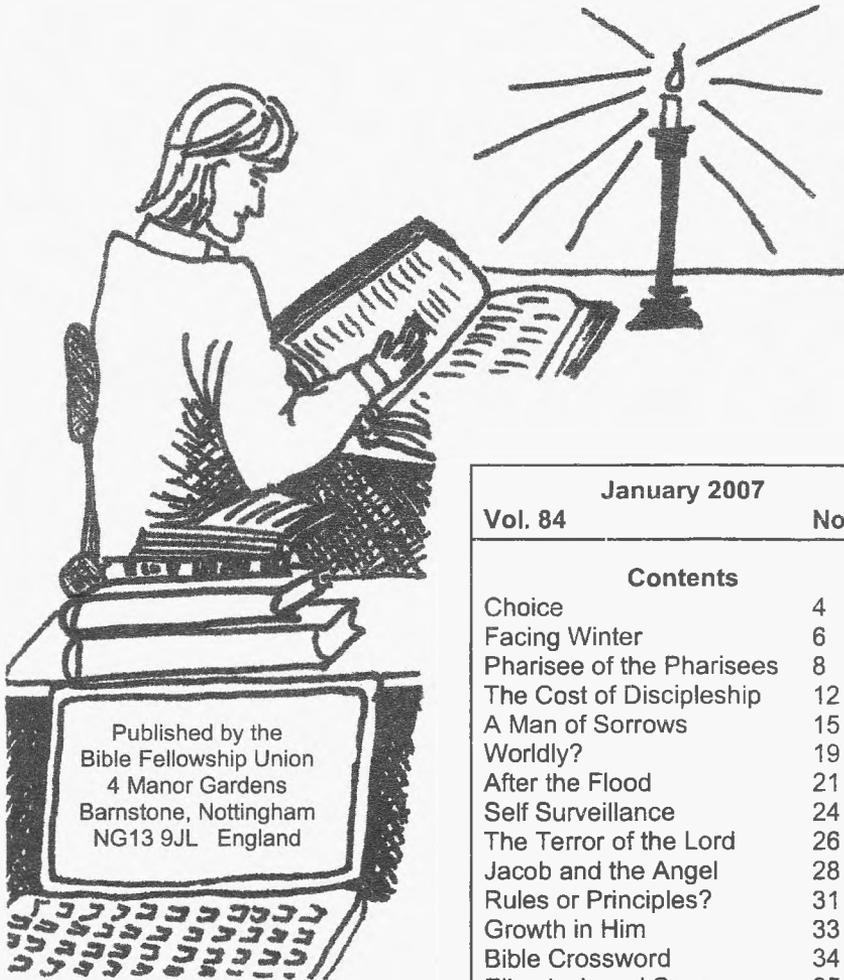


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)
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NOTICES

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984.

Bible Fellowship Union uses computer files to record names and addresses of all readers of the Bible Study Monthly. Information so stored is – the BFU reference number, reader's name and address, number of copies sent and last date of renewal – and appears on the label of each magazine sent out. The information is confidential to Bible Fellowship Union and is never passed to any other organisation. If a reader prefers us to record manually rather than electronically we shall be glad to do so if notified.

GIFT AID:

If you send a gift and are a UK tax payer, the Inland Revenue will refund to BFU tax commensurate with the gift. Please use the form on the back of the pull-out renewal supplement in the Nov/Dec issue. It should be signed, dated and sent to BFU. This need only be done once as forms and letters are valid from year to year.

MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT:

We try to make all publications as useful and helpful as possible to all readers. Comments from readers are appreciated. By God's grace and guidance, high spiritual values and good levels of communication will be maintained. Material published has a wide interest but what is printed may not necessarily be the opinion of those serving with BFU.

BFU reprints its own publications according to demand. The leaflet 'Salvation For All' has been reprinted as a booklet.

The reprinted booklet '**Spirit of Prophecy**' is now available.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

We hope that the changes made in the Bible Study Monthly have not come as too great a shock. We were compelled by postal regulations to make changes in size and shape of the magazine. There is a little less reading material in the A5 magazine but type size is approximately the same. We shall be pleased to receive comments but if there is a flood of correspondence please be patient for a reply. It will come eventually. When we plan, we consider the wide diversity of readers – differences of age and culture and Christian tradition. We tend to use more recent translations and to use language that will be more readily understood by a younger generation and by readers for whom English is their second language. We are happy for BSM material to be used in other publications in UK or overseas and we only request that what is used shall remain unchanged and with the usual acknowledgement of source. We shall continue to republish articles from the BSM of more than twenty years ago particularly from those well loved writers A. O. Hudson, T. Holmes and B. J. Drinkwater. We seek to meet the needs of today in language understood by as many as possible.

BFU only stocks its own publications. We are not able to handle Bibles and Bible study literature and other materials. We are not able to sponsor meetings or speakers or arrange pen-friendships.

We are grateful for back numbers of the Bible Study Monthly, second hand Bibles and Christian books that are sent to us and we pass these on to those we know have special needs.

We pray that you will discover that fellowship with Christ is the most important aspect of your walk in the Christian. Way. May God bless your reading and study of His Word as you travel with Him.

DN

I know not the way that's before me.
The joys or the griefs it may bring;
What clouds are o'er hanging the future,
What flowers by the wayside may spring.
But there's One who will journey beside me
Nor in weal nor in woe will forsake;
And this is my solace and comfort,
"He knoweth the way that I take."

Poems of Dawn

CHOICE

Just a thought

A raised voice said, "**we do not have any choice**".

Is life totally mapped out for us? Don't we need to make decisions? Let us look at some Scriptures. References are mostly taken from the RSV.

Moses said to the leaders of Israel just before He died *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live"* (Deut. 30.19). Moses made a choice according to Hebrews 11.24, 25 *"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."*

Long before this **God had chosen Jacob** rather than Esau, according to Paul in Romans 9.11-13. Jacob made his own choice when he was leaving the Land of the Promise recorded in Genesis 28.20,21 *"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God..."*

At the end of his life, Joshua said to the next generation, *"And if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24.15).

What of Ruth's plea to Naomi, that she might go with her to the land of Israel? (Ruth 1.16). Many centuries later Jesus was to say *"Mary has chosen the good portion"* (Luke 10.42).

Isaiah, describing Israel's hypocrisy, speaks for God, *"These have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in their abominations; I also will choose affliction for them and bring their fears upon them."* (Isaiah 66.3,4)

Jesus said *"All things have been delivered to me by my Father and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* (Luke 10.22)

The Lord appeared to give some measure of choice to the disciples when He said *"If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority"* (John 7.17), but later He said *"You did not choose me but I chose you."* (John 15.16) and earlier He had said *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6.44).

Jesus confronted the disciples with the question *"Do you also wish to go away?"* and Peter immediately asked *"Lord to whom shall we go?"* Did those who went away chose to do so? And what of Jesus' choice of Judas? (John 6.66-71).

Did believers choose to join the early Church? Luke describes its growth "*...the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*" (Acts 2.47 – see also Acts 13.48). Paul writing to the Ephesians (1.4-11) says that "*he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*. It's an interesting passage. Is being "*led by the Spirit*" evidence of personal choice? (Rom 8.14)

Is decision making part of our spiritual growth? What are the criteria for making such decisions? What prompted us first 'to make a decision for Christ'?

Jesus said "*Many are called but few are chosen*" and also said "*He who comes to me I will in no way cast out*"; He invites us – "*Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden*."

Is coming to Christ the same as the Good Shepherd looking for lost sheep? Those who have a 'good' Christian up-bringing are still 'lost'. We are all descendants of Adam and are therefore sinners. It is clear that some hear the Shepherd's voice at a very early age and are drawn to Him. We are all very different in our mental and emotional development and none can demand that others do or do not accept Jesus as Saviour from sin and begin to follow Him. The decision to become a follower of the Lord Jesus, at whatever age, is made on the basis of a need and Jesus is able to meet that need. Christians do not join a club or society that demands certain skills or attainment – nor do they need to pass a test or examination – their only requirements are that they will walk with the Lord and in doing so, become like Him. It is more a matter of mutual attraction than 'choosing'.

From the time we come into Christ all our decisions should be made by one criteria – is what I am about to do or say (or think) pleasing to Him? Decisions must be made on the basis of real heart to heart conversation with the Lord. The more we become aware of our Master's communication the easier (less painful) the decisions become. As with our earthly spouse, our only desire is to please Him – to cause Him no pain.

DN

LOVE'S ALCHEMY

Love is the filling from one's own another's cup
Love is a daily laying down and taking up.
A choosing of the stony path, through each new day
That other feet may tread with ease a smoother way.
Love is not blind, but looks through other eyes;
And asks not "Must I give?" but "May I sacrifice?"

Poems of Dawn

FACING WINTER

It was autumn, and the opportunity to preach the Word to a congregation of elderly Christian people. What to say? The time of year suggested giving some thoughts that might be helpful in the hard days to come. One also knew that some of those present were facing the winter of their lives, with pain and serious illness. Out of all the teaching in Scripture, was there anything directly related to winter? Sometimes talks and sermons are just a friendly chat with not much scriptural basis, while others are jam packed with references relating God's whole plan in a form likely to give the elderly mental indigestion. So what could be gleaned from the Word, and helpfully presented?

The first resort was a concordance. An RSV concordance gave only Matthew 24.20 ("that your flight be not in winter", referring presumably to the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem) and 1 Corinthians 16.6, where Paul was hoping to spend the winter with his friends in Corinth. It was the time of year when long journeys were avoided because of storms and rain, even though snow was a rarity except on the mountains. Further scriptures referred to this practice of wintering, but this seemed of interest rather than help or comfort.

The mind then turned to Ecclesiastes 12, where the advice is to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, before the evil days come on. The description of old age is graphic, poetic, but perhaps not very clear in parts. What is it like in 'The Message'? A paraphrase, obviously, but very much to the point:

*Honour and enjoy your Creator while you're still young.
Before the years take their toll and your vigour wanes.
Before your vision dims and the world blurs
And the winter years keep you close to the fire.
In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.
Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.
The shades are pulled down on the world.
You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.
The hum of the household fades away.
You are wakened now by bird-song.
Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.
Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.
Your hair turns apple-blossom white,
Adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.
Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest,
While your friends make plans for your funeral.
Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over.
Life as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends.
The body is put back in the same ground it came from.
The spirit returns to God, who first breathed it.*

To the point, yes, but encouraging? Perhaps not, taken on its own. But turn over a couple of pages and there is that description of Spring (Song of Solomon 2.11).

*Look around you: Winter is over;
The winter rains are over, gone!
Spring flowers are in blossom all over.
The whole world's a choir – and singing!*

So if we can understand that the winter of life, leading to death, is followed by the spring of the resurrection, we can face every harsh detail and still be encouraged. Whether we think of ourselves or our friends in failing health, or think of the world we live in with its evil; or we consider the wickedness of teenagers and tyrants, the folly of manufacturers and the impotence of ministers; in all these things, though we may have to suffer, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" Spring means Christ's resurrection, our resurrection, and His kingdom to come.

Meanwhile, is there any advice we can give one another as we face our personal winter? There are some points which come out of Paul's winter journey to Rome via Malta (Acts 27). The ship owner had delayed the precaution of 'wintering', and Paul with all aboard the ship had experienced peril from the winter storm, and fear. To him the message came: *'Do not be afraid, Paul: you must stand before Caesar.'* To tell the Good News in Rome and before Caesar was the great ambition of Paul's life at this time. It was because he was aware of God's purpose for him, a purpose beyond himself, that Paul was able to face this winter experience with faith and courage. Likewise we, facing winter, need to remember that God has a purpose for us beyond ourselves, to serve Him in some small way. Concentrate on that.

Paul had been prepared in his mind for the journey before him. He knew what he had to face, even if the ship's captain did not, and the sailors' precautions turned out to be unavailing. In an earlier time, a different situation, and on land, the Good Wife of Proverbs 31 was also prepared for anything and everything. *"She doesn't worry about her family when it snows; their winter clothes are all mended and ready to wear"* (v.21 The Message). To be prepared for winter is part of the secret of facing it.

But if our preparations fail of their object? Paul on his journey was at risk because the preparations made by others had been inadequate. We cannot always trust others. We cannot with certainty trust ourselves. Paul had to rest on God's providence and care. We too must rest on the 'everlasting arms'. It is rather like the swimmer learning to float – if you do not panic, the water will support you. Even when our 'winter' seems more severe than we expected, we can, we must, rest in God's love.

So the little group of elderly folk heard these thoughts from Scripture: to know that in Winter we can look for the Spring; to have a purpose in serving God whatever the circumstances; to be prepared, in our minds and practically, for what winter may mean; and to trust. As we face winter, you may have your own thoughts about what God is saying to us. The thing is, not to be just a hearer of the Word, but a doer of it.

GC

PHARISEE OF THE PHARISEES

A story of Paul

He stood by the little pile of garments, stiffly erect, his lip curling in disdain as he listened to the shouting of the mob. He had chosen this duty, the guarding of the witnesses' clothing, in order to keep away from the scene of the actual execution. He did not disagree with the verdict; he was a member of the Sanhedrin and sat at the trial of the Christian, Stephen, giving his voice in favour of the death sentence. He nevertheless despised, with all his heart, these tumultuous and ignorant Jews of Jerusalem and wished sometimes he was back in his native city of Tarsus in Cilicia, where his own family and all their fellow-Jews had adopted Greek customs and culture and lived their lives on a level of dignity and poise which was completely unknown to the masses here in Judea.

He turned now and looked again towards the crowds, his well-built form standing in an attitude of impatience and his aquiline features making no attempt to conceal the distaste he felt at the whole proceeding. The man deserved his fate; he had clearly been guilty of blasphemy and he felt no remorse or sympathy for him, but he was thoroughly disgusted with the manner in which the Sanhedrin had handled the trial and allowed things to get out of hand. Saul had wanted the evidence to be carefully presented and the connection of this man Stephen with the crucified felon Jesus of Nazareth clearly demonstrated, so that the whole affair could be made a stern warning to all who felt tempted to listen to the message of the risen Jesus so persistently being preached in Jerusalem. He had hoped to hear a grave and solemn statement from the High Priest, to be repeated from lip to lip as the news got round, followed by the pronouncement of a salutary sentence which would send a shiver of fear into the hearts of those who professed discipleship of Jesus. This man Jonathan was not a bit like his predecessor Caiaphas, thought Saul bitterly as he turned again and looked moodily at the heap of clothes at his feet. Joseph Caiaphas was a shrewd and crafty politician and knew just how to handle the men around him. Jonathan on the other hand had first lost control of his own feelings when Stephen made that absurd claim of seeing heaven opened and the

Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, and then allowed the disorganized rabble to take the prisoner by force and hurry him away to the place of stoning before so much as a formal judgment could be uttered. The proud claim of the Pharisees that whilst they sat on the Sanhedrin no son of Israel should have his blood shed, even judicially, until every means of avoiding that final act had been sought out and found unavailing, was a dead letter whilst these Sadducee High Priests ruled, he thought angrily. First Jesus of Nazareth; now this; even though they deserved what they received it was an offence against God and against Moses that their trial and execution should be dictated by mob law and not by the judicial procedure laid down in the statutes given at Sinai.

He shook his head as though to rid himself of the vision which remained still before his eyes; a countenance looking up to heaven, and appearing as though it was the face of an angel. A prisoner, accused of serious crime against God and Moses, by the stern law of Israel's great lawgiver commanded to be cut off from amongst the people, yet calmly standing there delivering a discourse on the purposes of God and Israel's place in those purposes which had won Saul's ungrudging admiration. That was the kind of sermon he himself liked to give and liked to hear. Stephen was a Greek Jew like himself, a man in every way superior to these clods of Judean Jews and had he not embraced this blasphemous heresy about a Son of Man who was also the Son of God he might have done great things in Israel. But he deserved to die, and for the sake of the purity of Israel's religion and the sanctity of the covenant he must die, and the sooner the whole wretched business was over and done with the better. He turned his head impatiently and through a gap in the crowd he caught a glimpse of that face again, once more a face as it had been that of an angel; upon his ears fell a faint voice borne to him on the wind "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" and then the crowd closed in again and suddenly there was a great silence.

How long Saul stood there after that he never knew. He was dimly conscious of the witnesses picking up their clothes and speaking to him, but he comprehended nothing of what they said. The mob was dispersing and going down the hillside in twos and threes and groups; the members of the Sanhedrin were coming towards him rubbing their hands and Jonathan the High Priest, a complacent smile on his face, began to say something to Saul of a congratulatory nature. Suddenly, Saul could bear it all no longer; he nodded curtly to Jonathan, turned his back on the group and walked quickly away, as though pursued by some nameless thing whose existence he would not admit and yet from which he must try desperately to escape.

Saul of Tarsus was a man of about thirty at this time, four years after the death of Jesus. Born in Tarsus, a seaport town in the Greek-speaking Roman province of Cilicia, some four hundred miles from Jerusalem across the

Mediterranean Sea, the greater part of his life had been spent under the influence of Greek life and culture. His father was a Jew of the Dispersion, of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Pharisee. For how many years his forbears had lived among the Gentiles is not known; maybe several centuries, maybe much less. But the father, though resident in an alien land, gave the lad the true training of a son of Israel, and to such good effect that at this early age Saul was already a member of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, the highest religious court in the land. His elevation to that position must have been quite recent, for four years earlier when Jesus was arraigned before that same Sanhedrin Saul was not a member; it is quite certain that he never saw Jesus in the flesh and could not have been in Jerusalem during His ministry. In all probability he was, as a young lad, sent to Jerusalem for a few years to study under the Doctors of the Law. This was when he *"sat at the feet of Gamaliel"* (Acts 22.3), then he returned home in Tarsus and was trained there to earn his living as a tentmaker (Acts 18.3). Cilicia was noted for its sail cloth and other materials made from the woven hair of Cilician goats and weaving was probably Saul's trade. Then he returned to Jerusalem, after the death of Jesus but before that of Stephen, to take up some official position in the Pharisee community which involved his election to the Sanhedrin.

Great changes had taken place in Jerusalem in those four years. Caiaphas had been deprived of his High Priesthood by the Romans. Pontius Pilate had been recalled to Rome in disgrace. The Emperor Tiberius had died and been succeeded by the insane Gaius Caligula. None of those who shared responsibility for the death of Jesus remained. It was almost as if a new generation was taking over the control of Judea and Jerusalem, and the young man Saul was one of that generation, marked out for high office in Pharisaic circles. Although so young, he was probably already a widower, for one of the qualifications for membership of the Sanhedrin which was considered almost an essential was that the candidate should have been married. The fact that there is no reference in the New Testament to Paul having a wife would seem to infer that if in fact he had been married, his wife must have died before his conversion on the Damascus road. The tones of almost yearning affection in which in after years he referred to Timothy and Onesimus as "sons" might well point to a great disappointment in earlier life in the lack of any sons of his own. It might even be that some great untold sorrow connected with the loss of a wife at an early age may account at least in part for the bitter unsparing frenzy in which he now plunged, hunting out and persecuting to the death, those who to his mind were disloyal to the Mosaic law. That he had a married sister and a nephew living in Jerusalem is known from Acts 23.16, but no other details of his family life are recorded.

The physical appearance of this great champion of the faith has always

provoked curiosity. Nothing is known for certain. There is a very common impression that St. Paul was of most unprepossessing appearance. A certain amount of play has been made with his own statement in 2 Cor. 10.10 to the effect that "*his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*" "to be accounted nothing of" is the meaning of the original. The verse need only mean that in the circumstances of his relation to the Corinthian Church he was far more terrible by his letters in his absence than he would be by his words at his presence. The one definite clue to his physical appearance comes from his visit in company with Barnabas to Lystra on his first missionary journey, when the pagan citizens, impressed by the miracle he had performed identified Paul with Mercury on account of his eloquence. Now Mercury in the ancient mythologies, the wing-footed messenger of the gods, was always conceived as young, tall and strikingly handsome. The Lycaonians would hardly have identified Paul with Mercury unless he at least measurably fulfilled their conception of the physical appearance of their god. That was when Paul was a comparatively young man; it is more than likely that persecution, ill-treatment and poor health through the years took their toll so that 'Paul the Aged' may well have come nearer to fulfilling the traditional aspect.

So Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, young, talented, ambitious, burning with zeal for the God of his fathers and intolerant of all who questioned the rigidity of the ancient traditions, came in touch with the message of the Gospel and the power of God, all unconscious that this thing was about to overturn his whole scheme of things and change his entire life. On the day that he gave his vote for the death of the martyr Stephen he all unwittingly set in motion a chain of circumstances that was destined to make him, first, the greatest exponent of the Christian faith and the most noted missionary of all time. Then it would lead through persecution and prison and thirty years of indefatigable labour, to a martyr's death in his own turn. He died alone, at the hands of the Roman executioner, on the Appian Way outside the city of Rome, but the torch he lit and tended with such fiery zeal during his eventful life has never been put out, and will not dim until it is swallowed up in the greater light of the Kingdom for which he lived and died.

AOH

Filled with the Spirit, we shall be a blessing to others; and rivers – not mere streams – of blessing will flow out from us to refresh the dry and thirsty wilderness of this world. We must leave the earth, or heaven will never be ours. Our arms are not long enough to reach heaven while we hold with one hand to earth.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

The disciples of Jesus were never left under any illusions about what it would cost to follow Him. He had come to Earth at tremendous cost to Himself as Paul so wonderfully describes it in Philippians 2.5-8 and about which he wrote to the Corinthian church, *"For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich"* (2 Cor. 8.9). When He laid before His followers the standard teaching of what we now call the 'Sermon on the Mount' and is sometimes referred to as His manifesto of the Kingdom, it soon became clear that suffering and denial were a part of the cost of discipleship. The 'Beatitudes' make that very clear (Matt. 5.3-12). Among the spiritually blissful attitudes is 'persecution for righteousness sake' and slowly but surely through the Lord's ministry He made this aspect of Christian living real; it was part of His life. He also revealed in stages that 'denial of self' was a living witness and that loving Him was more important than loving self. However little they appeared to understand of what it would cost to follow Jesus to death before the crucifixion, the Early Church quickly realized after Pentecost that it was a joy to suffer for 'the Name' (Acts 5.41).

A wealthy young man with high prestige among the Jewish people, thought that it was possible to be part of God's kingdom and gain eternal life by his own exertions. He had kept the Law faithfully and was already a ruler of the synagogue yet he lacked one thing. He still clung to his material riches and power. The wealth had to go and he had 'to come' and follow Jesus. What a contrasting type of life that would be! His life was comfortable; everyone looked up to him as a role model; he could calculate where the next meal was coming from; he knew exactly what was expected of him; and all of this cost him nothing. It was all part of a most desirable life style. Just at that moment when he encountered Jesus and asked his well known question 'What must I do?' he was not prepared to leave that comfortable life behind. Becoming a follower of Jesus at this stage in His ministry was a bit hazardous. Only a few weeks lay between the Saviour and Calvary. To follow Jesus had long since been an excommunicable offence from the synagogues by the Pharisees. It never occurred to the ecclesiastical authorities a thousand years later, who did exactly the same thing, that they too were following the way of the religious Jews and excommunicating true believers from their churches. The cost to the dissidents for Jesus' sake, in any age, has been the same. Those in authority in any sect should note the warning. But receiving the 'order of the boot' is not in itself a laudable situation and it is only when it is received truly for the sake of Jesus that it can be an indication of where our allegiance lies.

Jesus arrived at a village in Samaria and was rejected because on this occasion he was on His way to Jerusalem. The enmity between the two peoples

was intense. James and John immediately wanted to call down fire from heaven in true Old Testament prophet style. Jesus rebuked them for such a thought. Perhaps they had yet to discover that they must be at the receiving end of trouble not the giving end. That event is recorded in Luke 9.51-56.

A little further along the road he met several who were confronted with the possibilities of discipleship. To one he warned that following Him meant that He would be of 'no fixed abode' and many of the Lord's disciples have known what that means, especially those who have carried the Gospel far and wide.

He made it clear to other enquirers that there was no time for personal family ties. As we read through these incidents we might feel that Jesus was being quite hard in the restrictions he was placing on 'would-be' disciples. William Barclay suggests that the would-be disciples had really said "I will follow you some day when my father is dead" – after he had fulfilled all his obligations to his family. Jesus' reply is 'come now and get out of the dead world' – a warning to us not to delay – not to procrastinate – seize the opportunity now – something which comes to many of us, and being human we let the opportunity pass. Leon Morris gives some support to Barclay's suggestion. The lessons from Jesus reply to both of these men must certainly be that the affairs of the Kingdom of Heaven cannot wait for the protracted procedure of this world and its society. It does not mean that human relationships are unimportant or to be ignored, as in some sects. Paul, writing to Timothy, makes it quite clear that family ties are important (1 Tim. 5.8). If we are at one with the Lord in this respect then we shall have no difficulty in understanding our priorities. The interests of the Kingdom of Heaven, which are top priority, can certainly include our attitude to our natural relatives. If they choose to disown us because we follow Jesus, that is their responsibility.

The other side of the coin relevant to priorities is seen in Jesus' parable of the 'Great Banquet' recorded in Luke 14.15-24. The way in which the guests made last minute excuses for not attending the banquet is almost laughable in their silliness. The buying of property or animals or getting married were flimsy excuses and not reasons – such guests just did not want to bother attending the banquet. Such are the excuses made by those who Jesus calls but who cannot be bothered to make the effort.

He calls many but they find human reasons for rejecting the greatest offer ever made to mankind. But that quality of human reasoning is prevalent in human society in every age including the present. Why do people – leaders and those in power and authority makes such stupid blunders and decisions? Like so many others, they are acting on human values and criteria. Jesus has provided by far the best way of life ever known – and it's for eternity – but it's not all 'sugar' and people want their 'sweets' (candy some might say) now. To be a disciple of Jesus demands discipline – sometimes a bit rigorous but the

exchange of the values of the Sermon on the Mount for the chaos of sinful humanity is wonderful value – are we living up to it?

Jesus followed that rather well known parable with two miniature stories about 'counting the cost'. They are about a man who planned to build a tower but ran out of bricks and a king who went to war only to find his opponent was a lot stronger than he. Jesus is telling those who would be his disciples that they must consider all the implications of becoming a disciple. He didn't want people joining his little band of close disciples without them realizing the consequences. He was telling them that they must expect to sacrifice some aspects of human life if they followed Him. They might find themselves without income, shelter, friends, and lots of other things which ordinary people take for granted. Were they prepared for this? How suddenly can one be converted in order to really count the cost? And was Jesus really saying that there is an alternative option in life to discipleship with Him? If someone counts the cost now and finds the price too high, what must they do? Christ is the only means of salvation. But there is an opportunity for the majority of humanity who reject Christ now to re-think their answer to Jesus when He calls them from the grave. They will not have been condemned but will be judged by what they do then, just as disciples are being judged on what they do now.

As Jesus approached the cross He steadily impressed on the disciples that the way ahead was not easy – it might be distinctly hard. These warnings became stronger with more detailed prediction of His suffering. These can be traced through the latter part of the Gospels and Mark 9 and 10 give examples culminating in His reply to James and John's questions about sitting next to Him in His glorious Kingdom. Did they really know what they were asking? Did they really understand His answer?

Was the cost of suffering, even death for Christ's sake, the real difficulty in counting the cost of discipleship? Or was it rather the day to day change that must take place in those who live to serve others – totally. Paul, who gave up so much for a tremendously hard life had this to say *"Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him..."* (Phil. 3.8, 9)

Is it, the daily 'laying down' and giving up that in the end proves to be the stumbling block to accepting Jesus as Lord? He was the slave of all – a slave who paid the price to free all the other slaves.

DN

Build a little fence around today, and therein stay;
Look not through the shelt'ring bars upon tomorrow –
Sufficient for each day, the evil and the sorrow.

Poems of Dawn

A MAN OF SORROWS

5 - A Lamb to the Slaughter

A study in
Isaiah 53

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (Isa. 53.7).

In all His sufferings the Saviour never offered a word of complaint. That is the thought behind *"opened not his mouth"*. Jesus said so often emphatically that He came to do the Father's will, without protest or unwillingness. There was no shadow of impatience or reluctance, no whisper of complaint or question. His meat was to do the will of the One who had sent Him and to finish His work. Nothing else mattered. That is a lesson for ourselves. Too often we accept with thanksgiving and gladness the sunshine and flowers of the Christian way, but directly the shadow of adversity falls across our pathway we grumble and complain.

We so need to prepare ourselves in the sunny days, that if in His providence, dark and stormy come, we take those seasons of adversity in just the same thankful and loyal spirit in which we formerly received the good things. Not all of God's children are oppressed and afflicted for their faith. Few of us have suffered as our forbears or as some of our brethren do now in other lands. We do well to be humbly thankful that our Master has seen fit to withhold such experiences from us. We must be ready to bear without complaint, without opening our mouths, if such things come. If we tend to become impatient and quarrelsome with each other, we must learn how to endure the harder things of the Christian life without opening our mouths.

This prophetic picture of one brought as a lamb to the slaughter is the basis upon which the entire later picture of Jesus as the *"Lamb of God"*, the Lamb *"slain from the foundation of the world"*, is built. Isaiah's words here are taken from the Passover sacrifice, the lamb that was slain to become the symbol of deliverance from Egypt. Grammatically the phrase should be translated *"He is brought as the lamb to the slaughter,"* and it is a reference, not to any lamb taken to slaughter, but to the Passover lamb itself, slaughtered so that Israel could be delivered. Without the blood of that lamb on the portals and lintels of their houses there could be no salvation. Without the Divine acceptance of that sacrifice there could be no call to come out of Egypt and meet with God before the holy mount. Without the outward evidence that the Lamb had been slain, the destroying angel had no mandate to withdraw his sword. It was supremely important for every Israelite that he not only trusted in the blood of the slain lamb but that he made a public exhibition of the fact on the door-posts and lintels of his house so that the angel could see it. So we should heed the exhortation to be his witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth and confess Jesus before men.

It is even more important that in the privacy and sanctity of our homes we confess Jesus before God. Our knowledge of the Divine plan will not save us; nor will our wonderful works; and our profession of consecration before God will not be accounted of any worth, if we have not accepted and confessed Jesus the Son of God, the Saviour of us all.

That confession needs to be of Jesus the despised and rejected, the oppressed and afflicted. It is not sufficient to own Him only when He appears as the chief among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely, or when He is seen a King, mighty to save, travelling in the greatness of His strength. These things are true of Jesus but for the present He is still despised and rejected of men, and the servant is not to be greater than his Lord.

Our continual rejoicing should find outward expression. We should be pleasant and cheerful with everyone. But these do not necessarily denote a true follower of the Master. There is sorrow and sadness for the sin and misery of mankind in the Christian life, – and they become an evidence of the *'filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ'* (Col. 1.24) – as well as joy in the Gospel which is the possession of us all. Shoulders bowed with other people's burdens, and health and vitality given in the service of others is evidence that we walk *"as He walked"* and are pouring out our lives to death as He did. This modern world takes little heed of such. We do well to remember that we are followers of the One who went quietly, silently but resolutely, as the lamb to the slaughter.

"He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken." (v 8). This is a description of the trial, death and burial of Christ, written some seven hundred years before the event. It is impossible to read vv 7- 9 without noting how accurately the prophecy was fulfilled in history. His passive acceptance of arrest; His silence before the judges; the injustice of His trial are all here. The sentence and execution, innocent though He was of any crime, and the burial of His body in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea, are accurately foreshown in this remarkable prophecy. Unbelievers have been hard put to it to explain this chapter away. There is no way of accounting for it but by admitting that the words were given by One who has the power to see into the future.

Perhaps here and there a loyal heart, grappling with the problem of this tragedy which had shattered all their hopes, began to wonder if, after all, the story was indeed finished whether the last three verses of Isaiah 53 yet remained to be fulfilled in some wonderful manner that would reverse the entire position and turn their sorrow into joy.

There remained now only one last prophecy of dark things to be fulfilled before the tide was to turn and the meaning of all things be made plain. *"And he*

made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." (v 9) but after that the world was to see the salvation of God.

This word was literally fulfilled when Jesus was buried in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. That is a surface interpretation which can be accepted as true since so many of the Old Testament prophecies are declared by the Apostles to have been literally fulfilled in the experiences of our Lord. But there is more to it. The sublime words of Isa.53 contain a deeper theme than the burial of the Lord's body in a particular tomb. The expression is really a continuation of the theme that runs through the chapter from verse one. It tells of the apparently inexplicable and yet undeniable fact that the Lord of all righteousness, spotless in his unblemished purity, became so identified with sin and sinners that in the end He suffered and died and was buried just like the grossest of sinners. No penalty that men could visit upon evil and evildoers was wanting in His case who knew no sin. The Old Testament abounds with assurances of Divine favour and watch care exercised toward the righteous, but none of that was extended toward Him. He suffered as though He was the vilest of sinners and He died as though He were not fit to live. He was cut off from the land of the living. One assigned or appointed for him a grave with the wicked; that is the literal meaning of the first phrase of the verse. He was appointed to that destiny. In the sight of men He was as the evil king of Isa. 14 who is "*cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch..., thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet*". That was the viewpoint from which the world looked upon Jesus and the people of His day were as little concerned about Him after His death as they were over the bodies of criminals thrown into the fires of Gehenna, the burning valley.

The Father took a different view. "The wages of sin is death" says the Divine law and although in the sight of men this one had gone into death like the wicked and with the wicked, He did not remain in death. "*It was not possible for him to be held by it*" says the Apostle. The Father gave testimony to the righteousness of the Son by raising Him from the dead. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but that grave did not hold Him, because He Himself is righteous.

The people had treated Him with the same contempt as did their ancestors to Uriah the prophet in the days of Jeremiah when they "*cast his dead body into the graves of the common people*" (Jer. 26.23). So they thought to make an end of Jesus and His inconvenient teachings. So man proposed, and God disposed, and on the third day the stone was rolled back and the Lord of Glory came forth.

The expression "*with the rich in his death*" looks beyond the literal fact of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb and the costly spices and fine linen in which the Lord's body was enshrouded. That may very well have been the immediate

fulfilment but there is something more fundamental. The Scriptures refer several times to the fact that even the rich man in the riches of this world must eventually leave everything behind and go down into the land of forgetfulness. *"If his children are multiplied"* says Job *"it is for the sword; and his offspring have not enough to eat. Those who survive him the pestilence buries; ... Though he heap up silver like dust, and pile up clothing like clay; he may pile it up, but the just shall wear, it, and the innocent will divide the silver... The east wind lifts him up and he is gone,* (Job 27.14-19). Psa. 49.6-9 is similar. Despite his riches, he lies down in death and is forgotten. To the world it seemed that the death of Jesus was like that. True, He had not accumulated earthly riches, but it seemed equally true that all He had striven for during His lifetime had been wasted. He died without having achieved His purpose. *"We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel"* said the two disciples sadly, on the road to Emmaus. They had expected, but now all hope was gone and His life was as if it had never been spent. In that sense He made His grave with the rich in His death, the fruits of His life's endeavour dissipated to the four winds and He Himself lying, like all men of all preceding generations, lifeless in the grave.

(To be concluded) TH

A PSALM

O Lord, I see the wonders of your will behind me.
The joy of your providence in my life.
Your power and your Spirit are here to guide and bless me now
Your love is ever present to inspire the humblest of actions for you.
Your peace and power are beyond our human knowledge but always there for me.
Your mighty hand set the heavens in unison, gave the earth its glory and formed man to worship and commune with you.
Your coming Kingdom will make perfect the work of your hand in mankind
And praise to your name WILL be in all the earth.
Thank you, Lord for being in my past, in my future, and in my NOW.
Each minute of NOW, day or night.
I will bless and praise your name forever.

Written for a conference session by JGC

"Aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands."
(1 Thess. 4.11)

Try not to be distracted but concentrate on pleasing the Lord. Do not allow life to become too fragmented or diverse or you will be drawn away from your chief aim. Live not for time but for eternity.

Keswick Calendar

WORLDLY?

There are two sorts of Christians, it might be said. There are those who react negatively to the world around them, grieve over the evil, and live within the circle of those who share the same view. Then there are those who react positively to the world around them, enjoy life, and enjoy mixing and mingling with all kinds of people; these may be thought of as 'worldly'. There is a scriptural background.

Two Greek words in the New Testament are specially relevant to this subject. One is 'aion'. It means an age, an era, a long period of time. It can have reference to eternity – 'world without end' – but much of its use in scripture relates to the present age. Jesus before His death spoke of the present age that existed then, and Paul spoke of it at the point when the gospel first began to spread. What they say about that present age is resonant with conditions today, two thousand years further on in history.

It was in His parable of the sower that Jesus spoke about the 'cares of this age', which choke the growth of the kingdom in men's lives and hearts (Matthew 13.22). In another parable, He described the 'Sons of this age' as being sharper in business practice than the 'sons of light' (Luke 16.8). When replying to a conundrum about marriage links at the time of the resurrection, He said that marriage concerns were characteristic of the 'Sons of this age' (Luke 20.34) - relevant to the present time and not to the future life.

Paul has several references in 1 Corinthians (1.20; 2.6; 3.18) to the debaters and the rulers and the characteristic wisdom of this age – something which today we can sense in the presuppositions and assumptions of those who are involved in discussion programmes on radio or television. He sees it as being Satan's work, as the 'god of this age', to blind people's minds to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4.4). So, in Romans 12.2 he urges believers not to be conformed to this age, fitting in with and going along with what everybody seems to think and do. He states that Jesus, in dealing with our sins, releases us from the power of the present evil age (Galatians 1.4).

So beware of worldly attitudes: having no time for church or fellowship, being always too busy, or worrying about something or other; doing deals on the internet or elsewhere that sound like sharp practice; having an excessive concern with sex; rejoicing in one's own cleverness. Worldly people are blind to the reasons for having faith, set in a mould, and helpless to squeeze out of it. Didn't Jesus give Himself to set us free from all this?

Those who deliberately turn away from 'the world' may not be popular. For example, to leave a good job because it is unethical may be taken as a criticism by one's work friends. To give up social or sporting activities for the sake of doing something better instead..., to turn your back on the lottery..., to be careful of who you have as your friends..., perhaps publicly to reject someone you

disapprove of... Our faith, if not mixed with love, may appear as a negative quality to the people around us.

The second Greek word is '*kosmos*', and it is used in various connections. It means a harmonious arrangement of things, a state of affairs. It can refer to the earth which God has created at the 'foundation of the world' (Matthew 13.35), the world which God has made, and all things in it (Acts 17.24). It can mean the people of the world, whom Christ came to save (John 3.16). But it also is used to mean the present condition, pattern, arrangement of human affairs and human behaviour, which is bad. So, disciples are chosen by Christ out from the world. They are hated because they do not belong to it (John 15.19). They are told by the apostle (1 John 2.15-17) not to love the world, or the things in it. This order of things is, in the long run, evanescent, fading, temporary, not to be relied on as the basis for one's life. Worse, getting immersed in the world, captured by its sights and sounds, exalted by our own achievements, is incompatible with love for God our Father.

To have a world-rejecting attitude does not make the people of the world like you. The brothers of Jesus were not unpopular, they had done nothing that the world could hate them for (John 7.7). But although the world seems hostile, it can be overcome: that is, we can successfully resist its pressures by our faith (1 John 5.3-5). The suffering entailed in resisting the world may trouble us: but Jesus told his disciples they could be at peace because He has overcome the world (John 16.33). Having faith involves, to quote James (1.23), not only practical care for others but also taking care to avoid being contaminated by the thoughts and behaviours of those around us.

But God loves the world. God's intention for Jesus in coming into the world was to rescue the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him – but the world did not recognise Him. They didn't receive Him. But those who did receive Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1.10-12). God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but to save the world (John 3.17). How do Christians get involved in ministering His love?

There is a text, Mark 16.15, which says 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'. Although these words are recorded in only one of the alternative endings to Mark's gospel, that is not the point. The point is to let people experience God's love just here, where we are, in one part of God's larger picture. This is the part which concerns us.

As we set about putting wrong things right, we may think of 1 Corinthians 6.3 where Paul speaks about the saints judging the world. That is future. History is full of Christians who in being judges of others have acted like little tin gods. Christians should not even imagine that they must be in control. Jesus came as a servant. But one day they may expect to have work as judges in the new world,

making God's love real in people's lives.

2 Corinthians 5.19 speaks of God reconciling the world to Himself through Christ. What is the context? Paul, who writes this does not preach about himself, he preaches Jesus as Lord. Paul is a servant for Jesus' sake, servant to those who are listening. He is inspired as he sees the consequences of Christ giving Himself to rescue the world. So the love of Christ controls us. He died for all. We live not for ourselves, but for Him. We are new people living a new life. And God has given us a ministry of reconciliation. We act as God's ambassadors in the world, with this message – let God be your friend, your helper, your Lord. This is a relationship that He has made possible. Can we help others to share in it?

GC

AFTER THE FLOOD

14 - Journey to Haran

The time had come for a great step forward in God's purpose for human salvation. It was time for the downward moral trend to be reversed. So God planned to develop a people, a nation, that would demonstrate His standards and be His witness to the world. One man must be a worthy ancestor of such a people, one who would become known as the "father of the faithful". He must be known for his sterling faith and inflexible loyalty to the Most High God, in the midst of a world given over to idolatry. The Lord looked down and saw His man.

Abu-Ramu (Abram), youngest son of Tarakhu (Terah), was of Semitic stock in lineal descent from Shem, son of Noah. He was married, as was common in that culture, to his elder brother's daughter Sarai, ten years younger than himself, a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur, at that time, the head of the Persian Gulf. His vocation in life is unknown, but since Ur was a thriving seaport and industrial centre he was probably in industry or commerce. Born and brought up in the world's most advanced civilization, he would have been well educated and reasonably wealthy. There would seem to be no reason why he should not expect to continue through life in the manner of his fellows and eventually die, respected by all who knew him, in the fullness of days, which at that time was about two centuries. But God had other plans.

Abram worshipped and served the true God, probably one of very few in Ur of the Chaldees who did so. According to Jewish tradition his father worshipped idols, with a profitable business in making idols and images of the gods. With sixty-one major gods and a vast number of minor deities his business could not have lacked variety and most certainly would have been brisk. How Abram came to separate himself from the worship of the land and yield his allegiance to the One God is also unknown. His earlier ancestors, four or five generations

back, never wavered in their loyalty. A Talmud legend tells how Abram first worshipped the sun and later realized that its Creator was even greater *"Then Abram knew God, and said 'There is a higher Power, a Supreme Being, these luminaries are but his servants, the work of his hands'. From that day, even until the day of his death, Abram knew the Lord and walked in his ways."*

He probably had access to written records dating from five centuries earlier when men knew only one God and worshipped Him alone! They were records not only of Eden, the Flood and the Tower of Babel, more or less as we have them now in the Book of Genesis, but other stories of ancient times that have not survived and are unknown to us. Relics of these other stories passed into the legends of Israel and reappear in apocryphal books such as the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. In Abram's day there was intense literary activity and every Sumerian city had its library in which its citizens could consult the writings of past times. The student could take the tablet of his choice from the shelf, impress its number and his personal seal on a clay tablet to acknowledge receipt, leaving that with the librarian to ensure the tablet's return. He would take his selection home to read at leisure. It is likely that Abram, of studious mind, had read these ancient stories and looked beyond the idolatry of his father, grandfather and great grandfather. He took as his heroes his forebears of earlier times such as Peleg, Heber and Salah, men who served and revered the Most High God in the days before idolatry came into the world. He might well have been fully aware of the promise that was made right at the beginning, that the seed of a woman would one day undo the work of the serpent. He might not have been altogether surprised, when, one day, in the quietness of his room, alone in communion with God, he became conscious of a Voice, impressing itself upon his mind, even although he could not be sure it was sounding in his ears.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great ..., and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves". (Gen. 12.1-3 RSV). Long and earnestly must Abram have pondered the call. Where would the Lord send him? In what other land would he be able to serve the Lord better than in Ur? There was no revelation, only the realization that God was calling him. Abram, the Hebrew, was to play a part in God's plan of salvation. Perhaps it was at this point that Abram realized that idolatry could not go on for ever and that one day God would restore the ancient Golden Age of which the old stories had spoken when all men would worship God in spirit and in truth. Much later Jesus was to say *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad."* (John 8.56). God had spoken to him; He had called him and wanted him for an unrevealed purpose that would culminate in the blessing of all families of the earth. His only reply

could have been "*Here I am Lord, send me*". So Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to follow the Lord's leading not knowing whither he went.

Abraham did not go alone. His wife Sarai accompanied him and his nephew Lot and his father, Terah. In fact it would seem that Terah took the initiative (Gen. 11.31). Why did Terah, who worshipped idols, probably comfortably settled in Ur, join his son Abraham in what must have seemed a foolhardy enterprise? The answer probably lies in the political situation of the time. The independence of Ur was threatened by Elam in the east and Babylon in the north. Abram's grandfather had lived at the peak of Ur's power and glory. Terah saw the 'writing on the wall' and decided to quit while it was possible. Haran was much like Ur and he could still carry on his manufacture of idols. Nahor must have followed later.

The migrants left just in time. Soon Ur was under Babylon-Elam domination. One day as dawn was breaking over the cornfields surrounding the city and early sunlight glinted over the River Euphrates the usual caravans of merchants set out for Phoenician cities on the Great Sea. It was a thousand miles and would take many months. With them went Terah and his family, with all their worldly possessions. They were setting out for a new home in a strange land which they would reach in seven or eight weeks.

In three days they reached Uruk – Erech of Gen. 10.10 and associated with Nimrod. Three more days and they were in Shuruppak, a city of legends about Noah. Abram would see the high walls of Babylon in five more days. This powerful city began as the 'Gate of God' but was now 'Gate of the gods'. For the next two weeks they traversed the plain of Sumer, the vast wheat belt, watered by innumerable canals with the River Euphrates meandering through the orchards of figs and olives, peaches and apricots. As they travelled this hundred mile valley with everlasting sunshine, Abram might well have wondered what land could be more desirable.

The caravan would wend its way forward to the foothills of Aram (Syria). Here lived the racial kinsmen of Abram, Semites who still cherished the true worship of God. Did Abram have time while traders transacted business, to inspect the stately buildings with their inscriptions, unknown to the modern world until recently. Was this the place he was looking for? Before them now was the most arduous part of the journey with its constantly ascending tracks. Beside them foamed the river; mountains rose either side. A day's march was shorter and rests were longer. For the city dwellers it must have seemed a sore trial but the merchants had been many times before. They would scramble down a slope, ford a stream and then scramble up the other side. Did Abraham think of his old comfortable home in Ur?

Then, one day, two months after leaving Ur they would round a spur of the mountain and there ahead of them lay the towers and pinnacles of a magnificent

city built in the shape of a crescent moon. This was the twin-city of Ur, Terah's destination. Abram knew that it was a city as full of idolatry as Ur and could not be the land to which God was leading him the land of the promise. *"When they came to Haran they settled there"*. We do not know how long they lived in Haran but the implications of Genesis 22 would indicate some twenty years, *"And Terah died in Haran"* (Gen 11.31, 32).

With the death of Terah the post-Flood era, which began with Shem, came to an end. It began, as did the world before the Flood with one man and his immediate descendants loyal to God and serving Him in sincerity. It ended, as did that other world, with men forsaking the true God and descending into all kinds of idolatry and sin. Now, once again, God was to make a new start with one man, Abraham. Once again the torch of truth would be held aloft to enlighten the world. The story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is that story. It led to One who was the True Light that lights every one who comes into the world.

THE END

AOH

SELF SURVEILLANCE

By the way

When reading, it is always interesting to come upon a striking phrase or expression. 'Self-surveillance' is a thought which jumped out from the page at me the other day. These days we hear a lot about surveillance, in the context of conflict. Suspected terrorists are under surveillance, as are criminals of various kinds. The intentions of an enemy may be judged from aerial surveillance, whether it be troop movements or the construction of a nuclear facility. But self-surveillance, what is the point of that, and is there any conflict involved? Doubtless we must keep a watch on our own thoughts and actions – as God does. *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me, and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psalm 139.23, 24). We must learn to see ourselves as God sees us, and act accordingly.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 10, regarded himself as being in a conflict situation. The conflict was in the realm of theories, arguments, the pride which closes people's minds to knowing God. So he says, *"we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (v.5). Being on the same side as Paul in the conflict, we naturally keep close watch on our own thoughts in case we are slipping into disobedience. There is an old hymn, not often sung, which goes *"I want a principle within of jealous, godly fear, a sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near; I want the first approach to feel of pride or fond desire, to catch the wandering of my will, and quench the kindling fire. Quick as the apple of an eye, O God my conscience make; awake my soul when sin is nigh, and keep it still awake."* The remedy for this tendency is to have a real love for the Father, and the

remedy for any lapse is to humbly claim the forgiveness that Jesus came to give.

The result of our self-surveillance may turn out to be a guilt trip. It should not be so. We do not have to face our Judge unforgiven and with all our imperfections on our head, like the ghost in Shakespeare's Hamlet. It is not a case of walking on eggshells lest we should break some rule, but of realising that we are chosen, holy, dearly loved by God. That is why we are compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, forgiving (look at Colossians 3.1, 2ff, the portrait of a loving Christian life, love which overflows into all the relationships of daily life, as parents, children, husbands, wives, whatever.)

On the page in the book where I read the word self-surveillance, there were a number of ways stated in which we might, indeed should, examine our consciences. In this there is the danger of coming back to rules and guilt, but each glowing thought of Paul in Colossians needs to be worked out in practice as we go through life, so here are some points to think about:

Do I pray even on days of headache..., reprimands sin?

Have I been simple and natural with everybody or allowed pride to grow in me?

Do I always want to be right? Do I accept criticism?

Do I use lies to hide my failings?

Am I disinterested in wealth?

Do I organise my time and not waste it?

Do I work for the peace and health of others, or do I close myself to their sufferings?

As a parent Do I give adolescent children enough liberty, and talk seriously with them?

Do I respect the autonomy of my married children, and avoid the jealousy of my sons or daughters in law?

As a citizen Do I do my duty by voting and paying taxes? Do I accept public responsibilities?

As a worker Do I show conscientiousness and goodwill in my employment, and give a good example?

As an employer Do I know my workers individually? Pay just, legal, humane wages? Think of my workers as my brothers (and sisters)?

In marriage ... Do I try to make my wife/husband happy? Understand her tastes ... let her know I love her?

In discipline ... Do I distinguish between silliness and real moral faults?

As a neighbour Am I willing to lend things to others?

This book, by the way, was written by the broadcaster and writer Libby Purves, and describes her upbringing as a Catholic. These questions she quotes from a French missal of the 1950s, and were intended for the 'examination of conscience approaching the confessional'. Be that as it may, and however

different the religious tradition in which we may have been brought up, a little self-surveillance is never out of place. We each have questions we can ask ourselves. How good it is that we have forgiveness in Christ, and He will give us power to overcome.

GC

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5.11).

What is this "terror" of the Lord? Any idea that the Lord endeavours to frighten men into conversion by fear of the consequences of refusal is out of the question. A conversion motivated by fear is not worth anything to God. He will have His creatures' loyalty and allegiance by love and gratitude or not at all. In this respect some of the old-time revivalists who tried to scare men into repentance by lurid descriptions of the fate awaiting the unrepentant were, however sincere, grievously in error. The text must be understood in relation to Paul's argument and in harmony with the known purpose and character of God.

The main theme of 2 Cor. 5 is that a spiritual body, adapted to the conditions of life in another world, a *"house eternal in the heavens"*, is waiting for the believer after the termination of this life, and that this is an object of keenest anticipation to the Christian. Nevertheless we are content in this present life labouring, whether absent from the Lord or present with Him, to be acceptable in His sight, knowing that we must ultimately appear before the *Bema*, the place of judgement, where our Lord will review the life's work of each believer and give His verdict. It is in the knowledge of the solemnity and majesty of that "Last Assize", says Paul, that we *"persuade men"* – conduct our missionary work.

The word "terror" in the text is *phobos* which is generally used for fear or terror in the N.T. According to Thayer the word has two main meanings, (1) Fear, dread or terror in a subjective sense (2) Reverence or respect for rank, authority or dignity. It is easy to understand how the second meaning was derived from the first in an age when respect for authority normally had an element of fear associated. The extent to which this element has to be given weight in any given instance must depend upon the nature of the case. When Paul says *"Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil"* (Rom. 13.3) the usage is terror or fear in its most elemental sense. When on the other hand he says *"Let the wife see that she reverence her husband"* (Eph. 5. 33 "reverence" here is *phobos*) the idea of respect is uppermost and that of fear entirely absent. Likewise I Pet. 2.18 *"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear"* (ie with the respect due to their position). The injunction of Rom. 13.7 is *"Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom*

revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour" (RSV) where the word 'respect' is from the Greek '*phobos*' and is translated 'fear' in the A.V. In just the same way the numerous references to the "fear of God" in the N.T. have to be understood as referring to that respect and reverence which is due to God on account of His high authority.

The N.E.B. rendering of the passage in question is perhaps the most helpful. "*We must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad. With this fear of the Lord before our eyes we address our appeal to men*". It is to be noted that the softer word "fear" is substituted for "terror" in the N.E.B., the R.S.V., the R.V. and all modern translations. "Terror" came into the A.V. from the Geneva Bible which was the only one of the pre-A.V. versions to adopt the word – some say due to the influence of John Knox, who had much to do with that version. It is probably true that "terror" was adopted in view of the close relation of the text to St. Paul's words regarding the "judgment seat of Christ", at a time when the Last Judgment was looked upon as a day of foreboding and dread. The character of the Most High is better understood today; so far from being a stern and merciless despot He is in reality an all-wise Creator, who will by no means loose His hold of any one of His creatures whilst any hope remains that such can be persuaded to turn from sin and serve the living God. It was with this kind of "godly fear" in his mind that the Apostle Paul went about his business of "*persuading men*".

AOH

JACOB AND THE ANGEL

The somewhat chequered life of Jacob included that period during which, having separated from Laban his father-in-law, he made his way from Haran to his native land of Canaan, three hundred miles distant, with his family and possessions, to rejoin his father and settle down. He had gone to Haran alone and penniless; he was returning with four wives and a large number of children, servants and employees, vast flocks and herds. He was a wealthy and prosperous man. He returned, as he went, in the conviction that the Divine promise of ultimate blessing for all families of the earth was to be fulfilled through his seed; before he died he was to see the beginning of the nation of Israel.

During this journey there occurred the rather obscure incident which is recorded in Gen. 32.24-32. Jacob wrestled with an angel, and prevailed, receiving as token of his victory the name Israel – "a prince of God".

Prior to the occurrence, Jacob had made his peace with his pursuing and somewhat irate father-in-law. He had sent messengers to his brother Esau in the hill country of Edom, and received intimation that a strong force of Esau's men

was on its way to meet him. In some panic, and remembering the manner in which he had tricked Esau many years previously and the latter's vow of revenge, he thought the worst and made hurried preparations for defence. He divided his flocks and possessions into two sections, hoping that if Esau's men captured one half then he might escape with the other. He followed that with an impassioned prayer to God in which he rather tardily acknowledged his shortcomings and pleaded for deliverance from his brother's wrath. Perhaps he was not fully persuaded that his prayers would be effective and as an additional precaution he sent rich gifts of flocks and herds in advance to his brother. He followed these by his wives and family, sending them on in front while he himself stayed in the rear. It does not seem a very gallant or manly course of conduct, but then the character of Jacob as revealed in the O.T. is not that of a straightforward or courageous man. At any rate, when this incident occurred, Jacob was alone in the darkness of the night, with all his companions and possessions miles ahead.

*"And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking' But Jacob said 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said 'Jacob'. Then he said 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.'" That was when Jacob realised that his antagonist was not mere man, but a celestial visitor. He asked the angel's name and his request was refused but he received a blessing. As he loosed his hold and the angel departed he said reverently *"I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"*. So he called the spot Peniel, meaning "the face of God" and that name continued throughout the later history of Israel. But Jacob retained a physical defect, he was thereafter, at least for a time, lame on the thigh the angel had touched.*

The narrative must have originated from Jacob himself, for there were no witnesses. Whatever the nature of the physical factors, it was obvious that this whole thing was, to Jacob, a profound spiritual experience. It meant something of deep significance and it changed his outlook completely. Before it happened, he had gone in mortal fear of his brother Esau and was doing all he could to put off the moment of meeting him, even to the extent of letting not only his possessions but his wives and children go first to meet the avenger and suffer whatever was in store. After this encounter his attitude completely changed. Overtaking his wives and family (ch. 33.1-3) he placed himself in front of them and so faced his brother. He need not have been afraid, for Esau had long since forgotten the old animosity and received him warmheartedly. Jacob was able to take up residence in Canaan unmolested.

Was this incident, in which Jacob found himself wrestling with, and prevailing over, the powers of heaven, a means of restoring his self confidence and conviction that if God was with him, who could be against him? According to his own statement while still in Haran, the angel of God had appeared to him in a dream commanding him to return to his native land and assured him of protection (Gen. 31. 11-13). God had defended him from the quite justifiable wrath of Laban who admittedly had some cause of complaint. He survived a three hundred mile journey across a difficult desert terrain without loss either at the hands of Nature or of marauding Bedouin. After all this the mere intimation that Esau's men were on their way to meet him threw him into an unreasoning panic. He went to God in prayer, confessing his own unworthiness, reminding God of his promises and asking for deliverance from the wrath of Esau. He evidently had little faith in either the power or intention of God to deliver him, for he then made the frantic and somewhat pitiful attempt at mitigating the impact of Esau's wrath at the risk of losing his possessions and exposing his family to danger whilst keeping in the background himself.

Then came the struggle. There, in the quietness of the night, torn, perhaps, between the desire to go forward after his family and the fear of meeting Esau, he found his way barred by a stranger who attacked him aggressively. We cannot know if he took the stranger to be one of Esau's men who had found him, so that now he must in fact fight for his life. Or perhaps he realised by means of that strange insight which the ancients appear to have had in greater measure than we do today, that his assailant was more than human and had come from God. For some reason Jacob knew that now he must fight as he had never fought before. With such good effect did he wrestle that, whilst he could not overcome his opponent, he could at least hold him in a powerful grasp from which the other could not escape. But the angel was equal to the occasion. He appears to have touched the tendons which held the femur ball in the pelvis cup but it's not clear. Physically, perhaps in the intensity of the struggle Jacob overstrained the muscle. But he held on still. Something of the meaning of this midnight encounter was beginning to enter his mind. *"Let me go, for the day breaks"* commanded the angel. This was no myth. Perhaps the angel meant that with the onset of dawn Esau's arrival was imminent and it was high time for Jacob to get on the road to rejoin his company. But Jacob was growing exultant. He had struggled with a celestial messenger of God and had prevailed; why should he now be afraid of a mere man like Esau? He would go out, not in his own strength, but in the strength of God, and God would be with him. He only now needed the blessing of God. *"I will not let you go"* he cried exultantly *"except you bless me"*. And the angel, knowing that Jacob had now come to a right understanding of his position, gave him the blessing. *"Your name shall no more be called Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men, and*

have prevailed." From that day forward the nation which sprang from Jacob has been known as Israel. Although its political existence came to an end in AD70 the name was but dormant; in our own time the nation has become politically re-established and the name chosen by the hardy pioneers who established the modern State on the ruins of the British Mandate was the one awarded to their forefather so long ago – Israel.

Jacob wanted to know the angel's name; the angel refused to give it. The affairs of heaven are not the concern of mortal men. He had given Jacob the Divine blessing and his mission was accomplished: he left the patriarch in a different frame of mind from that in which he had encountered him. *"I have seen God face to face"* said Jacob reverently *"and my life is preserved"*. He knew, of course, that he had not looked on the Most High with his natural eyes but he accepted the one with whom he had wrestled as the manifestation of God. In that way he could see God, and yet still live. And now he knew that within himself there resided a strength which, because it was of God and because he had complete trust in God, would carry him victor through whatever opposition was raised against him. Without further ado he quickened his pace and overtook his wives and children, pressing on in front of them without qualms to meet his brother Esau.

To Jacob the experience was a demonstration that he could and would triumph by determination, but only when God was with him. His persistence overcame the angel, but the angel showed he could have the last word by touching his thigh-joint. The determination of Jacob, added to the power of the angel, made him irresistible, with the Divine blessing he went forward in full assurance of faith that the promise of God would certainly be fulfilled.

AOH

ON PRAYER

Someone has remarked that as the sharpening of scythes in harvest times does not mean lost time and energy, so also time spent in prayer is not lost as respects the affairs of life. Unquestionably the best men and women in the world are those who pray, and pray regularly; who bow the knee as did Daniel. Unquestionably the moments thus taken from earthly affairs are well spent and bring more than commensurate blessings upon the worshipper. Unquestionably it is impossible to live a consecrated life in neglect of prayer.

What would Daniel have been without his praying time? How would his faith in God have persisted in that heathen land? How would his loyalty to principle have maintained itself in the midst of corruption had it not been for his communion with his maker? To the Christian this privilege is still further enhanced by a realization that "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," in whose all-prevailing name we may approach with courage, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

BSM 1963

RULES OR PRINCIPLES?

Some thoughts about moral judgments

"This man is not from God for he does not keep the sabbath" (John 8.16). So who were the Pharisees that showed such disapproval of Jesus and why did they want Him dead? In the time of Nehemiah the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon became aware that they were not keeping the Law. Such a problem had led to the captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Nehemiah ruled that Jews must keep the Law. Later some felt compelled to separate themselves from fellow Jews so that they could keep the Law more strictly. In the several centuries that followed these 'separated ones' developed into the sect of the Pharisees and regarded ordinary Jews as sinners who did not keep the Law (as carefully as they did). They were strict in obedience to Moses' Law; so what was wrong with that?

Conditions change and rules that are important during one period may not be so applicable a hundred or a thousand years later. What was important for two million Israelites who left Egypt and walked through the desert, may not be so appropriate to their children who settled to an agricultural way of life. Perhaps they were even less appropriate fourteen centuries later. There may be a difference between the great principles enshrined in the Ten Commandments and a lot of explanatory notes appropriate to immediate needs.

In the days of the wanderings through the wilderness under Moses it was considered right to stone a man for gathering fire wood on the Sabbath. God told His people, through Jeremiah, that they must not bear burdens on the Sabbath (Jer. 17.21). Israel regarded the Sabbath as having been given by God at Creation because the Second Commandment told them to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy and do no work because God rested, blessed and hallowed the Sabbath. Why did Jesus not keep the Sabbath in the same way as the Pharisees? He had a part in Creation for *"... all things were created through him and for him."* (Col. 1.15). The Son must have shared the first Sabbath with His Father. So He was able to say that He was 'Lord of the Sabbath' and that *"the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."* But what did He mean by saying that *"my Father is working still and I am working"* (Mark 2.27; Luke 6.5; John 5.17)?

When His disciples walked through the cornfield grinding corn in their hands on the Sabbath and eating it He quoted the story of David who went to the high priest and requested 'show bread' to eat.

God gives rules that are good and right and necessary particularly in a large society of people. Rules enable us to anticipate what other people are going to do and how they will act. In Britain a green traffic light tells road users to 'go' – until an emergency services siren tells every one to stop.

Good and useful as rules may be, they tend to be localised – suitable for a

particular environment and social mix. It is much easier to obey exact rules than it is to make moral judgments.

Time and places alter things but God has given wonderful, eternal, spiritual-moral principles. The Pharisees forgot the most important thing that God said through Moses – that He was a God of compassion (Exodus 34.6). That is more important than anything else because it describes God's character of love, the kind of love that Jesus spent three and a half years demonstrating and describing. Times have changed and we do not live in the world of 2000 years ago so how do we know how to behave in a modern world? Firstly, we must do everything we can to obey the Word of God. A brother or sister in Christ may sincerely believe God's Word literally yet interpret certain parts differently from ourselves. We may find, some day that they were correct. In his letters, Paul dealt with a number of local problems which had arisen in the Church, some of which were conflicting attitudes to the Jewish Law. Paul's answers to questions raised were often appropriate at the time and place in which they were then living. His comments about slaves might be different today from what they were then, although even in that matter he gave us a principle – there are no slaves in Christ, except where Jesus is Master, for we are all one in Him (Gal. 3.29). The churches in Galatia had all kinds of trouble because some believers had come from Judea and told them they must keep the Law. Circumcision of the heart is all that is required in Christ – and that principle goes way back into the Old Testament (Deut. 30.6). Choosing the right foods was a matter of conscience and that referred back to something the Lord had said about keeping the traditions of the Law (Mark 7.19). We may well interpret Paul's comments about keeping certain days as special in Roman 14 to mean that every day is special – every day a Sabbath, holy unto the Lord.

We live in a democratic, technocratic society. Does being respectful to rulers mean we ought to vote? Does being charitable mean that we should support lotteries? Making moral judgments is much more difficult than most people realise.

God speaks directly to our hearts, if we spend time with Him and if we walk and talk with Him, every day. When our understanding of the Bible is challenged, we must take it to the Lord in prayer. When a community of God's people find that there is a difference of interpretation of the Bible among themselves that affects their communal behaviour, they must take it to the Lord in united prayer – and pray meaningfully. Many of God's saints testify that God speaks to their hearts telling them what they must do. God will forgive us if we fail to hear correctly but what if we forget to seek His wisdom?

There is nothing more important than spending time with the Lord and His Word. The Quiet Time each day is not for academic analysis of God's Word – but for meditation so that it speaks to our hearts and if need be, corrects our earlier interpretation.

DN

CART Report – Autumn Newsletter

website www.cart.yorkshire.co.uk

From Malawi come some worrying statistics about Average Life Expectancy (now only 37), Maternal Mortality, Infant Mortality and AIDS (70% of hospital deaths being due to this cause) - but from Malawi there is also an encouraging report of helpful items received from CART, with photos of them being unpacked and distributed.

From Uganda come reports of a wide range of relief goods safely received - 'We received 8 boxes of shoes; 25 boxes of clothing for men, women and children; 20 boxes of household goods; 12 boxes of soap; 15 boxes of educational aids and stationery; 20 boxes of books; 10 computers; 4 typewriters; 10 sewing machines; 10 bicycles; 3 boxes of toys, and some individual gift-boxes.' The writer outlines how these were distributed, and with what joy they were received. Praise the Lord!

From Zimbabwe, we can sense the increasingly desperate state of ordinary Africans in an illustrated article about those who live permanently 'In the Dumps' - that's to say, on the landfill sites around Harare, making a meagre living by picking over someone else's abandoned rubbish in hopes of finding something that can be recycled.

Finally - and far more encouragingly - from Zambia comes a report that 'we finally opened up the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Centre with the 8 computers you have provided us with The response has been exuberant in Chililabombwe, from the youths, children and women we are very thankful for your blessings and support.'

All CART's administrative costs are met by the Trustees, so every penny given to the work goes directly towards sending out shipments to those who so urgently need them. Financial contributions for the general work (payable to 'CART') should be sent, please, to: Guildford Tompkins, 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks HD8 0LR.

Thank you all for your help in the past, and God bless you.

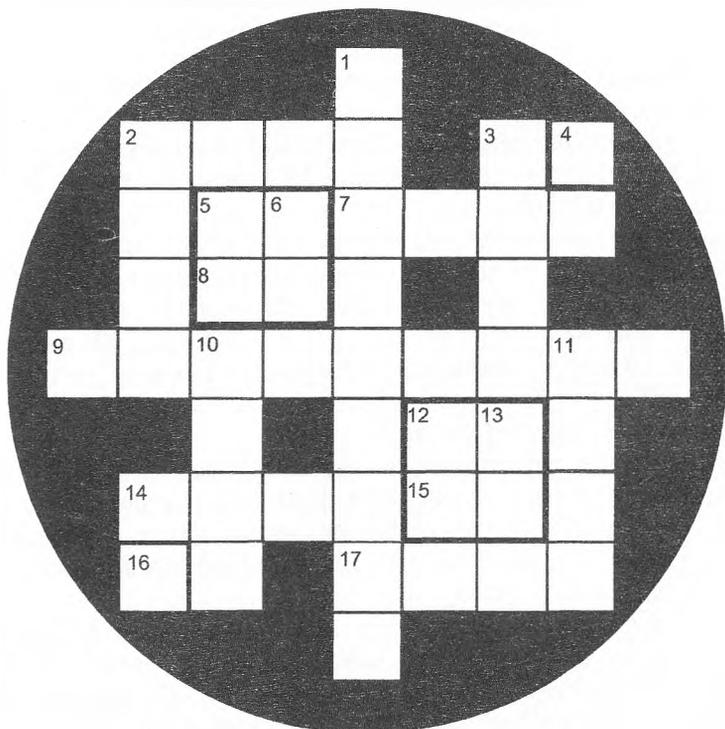
B & K.K-S

"Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus."

How would you like a testimony of this kind? Because of him or her, many believed in Jesus. What an epitaph for your gravestone! To so live and serve that others were drawn to follow Christ! The Christ-life will attract the observer. Let us go in for reflecting His beauty.

Keswick Calendar

BIBLE CROSSWORD



Across

- 2 The time at which Jesus met the Samaritan woman – John 4.6 (4)
- 4 The first – Revelation 1.8 (1)
- 5 Used to compare a deer to the believer – Psalm 42.1 (2)
- 7 An object of heathen worship – 2 Kings 23.5 (4)
- 8 This marks a destination, for example the Jerusalem-Gaza road – Acts 8.26 (2)
- 9 Abraham and Lot did this – Genesis 13 (9)
- 12 Semitic word for God (2)
- 14 Wise men – Matthew 2 (4)
- 15 Instruction to the 11 – Matthew 28.19 (2)
- 17 Do this with joy – Isaiah 55.12 (4)

Down

- 1 Subject of Paul's advice – 1 Corinthians 7.8 (9)
- 2 Place for a ring – Ezekiel 16.12 (4)
- 3 Key word in Luke 15 (4)
- 5 Marks a point of time – Luke 24.1 (2)
- 6 To such an extent – John 3.16 (2)
- 10 Can be done by a hypocrite – Matthew 6.5 (4)
- 11 Towards the sunrise – Exodus 38.13 (4)
- 12 Hopefully, Timothy was this for the believers – 1 Timothy 4.12 (2)
- 13 Emphasises an important remark – Matthew 28.20 (2)
- 16 Not the first letter, but the last (Greek) – Revelation 1.8 (1)

ELIMELECH AND SONS

Joshua had challenged Israel to serve the Lord. He knew of their readiness to embrace the gods of the Canaanites and foresaw that they would continually lapse into idolatry. This led to all kinds of immorality and sooner or later they were oppressed by their enemies. The stories of Gideon and Samson illustrate this cycle of events – the persistent rise and fall of devotion to Yahweh, the only true God. When they cried to the Lord in their distress He heard their prayer and restored their fortunes. This was the time of the Judges which came after Joshua and before Samuel appeared on the scene, eventually to give them a king. God had promised that if they were faithful to Him He would supply their every need – crops would yield abundantly and their animal stock would multiply. When they sinned greatly by trusting in pagan gods they prevented God from helping them. He kept His Word and shut up the heavens so that there was no rain and consequently no crops. Israel had famines as Moses had warned Israel in one of his final addresses to the nation recorded in Deuteronomy 11.17. The people in and around Bethlehem suffered like the rest.

There lived in Bethlehem a man and his wife, Elimelech and Naomi. They had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. All of these were good Hebrew names. The famine was beginning to bite and they were short of food. This was a fairly local famine and news came that there was food in the country of their neighbours, the land of Moab. Israel were distantly related to the Moabites through Lot but Moses had put a strong prohibition on marriage with these neighbours (Deut. 23.3). Doubt has been cast upon the wisdom of Elimelech in leaving the land of Israel but now there is further transgression of the rules because the two young men found wives in Moab. Were they courting disaster? Ruth and Orpah are distinctly Moabite names; what kind of an upbringing would these foreign women give to any children that were born to the two couples?

Before long Elimelech had died and Naomi was left to complete the rearing of her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion in a strange environment. The boys married Ruth and Orpah and for ten years lived apparently contentedly in Moab. Then the hand of death struck again and the two young husbands were laid to rest in foreign soil. Undoubtedly, some will have seen in that disaster the hand of God, punishing those who had disobeyed His laws but as the story unfolds it takes a most unusual twist. That God's hand was with Ruth there can be no doubt, and somehow during her days of courtship and marriage she had learned of Israel's God – the one living and true God. She perhaps noticed the difference between the worship of Yahweh and that of her own people who bowed to the idol of Moloch. She was basically of Hebrew stock – was it a lamb returning to the fold?

God now acted to save His people and they once more had bread to eat. The famine had passed. The news of better things in Israel reached Naomi's ears and she longed to return to the land of her birth. She made plans and the two young widows shared her interest. They had learned to love her and they decided to go with her to Bethlehem. After a while Naomi realised that life would not be easy for the young women and persuaded Orpah to return home to her own people and perhaps marry again from them. Ruth was not so easily turned from her desire both to help her mother-in-law and to discover more about Israel. The words she used in her declaration to Naomi virtually embraced the covenant of Israel. "Your God shall be my God". When Israel had settled in Canaan a generation or so before, a man of Judah called Salmon had married Rahab the Jericho heroine and a prostitute, who had saved the spies' lives. His son Boaz was Mahlon's nearest kin and he discovered that his inheritance included the beautiful girl from Moab. Mahlon, having died childless, now had a legal child through Boaz and Ruth. Obed, grandfather of King David and ancestor of the Lord Jesus was the legal grandson of Elimelech. If the family had not made the temporary migration to Moab that line of descent of messianic character would not have been formed. God moves in a mysterious way – Rahab, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba somehow are part of a wonderful plan to bring salvation to Israel, Moab and many millions more. Perhaps after all Elimelech and Sons had a rather important part to play in God's great scheme of things. Perhaps after all, they weren't being disobedient to Him when they went to Moab. It is a good thing to reserve judgment when we don't know all the facts – as is so often the case.

Let Prof. Knight in his little Torch Commentary (SCM) on the Book of Ruth, have the last word when he comments on the "significance of a seemingly trivial decision" which may affect future generations. – "Such a thought as this forces us to realise how essential it is for frail humanity to lean in utter dependence upon the wise and loving guidance of God".

DN

Crossword Answers

Across 2 Noon; 4 A; 5 As; 7 Moon; 8 To; 9 Separated; 12 El; 14 Magi;
15 Go; 17 Exit.

Down 1 Unmarried; 2 Nose; 3 Lost; 5 At; 6 So; 10 Pray; 11 East; 12 e.g.;
13 Lo; 16 O.

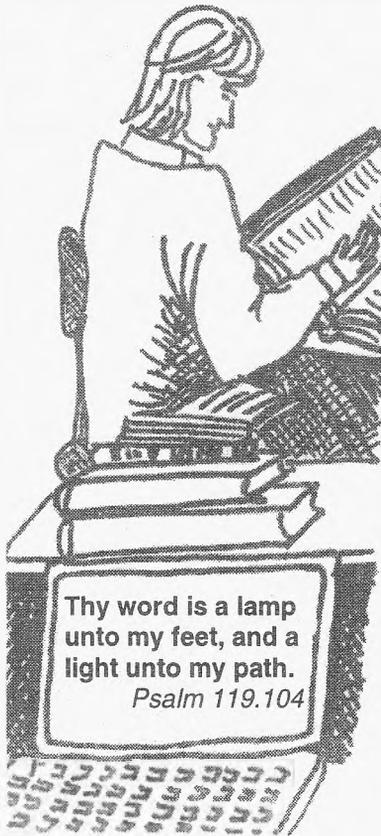
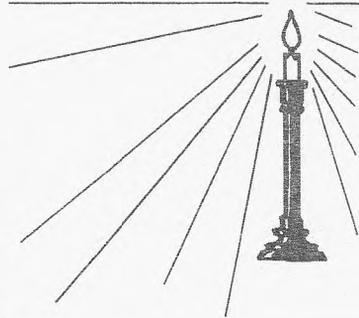
“So let’s keep focused on the goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision – you’ll see it yet! Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.”

From Phil. 3 The Message, Peterson

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Thy word is a lamp
unto my feet, and a
light unto my path.

Psalm 119.104

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"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

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NOTICES

BOOKLETS AND PAMPHLETS

Publications are to help readers in their own lives and to help them tell others about their beliefs. Every effort is made to maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication. Material published has a wide interest but may not necessarily be the opinion of those serving with BFU.

BFU reprints its own publications according to demand. The leaflet 'Salvation For All' has been reprinted as a booklet. Recently reprinted booklets '**Spirit of Prophecy**' and '**The Tragedy of Samson**' are now available on request.

A small **new pamphlet** is available on request; useful to pass to friends – '**Jesus – the Challenge**'.

TELL A FRIEND – Many readers of the Bible Study Monthly have passed the magazine to a friend and suggested that they become readers. BFU will gladly send the magazine to any address on request.

Another way of sharing your blessings with a friend is to draw their attention to the **BFU WEB SITE** - www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk where they can have a taste or catch a glimpse of what BFU has to offer.

The Trustees of the Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust invite you to a **Convention in the Chapel at Gainsborough House**, on Sunday, 24th June. If you attend this gathering, you will be able to see at first hand the accommodation available at this Christian Retirement Home. There are vacancies for short or long term residents. Ring the housekeeper on 01963250684. Milborne Port is a rural town in lovely countryside.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

Easter time in Spring speaks to us of new life - the resurrection of Jesus pictured in the beauty of trees and plants - and young animals. It is a time when many followers of the Lord Jesus Christ specially remember His Last Supper and His death.

But why call it Easter? According to Encyclopedia Britannica "Bede in the 8th century derived it from that of the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre." Others have said that it goes further back to a Babylonian deity of similar name.

And why it is a 'moveable feast'? "Easter day in the 'west' is the first Sunday after the full moon which happens upon or next after the vernal equinox. If the full moon occurs on a Sunday, Easter day is the Sunday after."

The Jewish Passover is calculated by the month Nisan beginning according to the vernal equinox new moon, and the feast follows from the 14th day of Nisan. Early Christians in the east observed Jewish custom. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus in the second century, followed by Eusebius in the fourth century had something to say about this. By then the two traditions had become clear.

Does it matter? Many will think it does, while others will be particular only about the 'spiritual' aspects of the celebration. For many, the Memorial of our Lord's death celebrated on 14th Nisan will be very important but others will not be concerned whether non-alcoholic juice or alcoholic wine, is used; Passover biscuit or ordinary bread. Two great leaders of the reformation, Luther and Zwingli argued in Marburg Castle about the meaning and keeping of the Lord's supper. The controversies continue.

Does it mean that in the attention to material detail something of the spirit of this wonderful occasion is lost? Let us all so speak and act that we do not offend the conscience of another for whom Christ died (Rom. 14.15-19). Perhaps then together we can shout 'Hallelujah' on Easter Sunday morning and greet each other with "The Lord is risen indeed".

It is in that resurrection power that we can live through the remainder of the year, changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the likeness of the living Saviour.

DN

Our life is like the dial of a clock. The hands are God's hands passing over and over again - the short hand, the Hand of Discipline; the long hand, the Hand of Mercy. Slowly and surely the Hand of Discipline must pass over the hand of Mercy, showering down sixty-fold of blessing for each stroke of discipline and trial; and both hands are fastened to one secure point, the heart of God.

"God doesn't need passengers or conscripts but volunteers."

Kidner on Num. 13

THE HILL CALLED OLIVES

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! I would fly far away and be at rest; yea, I would wander afar, I would lodge in the wilderness." (Psa. 55.6,7). How often have we expressed similar sentiments in the environment of a city in the modern world? *"I see violence and strife in the city, day and night do they go around it on its walls: and mischief and trouble are in it, ruin and fraud do not depart from its market place"* (Psa. 55.9-11). We think of another and greater than David who trod those same streets; how much more must His sinless nature have revolted against the selfishness and scheming which met Him at every turn. The Psalmist said he would go to the wilderness but Jesus had faced temptation there and found sanctuary elsewhere. He spent many of His last days in this same city, but at night he left it for the "Hill of Olives". The calm dignity which elevated Him far above the treacherous priests and the angry mob, and which called for the exclamation "Behold, the man" was surely the outcome of those quiet hours spent in solitude from human companionship. It was here that Jesus drew very near to His Father.

"They went each to his own home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives". (John 8.1 RSV). Here Jesus was "at home" after the strenuous labours of the day. Jesus found rest on Olivet after teaching in the Temple, healing the sick, comforting the sorrowing, bearing with His disciples and meeting the scorn of the "learned ones". The tired limbs, the throbbing brow, the aching heart would preclude all possibility of sleep, but Jesus found rest and refreshment, not in sleep but in quiet and undisturbed communion with His Father.

Centuries earlier, David taking flight from Absalom, mounted the ascent of Olives, weeping as he went, until he reached the summit. David was at his lowest ebb, but it was here that friends came to his help in his trials and problems, and with help for his journey. In our case the trials of this life at work and the multitude of problems which confront those responsible for the home, all tend to weary and depress us; but when we can leave the "city" and ascend the hill of Olives, "where God is worshipped", there we can release the mind from its burdens and there find rest and peace, The weariness and heartache melt away, and we regain our poise and sense of proportion. Here too we find "asses for the King's household", aids for our heavenward journey; bread and fruit for the soul, and wine to drink when we faint in the desert.

There are parts of this hill which may be used to portray differing experiences in drawing near to God. From Jerusalem, figurative of all that is worldly, the pathway dips steeply down to the Kidron valley, then upwards to the garden of Gethsemane. From thence it continues to the summit, then down again to Bethany, the scene of some of the happiest and most blessed of our Lord's earthly experiences, but also of the saddest. Can we visualize the scene

as the golden sun is setting over the great city? The humble home, kept clean and bright by the practical and industrious Martha, is filled with the sound of happy voices. Left behind are the labours of the day, and Jesus, with Lazarus by his side and Mary at his feet, converses quietly with them and his disciples. Martha, mindful of the natural needs, enters with refreshments and for a while a fitful silence reigns. Supper over, the murmur of voices in pleasant conversation rises again and later the sound of voices blended in the sweet harmony of psalms and spiritual songs is heard. But it had not always been thus. No longer was the sound of happy voices raised in song; the lowly home is now filled with the sound of mourning. Lazarus is in the tomb and Mary and Martha, hope all gone, wait with heavy eyes turned towards the pathway along which their Lord will surely come. With His presence, faith revives a little and hope stirs again, There is silence as the Lord weeps over that sad scene. Then, by the mighty power of God, sorrow is turned to holy joy.

As Passover drew nearer Jesus increasingly sought the sanctuary of Olivet and Bethany. It was on Olivet that He wept in sorrow over Jerusalem and foretold the destruction of the temple, it was here too that He uttered that wonderful discourse concerning His return and the end of the Age.

To Jerusalem went Jesus for the Last Supper and afterward He was drawn again to Olivet. There, in the garden of Gethsemane, He reached the crisis of His earthly life but with the ministry of an angel of the Lord His strength and courage returned. How He must have longed to go further over Olivet to that sweet haven of rest at Bethany; but to the cruel city He returned, there to suffer and be condemned to a criminal's death. But the power that raised Lazarus from the dead brought Him forth from the grave, the first born of a New Creation. A little later came the glorious culmination of the greatest chapter in the world's history; Jesus left this Earth to enter the Heavenly courts again. Not from the city, nor from the Temple did He ascend, but from Olivet.

The record does not tell us which way He went that day – to Bethany – the summit but He took leave of His brethren from that hill which had witnessed His greatest joys, His deepest sorrows and closest communion with his Father. If we would follow Jesus into the heavenly realm we must follow Him daily up the ascent of Olivet, and continue on to Bethany; then when we come to our time in Gethsemane we shall pass the crisis safely, and wing our way from Olivet to dwell with Him through eternity. Maybe many days must pass before that day comes; but as we draw near to God we shall ascend the heights and plumb the depths. Paul must have spent many happy hours at "Bethany"; it was he who urged the brethren at Ephesus to *"converse with one another in the music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life."* Should we occupy our time thus, there would be less time for unseemly arguments about so-called 'essentials to salvation'.

Even as Jesus sought the quiet joys of Bethany as an antidote to the restless excitement of the city, so we should find time to relax, rejoice and converse with one another in the music of psalms, hymns, and songs of the spiritual life. We must not be surprised, however, if we find our deepest sorrows at Bethany too. The sharpest pang may come from those who are nearest and among our brethren we may experience the greatest heartbreaks as did our Master before us. Going to Bethany, whether it be to songs or to sighing, we shall find our Master there to share both joys and sorrows; then when our time comes to face the last ordeal, we too may mount the ascent of Olivet weeping, but in Gethsemane we shall find the ministering angel, and gain strength and courage to face the loosing of the silver cord, and in the resurrection morning reach the summit of Olivet whence we shall enter into everlasting joys.

TH

THE TRAGEDY OF JUDAS

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Was it financial gain? For thirty pieces of silver was he prepared to lose his place in the Messianic kingdom and to deliver to death One whom he knew to be innocent?

Judas was the only one of the 'twelve' who was not a Galilean. 'Judas Iscariot' is the Greek form of his Hebrew name, "Judah of Kerioth", in southeast Judea. He may have looked down on his Galilean brethren, in joining the band of disciples he must have been sincere or Jesus would not have chosen him. It was later that he conceived the plan with such terrible results.

Little is known of Judas as a disciple. Only once did he take a prominent role and that was to his discredit. When Mary broke her alabaster container of perfume in the house of Simon (John 12.1-8) Judas protested at the waste and said that its value should have been given to the poor. John said that he was a thief and stole what had been contributed to the needs of the disciples. Matthew and Mark credit the same comment to "*his disciples*" and to "*some*" who were at the meal (Mk. 14.3-9; Matt. 26.6-13). It would seem that Judas spoke on behalf of several of the disciples who were critical of Mary's action.

Why did Judas become a thief of their slender financial resources? Their needs were few and simple; they lived plainly. If the motive was to get rich, surely there were plenty of other ways to do so for a man like Judas. Was he, the treasurer, setting aside money, for another purpose?

The price paid, "*thirty pieces of silver*" (an argurion or shekel) was a relatively small amount. This was the price apparently paid in Israel for a slave, and was the compensation fixed by Moses for the death of a slave (Ex. 21.32). It is strange that Judas bartered so valuable a 'prize' for the traditional price of an ordinary servant. The priests were keen to secure Jesus and Judas might have

expected considerably more. He knew how to assess the value of the perfume at 300 denarii, a considerable amount even today.

It would appear that Judas was not of the same spiritual calibre as the others. Although slow of heart to grasp the meaning of Christ's life and death, they were prepared to follow their Master wherever He led them, from this world to the world of the spirit. Judas saw nothing beyond earthly things and an earthly kingdom. His idea of Messiah was the popular belief of a mighty King who would crush their enemies. He pictured Israel restored and himself as a leader in it.

While the other disciples were learning, however imperfectly, from Jesus' teachings and were being prepared for a great change in understanding at Pentecost, Judas was wrapped up in dreams of future power and glory. Nevertheless, he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He saw His miracles. He saw Him feed thousands with food, miraculously. He knew the power at Jesus' command. He knew that Jesus possessed the power to avoid arrest or to deliver Himself should He be arrested. Judas must have seen that power when men tried to take Jesus, and could not. So did Judas ever expect the betrayal to result in the death of his Master?

The authorities had never seriously interfered with Jesus' teaching. When the people of Nazareth tried to throw Him over the cliff He passed through them. (Luke 4.23-30). Officers failed to arrest Him. He expelled the traders from the Temple and none stopped Him. When He rode into Jerusalem five days before His crucifixion, the heart of Judas like many others must have beaten fast.

The moment passed and Jesus now spoke of imminent death. Perhaps for the first time, Judas began to be seriously alarmed respecting his hopes. Could he precipitate the crisis? Could he force Jesus' hand? So the temptation came to Judas to plot Jesus' arrest while he was in a frame of mind that would permit arrest. Surely, Jesus would assert His power to overthrow His adversaries.

Why did the priests pay good money to Judas for pointing out a man whom they knew perfectly well? Why at Passover, when a week or so later the trial could proceed quietly? Why did Judas say "*When you have him, hold him fast*"? Did the priests rely on Judas to indicate the critical moment when Jesus would not resist arrest?

Why the kiss of betrayal? He had recently seen Jesus. Was the display of affection meant to convey his motive for betraying Him, and that he was furthering the cause of the Kingdom? Did he hope that Jesus would look upon his action as one of apparently misdirected zeal that He would afterwards understand?

Some time during the long hours of that night or the following morning, when Jesus was being taken back and forth between the Sanhedrin, Pilate and

Herod, Judas received the terrible shock that unhinged his brain and drove him to suicide in a frenzy of remorse.

Jesus was not going to save Himself! Too late, Judas realised that something had gone terribly wrong with his plans, and that Jesus had no intention of using His powers in order to escape His enemies. He intended to accept the sentence they passed upon Him. Perhaps, at last, some dim understanding of words so far ignored penetrated the dark recesses of Judas' mind. Perhaps he recalled the words of the prophets about 'a despised and rejected One, led as a lamb to the slaughter'. Demented at his crime, he rushed to the priests with his frantic cry "*I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood*". He returned the money, as though that could undo the work

In despair he saw no escape from Divine punishment for one who had killed the Messiah. Israel had waited long centuries for the promised Deliverer and now he had caused Messiah's death and frustrated the purposes of God. How could he expect mercy or forgiveness for so great a sin?

Paradoxical as it may appear, Judas was probably the only one of the twelve who never lost faith that Jesus was the Messiah of prophecy. The others abandoned their belief temporarily when the crisis came. Judas failed because his was an intellectual belief and not of the heart. His belief was built upon certain Old Testament histories and prophecies and he never saw the light that Jesus revealed.

The above is based on an article "The Tragedy of Judas' that appeared more than 40 years ago in this journal. It is interesting to read various authors who have been fascinated by this subject. John Ruskin wrote "How many of our present money-seekers ...would have the grace to hang themselves whoever was killed."

Dr E. H. Fairbairn wrote "Surely, Jesus included Judas in His prayer, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?'" and from the YBSM, May 1951 – "May we not betray our Lord by our attitude towards our brethren; and should any offend us, may we forgive and treat them according to our Lord's example."

DN

When Simon Peter stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin and said "And there is salvation in and through no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by and in which we must be saved he was offering to those leaders of Israel the great and eternal truth – Jesus the Saviour of mankind. There never was a time when mankind needed saving from its own selfish ways – threatening to destroy itself and the wonderful planet on which we live.

(Acts 4.12 The Amplified Bible)

POSSESSIONS – OR POSSESSED?

If you received a windfall of a thousand pounds, what would you do with it? Some people might put it in the bank; others might share it around their children. Perhaps it might make it possible to buy a new car. Or you might, just might, give it away secretly to someone who needed it. Whatever we choose, it reveals something about our priorities, and our attitude to money.

Being rich makes it more difficult to follow Jesus. He said something along these lines in Luke 19.24, "*how hard it is for a rich man...*" It has been suggested that riches create a false sense of self-security. Whatever occurs in life, you can cope. You can buy your way out of trouble. Riches make us selfish – things that we want, we begin to think of as things we need. And our minds are focused on the here and now, rather than the unseen things that are eternal. And we are all rich, aren't we? Possibly everyone living in the twenty first-century Britain should be thought of as rich, by world standards.

Like it or not, we are enmeshed in a materialistic society. If something is new, we would like it. If a gadget is clever, we want it. The prosperity of our society is based on people creating new needs and then supplying them. When a girl makes a cold call on your telephone offering to sell what you don't want, she is only doing her job, and creating employment for others, too. Your courteous answer enables her to meet her own need, and earn a living. But for the Christian, the question has to be met – what are my reasonable legitimate needs? The answer may vary according to where we live – the needs in Rwanda, for example, are different from ours. Or is it just our *wants* that are different and our real needs are much the same?

Human beings everywhere pursue the same economic activities, and they always have. Consuming food, marrying, buying and selling, planting and building are the ordinary concerns of everybody's life. As Jesus remarked in Luke 17.26-30, this is just what was happening before the disaster of the Flood, or the sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Not that these ordinary activities are sinful. The sin lies in being wicked as well as ordinary, in being so engrossed in these things that one forgets God, and His laws, and His judgement. This is the eternal dimension. Jesus wants us to live so lightly that we are ready for His unexpected coming, whenever it is. After all, it was the man completely preoccupied with amassing wealth who is called the rich fool.

The desire for material things tends to take over one's life. Jesus noticed this, and tells the story of the man who finds treasure in a field, and then sells everything he has in order to buy the field and claim the treasure. Also, He cites the case of the woman who loses a coin and cannot be contented until she finds it (Matt. 13.44, Luke 15.8-10). He does not criticise these people, He might even be wryly amused as they go over the top'. But He tells the stories to point out that an equal dedication is needed in spiritual things. Do we in fact give up

everything ... everything? ... for the sake of the Kingdom? How much joy do we have when a sinner who is known to us repents?

We may feel that we have this required dedication. Indeed, it is comfortable to sit down with the brethren and feel that we are all on the Lord's side. That was how a fellow guest of Jesus felt at a feast they attended. His complacent remark drew forth from Jesus the story about the invited guests who failed to come to the king's banquet (Luke 14.15-24). This parable, though it doubtless refers to the chosen people of Israel rejecting Jesus, at another level has a lesson for us about materialism. Consider the excuses the invited guests made. As the song has it ... "I cannot come to the banquet, don't trouble me now I have married a wife ... I have bought me a cow I have fields and investments which cost a pretty sum Pray hold me excused, I cannot come!" Their concerns were reasonable enough, but they let them get in the way of a higher call. Like them, the rich young ruler too had found that he 'could not come' with Jesus. In those days, to refuse an invitation to a meal was no more nor less than an insult. Don't let us be complacent, and disappoint our Lord.

The insidious effects of materialism may make things different from what they seem. The disciples of Jesus, for example, must have been looked up to as the ones He had chosen. But it was one of them who betrayed Him, and we gather that Judas did it for the sake of money... and it was money that he gave back when he realised what it was he had done. (John 12.6, Matt. 27.3-5). Or that magnificent temple in Jerusalem, a house of prayer. The taint of injustice and greed had made it become, perhaps by imperceptible stages, a den of thieves (Luke 19.46). There is always the risk of distorting the gospel when we confuse what we want for ourselves, whatever it is, with what we are giving in worship to God.

So, if we acknowledge that God has a claim on all our possessions, we will take some thought what this means in practice. The people of Israel gave their tithes (Mal. 3.10). Not many of us do that. It bears thinking of that even one tenth of an old age pension amounts to a worthwhile sum. We may go on to puzzle our heads how money 'given to God' should be used. Used for our own fellowship? Used for our fellow men in need? Used for Christian causes in particular? Used for what God's inspiration especially directs us to? If we have it in mind to plan our giving, such questions will need an answer. And do such considerations apply only to one tenth, or to all that we have and all that we are? The use of our money and our property is just one part of our whole life that is given in fellowship, in study, in service.

The use of possessions as part of a dedicated life may have unexpected results. The story is told of a Christian youth group involved in marking a Bible-study course for people in the Third World. About twenty new people would write in each month with the first part of the course, to be marked and

sent back. Often someone would ask for a Bible, and then the young people would club together, sacrificing pocket money to make sure that anyone who asked for a Bible would get one. One day a course was received from a high security prison in Africa, a Bible being requested which was duly sent. A reply came ... "I cannot thank you enough for sending the Bible. I have been reading it for hour after hour ... and since it came, six brothers have come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour. I am not sending the next part of the course back, we are all being executed tomorrow."

Life is not a matter of possessions, rather that God possesses us. We don't trust our possessions, we trust God. Our Father in heaven knows what we need. Our concern must be about His Kingdom and what He requires of us (Matt. 6.31-34). Like the disciples that Christ sent out two by two, we don't carry lumber with us (Matt. 10.7-10). We might even take an example from the *parabolani* (reckless ones) of the olden days. Their task was to visit the sick, even in times of epidemic and plague - whatever the risk to themselves. Once committed to this task, they could not withdraw. Do our hearts quail at the thought that, even today, to follow our Saviour means unconditional risk taking?

Such risks do not seem to be risks if we take the eternal perspective. For the future is in God's hands. "When Jesus spoke about 'treasure in heaven', He knew that God's love responds to our faithfulness, now and for ever. This is not a selfish attitude, for our personal hope is balanced by a hope for all the world, of when *"there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying ... for the former things are passed away"* (Rev. 21.4).

There is a nurse in India, who comes from the prosperous city of Bangalore. She wrote, "... I was asked to work at a hospital in a small town in North Karnataka. The people there were mostly poor, uneducated, exploited villagers who had no access to even the basics needed for healthy living. It was heartbreaking to see the conditions in which they lived. I worried that whatever I did, I would be able to improve the conditions of these people only temporarily. Only in the ultimate reign of our Lord Jesus Christ can we expect all suffering to be relieved and for all to have access to the fulness of life that the Bible promises."

"What, then, is our duty toward others? Christ calls us to be compassionate and caring to those who have not been blessed as abundantly as we have. Our small acts of mercy can make a difference in the lives of others and draw them to God, in fact, in these acts the Spirit works through us to make the promise of God's reign visible. We become a sign of the reign of God that will eventually 'make all things new'."

We too, when God possesses and controls us, can make some difference in the lives of others, and be a pointer to what His Kingdom will mean in the fulness of time.

GC

'LIVING BY FAITH'

A practical
doctrinal essay

Everyone exercises faith in daily life. We all learn to trust people in all kinds of ways, otherwise life would be very difficult. When we use the road we trust that others will keep the Highway Code. When we buy food we trust those who produce and prepare it for the shops, if we do not trust others in these and many other ways we should live very isolated lives, struggling with the simplest needs. Progress in every aspect of life depends to some extent upon our willingness to trust other people, their products and their actions. When people keep their word we develop confidence in them and we lose that assurance if we are let down. There are various forms of trust and some of these are very special as for example the relationship between parent and child or teacher and student. Happiness in marriage demands trust between husband and wife. Lack of trust, for whatever reason, promotes fear, envy and conflict.

Faith in the biblical sense usually refers to the faith of men and women in God. Heb. 11.1 is regarded as a definition of faith but it would be abstract and impractical without the many examples of faithful people which follow in that chapter. From the Bible records of the men and women mentioned in Hebrews it is clear that faith is very much a part of the relationship between God and His people. God, in His holiness, is able to accept us and to change us because we trust Him. When He says He will forgive and renew us we know from experience that He means it. Sin and unbelief create a barrier that separates us from Him but He wants us as His own children. In Jesus' parable of 'two sons', the younger boy needed to believe that his father might accept him back even as a servant, before he could make the return journey and discover his father's love.

Returning to Heb. 11, William Barclay in his commentary, translates v. 1 "*Faith means that we are certain of the things we hope for, convinced of the things we do not see.*" If we apply that to the weather, our trust might be in the weather forecaster. If there is repeated inaccuracy in weather forecasting we may be led to ignore weather warnings and have no confidence in the science of meteorology. If we apply Barclay's translation to our career prospects, our faith might be based upon the known honesty and generosity of an employer. In each example our confidence for the future is built upon past experience and in hope for something better. Our trust is in another's reputation and their fulfilment of promises. Constantly we should be looking for evidence that other people can be trusted, because social units however large or small can only operate if there is a measure of trust between the people involved.

Jesus appears to have had some surprises concerning people's belief in Him and about what He was doing and saying. He was shocked by the unbelief of His fellow Jews (Mark 6.6). For many centuries God's people had enjoyed the

growing revelation of their Creator. They had inherited the promises made to the Patriarchs who had been great men of faith. These were not abstract ideas but down to earth assurances that they could test in their own experience. Israel's Law, given through Moses, if obeyed in the spirit in which it was given, would demonstrate that God's rules really work. The unfolding pattern of God's purpose came through the prophets. They told the people of Israel what God was like and what He was doing. Into that revelation was woven the eternal loving desire of the Almighty Creator to express His friendship to His creation on Earth. That too was something that could be tested by experience. God doesn't want blind credulity or superstitious hopefulness. As if all that He had given was not enough, God sent His Son to demonstrate His love in flesh and blood.

Jesus showed in word and action just how much God cared. Some Gentiles noticed it more readily than Jews. They had not been blinded by their own preconceived ideas as to what God ought to be like and what He ought to be doing. How Jesus rejoiced as He said *"O woman, great is your faith!"* (Matt. 15.28; see also Luke 7.9). The simple souls in Israel, whose minds had not been clouded by dogma and ritual reached up in faith to His mighty power and were healed of their diseases (Luke 7.50). Those whose hearts cried out *"I believe, help my unbelief!"* were rewarded by seeing and understanding the signs of the Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 9.24; Luke 17.5).

Jesus went to the heart of the matter when He told the disciples concerning a dumb spirit that *"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."* (Mk. 9.29). Effective prayer is not intoned in archaic language of a bygone era. Nor is it concerned to lecture God about His own plan and purpose. It is the outpouring of a heart that has a desperate need and that speaks in today's language about today's experiences. It is the most effective way to strengthen faith. God's people who want to dispel doubts and totally trust in the Lord must live a life of prayer. Faith then becomes a shield (Eph. 6.16) that quenches the darts of doubt and keeps the enemy at bay. We may be busy in serving the Lord and we may give much time to studying the Word, but those activities are only effective when we have continuous, personal contact with our Heavenly Father.

The heart of the Gospel is 'to believe' that Jesus is God's son, sent to Earth to show us that God has a way of mending broken lives - of making men and women whole. Repeatedly Jesus urged the disciples to have faith; to believe Him (Matt. 17.20; Mark 11.22). He was very concerned about their absence of faith and the fact that they would not trust in the living God for their daily needs (Luke 12.28). Faith to the Jew should not have been a passing incident or localised interest. Faith is the very atmosphere of life, entering into every tiny detail of what life is about. Their faith was not the superficial religion of idol worshippers. Their God was real, with eyes to see and ears to hear. He was the

Creator, steadfast and reliable; who made covenants which lasted from century to century, and who could be relied upon to keep promises which He had made two thousand years before. Such eternal love demands the abandonment of self interest, and claims our willingness to let God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. What He gives to us is not a reward for anything we have done for Him but the outpouring of merciful generosity in response to our faith. Nothing is too hard for Him; there is nothing that He cannot do, if it is good and right. Therefore Jesus was able to say "... *whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith*" (Matt. 21.22)

Justification before God, His forgiveness and cleansing from sin, is received as an act of faith. We must be willing to cast ourselves upon the mercy of God and realise that He is more ready to forgive our sin than we are to request that forgiveness. Faith is thankfulness and responds obediently to His revealed will. Faith is trust in God and the old hymn rightly exhorts 'trust and obey'. That obedience leads us to action. James wrote "*So with faith, if it does not lead to action, it is by itself a lifeless thing*" (Jas. 2.17 REV). Faith in Jesus Christ does not promote a lazy religion. It is a living piety which grows into a vigorous relationship with God and His dear Son.

"*Faith comes from what is heard*"; so writes Paul in his discussion about the need for the Gospel to be preached (Rom. 10.17). While there is a constant and urgent need for the Church to preach the Gospel yet a great many of the seeds of faith are sown among the members of our own human family or among friends and acquaintances. Nor is communication of the Gospel always in the language of the tongue but in the kindly actions and thoughtful patience of daily life. A life that has real trust in Jesus Christ has its own manner and method for telling the Good News. That message is referred to in Scripture as 'the Faith'. The content of the preaching of the early Church rapidly became "*that faith which God entrusted to his people once for all*" (Jude 3). That in which we believe shapes our lives and is that which is spoken of as 'the Faith'. It is not the complex interpretations of the Gospel which form 'the Faith' nor is it the personal opinions of a few faithful souls who persuade themselves that they have the whole truth and nothing but the truth and nobody has it quite like them. That which may be described as 'the Faith' is that which builds us into the likeness of our Master and cements us to Him and each other forever, it is in fact that which will be as important to us in a million years from now as it ought to be today. 'The faith' is that real personal knowledge of God that can be understood by all. It doesn't take a highly academic and intellectual person to understand it. It is that knowledge which enables us to walk with God by faith in Him alone.

DN

A MAN OF SORROWS

6 - 'The Travail of His Soul'

A study in
Isaiah 53

"Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief. When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53.10 RSV).

Here is a prophecy of the sufferings of the dying Messiah. At the very last, the Father takes upon Himself the ultimate responsibility for all that has happened. *"You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above"* said Jesus to Pilate, (John 19.11 RSV). The Father, Creator and sustainer of all things, declares His acceptance of responsibility for everything that happens in His creation. God is not the author of sin but takes responsibility for the fact that sin is allowed to remain in the world and evil men are permitted to practise evil deeds. He could end all that in a moment by the exercise of His will, but Jesus knows that the eventual outcome will justify the wisdom of the course He is taking. So it is true to say that it pleased the Lord to bruise Him in the sense that the Father deliberately allowed that "bruising" to take place, and did not lift a finger to stop it. None would claim that God took pleasure in the harrowing scenes of the trial and crucifixion, but we ought to realise that God did look upon the whole transaction with the serenity of infinite wisdom, knowing that the end of the story would be glory. And in the meantime He gave strength and comfort to the Son as He drank to the bitter end the cup which He had poured for Him. Father and Son were in complete harmony and full understanding the one with the other during the whole of that dark time.

This is when Jesus uttered the sad words *"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with me"* (Matt. 26.38). It is so easy to assume that Jesus was troubled in mind at the thought of the physical sufferings He was so shortly to endure. One wonders if our thinking has not been altogether along wrong lines, unduly influenced by what would undoubtedly have been our own reaction under similar circumstances. Jesus' outlook was different from that of sinful man and He had a wider mental horizon than any other. He had lived before the world was; the whole wide creation of God had been His sphere of action. Even in the bitter moments of the betrayal, the trial, and the crucifixion, that fact must have made an inestimable difference. Men who enter into what they know is to be suffering ended by death cannot visualize, because they do not know, what lies beyond death. Jesus did know, and His knowledge of the other world must have been a wonderful stay and strength in the midst of His physical suffering. But there was another suffering to be endured, one that perhaps was much more crucial to Him. How would His disciples behave after He was gone? Would they show themselves men of stamina and courage to continue the work He had begun? He must of necessity leave them to plant the

seed of His word in the world after His death and in the power of His Spirit lay the foundations of the Church, without which God's purpose for all mankind could not go into effect. Were they capable of discharging the commission He must now leave to them? Were these the thoughts which caused Jesus' soul to be "*exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?*" The men He had chosen were so little conscious of the position in which their Master was placed that they could sleep soundly while He endured His Gethsemane agonies. In a few hours' time one of them was going to deny Him in public and they were all going to forsake Him and flee for their lives. Was this the cup He had to drink and from which He desired to be saved if it were the Father's will? If so, the expression "*he has put him to grief*" takes on a new and a terrible significance. That grief was caused, not by the Master's enemies, but by His own disciples. He might reasonably have expected to yield up His human life on the Cross fortified and comforted by the presence of the twelve who had continued with Him in His trials. He might have hoped that the last sight His eyes would behold as the shades of death came down would be the stalwart company of men who were to proclaim and establish His message in the world. But it was not to be; there were just a few women and the faithful John. It cannot be held that Jesus lost faith, even for one moment, during that climax to all His sufferings; but that He must have suffered intense grief at the defection of those who should have been His comforters during that time is undeniable.

It was at this moment that Jesus uttered the oft-misunderstood cry "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Whatever Jesus meant by the words, He could not have meant that He had any doubt as to His Father's continued favour and strength. To His last moment He knew that God was with Him. Rather it is that Jesus uttered the words as an affirmation in the sight of all spectators that His faith still held. Jesus deliberately quoted the opening verse of Psalm 22. Now that fact is of great significance for it is a very special psalm, it is the traditional psalm sung or quoted by Israel when hard pressed by their enemies, when escape seemed hopeless and death stared them in the face. The first 18 verses of the psalm are eloquent of despair, as though God had deserted His people and left them to their fate. Then verses 19-22 express the continued faith of Israel, that despite the apparent indifference of God, He does care and is mindful of His people's plight, and will eventually deliver. Finally, vv 23-31 tell of deliverance accomplished, the enemies of Israel scattered, and the people of God triumphantly exalted. It thus follows that the crying out of the first verse of Psalm 22 at a time of extremity was tantamount to an avowal of faith that, despite the apparent hopelessness of the case, God would surely deliver at the end.

When Jesus cried the words, they conveyed to the listeners His implicit faith that although He was going down into the darkness of death, He knew that the

Father would raise Him from the dead and exalt Him to His own right hand. Like Israel in their battles, the enemies had for the moment gained the upper hand and there was no immediate salvation from their murderous designs; He must inevitably perish at their hands. But that was not the end; as a witness to that sure fact He cried the words which told all Israel of His faith that "*the third day he shall rise again.*"

"He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to become righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (v. 11).

When the Creator of all things stood and viewed all that He had made, He pronounced it "*very good*". By how much more shall our Lord be satisfied when he sees the glorious consummation of His redemptive work?

It is a most important principle that God looked upon His creation in the days of Adam's sinless perfection and it was satisfactory. After the Fall He was not satisfied and He did not intend to leave matters there. He put into operation the great Plan of redemption of which Jesus is the central figure. The serpent was to bruise the heel of the seed; but the seed was to bruise the head of the serpent – to destroy it. That was the promise given in Eden, and although many years were to pass, God was not indifferent. At the right time the work of deliverance began.

Here in Isa. 53.11 that work has ended. The Deliverer looks back upon the dark story of the past, and views the glorious reconciliation of "whosoever will" to the Father. All that mankind has achieved during the Millennial Age, 'a thousand years of trial', has been in consequence of the "*travail of his soul*". All that ascends to God in praise and worship from the multitudes of redeemed humanity is the direct result of the "*travail of his soul*". The happiness and the loyalty of all mankind, the beauty and the glory of the restored and everlasting Earth, the peace and harmony of a creation ordering its course as God desires it, has come about because of the "*travail of his soul*". So when our Redeemer looks upon the human creation made perfect through willing acceptance of His sacrifice on their behalf, He will be satisfied. As He enters communion with the glorified body of saints, His Church, "*changed*" to be like Him and with Him where He is, He will be satisfied. Fruits of God's plan will be sources of satisfaction to the One who suffered and died for us that we might live for ever with him.

TH

All the best things in a human friendship are true of our friendship with God. Prayer is the way we keep that friendship alive, saying "thank you", saying we are sorry when we have done anything to spoil it, telling God all about our lives, letting Him tell us what He wants us to do. Most of all, prayer helps us to remember that God is the friend who is always with us although unseen.

SPIRITUAL CARE FOR THE FRAIL ELDERLY

By the Way

It started when we joined a group who were going to sing hymns with the residents at our local old people's home. It's a happy thing to do. One delicate old lady follows everything, joins in the singing and knows all the words, and keeps her beady eye on everything that happens. Another sleeps all through it. An old gentleman makes a loud comment at an inappropriate moment, and is shushed by the rest of the group. 'Crimond' is played, and everybody softly joins in 'The Lord's my shepherd'. 'Thankyous' are said at the end. "Come again." "God bless." Those who are not interested have kept out of the way.

It was following this that we were invited to a training session about the 'spiritual care of the frail elderly'. I suppose that on one level this simply means providing Christian fellowship for those who can no longer get out and about. It is the sort of thing a clergyman or pastor might do (if one were available), or a church leader, or simply a friend who comes along to share a prayer and read a scripture. One doesn't expect too much - their spirit is willing but the flesh is by definition weak. Nevertheless, the old patterns of fellowship are preserved, the old hymns and familiar thoughts are brought back to mind.

It is difficult to think of any person in the New Testament who can be thought of as 'frail elderly'. Even the woman who for 18 years had a 'spirit of infirmity' and a bent back and was healed by Jesus (Luke 13) was not necessarily elderly. Simeon and Anna (Luke 3) were certainly elderly, but were out and about and alert.

Mental alertness is one of the points visitors need to consider. Mental frailty, bodies failing and minds failing too. Short term memory gone, same question or comment repeated time and again. Dementia ('a mental disorder marked by memory failures, personality changes and impaired reasoning'). Only the past is clear in the mind.

Bodily weakness may respond to encouragement and advice, but mental weakness requires a different kind of care. If the mind is not functioning, is it still possible to feed the spirit? Can an elderly person with Alzheimer's be a functioning part of Christ's body, the Church? Or is the condition rather like a premature if partial death?

How can Scripture be shared with people who are elderly and frail? Someone might choose a Gospel passage from a lectionary as the Gospel for the day, but this may not be particularly appropriate for the elderly. For example, suppose Luke 14.25-27 came up. "Large crowds were travelling with Jesus ... To them He said *"If any one comes to me and does not hate his father and mother even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* In these words Jesus is

challenging the fit and active to face up to the cost of being a disciple. Sharing with the elderly, surely it would be better to quote the words He spoke to the burdened and heavy laden, telling them to come to him and find rest for their souls (Matthew 11.28).

The risks in using the Luke scripture with the frail and elderly are apparent. They may not understand what Jesus is saying. It does not properly apply to them. They may forget straight away what has been said - like the good seed scattered on the path which the birds came and ate before it could take root (Matthew 13). On the other hand, there is the argument that just having Scripture read, whatever the Scripture, carries a blessing, carries a kind of magic. I am not sure whether this is a valid point, but is it true that we also who are mentally agile can be blessed by a scripture - even if we do not fully understand it? Is it good to listen to familiar Scriptures whether they specially apply to ourselves or not?

There is a general point here, about how we approach Scripture. As students, we need to be precise about what it means and how it applies. But as carers, how much does it matter that we get our understanding precisely right?

At the training session it was said that even just one word in a passage can speak to an elderly, frail person, 'strike a chord', 'ring bells', even if taken out of context. "Yes", said someone, "in the reading it speaks of taking up your cross. That would appeal to old people who each have their own 'cross' to bear." Now in my opinion Jesus was not talking about the ordinary 'crosses' of daily life, which we describe in this way, but rather of the suffering that comes specifically because you choose to follow Him. Therefore old people who picked out the phrase in this way could be misunderstanding Scripture. But, emotionally speaking, they would get a blessing from it!

Emotion is perhaps the issue here. The frail elderly respond to the touch of a hand, a kindly voice, a listening ear, the tune of an old familiar hymn; to the company of someone who is specially for that moment giving herself personally to them; to a spoken prayer; to the sense of God. Intellectually, they may be all over the place. But they are receiving some sort of spiritual care, given in love.

GC

Some eyes, now open to the Heavenly Light,
Some wings, once folded, that are now in flight
Yet, Lord, Thou knowest I am weak and old.
Still keep my heart from ever-growing cold,
Or being in Thy service over bold.
This, at the last doth grieve my spirit sore,
This now above all else I now deplore,
I have not loved my fellow-pilgrims more!

THD

COMMISSIONED TO DESTROY

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus is one of the inexplicable events in New Testament history -- inexplicable, that is, to all save those who attribute it to the miraculous intervention of Heaven. Many have tried to rationalize the event but most retire defeated in the face of the unassailable fact that a brilliant and talented Pharisee, high in worldly position and honour, destined for a notable future, whole-heartedly convinced of the falsity and menace of Christianity and determined to do all in his power to suppress it, should experience a conversion to the faith he was sworn to destroy. It was a conversion so thorough and complete that never in after life did he waver in either conviction or steadfastness. He died a martyr for the cause he embraced.

It must have been very shortly after the death of Stephen that Saul sought and received his commission to go to Damascus and apprehend any Christians he might find there. The persecution in Jerusalem, the first organized persecution of the Christian Church was initiated and conducted by Saul. Immediately following Stephen's martyrdom, Saul "*made havoc of the church*" He combed Jerusalem for believers in Jesus and consigned them to prison for trial before the Sanhedrin. His power to do this stemmed from the Roman principle of allowing the undisturbed practice of native religion in each of the countries under Roman government. The arrest of the Christians would have been on the pretext that they were blaspheming against the accepted official religion of Judea and although the Roman governor Marullus, successor to Pontius Pilate, was probably quite indifferent to the merits or demerits of the accusation, he was unlikely to do anything that could be construed in official quarters as hostility to the religious faith of Judea. Pilate had been faced with the same position at the arrest of Jesus, and reacted similarly.

The effect of Saul's campaign was an immediate contribution to the spread of the Gospel. Many of the believers left Jerusalem to avoid the persecution and became missionaries of the new Faith. "*They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*" The rapidity with which the faith of Jesus Christ spread through the Roman empire within a few years of the Crucifixion has always been a matter of wonder to scholars and historians, it reached and took root in the British isles within twenty years of Pentecost, and Britain was remote from Judeans at that time.

Damascus was the capital of Syria and the most notable city of the seaboard lands. It is probable that many believers fled there and established a healthy Christian community. Such a consequence of Saul's Jerusalem campaign did nothing to improve his temper. If the birds were flown, he would go after them. In the certainty of his conviction that these men were dangerous heretics he intended to leave no stone unturned to seek them out and bring them to justice.

He approached the High Priest, Jonathan, for the necessary letters of recommendation and authority with which he could establish himself with the ecclesiastical authorities in Damascus and carry out his intentions there with their full approval and backing.

So it came about that a little procession left Jerusalem by the Damascus Gate and took the road heading north through Samaria and past the Sea of Galilee. The bystanders would conclude that among the travellers there was a person of note for they were mounted on asses or mules, whereas the ordinary traveller or the peasantry would normally go on foot. The man in the centre, mounted on the best mule, who was clearly a Pharisee, looked forbidding. His companions were Levites of the Temple guard, strong burly men with a few servants and attendants. The convoy disappeared in the distance and the bystanders shrugged their shoulders and returned to their own interests.

It was about a hundred and fifty miles from Jerusalem to Damascus. Saul and his companions could not expect to complete their journey in less than a week. At dusk they would put up at a convenient wayside inn and resume their way in the morning. The mule-drivers and the Levites would get on together well enough; there was plenty of variety in the minor incidents of the journey to interest them and at night they would gather round the fire in the yard of the inn and entertain themselves and each other. With Saul the position was different. He had none of his own kind with him; as a Pharisee he felt it necessary to maintain a position of remoteness from his subordinates, and whether he was riding on his mule during the day, or seated by himself in a corner of the inn through the long evening, he had only his own thoughts for company.

That might well have been the Divine provision for Saul of Tarsus, leading his thoughts into a position where the revelation so soon to be made to him should strike in the most effective way. It was inevitable that his active mind during the long hours of the journey should be occupied with the object of his mission and all that had led up to it. He was sincere and zealous for the God of Israel and the Laws of Moses. The man of God that we know Saul to have been, the sterling candour and honesty of his mind must continually have been pondering the contrast between the requirements of that Law and the hypocrisy and dishonesty of his fellow-Pharisees and Sadducees. He could not but be conscious that there was a tremendous gap between his own understanding of how the righteous son of Israel should serve God and the miserable exhibition of greed, hate, injustice and every evil trait, manifested by the rulers he had left behind at Jerusalem. He must have known and admitted to himself, that these men who professed to keep the Law stood far from the portals of the Kingdom of God. If anyone had ever told him of the words of Jesus *'The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof'*

he would most certainly have admitted to himself that the condemnation was just. From that point he must have reflected on the contrast presented by these simple Christians whom he had vowed to destroy. He could not avoid seeing their purity and uprightness of life, their steadfast loyalty to all those righteous deeds that were incumbent on every Jew and their insistence that there must one day be due retribution or reward for every good and evil act. They had fervent conviction that the kingdom that would release the people of God and bring to pass all God's purposes and exalt His salvation to the ends of the earth was shortly to appear, if they had not espoused the cause of a crucified felon as their Messiah and proclaimed that the Son of God must suffer and die for man before He could redeem and restore him, and that sacrifice must precede glory, he could almost have thrown in his lot with them. So he might well have mused as the little party passed through Shiloh where once the Tabernacle of God had stood, and Samuel the lad who became the greatest of Israel's Judges, spent his boyhood. With disdain he looked upon the Samaritans as he journeyed through Samaria. His eyes lighted upon Mount Gerizim with its ruined Temple. Never, thought he impetuously, would he tolerate any challenge to the traditions of Moses and the Law that God gave him on Mount Sinai. Samaritans and Christians were all the same to him. He came within sight of the Sea of Galilee but the glimmer of its blue waters only reminded him of the Prophet who came from Galilee and like some of his brother Pharisees in earlier years he might have muttered to himself "*search, and look, for out of Galilee arises no prophet*".

Perhaps he would remember that Elijah the Tishbite, the prophet who converted Israel, came from Galilee, and that Jonah the prophet, who converted the Assyrians, came from Galilee. Angrily his thoughts turned into another channel: but every time he came back to the same maddening conundrum. Why, if he and his were the true worshippers of God, did their work and actions so deny the principles that he knew to be inherent in the Mosaic Law? Why, if the Christians were so deluded and blasphemous, did their lives exhibit such evident manifestations of the spirit of the Law? Why, if Jesus of Nazareth was the blasphemer and the seducer Saul verily believed Him to be, could He have inspired His followers with a zeal and devotion and tenacity which Saul would fain have seen amongst his own people? He lay, sleepless through the long Syrian nights, his mind racing over the dark sayings of the Law and the prophets, words he knew so well and understood so little. "*Gird your sword upon your thigh, O most mighty, with your glory and your majesty, and in your majesty ride prosperously.*" "*He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*" "*All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him.*" "*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.*" "*Unto us a child is born, and his name shall be called the Everlasting Father. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall*

be no end." "He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken, and he made his grave with the wicked." Over and over again the words repeated themselves, tantalizing him almost beyond endurance with their contradictions. The Messiah when He came must live forever; how could he die? The Sent of God comes to exalt Israel over the nations and put down evil with firm hand. How could He suffer death at the hands of men? So the burning questions tormented his fevered brain and all the time he saw before him the face of one who, radiant as an angel, looked up into the heavens and claimed to behold the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. In the horror of that blasphemy he had given his vote for the condemnation of the offender and watched him put to death pleading Divine forgiveness upon his murderers – Saul turned over wearily and rose from his hard couch to prepare for yet another day's journeying under the blazing Syrian sun.

AOH

Yonder, friend, behold the darkness
Lightly tinged with streaks of grey.
Far beyond the Mount of Olives
Comes the glorious radiant day.
See how pink and rosy fingers
Clamber up the lightening sky;
Heralds of the sun's own glory,
Soon to reign supreme on high.
Now the light has reached to Hebron;
Priests and watchmen cry aloud:
Men are rousing from their slumbers,
Heads in prayer and praise are bowed.
Lo! The sun itself, in splendour
Rises high o'er Zion's hill,
Pouring down its life and blessing
Free for men to take their fill.
Come thou thus, O blessed Jesus,
To this darksome world of sin,
Bringing rich Millennial blessings,
Calling men to enter in.
Thus the glory of thy presence
Manifest to all will be,
Glory that enshrouds creation,
As the waters shroud the sea.

AOH

DISCIPLES ARE COMMISSIONED

Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee. It must have been a boyhood haunt with his cousins James and John the sons of Zebedee. Along with Peter and Andrew they were already followers of the carpenter from Nazareth. But here there were many followers; a great crowd thronged around Him so He stepped into Peter's boat and asked him to *"put out a little way from the shore"*. This gave Jesus space to speak to all the people and as a teacher He sat down to speak to His audience. When He had finished He told the fishermen to move into deeper water and let down their nets. They had caught nothing during the night and seemed reluctant to take instructions from a carpenter but they did as Jesus asked. Simon was so petrified at the wonderful catch that they hauled in that he could not bear to remain in Jesus' company. But the Lord told him not to be afraid for now he would be fishing for people. He was giving Simon Peter his commission as an evangelist to preach the Gospel. Peter made his debut in that role at Pentecost.

A little later in Jesus' ministry the 'Twelve' were commissioned to preach the gospel and went out to all Israel. Judas would be among them, with power and authority to preach the Gospel and heal the sick and possessed. (Luke 9.1-6). How could he ever fall so low after that – or how could Peter deny His Lord. Still later seventy disciples were sent out and the instructions they were given and the report they made afterwards are worthy of study.

A year or so later Peter, with some of the 'Eleven', was again by Galilee looking at the heap of fish, the result of another dramatic catch, directed by Jesus. This was one of Jesus' appearances to the 'Eleven' as evidence that He had risen from the dead. The Master commissioned Simon Peter afresh, this time as a pastor of the flock – one who was to feed and care for God's people. Many have seen this as three questions to balance the three denials at Jesus' Jewish trial, but Peter had been specially interviewed privately before this and Jesus had said all He wanted to about that matter without other 'ears' present. By the lakeside again, Peter was given this very special privilege to lead the Church in feeding and caring for the Sheep and Lambs of Jesus' fold. He was also to be the one who would officiate at the formal introduction of Gentiles to the Church. His responsibilities were without title or investiture. He was to be the simple and humble leader of the Church and was to do it in the manner of His Master without fuss or adulation. Note the way he introduced himself to Cornelius (Acts 10.26). He would allow no one to bow down to him for like the centurion he was but a man. O that we could understand and emulate the deep humility of Jesus who was the exact image of the Heavenly Father. We still have much to learn about the Father of the Prodigal Son.

There is another lesson from Jesus second 'interview' with Peter at the lakeside venue. Peter asked Jesus a question, "*What shall this man do?*" referring to John. What was Peter's motive for asking that question? Was it idle curiosity? Was it because Peter and John were such unusually great friends? Or was it because there was still a lingering doubt about 'who was the greatest'? Peter was still learning and on that occasion Jesus seems to tell him that he had enough to do without worrying about colleagues' business. John like Peter, and afterwards Paul, had one Master -- they, like many more to come, were responsible directly to their Lord. It is a lesson for us all. However a Christian community is organized, and the Word does not lay down hard and fast rules for the whole Church, ultimately we are each responsible to Jesus for our commission. And each disciple has a commission. We do not all do the same job and do not all have the same gifts to do what we have been given to do.

A dear lady who had served her Master for more than sixty years and who had often 'refreshed the saints', gave thanks at a meal time and ended "bless us in your service". When questioned about the fact that she was no longer physically able to serve the brethren she simply said "I can still pray". We all have a commission in that respect. Let us not miss our opportunities to pray. Those prayers will be answered sooner or perhaps later.

There were few with a greater commission than Saul of Tarsus and it began at Damascus (Acts 9.10-19). What he had to do was not revealed all at once but he was soon preaching the Gospel and demonstrating "*that Jesus was the Christ*". As the days lengthened into months and years Paul knew what he had to do and he did it with the enthusiasm and skill which that wonderful man had received by various means from God. Yet like his fellow apostles, he always remained humble and ready to learn. God's instructions sometimes came through the human means and at others through direct visions. Paul must often have talked to 'headquarters' as he strode along the Roman roads or patiently stood on the deck of a ship.

Whatever our natural gifts, inherited from forbears as Paul's had been, they need shaping and polishing for the Master's use - alongside those gifts which are given through the Holy Spirit; and above everything else we all need the gift of love, in order to fulfill our privileges of service. There is such a danger for some gifted folk believing that they have all the answers and are directors of operations. There is also the danger of the quiet souls feeling useless in the Christian community. Paul's own words should correct that mistake (Rom 12.3-8; 1 Cor. 12 particularly vv 14-26). Let none who love the Lord and who have given their lives to Him, think they do not have a commission. Every part of the Body of Christ is important to Him.

DN

ZERUBBABEL'S PASSOVER

Part I An Awakening

"Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion." This is the spirit in which the Jewish exiles, returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, journeyed across the desert and climbed the steep, rugged Judean hills to their ruined city.

"Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out thence, ... you shall not go in haste, you shall not go in flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (Isa. 52.8-12 RSV.) The deliverance from Babylonian captivity was very different from the Exodus out of Egypt. Under Moses, the earlier Israelites had gone out in haste and by flight, first eating the Passover girded as for a journey and with every evidence of urgency. They had gone out against the wishes of Egypt that had held them captive for four generations. But this time things were different. Cyrus king of Persia had issued a decree encouraging them to go, and had given them necessities for the journey and the wherewithal to commence a new life in an empty and desolate land. He had restored to them the holy treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the magnificent Temple and had commanded them to build it again. No wonder they rejoiced. No wonder that, in the words of the Psalmist, singing of this very event, *"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad"* (Psa. 126.1-3).

It was in this spirit that fifty thousand immigrants came into the land and immediately set about raising the walls of the Temple. Now in the seventh month, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, they were gathered together in Jerusalem. From all the villages and hamlets of Judea they had come to worship before God at the first ceremonial to be conducted on the sacred site since Nebuzar-Adan had set fire to the Temple, and burned it to the ground, at the time of the Captivity. That had been a time of disaster and sorrow; this was one of hope and expectation. The house of the Lord was to be rebuilt and the ancient ceremonies restored, and Israel would once more bear a name among the nations. That was the faith that burned brightly in every heart.

The little community had two leaders of sterling worth, Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest. Zerubbabel was of the kingly line; he traced

his natural descent from Nathan the son of David. The royal pedigree from Solomon had become extinct in Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, and the humbler line of Nathan took its place after the Captivity; thus Zerubbabel was its present representative. Through him the line of Christ was to be carried on until Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Joshua the son of Jehozadek was a High Priest. Nothing is known of his father, who was Israel's High Priest during the Babylonian captivity. His grandfather, Seraiah, High Priest in the days of Zedekiah, was executed by the victorious Babylonians at the capture of the city. Jeremiah's picture of the political intrigues of that period indicate that the priests were entangled with politics and Seraiah suffered a fate that he might have avoided had he been more devoted to his own commission before God. Nebuchadnezzar had a shrewd insight into the honesty of men and there was a difference between the respective treatments he meted out to Seraiah and to Jeremiah, who had kept out of politics and maintained, very faithfully, his witness to God. (Jer. 39.11-14 and 52.24-27). Joshua was of sterling worth. The approving tone of Zechariah 3 shows that he was a man the Lord could use. Under these two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Israel could have risen very quickly to a place of honour and power among the nations.

The people failed them. The people, who had come back from Babylon with songs of praise on their lips for so great deliverance, in joy that the Lord had turned again their captivity and done great things for them, began to lose their first fine enthusiasm and to care more for their own farms, gardens and houses than for the house of the Lord. The affairs of daily life loomed as of greater moment than the service of God, and when the adversaries of Judah began to put obstacles in the way of the restoration work, Israel let it go by default.

While Cyrus lived, the work went on, but not at the pace originally planned. The Samaritans, even then bitter enemies of Judah, hindered and frustrated the work. It was not entirely stopped, but neither was it pressed ahead with zeal and expedition. They made one great and grievous mistake. If the Samaritan complaint to Canbyses, the successor of Cyrus, as recorded in Ezra 4, was true, and not a malicious misrepresentation on their part, then the Jews were at that time engaged in building, not only the Temple, but also the walls and foundations of the city. Now it is an important thing to notice that the decree of Cyrus gave no mandate to build the city; it was to build the Temple only. There was a deep truth here for Israel to learn. Their Temple was to rise, undefended, in the midst of a hostile population. The Lord Himself would defend both His Temple and His people. But they would not. They fell after the same example of unbelief that has been seen so often in history, dependence on material means of defence, and carnal weapons, to defend Divine interests. They would not understand that God is able to defend His own.

So the work was stopped. The successors of Cyrus had no such interest in this despised and hated people and its Temple as had Cyrus. The new king withdrew the decree and commanded work to cease. That was a test on the people. They could have defied both the Samaritans and the king's edict, and taken themselves in prayer to God for His leading and His protection, and gone forward in faith that His purposes would be accomplished. They did not and in consequence *"then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased to the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."* (Ezra 4.24.)

So the whole glorious dream faded and the golden hopes with which the exiles had set out to return to their own land were, in less than a decade, dashed to the ground. At the first breath of opposition the people had wilted and laid down their tools, and turned themselves to the secular pursuits of every day, tilling the land, building houses, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, while the deserted, half-finished house of God stood on Mount Moriah, a crumbling monument to the fickleness of man and the weakness of his faith.

But in the second year of Darius, nineteen years after the exiles had returned from Babylon and ten years after work on the Temple had been completely stopped, something momentous happened. Two young men, Haggai and Zechariah, suddenly came into the public eye and commenced preaching in Jerusalem and Judea. Haggai started first; two months later he was joined by his fellow-prophet Zechariah. These two young men, without material resources, accomplished in the short space of four years what Zerubbabel and Joshua, the material wealth of the thousands in Israel, and the authority of the decree of Cyrus, had failed to do. They achieved the rebuilding and the dedication of the Temple.

If the Zechariah and Iddo of Neh. 12 are the same as the prophet and his forebear of those names mentioned in Zech. 1.1, which is a very probable thing, then Zechariah must have been a very young man, certainly at most in his early twenties, for Iddo his grandfather would then have returned to Judea in the first year of Cyrus, probably an old man. On this assumption, it is likely that Haggai, about whose antecedents we know nothing, was a young man also. There is a freshness and vigour about both their prophecies that seems to suggest as much. Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest would by this time, twenty years after the Return, be getting on in years, at the very least in late middle-age. Neh. 12.16 indicates that later on Zechariah held office in the priesthood under Joiakim, the High Priest who succeeded Joshua. The two older men would probably be to some extent dispirited and discouraged at the failure of all their high hopes, the adverse decision of Artaxerxes and the apathy of the people of Israel combining to dissuade them from any considerable activity in the

direction of restoring the Temple of God. Then like a thunder-bolt came the message declaimed in the streets and squares of the city, told in the cars of shepherds and peasants in the countryside, brought to the notice of the prince and the High Priest, word that prophets were arisen again in Israel. A message for the times, a message that told with decision and conviction to what cause was due their unhappy condition and the failure of their one-time high ideals and hopes. *"is it a time for you, yourselves to dwell in panelled houses, and this house lie waste?"* demanded Haggai. *"Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways!"* Scarcely had the tones of his accusation died upon the air than the equally penetrating voice of his brother-prophet Zechariah commanded attention. *"The Lord has been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore ... thus says the Lord of hosts, Turn to me ... and I will turn to you."* Then Haggai again *"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood and build the house and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the Lord."*

AOH

THE UPPER ROOM

It was very quiet, up there in the cool and the peace of the upper room. A noisy crowd surged and jostled in the street below, sturdy countrymen up in Jerusalem for the feast rubbing shoulders with Greek merchants; truculent Galileans striding past the gentler Judean shepherds with glances of contempt and veiled hostility; and always a party of Roman soldiers stepping smartly along the centre of the highway, Pharisee and beggar alike hastening to give them free passage and combining after their passing to look upon their retreating backs with smouldering animosity. But upstairs, in the upper room, it was quiet and cool. Loving hands had been very busy setting out the table for those who were soon to meet around it in solemn observance of Israel's Passover. The lamb, roast with fire, cut into its pieces, lay in the centre of the festal board. Little piles of unleavened bread – bitter herbs – cups of wine – the dish of *cheroseh*, of fruit and nuts – all was ready for the time when twelve men and their Master would enter the room and partake together.

In every house in Jerusalem that feast lay spread. In palace and in hovel, in the best room of every inn and within the Temple precincts where dwelt that priestly course whose turn it was that day to conduct the sacred service, the lamb, the bread, the bitter herbs, lay waiting, mute testimony to a night in olden time when the Destroying Angel passed over the land of Egypt, to the first-borns of Egypt a messenger of death, but to those who were under the blood, deliverance – glorious and complete.

Now the door is opening, and men appear. One by one, until twelve have entered, they take their places around the table, and wait. A quiet footfall on the

threshold and their Master enters and closes the door, and by that simple action shuts out the world and all its cares and interests. The faint murmur of people rising from the street below dies down and is gone. The world is very far away, and the disciples are with their Master.

Who among them but did not feel the solemnity of this night? Accustomed as they were to the Passover ceremonial, observing it year by year continually, they could not but be conscious that after to-night, things would never be the same. On the two previous occasions when they had partaken of the Passover with their Master, this consciousness of impending crisis had not filled their minds. Something was going to happen; they realised that instinctively, without knowing its nature. But mingled with that apprehension there was a strange triumphant joy as though at last all the perplexities and misunderstandings of the past three years were to be resolved into a clear knowledge of the life which lay before them. That trouble and distress might yet lie beyond the bounds of this Passover evening they knew, but that God was with them in all their ways they were confident. Now the Master's voice broke the silence; tender tones, vibrant with rich feeling, searching their inmost souls and drawing their very hearts to an ecstasy of devotion and surrender.

"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Wonderful words! Would the Kingdom of God come so soon? This was the goal of all their hopes; the prayer of every child of Israel. These were thrilling words – that He would not eat of the Passover again with them until the Kingdom of God should have come. That was what He had said so recently on the summit of Mount Tabor – some of them would not taste of death *"until the Kingdom of God should come"*; now that they had endured with Him in all His trials, surely the day of God's recompense was at hand and Messiah would declare Himself ... Eager thoughts are interrupted; the Master has taken a cup of wine in His right hand and is looking upward to Heaven. His voice breaks the stillness in solemn invocation.

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine."

Silently, reverently, they all drank. The feast had begun. All eyes were turned to the Beloved One at the centre of the table. Again He spoke ... of the Lord's Passover, when He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt and smote the Egyptians but delivered their houses. How He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. He brought them forth with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. He brought them forth from servitude to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to marvellous light ... HALLELUJAH!"

In low tones the word passed from lip to lip, "*Hallelujah, Hallelujah*", a murmur of reverent praise ascending to Israel's God. Then twelve voices joined in the recitation of familiar words.

"Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this present time and for ever. From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised."

Once more the Lord's hands are moving over the table, breaking one of the cakes of unleavened bread. His quiet voice rises in the benediction.

"Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, the King of the universe, who brings forth food out of the earth."

The little cakes passed from each to his neighbour. Reverent hands reached out to the dish upon which lay the lamb roast with fire. They ate hastily, solemnly, as men fulfilling an ancient ritual. The room was very quiet the flickering lamp cast strange cross-like shadows upon the wall behind the Lord.

"This is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me." They took of the bread, sharing each with other, wondering.

"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Drink ye, all, of it."

They drank, a strange, fierce joy pervading their souls. Now and for all time they were to be joined to Him they loved, in a relationship that would never be severed, to serve Him and be with Him for ever. Surely now He would speak plainly and disperse the mystery and misunderstanding that had surrounded their hopes for so long. Surely now He would tell them all.

"Verily I say to you, that one of you shall betray me."

They looked at one another fearfully. What horrifying calamity was this? How could any one of them dream of betraying the Master and the Cause they loved so dearly? What did it mean? What dread portent lay behind those unexpected words?

"Is it I?" "Is it I?" "Is it I?" How could it be? The question rippled round the table. It came to one whose haunted eyes looked every way for succour – for assurance – for denial. Surely this could not be real; this was not in very truth happening to him? Surely it had all been a nightmare; that visit to the Priests, that shameful bargain, the cynical congratulations of those whom he hated more than he hated any man. *And Jesus knew*; he was sure of that now. Jesus knew all about that night visit, about the thirty pieces of silver, about his own desperate resolve to precipitate a climax to their three years' preaching. *He knew*, and still He did not declare himself..

The sound of a door, opening, and closing, quietly. Footsteps dying away down the stairway. Silence. Judas the betrayer was gone.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been, glorified in him... Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me. Where I am going you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you

love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."

The soft cadences ceased. They sat silent, knowing now that their golden dreams were after all only dreams. Dimly they visualized a life without their Leader; a continuation of the toil and weariness of constant pilgrimage, no longer illumined by the presence and companionship of the One they loved. Heads were bowed; they could not meet each others' eyes. He was going away, and they would never see him again.

Peter – a strangely quiet and subdued Peter broke the silence, a quiver in his voice; *"Lord... where are you going?"*

"Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also ... Love one another as I have loved you. The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God ... I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."

They heard the words, but they understood not. Even though He return to the Father, of what avail if all their hopes were gone and there was no deliverance in Israel? They loved him still and would always love him, but He was leaving them and they could not understand why. They could only trust.

A sign from those dear hands, and eleven men rose to their feet, eyes uplifted to Heaven. Voices joined in the traditional hymn which was to conclude their feast. And when they came to the time-hallowed words,

"I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord,

Open to me the gates of righteousness into which the righteous shall enter.

The stone which the builders refused; is become the head of the corner.

This is the work of our God it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it" hearts were a little lightened and eyes a little brighter. Somewhere in all this was enshrined the ways of God. Israel had waited long for deliverance, but God is faithful; one day they would understand. The solemn chant rose upon the night air and listening angels wondered at its note of triumph. The lamp burned brightly in its last expiring flicker in the upper room – but the forces of evil were speeding fast away.

And when they had sung that hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.

AOH

This catches the spirit of the 'Last Supper' and fills in background – although we may wish to amend some of the details. The article has been abridged.

THE ORIGINS OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is referred to by name for the first time in the Book of Joshua at Israel's entry into the Promised Land. For a long time it was thought that it had not existed very long before that, but more recently there have been discoveries of written records on clay tablets. Tablets at Tel-el-Amarna deciphered in 1915, Thebes and Saqqarah in 1920, Ras Shamra in 1930, and most notable of all, the lost city-state of Ebla in 1974, have carried the known existence of Jerusalem back to the 23rd Century before Christ, more than two centuries before Abraham.

We have always known that Salem of Gen. 14, where Abraham met Melchizedek, the priest-king of the Most High God, was Jerusalem. Some commentators tried to establish that it was Salim of John 3.23, on the west bank of the Jordan, but that is discredited. That was a village and there is no evidence that it even existed in archaic times. Other considerations, such as statements in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, indicated that Melchizedek ruled a sizeable territory with Salem as its capital. The reference in Psa. 76.2, "*in Salem is his tabernacle*", is to Jerusalem in the days of David.

In the ancient tablets mentioned above, the name is *Uru-Salim*, evidently the name given at its founding. *Uru* is the Sumerian word for "city" and *Salim* for "peace", (hence the modern Hebrew word - Shalom). Prior to the 23rd century B.C., Canaan and Syria were in the sphere of Sumerian influence; language and writing was either Sumerian (of Ham) or Akkadian (of Shem). The celebrated Sargon of Agade, the first military conqueror of history, had extended his empire from the Persian Gulf to Syria and Canaan and it was by him and his successors that the city-state of Ebla was overthrown, so that Jerusalem must have been founded well before the 24th century, possibly four centuries or more before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees.

Who built it? The line of Priest-kings claiming to hold office by decree of the Most High God spanned at least seven hundred years, from Melchizedek (king of Righteousness) in Abraham's time to Adoni-zedek (Lord of Righteousness) and his successor Abdi-Khiba (Father gives life) in the time of Joshua. Abdi-Khiba in his letters to Pharaoh Amen-Hotep III insists that he was king of Jerusalem not by permission of the Pharaoh, like the other rulers around him, but by decree of the "Mighty King" (i.e. God; the same expression in Psa. 48.2). What rulers were these, and what people did they rule, who at a time when all, except Abraham, from Egypt through Canaan, Syria, Babylon, Sumer and Elam, embraced idolatry and renounced their original worship of the Most High God? Is it possible that Jerusalem was founded by some descendants of Noah other than of the line through Abraham who had never renounced their worship of the God of Heaven? If such was the case, then the date could be as far back as the 26th century when Canaan was being settled by Canaanites and Aramites.

So they could have come into the land, barely inhabited. To the south lay Egypt, to the north the commercialized lands of the Canaanites, (Syria today), to the east the highly civilized and busy lands of Sumer and Akkad, all idol worshippers. Here was a quiet, relatively empty land as yet undefiled by idolatry; here the elevated mountain mass afterwards Mount Zion and Mount Moriah, where they could build their capital city and worship God after the dictates of their own hearts. How appropriate to call their new abode the city of peace!

What people were they, if in fact it was like this? When Abraham entered the land he found Jerusalem and the surrounding territory peopled by Jebusites, a Canaanite people descended from Ham. An alternative name for the city at that time was Jebus, that of the ancestor of the tribe. This name was still in use six hundred years later when Joshua invaded the land. Since Gen. 10.15 gives Sidon and Heth as the two sons of Canaan, Jebus and his eight fellow tribal leaders must have been in the third or fourth generation from Ham and might well have been involved in the dispersion from Babel. During later centuries the tribes of Canaanites and those from Aram, a son of Shem, lived side by side in Canaan and must have intermarried so that the Jebusites of Abraham's day could well have been a mixed Hamitic-Semitic people. That would explain why they were ruled by priest-kings having Semitic names and lend colour to the supposition that, like their rulers, they still worshipped the Most High God, unlike the rest of the tribes of Canaan. A point which tends to confirm this is that the Jebusites were great fighters, a definite Semitic trait but not Hamitic. Israel never succeeded in driving them out of the city, even in the days of David, and they were ultimately absorbed into the Jewish people.

So it could have been that Abraham, departing from the idolatry of his native land, found himself in one where God was still worshipped, and lived the rest of his life in the vicinity of a city which, although he knew it not, was destined to become "*the joy of the whole earth, the city of the Great King*" (Psa. 48.2).

AOH

QUIET TIME THOUGHTS MATT. 5.1-11

The joy of the Lord is known to those who are aware of their spiritual weakness; who discover something of the world's real grief; who never place the interests of self before others; who long for justice for all; who never ever desire revenge; whose hearts carry nothing that pollutes God's holiness; who will go to any length to bring total and absolute reconciliation to all; who are really prepared to suffer so that God's will is done; who will do absolutely anything for Jesus even to the cost of life itself. Such will save the world; such carry the light of God's goodness in whatever they do and everything they do will make the world a better place.

THE FIRSTBORN

There are in Scripture references to the "*church of the First-born*" and "*a kind of first-fruits of his creatures*" (Heb. 12.23, Jas. 1.18). This implies others ultimately of God's family later born, after-fruits. It was God's intention to save all Israelites. The whole nation by Divine power was miraculously delivered by the Lord and led across the Red Sea. That is a picture of the ultimate deliverance, from the power of sin and Satan, of every creature who accepts the Lord and desires to render Him worship - not an Israelite was left behind! But we remember not the Passover at the Red Sea but passing over or sparing of the first-borns of Israel in Egypt. Only the first-born were in danger. The deliverance of all depended upon the salvation of the first-born. So the Church of Jesus Christ, the "*first-fruits unto God of his creatures*", the 'Church of the first-born' are being spared at the present time - are being passed over, provided they are "*under the blood*". When the night has passed the glorious morn of deliverance will come, and the Christ, pictured by Moses, will lead forth, will deliver all who when they have been enlightened are glad to reverence, honour and obey the will of God. That day of deliverance will be the Millennial age at the close of which all evil and evil doers, pictured by the hosts of Egypt, will be utterly destroyed.

The Apostle clearly identifies the Passover lamb with our Lord Jesus, when he wrote, "*Christ our Passover is slain for us, therefore let us keep the feast*" (1 Cor. 5.7, 8.) He tells us that we all need the blood of sprinkling, not upon our houses, but upon our hearts (Heb. 12.24; 1 Pet. 1.2). We are also to eat the unleavened bread of truth if we would be strong and prepared for the 'deliverance in the morning'. We must eat 'the Lamb', taking Christ to ourselves. We "*put on*" Christ by faith, and more and more, we put on His character and are transformed day by day to His glorious image in our hearts and lives. We 'feed' upon Him as the Jews fed on the literal lamb. Instead of the bitter herbs that aided and whetted their appetites, we have bitter experiences and trials. These help to wean our affections from earthly things and give us an increasing appetite to feed upon the Lamb and the unleavened bread of His Word. We, too, are to remember that we have no continuing city, but are *en route* as pilgrims. Strangers and travellers, with staff in hand, girded for the journey we shall ultimately reach the heavenly Canaan and all the glorious things which God has reserved for the Church of the First-born with their Redeemer as kings and priests unto God.

Our Lord Jesus also fully identified himself with the Passover Lamb. On the same night that He was betrayed, and just preceding His crucifixion, He gathered His disciples in the upper room, saying, "*With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*". It was necessary that as Jews they

should celebrate the Passover Supper on that night but as soon as the requirements of the new Passover had been fulfilled our Lord instituted a new celebration saying, *"As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me!"* (1 Cor. 11.24, 25).

At that Last Supper as our Lord blessed the bread and the wine, representing His broken body and shed blood, He exhorted His followers to participate, not only feeding upon Him but being broken with Him, laying down their lives in His service, in co-operating with Him in every way. In our minds let us follow Jesus to Gethsemane, and see Him with strong crying and tears, praying to Him who *"was able to save Him out of death."* Our Lord was comforted by the Father, through the angel, with the assurance that He had fulfilled His consecration and that He would surely have a resurrection as foretold. We behold how calm He was thereafter, when, before the High Priest and Pilate, and Herod and Pilate again, as a lamb before her shearers is dumb so he opened not His mouth in self-defence. We see Him faithful, courageous to the very last although He could have asked the Father for more than twelve legions of angels for His protection. Instead of asking for aid to escape His sacrifice, His petition was for aid to endure it faithfully. What a lesson for us.

Even among His loyal disciples the most courageous forsook the Lord and fled. One of them in his timidity even denied his Master! This is an occasion for examining our own hearts concerning our faith and courage and willingness to suffer with Him. What an opportunity to buttress the mind with resolutions that we will not deny our Master under any circumstances and conditions – that we will confess Him with our lips and in our conduct. *"If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. If are dead with Him we shall live with Him"*; for the trials of the present time are *"not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us"*. (Rom. 8.7; 6.8.) Let us keep the feast with joy, in spite of trials and difficulties. Thus continuing faithfully as His followers, we shall have the great privilege of leading forth the Lord's hosts, all who ultimately shall hear and know and obey the great King, out of sin and death, out of Egypt into Canaan. Then, in the language of Paul *"Christ our Passover is slain, therefore let us keep the Feast"*.

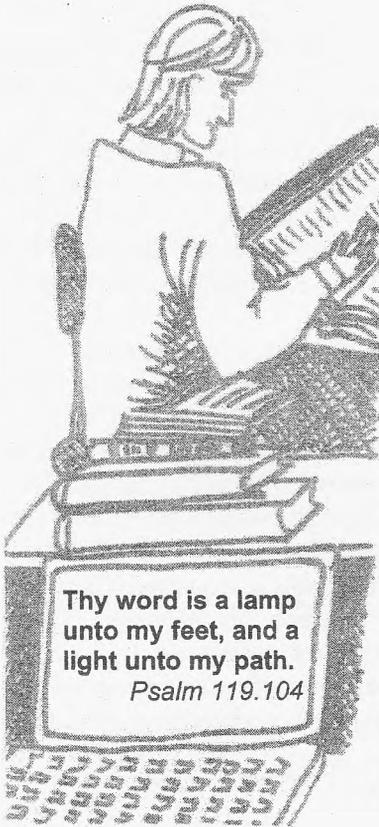
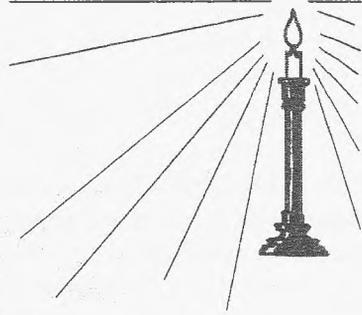
WTR

Stars shine brightest in the darkest night, spices smell best when bruised, young trees root faster for being shaken in the wind, and gold looks brighter for scouring. Such is the condition of all God's children. They are most triumphant when most tempted; most glorious when most afflicted; most in favour of God when least in man's and their own. As their conflicts, such are their conquests; as their tribulation, such their triumphs. They live best in the furnace of persecution.

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)
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NOTICES

TELL A FRIEND - Many readers of the Bible Study Monthly have passed the magazine to a friend and suggested that they become readers. BFU will gladly send the magazine to any address on request.

Another way of sharing your blessings with a friend is to draw their attention to the **BFU WEB SITE** – www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk where they can have a taste or catch a glimpse of what BFU has to offer.

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Help with postage on literature dispatched is always appreciated.

Bibles and Bible study helps that are no longer needed, if sent to BFU, will be sent to readers who have need of them.

BFU maintains high spiritual values in published material but members of the BFU team may not always agree with every expression of thought.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE has 5 permanent residents. Accommodation is also available to visitors upon request. They are accommodated in self-contained flats and a mid-day hot meal is available if requested. Gainsborough House has two communal lounges, one of which has television. There are opportunities for formal worship and informal fellowship.

Milborne Port is a very pleasant centre to explore many places of interest. All enquiries should be made to the resident housekeeper – Mrs. Corrinne Vaughan - 01963 250684.

Gone from us

Sister Phyllis Redmond (Crosby, Liverpool)

Brother Eric Williams (Sheffield)

"Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away."

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

This is now the third issue in the new format. We have been very interested in the feedback from readers. Generally, we get the impression that readers like the different size. We very occasionally receive letters that suggest improvements to the magazine and even more rarely expression of disapproval of something in an article. We consider all these and where we feel led to do so, we make amendments. The new cover has had a mixed reception from a few readers and this matter is also under consideration. We will also consider sympathetically any cover designs that may be submitted.

We are aware that our readers differ very widely in their places of worship, in their cultural and geographical background and in their experience of Bible study. Just what items should we use in this magazine? Some would like to see more 'doctrine' – others more material for the younger generation – what is God's will and what would He have us do? We believe that the magazine content should remain non-sectarian, as it has been for sixty years. Each contributor must be led by our Heavenly Father with His glory as the only goal.

As we look at the Bible we find a vast collection of material on all kinds of topics. For those that love history there is a vast panorama of material. For those who love the natural world there is also much to take our attention. The great doctrines of Scripture - the reconciliation of mankind to God, enshrined in the Atonement and Covenants are not only interesting but provide instruction for living now, and in the future. Some love prophecy and others find it impossible to understand; some love poetry and our Bible contains some of the finest the world has ever known. In the Bible we learn about mankind and discover what kind of people we are. God's purpose is revealed and that tells us where we are going. Above all, this book speaks of its Divine Author- if we will but let Him speak to us through its pages -and of His beloved Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who once prayed that to know them is eternal life.

May He bless you, as you read each issue.

DN

Paul became the energiser of his brethren in the Lord. When others were taking life easily, Paul was intensively seeking ways and means of putting himself at the service of the believers, hoping thereby to produce spiritual energy in his brethren. Persecution might stop some, but not this seasoned warrior. Perplexities might stop some, but not this unconquerable spirit. *“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”* (2 Cor. 4.7-10 RSV)

ZERUBBABEL'S PASSOVER

Part 2 The Fruit of Obedience

The two prophets had spoken strongly to the returned exiles of Judah. Now Zechariah addressed himself deliberately to Joshua, the people's High Priest,

"Thus says the Lord of hosts; if you will walk in my ways, and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house, and have charge of my courts"; with Haggai rejoining, *"Take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord, and take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, take courage all you people of the land, says the Lord, work, for I am with you."*

Haggai and Zechariah had put their fingers upon the source of the trouble. Faith and zeal had sunk to a low ebb; there was no longer that heavenly vision which had inspired the first emigrants to wend their way across the desert with songs and thanksgiving on their lips, and their faces turned toward Zion. Because faith and zeal had waned, the enemies of Israel and of God had loomed nearer and more menacing, and in fear and doubt the work of God had been stopped.

Behold now the difference. The prohibition of the Persian king was still in force. *"Cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until commandment shall be given from me"* (Ezra 4.21). The wrath of the king could still be backed by the military might of Persia if this handful of Jews dared to rebel against his express decree. The Samaritans, the ancient enemies at whose instigation the work had been stopped ten years previously, were still there, malignantly watchful, and would not hesitate to report any new activity to the king without delay. There was no change in the circumstances, no reason from the outward and material point of view why any fresh endeavour would not meet the same fate as past ones. And yet, most remarkable of happenings, the fervent preaching of these two youngsters so wrought upon the minds and hearts of the people that they forgot all their fears and apathy, regained their faith, and without so much as giving a thought to the king of Persia, rose up as one man to resume the building of their Temple. *"Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel ... then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them were the prophets of God helping them"* (Ezra 5.1). That is only the bald historical notice of the happening; let the books of Haggai and Zechariah tell the splendid story, in their own way, how that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, and all the people, so that they came and did work in the house of the Lord (Hag. 1.14), how the Lord promised *"the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former"* (Hag. 2.9) and that wonderful award, set as a gem in

this inspiring prophecy "*from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid ... from this day will I bless you*" (Hag. 2.18-19). Let the splendid imagery of Zechariah's visions illuminate those joyful days, the view of Jerusalem inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein, of Joshua rescued from the accusers, of the prosperity of Judah and ultimately the defeat of all her enemies, and the kingship of the Lord established over all the earth. "*At evening time it shall be light.*" The wonderful inspiration that we ourselves draw from this thrilling book we owe to the days when those two young men stood in the markets of Jerusalem and bade the people forget their fears, pay no heed to the mandates of that heathen king, and enter the service of the Lord their God in the building of His sanctuary.

Of course it was not long before the Samaritans were there again, taking particulars from the leaders, and sitting down to write another report to the Persian king Darius this time at Babylon. Note the difference in the spirit with which their questioning was met on this occasion. "*We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was built these many years ago*" (Ezra 5.11).

There was no fear and hesitation now; the same Zerubbabel and Joshua, the same builders and labourers, the same citizens, who ten years ago had laid down their tools at the king's behest, now proudly declared their determination to continue. Last time they ran away from the lion; this time they faced the lion and defied him, in the strength of the Lord their God.

And the sequel? Let Darius answer for himself, in his reply to the complainants, "*Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree ... and Darius went on to command that assistance be given to these Jews in their work, with materials and money, and offerings to be made to God on the king's behalf; that any who hindered the work or violated the king's word should himself be put to death. The king personally invoked the wrath of the God of Israel upon all who would harm this house of God at Jerusalem. "I Darius have made a decree, let it be done with speed"* (Ezra 6).

How often do we repeat to each other the old saying "Fear knocked at the door; faith opened it and no one was there!" Here is an instance where that principle was put into practice and a whole people reaped the reward of faith. But there was much more involved than the building of a house of prayer for that generation. It was from this day, when the Temple began to be built, that there commenced the development of that Jewish people, with its distinctive worship, to which Jesus came nearly five centuries later. It was at this time that the Old Testament as we know it was completed, in the sayings and writings of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, to be welded into an authoritative canon of Scripture by Ezra the pious priest fifty years later. Those enthusiastic and

zealous Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, built better than they knew when they defied the powers of this world and laid their hands to the Lord's work. They brought the work and the story of the Old Testament to its consummation and prepared the way for the New.

"And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king" (Ezra 6.15). Four short years! In that brief space of time they had built the sanctuary, erected the great altar, set the golden vessels of Solomon's Temple, brought back from Babylon, in place, and were ready to reinstate the ceremonial and offerings that were commanded by Moses. It was nearly the season of the Passover. Nisan followed Adar, and from the third day of Adar there would only be some six weeks to the fourteenth day of Nisan and the celebration of Israel's most solemn feast.

It was in the spirit of this great awakening of faith and zeal that they kept the Passover, perhaps one of the most memorable that Israel had ever known. It was memorable because it made so deep an impression upon the minds of all who participated. It made that impression because it meant so much more to them than did an ordinary Passover. The usual year-by-year celebration reminded them in a perfunctory sort of way of their ancestors' deliverance from Egypt, but it had grown to be a custom having some historical interest that did not touch daily life very closely. This Passover was different. It denoted something more than their nation's deliverance from Egypt. It denoted something more than their own more recent deliverance from Babylon. It denoted each one's individual deliverance from the bonds of apathy and indifference which had well nigh cost them the loss of their favoured standing before God. It marked their entrance into a new life, a life in which God and His holiness was to be placed first and become the centre around which all of life's actions and activities were to circle. The glowing words of Zechariah had taken firm root in their hearts, and they could not wait for the then far-distant Millennial Age to realise their fulfilment, even although the real application of those words is to that Age. They must apply them to themselves at once, and they did. *"In that day"* he had said *"shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar."* Everything in life, whether normally finding its place in secular or sacred use, is to be holy to God. *"Whatsoever ye do"* said the inspired Apostle at a later date *"do all to the glory of God."* So that Passover became a time of renewed dedication of life, consecration of heart, to the service of the Lord of Hosts.

There is a great lesson for us in all of this; great doctrinal truth that we must take to ourselves. It is that cleansing must precede consecration, faith and zeal precede entrance into Divine favour and a place in Divine purposes. Not for nothing did the Apostles exhort the generation that witnessed Pentecost to repent and be converted *so that* times of refreshing might come from the

presence of the Lord. (Acts 3.19.) There is a great work of Temple building going on during this Age but God cannot use any in this work except they first be cleansed from all contact with the people of the land, separated completely to His service, and then be animated by that spirit of faith and belief, zeal and enthusiasm, which alone can make them mighty through God in the doing of His work. The powers of this world may threaten and forbid; it is the spirit that trusts in the over-abounding power of God Most High, that will defy the forces of unrighteousness and lay hands to God's work in full confidence that He will defend and prosper, that is triumphant at last. Once let us be fully persuaded, as Israel was persuaded by Haggai and Zechariah, that God's righteousness must assuredly prevail at the end and all the forces of evil be vanquished and flee away; and the battle, so far as we are concerned, is won. We shall stand and see the Temple completed, and know that in that Sanctuary the Lord of all will find a dwelling-place and a place of meeting with all nations.

Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, and all the people with them *"kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful ...to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."* So the story ends at the last verse of that eventful sixth chapter of the Book of Ezra. *"The joy of the Lord shall be your strength"* said another. How true it is that joy comes from a full and sincere consecration of heart and life to the Lord, and a clear and definite separation from the interests and distractions of earth, the 'people of the land'. When there is a firm, unyielding resistance to every opposing and seductive influence, the enemies of our faith, this joy gives strength to overcome. We shall be like Elijah, who ate heaven's food in his time of extremity. So we will reach out to take to ourselves every spiritual provision that is made for our needs and remain unshaken by those things shaking the Earth today.

The feast of joy follows faith and zeal, never doubt and unbelief. We who have been set free from a great bondage are given the privilege of becoming Temple-builders. It is in the strength of God that we play our part in that work of building the Temple which is to be a house of prayer for all nations. As we share together in Passover let us remember that there was a time when the powers of this Age, the powers of evil, had to be defied before God's protection could be manifested and his work go forward. It may be so again. God grant that we are found, not like those who weakly acquiesced in the command to stop work, but those who joyfully and zealously went forward to the execution of their Divine commission, trusting their God for defence while they laboured in the interests of His work in the Earth.

AOH

ON TO DAMASCUS

A story of Paul

Paul and his company went on, leaving the gleaming waters of the Lake of Galilee behind, up into the Syrian mountains. At last, one day at noon they topped the final peak and saw, spread before them in the plain below, the beautiful city whose loveliness was renowned throughout the East. There, he may have thought, as the little convoy stopped to rest and he looked down upon the view, were the Christians he had come to hunt out and take back with him bound to Jerusalem. In the excitement and fervour of his work he would forget the questions and thoughts which had tantalised his mind. He would stop trying to reconcile those contradictory scriptures that had burned themselves into his brain by day and flickered across the screen of his consciousness at night. He would.....

A flash of light, vivid, searing light which rose up and outshone the hard, brassy glare of the Syrian noonday sun; a white hot, gleaming screen which blotted out earth and sky and burned itself into the eyes of Saul even to the extent of causing physical pain. He was dimly conscious of the asses and mules standing stock still, of his companions prostrating themselves on the ground in terror: then, his gaze drawn irresistibly upwards to the almost unendurable glare above him, he beheld, with a shock that pierced through his very being, a form whose own glory exceeded by far that of the shimmering light around him and at that Saul himself veiled his eyes and fell to the ground and there lay, fearing to look again upon that Majestic Presence, still, silent, his mind racing, waiting.

A sound, as of a distant wind, coming nearer; the rush of many' waters, a swelling crescendo of rolling thunder, taking the form of a voice, a heavenly voice, shaping itself into words, awe-inspiring words that yet seemed to have in them a tinge of gentleness, almost as if they breathed assurance with their enquiry.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"

Persecuting God? He, Saul, the zealous upholder of the Law and of the true faith? Persecuting the One to whom he had devoted his whole life and all his energies, for whom he was willing to do all and dare all and lay down life itself if need be? Persecuting the Rock of Israel whose enemies he was even now engaged in hunting down and punishing? How could such things be? It was unthinkable. Then who was this One whose solemn voice had reached his stricken mind, whose awful Presence had appeared before his amazed sight? Had he indeed beheld God, and lived? Had the Most High verily appeared to mortal man?

"Who art thou, Lord?"

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting."

The shock with which Saul of Tarsus must have heard those words might well have unhinged the mind of a lesser man. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified

felon, the imposter who had claimed to be the Son of God and the Messiah that should come, and who had been executed for His blasphemy? Taken down from the cross, His dead body certified by the authorities, and interred in a tomb, his delusions and claims silenced for ever – *there, in that glory*, at the right hand of God? Only a little while ago he had watched Stephen lift his face to heaven and declare that he saw heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God and he had judged him guilty of blasphemy and condemned him to death; now he himself had undergone the same experience and he himself had with his own eyes seen heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. "*Jesus of Nazareth*." Had the answer been "The Word of God" he could have understood it. Had it been "Your Messiah, the Coming One" he would have rejoiced and looked for His speedy descent to take the glory of His Kingdom. Had it been "the Arm of the Lord" "the Hope of Israel" "the Son of God" he would have understood those terms and bowed himself in submission. Had the Presence even announced Himself as Michael the Archangel, the Captain of the Lord's Host, he would have rendered humble adoration and awaited the heavenly message. But no; "*I am Jesus of Nazareth*".

When they picked him up from the ground he was blind. The intensity of that scorching glare had destroyed his sight. The men with him had dropped to the ground when first the light flashed, they saw the radiance but they did not see what Saul saw. As they lay they heard a noise but they distinguished no words. Now the light was gone and the solemn rumblings died away. The sun shone brilliantly down upon the familiar landscape and everything was as it had been before – except that little group of wondering Levites leading in their midst a broken and sightless man.

So Saul entered Damascus, walking on foot, holding the guiding hands of his erstwhile despised subordinates. One might ask how it was they did not set the blind man upon his mule for the remainder of the journey – surely that would have been the most convenient way to get him to a place where he could be cared for. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Saul himself, under the effect of his experience, insisted on completing the journey on foot, in token of his humiliation and submission. He left Jerusalem an arrogant, self-assured Pharisee. He entered Damascus a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three accounts of this incident in the Book of Acts – one, the narrative of the happening in chapter 9, another, as recounted by Paul in his defence before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin years later, (chapter 23) and a third, in his speech before King Agrippa just prior to his voyage to Rome (chapter 26). In none of these does Paul say that he actually saw the Lord, only that an overpowering light shone around him and his companions. The evidence that he did in fact behold a form enshrined in that supernatural radiance lies in his statements elsewhere in the New Testament that he had actually seen the person of Christ and that he saw Him "*as one born out of due time*", as though his eyes

had been enabled to witness an appearance which in the ordinary manner no man would expect to do until in his own time he was born into the heavenly world 'beyond the Veil'. The Apostle John tells us (1 John 3.1-3) that *"it doth not yet appear what we shall be but ... we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"*. This celestial glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is of necessity something no human mind can visualize for we have no basis of comparison. The medieval idea that Jesus preserves the fleshly body of His humanity to eternity, even though in a "glorified" condition, may be dismissed, for the conditions of life in the celestial world and in the Divine Presence are such that, as Paul himself told the Corinthians, *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"*. (1 Cor. 15.50). Our Lord's celestial glory at the right hand of God the Father is one that cannot be discerned by the human faculty of sight. It remains then either that the risen Lord manifested Himself in some such fashion as God revealed Himself to Moses on Sinai or the angel Gabriel to Daniel, in which some kind of physical manifestation perceptible to the human optic nerves represented the reality of the Being behind it, or in some wonderful fashion Paul was literally translated for the moment into the world of the spirit and received a sense impression that normally he would have been quite incapable of accepting. His reference in 2 Cor. 12 to his having been translated into the 'third heaven' and hearing *"unutterable things which it was not possible for a man to relate"* goes to show that such an experience did befall the great Apostle on at least one other occasion. If this is so, and if of all men Saul of Tarsus is the one who alone has seen into the mysteries that lie beyond the barrier of human sense and retained a recollection of what he saw, then how apt his expression, referring to this event in his life *"last of all, he was seen of me also, as one born out of due time"* (ie prematurely 1 Cor. 15.8).

One thing is certain. The sight which Saul witnessed on the Damascus road was one which convinced him utterly and irrevocably that the man Jesus of Nazareth who had been put to death in Jerusalem was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. For the rest of his life he never wavered in that belief. Nothing of the evidence against the claims of Jesus, satisfactory as it had been to him previously, now weighed in the slightest against that fixed conviction. He had all to lose and nothing to gain by accepting Christ. The whole of his career prospects, his power and honour, were thrown away in this whole-hearted acceptance of the crucified one. He lived with the events; he had access to all the evidence for both sides of the matter. He could question and obtain information from living men who had been the principal actors in the drama. His own personal zeal for the principles of the Pharisees and the Law of Moses and the traditions of Judaism strongly predisposed him against the claims of Christianity. In spite all this, that which happened to him on the road outside Damascus convinced him so completely that his whole future life and work was

devoted to the preaching of that Gospel which previously he had condemned. One of the strongest evidences for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead lies in the conversion and conviction of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the Church.

AOH

"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, mighty in strength, that execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his word; bless the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye his ministers, that execute his will: bless the Lord, all his works in all the places of his dominion" (Psa. 103.20-22).

This is a remarkable passage that affords a fascinating glimpse of activity in a world beyond the reach of human senses. We may call it the spiritual world, the celestial world. Or just by the familiar name 'Heaven'. By whatever name we know it and in whatever form we visualise it we refer to an order of things, a real sphere of intelligence, a department of Divine creation, in which the Divine Will is carried out without opposition or question. The Church has prayed for centuries *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*. In that prayer she testifies her faith that there is a sphere of creation in which evil finds no place, in which all that is said and done is in full accord with the standards which the Most High has ordained for the orderly conduct of life in His Creation. It would seem that David was possessed of a rare depth of spiritual insight when he described that world as one of ceaseless activity, as he does in this psalm. Angels are mighty in strength compared with we puny humans, hastening to carry the Divine word. Hosts of ministers busy in the execution of His will denote a world in which there is also much that is static and to a considerable degree there is retrogression. In that world, nothing is static and there is no retrogression. Everything goes forward; ever new fields to conquer and new peaks to scale. The famous astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked in his book *'The Nature of the Universe'* *"Christians have so little to say about how they propose eternity should be spent. What the Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration."* Perhaps the criticism is justified. Much Christian evangelism centres around the process of getting ready for the after-life without any clear idea of the nature, and more importantly, the purpose, of that life. The poetic imagery of the Apocalypse, its harps, trumpets, white robes and golden floor are hardly sufficient to a clear picture. No wonder an active mind recoils at the prospect of an eternity in which there is nothing left to discover or to do. But, of course, it is not going to be like that. The only view of God consistent with our current knowledge of Him is one of ceaseless creation and continual planning to enlarge His vast domain. So it will be people with fresh forms of life all willingly and happily engaged, like those angels and ministers of Psalm 103, in carrying out His word and executing His Will. The fact that we do not yet see men upon earth in that happy state is merely an indication that we are as yet in the babyhood stage; men will eventually attain maturity and be ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

HABAKKUK THE PROPHET

We know nothing in scripture about Habakkuk, so we must picture him as best we can from his own evidence. A prophet, a singer perhaps in the temple services, where lyres, harps and cymbals accompanied the patterns and rhythms of the ancient music, which had risen there in praise and thanksgiving for three hundred years. He was an older man, perhaps, among the musical apprentices. A writer. A poet. A thoughtful man, concerned for his people, who were God's people.

His people had ancient traditions, handed down for over a thousand years since Abraham, six hundred years since Moses. The history and the laws were there, written down, a record of God's help to His people, a statement of His commands. Over the centuries there had been high points and low – a wonderful Exodus from Egypt followed by a painful forty years in the wilderness – judges bad, judges good – Samuel, David the king, and his son Solomon, whose servants had built this temple. Through the years there had been wars, alliances, factions, idolatry, the forsaking of God and following the excesses of idol worship.

More recently, the good young king Josiah had wilfully gone to his death in battle against the Egyptian superpower, a death the singers still lamented. The Egyptians had deposed his son after only three months, and set another young man in his place. And the Egyptian army had gone north to Carchemish, where, it was reported, Pharaoh Necho had been defeated, by an active new superpower.

At this time, Habakkuk could see his people suffering, not at the hands of foreigners but of each other. Society had become lawless, the picture was violence and contention (we might see a similar picture on our television screens of conflict in middle eastern countries today.) Those who stood up for justice were outnumbered by the gangs and the mob, and were not supported by the authorities. The law had lost its power because of a lack of moral fibre in those who administered it. And this state of affairs went on, and on, and on. Habakkuk appealed to God about it, but nothing happened. "*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and thou wilt not hear?*"

Jeremiah, the prophet from the village of Anathoth had similar concerns and a similar message. But while he, with the aid of Baruch the scribe, was active in the thick of the fray, Habakkuk we may imagine watched events, and feared for his nation, and looked to his God, and recorded what he 'saw' in poetic form – a dialogue with God, five woes on the wicked and a psalm to be sung in the temple.

He knew the Psalms. He knew that "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*" The Lord of Hosts is with us, destroying weapons, ending warfare, protecting His city The heavens are telling His glory. His law is perfect, to revive the soul, make wise the simple, give a clear view of what is

right and true, keep His servants humble. "Yes, but..." thought Habakkuk, "this is not what I am seeing around me. The wars continue. The righteous suffer. How long, O Lord?"

The answer was unexpected. "Look among the nations, I am rousing the Chaldeans" (Babylonians). Babylon was the new superpower. Their horses made possible swift attacks. They were a law to themselves, taking no account of a chieftain's authority, capable of raising siege banks against the walls of any fortress to take it and move swiftly on. For them, might is right. They come for violence, fear of them goes before them wherever they turn their attack. And was God rousing them up? Against Israel? Israel, who were still under the wing of their enemy, Egypt? It meant annihilation.

Habakkuk could not understand how a judgment like this, at the hands of wicked men, was in keeping with God's righteous character, or with His eternal care for His special people, to whom He was a Rock. It could not be that they would face slaughter, "We shall not die." But perhaps captivity? The Babylonians were like a fisherman with his net, gathering captives from all nations. To them in their strength their victims were despised like ants perhaps, whose nest has been destroyed. Was it possible that God would bring this fate upon His people? Some at least of them were righteous and had faith in Him.

Habakkuk resolved to settle himself, like a watchman on the battlements, to see how God would answer his perplexity.

The answer came, "Wait." Write the vision plain upon tablets, the vision awaits its time, but it will inexorably come even if it seems slow.

What vision? The Jews who later translated Habakkuk's words into Greek took this to mean a person, a coming one, and so it is quoted in Hebrews (and we can think of a 'coming One' six hundred years after Habakkuk. Even a coming One future to our own day.) But what Habakkuk saw was a principle and a promise in God's dealings. As translated in the RSV it reads: "He whose soul is not upright in Him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by His faithfulness." (Hab. 2.4)

He was not to despair, but to keep on keeping on, obedient, trusting.

The next section of Habakkuk's writing consists of five woes. Most commentators believe these apply to the Babylonians, others say they should apply 'wherever the cap fits' (it would not be hard to find cases in our time where the fit is good). In this section, along with the poetic descriptions of how certain people will receive their come-uppance, we find two glorious insights, one a quotation from the earlier prophet Isaiah, and another a mouth-stopping vision, reminiscent of God's revelation of Himself to Job. This will settle all Habakkuk's questioning.

The woes are similar to the woes of Isaiah 5, and Jesus used the same form of words when he denounced the 'scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites' (Matthew 23). Habakkuk's woes are expressed as a taunt from the enslaved nations against their persecutors.

1. Woe to those who plunder, and impose payments on their victims like a cruel moneylender. The tables will be turned, they themselves will be plundered.
2. Woe to those who build their dynasty by slaughter. The very stones of their palaces will speak their shame.
3. Woe to those who build their cities based upon the sufferings and death of others. What they have achieved is transitory and will go up in smoke. In the end, the earth will be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as completely as the waters cover the sea. (This from Isaiah. It is still our hope.)
4. Woe to those who bully their neighbours and take pleasure in humiliating them. They will reap the same treatment. The cup will come round to them also filled with the blood of men and violence in the earth.
5. Woe to those who trust in idols. They are confident in what they have made for themselves, but idols are lifeless, powerless. Habakkuk's vision reaches up to the true God.

God is alive in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence, whether in speechless terror or in quiet faith.

To the dialogue with God and these woes, is added Habakkuk's prayer, set to music. It carries the theme of God's transcendent power at a time when His people are threatened by the great earthly powers. Habakkuk recalls God's past interventions. He asks help now, God's mercy now, even if the foreign invasion is expressing His punishment.

Just as God's power from the south was displayed in the Exodus long ago, so a terrifying thunderstorm coming from the south is a sign of His power now, a picture of God's armies bestriding the earth, coming to rescue His people.

He stands still and shakes the earth,
He looks and makes the nations tremble;
the eternal mountains are riven,
the everlasting hills subside
Art thou angry with the streams?
Is thy wrath against the sea, O Lord?
When thou dost mount thy horses;
thy riding is to victory
The torrent of water rushes by.
The deep sea thunders aloud
With threats thou dost bestride the earth
and trample down the nations in anger.
Thou goest forth to save Thy people

(NEB)

Compare with this a modern report of a thunderstorm in the area: "At 5pm a tremendous thunderstorm began. The rain fell in torrents, and the roar of the thunder echoing from peak to peak, and the howling of the wind, were quite deafening. It soon grew dark, but the flashes of lightning were so incessant that we could see everything around us... In less than a quarter of an hour every ravine and gully in the mountains was pouring down a foaming stream in the watercourse a white line of foam appeared wave after wave came rolling down a few minutes after 6 pm it had ceased raining and there was a foaming torrent from 8 to 10 feet deep carrying hundreds of palm trees boulders ground along beneath the water and every now and again the ground shook as some huge rock charged down against it. By the next morning there was only a gently flowing stream a few inches deep ..." For Habakkuk to experience, or even just to imagine such a storm would shake him to the core. God's 'army' is more terrifying than the Babylonians. He determines that he will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon the invaders.

But in the meantime, they may do their worst, stripping the land of produce, making agriculture impossible, threatening starvation. Even if this befalls, Habakkuk knows he can be happy, happy to trust and rejoice in God, who saves him personally and gives him strength. As one of the righteous, he will live by his faithfulness - God's faithfulness too. Like a sure-footed deer, he can climb the hills away from the trouble. The hills bring him closer to God and God's ultimate triumph.

GC

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Hoddesdon, Herts England

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Theme "A New and Living Way" Heb. 10.20

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HAGAR THE BONDMAID

Part 1 – Firstborn

One of the most human stories of the Old Testament is that of the Egyptian slave-girl presented to Abraham by his childless wife Sarai for the purpose of providing an heir to his estate. Lack of familiarity with the laws and social customs of the time has led many to condemn the proceeding, whilst Paul's use of the episode in the Epistle to the Galatians has tended to divert attention from the human aspect.

The story is related in the 16th and 21st chapters of Genesis. Abraham and Sarai, married for many years, had no children, and from the natural point of view it seemed their hopes would never be realised, Sarai was past normal child-bearing age. God had promised Abraham that from him would spring a great nation, and that in his descendants all families of the earth would one day be blessed. How could the promise be fulfilled?

Abraham and Sarai came from the Sumerian city of Ur, on the lower Euphrates. From there they had migrated to Haran, on the upper Euphrates. Both these lands maintained marriage laws aimed at dealing with this problem, laws the records of which are extant today in legal tablets of those times which have been discovered. It was provided that in such a situation the wife was permitted to give one of her own slave-girls to her husband as a second wife, standing in an inferior position to the first, but, if a child was born, automatically becoming a freewoman. Her status as a wife could not then be repudiated.

This was the law which Sarai invoked; perfectly proper, and quite customary at the time. No kind of moral stricture ought to be passed on this couple; they did what every right-thinking individual of the day would endorse. To risk the passing of Abraham's estates into alien hands by failing to take this step would have been considered most reprehensible.

Sarai's choice fell upon Hagar, a slave-girl whom she had brought back with her from Egypt at the time of the household's sojourn there some few years previously. She is called an Egyptian but that may only mean that she was born in Egypt. Hagar is a Hebrew and not an Egyptian name and there were many Semitic Hebrews infiltrating into Lower Egypt at that time and nothing is more natural than when Pharaoh gave Abraham man-servants and maid-servants, as related in Gen. 12, he should thus dispose of a few unwanted Semitic immigrants.

It is not likely that Hagar had any choice in the matter. She was a slave girl; slavery was an established part of the social order and she had to do as she was told. At the same time it can be borne in mind that in patriarchal times the entire establishment of a man like Abraham would be conducted more or less like a large family and the bond-servants enjoyed as full and contented a life as sons and daughters of the house, subject to the performance of their assigned duties.

The prospect of becoming the mother of the heir to the estate and a freewoman into the bargain was probably attractive and Hagar might well have considered herself fortunate. When, a little later on, she found that she was indeed to become a mother, the exultation of the moment seems to have overcome her discretion and she demonstrated her feelings in the presence of Sarai, and that was a sad mistake. The account says "*her mistress was despised in her eyes*". That might mean merely that Hagar was guilty of 'showing off', by look or word taunting Sarai, or, more seriously, that she made an endeavour to usurp Sarai's position as first wife on the strength of the expected heir. This latter action was condemned by the law and could result in the offender being relegated to the former position of a slave, at least until a son was born.

Sarai, not unnaturally, complained to her husband, and he, obviously with the provision of the law in mind, responded "*your maid is in your hands; do to her as it please you*". So Sarai "*dealt hardly*" with her. The expression does not mean that she used physical violence, only that she took away her privileges and reduced her to her former condition of bond-service.

The indignity was too much for Hagar; she ran away. She seems to have been a high-spirited girl who could not brook humiliation; it may be also that she did not fully understand the position and believed, erroneously, that she had now forfeited the right to bear an heir to Abraham. She seems to have been possessed of pluck, too, for, though alone, she headed for her native Egypt. Abraham must have sent out men to find and bring her back but if so, they were unsuccessful. It was the angel of the Lord who found her, sitting by a spring of water "*in the wilderness, in the way to Shur*". The wilderness of Shur was the district of Western Sinai adjacent to Egypt. Hagar must have covered at least a hundred miles through sparsely inhabited territory, subject to all the dangers liable to befall a solitary woman travelling alone, before the angel found her.

At this point there is revealed Hagar's simple but sterling faith in God. To the angel's question, from which she discerned at once that he knew all about her, "*Hagar, maid of Sarai where have you come from and where are you going?*" she answered simply and without excuse "*I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai*". Whatever of pride or arrogance there might have been in her former attitude back at Hebron, there was none now. When the angel told her to return to her mistress and submit herself to whatever might befall she was quite ready to obey.

The angel appeared in the form of a man, but Hagar knew him for a messenger of God. How she knew, she would have been at a loss to explain. His authoritative bearing, his knowledge of her past, and perhaps an inward illumination of mind bestowed upon her at that moment by the Holy Spirit, all together made her certain of the fact. So when he began to tell her what the future held she listened and accepted it in child-like faith. She would bear a son, and she was to call his name Ishmael. He would be a "wild-ass" man – not "wild

man" as in the AV—a term which likened him to the noblest animal of the desert, the wild ass, free and untamed, loving the wide open spaces and beholden to no man. To this day the true sons of Ishmael, the Bedouin of the deserts, have been like that. God had looked upon Hagar and her affliction, had himself named her son as yet unborn, and had a place for him in his world.

Here the reverential spirit of Hagar comes to the top. *"She called the name of the God who spoke to her, 'Thou art a God of seeing' for she said 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'"* (Gen. 16.13 RSV). Like all of her times, Hagar believed that no one could see God, and live; He is too great to be comprehended by mortal eyes. Yet now He had manifested Himself to her in the guise of a man, and she had looked upon Him, and lived! *"Thou art a God of seeing"* or as the A.V. has it *"Thou God seest me"*. Many a distressed or despairing heart since the Egyptian bondmaid's day has been comforted and strengthened by that same realisation. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good Your Father in Heaven knoweth what things ye have need of."*

In after days that spring which marked the turning-point of Hagar's life was called Lahairoi, meaning *"The spring of the Living One who sees me"* It eventually became the headquarters of Isaac when he had acquired a household of his own. At this present time, with, perhaps, a sense of peace in her heart and some hope for the future, Hagar retraced her steps that hundred miles to Hebron and quietly took her assigned place in the household, trustfully waiting on the Lord to reveal His further will. And in due time Abraham looked upon his first-born son. Who can doubt that Hagar had told him every detail of the encounter at the spring in the wilderness and Abraham realised that the hand of God was in this thing? At this time, of course, he fully believed that in Ishmael he had received the promised "seed" through whom his line would be perpetuated and the Divine promise which guaranteed blessing to all families of the earth be fulfilled.

But God had planned otherwise.

AOH

Christians in a West African village had no privacy for prayer in their huts, so they formed the habit of retiring to the bush to get quiet moments with God. Soon from each hut where there was a Christian a little track could be seen leading into the bush. If they grew slack in prayer, the track soon became overgrown and then some watchful elder Christian would approach the back-sliding one and say: "Brother, there is something wrong with your track." In these days of haste it is good to remember that if we are too busy to pray, we are busier than the Heavenly Father wants us to be.

A MAN OF SORROWS

7 - *Satisfied*

A study in
Isaiah 53

"He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant be satisfied; make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53.11 RSV).

How has the reconciliation of all who will, been effected? It is by the knowledge possessed by our Lord. Knowledge of God, gained by His presence with the Father "before the world was", when He was at the Father's right hand. Knowledge of man, gained during His earthly life when He was made like man that He might share with men in all their infirmities and sorrows, and be made a merciful and faithful High Priest able to have compassion upon the ignorant and them that are out of the way. Knowledge of the Devil and his wiles, gained both from the times before the fall of Lucifer, when he was a sinless creature in the high courts of Heaven, and in the time when he bore the grim title of prince of this world. It was because of this knowledge that our Lord was able to carry out His mission with inflexible determination and assurance of ultimate triumph. He, the Lord of glory, was of necessity possessed of all knowledge; that is why His personality is presented under the name of "Wisdom" in the early chapters of the Book of Proverbs.

In later days the "Wisdom" of early Jewish thought became the "Logos" or word, thought, mind, of God. The "Logos" in turn became identified with the Man of Nazareth when John, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told his listeners that the "Logos" had been made flesh so that the invisible and incomprehensible Son of God might be manifest amongst them and to them. So the One who lived among men, ministering to them, who taught them, suffered with them and ultimately suffered for them, was Himself the repository of all Divine wisdom and knowledge. Thus it was that by knowledge the One we love and serve, justified many.

"He shall bear their iniquities." 'When' He shall bear their iniquities, is the right thought. It is when Jesus has borne the iniquities of the children of men and given Himself a Ransom for all, that the basis for justification is laid down. Even then one is not automatically justified, for there is the human part in this as well as God's. No one can be justified by faith until they have exercised faith and become conscious of faith in Jesus Christ. No one can enjoy the state of reconciliation with God until they have first accepted Jesus as their Saviour and trusted in Him as the basis of their acceptance before God. And no one can attain that state without repentance – repentance for the sin of the past, repentance for their share in the undone state of the world, repentance for all that is out of accord with the Divine ideal. Not many thus repent today. Even though God has, since Pentecost, extended to all men a call to repentance, few of earth's

millions have heard the call and fewer have heeded it. The world continues in sin and the Redeemer bears its iniquities, until at length they are forever removed by the cleansing measures of His Kingdom. In that day God's Plan of salvation will reach its glorious climax and as the fruit of the coming of the Lord in human form "for the suffering of death" many will be justified.

"Therefore will I appoint him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (vs. 12).

This final verse is something like the "Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's "Messiah". It is the acclamation of triumph that ends the story. This glorious climax was inevitable from the first; there was no doubt at all of its coming, but none the less it resounds with notes of joy and gladness which could not have been struck before. This is the Father setting the seal of His own satisfaction upon all that has been done. The first two clauses of this verse picture a victorious warrior returning from battle to receive honour and reward from His King. The Lord Jesus Christ is the warrior and He has vanquished death and all its powers and driven sin and evil far away so that they can never return. There are many captives and trophies of the battle. All those things which in any way have opposed the righteousness of God or have flouted His laws or have ravaged His dominion have been subdued and led captive by the conquering Christ. All enemies have been put under His feet. But since He also is to be subject unto God Who did put all things under Him, that God may be all in all, it is an entirely appropriate picture here that shows him bringing the trophies and spoils of victory to God His Father, as it were, and receiving back from His Father's hands the honour that is rightfully His. We know what that honour is; in the name of Jesus shall every knee bow, both in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So when the Father is depicted as declaring *"I will appoint him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong"* He implies that He himself is the great and the strong one to whom has been rendered the spoils of war and who divides those spoils with the Son, the victor in the conflict. In no better manner could we have shown to us the unity which exists between the Father and the Son in the final triumph over evil. The whole Plan of Redemption is of the Father; its execution is by the Son. The power which overthrows evil is of the Father; that power is wielded by the Son. During a long period sin was upon the Earth but the time for the work of atonement was *"born into the world to save sinners"* the Father in heaven who dwelt in the indescribable light which no man can approach unto, and the Son on Earth, made in the form of a bondman, in the likeness of humanity, remained still in the intimacy of unfettered communion and the harmony of perfect unity. When the time of sacrifice and suffering was

ended and the way prepared for men to walk the highway back to God, the risen Christ ascended to perfect reunion with his Father, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. In all of this the relationship of the Son to the Father is clearly shown; and now in the end of all things the Son received from the Father excellent honour and glory. God the Father has appointed him a portion with himself – 'the great'; He has graciously given that the Son shall divide the spoil with Himself the strong, and so the heavenly chorus goes up in jubilation "Worthy is the Lamb That was slain to receive riches, and power, and honour, and glory, and blessing".

For three-and-a-half years He faithfully carried out His earthly commission and the whole of that ministry was a pouring out of His life unto death. Jesus not only died for men; He also lived for them, and that living was in itself a dying, for He died daily, giving and being given, spending and being spent, yielding to all who would partake His flesh which was given for the life of the world.

He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. Becoming poor involved His being counted among the transgressors, He who knew no sin. It involved being condemned as a criminal, He who knew no guile, neither was deceit found in His mouth. He the holy, the sinless one, was put to death as an offender against the holy laws of God, and counted among the criminals of this world. In bearing away the sins of mankind He was himself accounted a sinner. That is the final note of triumph. By this very means He made intercession for the condemned and dying race before the Throne of God, and established His plea. The fallen sons of men, despairing and dying in the darkness, without hope and without God in the world, all unwittingly saw a great light. Adam's children, sitting unheeding in the land of the shadow of death, found the light streaming upon them. The Light of the world shone at length into their hearts, transforming the fear and gloom and terror into peace and joy and love. The all-powerful wisdom of God had found a way – the only way – whereby the creation of His hands could achieve its fore-ordained destiny despite the invasion of sin. The holy Son of God, looking down from His exalted station in the heavens "*shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied*", and from all the Earth shall arise the joyful chorus in honour of the God who planned it all – "*Lo, this is our God... we have waited for him ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*".

The End

TH

PURPOSE IN CREATION

The Book of Genesis is the book of 'origins' and the first chapter shows the very beginning of everything in so far as God has been pleased to reveal His work in the material world. That is reflected in those very first words in Genesis 1.1 *"In the beginning God..."*. Science seems to have the same starting point. Whether studying the early chapters of Genesis or what science has discovered, it is not the data that are disputed but the interpretations of that data. Some will take the words in Genesis very literally while others will see them rather more symbolically but either way the Scriptures reveal God's purpose in Creation as an expression of His love. Through the ages from Creation in Genesis to the Holy City in Revelation, God is fulfilling His purpose in love that was expressed in the life of His Son. The New Testament discloses that the Son was involved in making everything that was made (John 1.3; Col. 1.16)

Genesis 1 is a poem of great beauty and grandeur. It displays God's majesty and mystery. The curtain is drawn back just a little to show us a fascinating glimpse of His purpose expressed in the work of His fingers. (Psalm 8.3). It is not easy to understand why God chose to create mankind, and also animal and plant life and place them in such a wonderful home. This planet appears to be unique in the vast universe in having characteristics just right for its purpose and therefore as the only known habitat for living things

It began formless and empty, a whirling globe of hot gases. The discoveries of science confirm the accuracy of Genesis in the order that God made all things: matter, light, plants, marine and land animals; and finally man. Entropy and the Second Law of Thermodynamics suggest that God 'wound up' the spring of the universe to its complexity and since then it has been running down -- getting simpler.

One of the biggest problems in matching human investigation with God's revelation is the use in Genesis of the word 'day'. It has been commonly assumed that the word 'day' is a '24 hour day'. The word used in the Hebrew text is 'Yome' and can mean an 'age' or a long period of time and it could be translated 'epoch', as well as a period of 24 hours. It has no specified length and need never have been a point of dispute between science and religion. P. J. Wiseman in his book 'Creation Revealed in Six Days' suggests that the six days of Genesis 1 may have been the periods of time when God was revealing what He had done in Creation to the one who wrote down Genesis.

Which ever theory we choose to explain the beginning of things, such as the 'Big Bang', the fascinating thing is that all matter appears to be moving away from the place where it began and this has led one commentator to consider Revelation 20.11 (RSV) *"I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them."*

The next stage in Genesis was 'separation' when land appeared out of the waters or in the words of science 'the continents clustered'. Much of the planet is water – that fascinating liquid, the characteristics of which benefit all living organisms in all kinds of interesting ways. The Earth was now ready for the next big and orderly step in Creation.

Day 3 brought 'greenness' – those extraordinarily complex plant cells containing nature's 'wonder molecule' that we know as chlorophyll. Insects and flowers began their remarkable symbiotic existence where plants provide animals with oxygen and animals expel carbon dioxide which is needed by plants.

The fact that 'lights' appeared on Day 4 does not preclude the possibility that there was light in the Universe before this as stated in v.3. The Bible and Science agree that life began in the waters recorded in the first rock strata. Reptiles followed the insects, then birds and mammals appeared. Finally, God made man in His own image, an intellectual and moral likeness, that gives glory to his Maker as occurs in no other life form in Creation.

Man was given a 'stewardship' – an environmental responsibility that he may have exercised to begin with. Human worship and morality deteriorated after man's rebellion against God and he has dominated nature rather than given proper oversight. Such an attitude has helped to destroy himself as well as the beautiful home that God has provided. Atkinson suggests that "... 'dominion' cannot be exploitation but must be seen in the sort of facilitating servanthood which maintains an environment, in which persons who reflect something of the nature of God's love and creativity, can be at home".

Purpose in Creation is demonstrated by the orderliness of the stars in their courses, in the wonder of genetic material in all living organisms and all the things in between. This has brought some scientists of our day to the point of believing that all things are the product of 'intelligent design'. At least one group base their ideas on what is now known about the complexity of even the simplest form of DNA. Paul Brand described this genetic material when he wrote "The DNA in my body's cells would fit into an ice cube, yet if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back more than four hundred times."

Then God 'rested' on the seventh day. The Eternal God – the one who is altogether omnipotent – in whom all power rests – did not get tired! Genesis 2.2 could mean that He stopped doing that particular task because He had finished it. Alternatively it may mean that He was setting an example to humanity to have a rest on the seventh day. The student might wish to consider Jesus' comments of God resting and working in John 5.17 and also the use of the word 'rest' in Hebrews 3.

The scene changes, 'the serpent' enters the drama of Creation and our first parents failed under test. This was to change their lives completely but it did not

change the purpose of God. It is clear from Genesis 3.8 that God made His presence felt in 'Eden' and He had kept company with Adam and Eve. After their disobedience they would miss the sense of His nearness. Yet the evidence of God's great love in the whole Earth, as the human race inherited it, remains. His provision of systems of defence mechanisms in living organisms might be taken as evidence of His concern for their vulnerability once they had fallen into sin.

Books for further reading and that have helped in producing this study

David Atkinson – The Message of Genesis 1-11 – (IVP)

Derek Kidner – Genesis - An introduction and Commentary (Tyndale Press)

Paul Brand – Fearfully and Wonderfully Made (Zondervan Publishing House)

DN

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus ... for we ... are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake ... so then death works in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4.1-12). It was a case of Paul putting Paul to death, for his brethren's benefit, that life, and strength might be induced in them. It was the life blood of Paul that became the quickener, the energiser of these, his dear brethren in the Lord. When other men might be taking life leisurely – yea, when many of his brethren were taking life easily, Paul was intensively seeking ways and means of putting himself at the service of these believers, hoping thereby to produce spiritual energy in his brethren. Persecution might stop some men, but not this seasoned warrior – perplexities might daunt less determined men but not this unconquerable spirit – “On every side pressed hard, but not hemmed in, without a way, but not without a bye-way, pursued, but not abandoned, thrown down, but not destroyed. At all times the putting to death of Jesus, in our body bearing about.” That is Rotherham's beautiful translation of Paul's intensive words, as he describes what it means for him to serve his Corinthian brethren.

GOD'S SIGNATURE

Our problems look much less terrifying when we realise they are Father-filtered. The filtering is guaranteed in promises such as *“God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear”* (1 Cor. 10.13). In other words, nothing can enter the life of God's child without His signature. His approval is based on what we can bear. He will allow me to be pushed to the building point, but not the breaking point. It's a little like weightlifting. Too much weight will crush us, but greater weight than we have lifted before is reached to make us stronger. Only the Lord knows the difference. He filters every additional load.

Ron Hutchcraft

WATCH AND PRAY

"... what I say to you I say to all: watch" (Mark 13.37).

Our Lord placed much stress on watchfulness. He taught it by direct exhortation, illustrated it by several parables and practised it in His life to such an extent that if the question were put to us, 'when shall we watch?' we must reply, 'always, every moment of consciousness'. The standard set up by a review of our Lord's example and teaching on this matter is exceedingly high; indeed it seems there is nothing more difficult for a Christian to practice.

Regarding watchfulness from a general aspect, it is usual to associate it with ourselves alone, but the Bible assures us that God, the angels, and Satan, all watch. There is also the special prerogative to be exercised by those whose privilege it is to serve the Church, besides the general watchfulness of the whole Church in respect of the Lord's return, which in practice is an individual matter for each one of us.

God watches. This is the all important thing. Is He watching over and for us? The Psalmist says in Psalm 127.1. *"Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"* and the principle holds good whether it be a city or an individual. Is He our Father? Can we go to Him and claim a Father's protecting care? If so, we need not fear. Psalm 121 is full of God's loving care for Israel, *"Behold he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."* If He took such an interest in them, how much more does He watch over us who are recognized as being in Christ, personally represented before Him by His own beloved Son? This psalm alone will furnish material for much thought and comfort. God is represented there as teaching them the necessity of meeting trial and temptation by watchfulness and prayer. When Jesus was face to face with the crisis of His life, when it might reasonably be expected that He would be concerned only with His own need, we find him rising from His knees, going to His disciples and finding them asleep and waking them, saying. *"Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation."* He forgot Himself, desiring only to help them to meet their comparatively light temptations with the same weapon as had brought Him success. No human sympathy could be found for Him, but for them the love and sympathy of the Son of God was expressed in the most practical manner at the very time He was longing for theirs. With what regard then should we seek to watch and carefully consider what it cost Him to help us. In season and out of season to Himself, He never ceased to warn us.

Watchfulness was not given as a command, or as a piece of advice such as a parent might give his son when starting out in the world, but as the last word of love to those for whom He was about to give His life, His dying wish. Does not this enthuse us and make us wish to examine His words again and respond to

them to the very best of our ability? We cannot watch continually without a living motive to sustain us; it would be too arduous, too wearying, but when love demands it what is too hard? If we really loved Him as much as we love some of those around us we should delight in Him more than we do, and we should find His yoke easy and His burden light. If we desire to love Him better, our prayers will continually express that desire, and He will reveal himself to us. Then we shall see things in a new light: place fresh values on everything, and in Christ become 'overcomers'. *Watchfulness is love in action.*

Watchfulness presupposes vigilance, wakefulness, to take heed, to observe. It implies keenness, placing duty to the Lord above every other. It is always coupled with prayer. We have already seen that God must watch for us, otherwise it is useless for us to watch. Paul in Col. 4.2, exhorts like Jesus and his last words to Timothy included an exhortation to be watchful in all things (2 Tim. 4.5). How can we be delivered from entering into temptation, seeing that we are surrounded by it, and even more, seeing that it comes from within also? Here lies the reason for prayer; watchfulness alone would not save us, or we should attribute overcoming to our own strength. As we are fallen by nature how can we watch against evil in our own strength? So He bids us pray, taking our joys, temptations, trials, victories and failures to Him that we might remember that all our ways are ordered of the Lord. What room is there for the selfish counsel our hearts would dictate? What opportunity is there for the Adversary's suggestions to take root if we watch our thoughts, words and conduct by applying the principles of the Word to them and seek His blessing and guidance continually? Why should we not lift up our hearts to God in mental prayer at any time, wherever we are, whatever we are doing? There is a tremendous power latent in that.

The Scriptures show also that Satan watches, and the Apostle in 1 Pet. 5.8 tells us that we are to be sober, vigilant and watchful that we may resist him, steadfast in the faith. James tells us that if we resist him he will flee from us. The watchfulness of Satan may be defeated by being vigilant ourselves. If we do not watch there is the possibility of being devoured.

In Rev. 3.1-5 the Church at Sardis was exhorted to watch and strengthen the things that remain, and some were specially commended because they had kept their garments pure. This is to be the aim and object of watchfulness. If we fail to watch to keep ourselves pure we shall be judged and found wanting in an hour when we think not. Have we set our hearts on being with Him and being accounted worthy? Then let us watch and not let our garments be defiled by anything impure either from within or without. Let us set ourselves this daily task for love of Him who will not be ashamed to confess our names before God and His holy angels.

*Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for thine appointed hour:
To fit us by thy grace to share
The triumphs of thy conquering power.*

TWW

MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE

To what extent was Matthias generally accepted as the twelfth Apostle in succession to Judas, after the latter's betrayal of Jesus? The outstanding position of Paul in later times has led to a very general feeling that he was the twelfth Apostle although there is no statement to that effect in the New Testament. He was certainly an Apostle, but conceivably of a different order, like Barnabas (Acts 14.14) who is also called an Apostle. In any case Paul was virtually unknown to the Apostles, except Peter, or to the Judean and Galilean churches for at least ten years after the Resurrection. It is unlikely that these believers would readily have accorded him the status of one of the Twelve unless and until they had become thoroughly familiar with him. The account in Acts 1.15-26, relating how Matthias came to be selected as the successor to Judas immediately after the Ascension states plainly that he was accepted by the assembled church as such after prayer and the seeking of the Lord's will.

The question is sometimes raised as to the precise meaning of the phrase in Acts 2.14 *"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said"*. Does this imply that Peter was included in the 'eleven' or that he stood up with eleven others? If the latter, it is clear that Matthias was present and shared in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with its miraculous gifts. This, in turn, if correct, would seem to imply Divine acceptance of Matthias as one of the Twelve.

The answer to the question lies in the usage of the preposition '*sun*' - with. Parallel instances in the New Testament seem conclusive that the meaning here is that Peter stood up with **eleven** others; there were twelve in all. As illustration, note the following examples,

Acts. 1.14 *"These all (apostles) continued ... in prayer with the women," and
"Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren."*

Acts 1.21-22 *"Wherefore of these men ... must one be ordained to be a
witness **with** us of his resurrection."*

Acts 3.4 *"And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him **with** John."*

Acts 3.8 *"And he, leaping up ... entered **with** them into the temple."*

Had the writer of Acts intended to convey that Peter was included in a total number of eleven he would have used a different preposition meaning 'among' as he did in fact use in numerous instances of which the following are examples.

Acts 1.17 *"He (Judas) was numbered among us."*

Acts 4.34 *"Neither was there any among them that lacked."*

Acts 5.12 *"By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people."*

It is true that Matthias is never mentioned again in the New Testament. His later life and career are completely unrecorded. In this he is not alone. Neither are those of the apostles Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, James of Alpheus and Simon the Zealot. Absence of further reference is evidently no indication of Divine non-recognition. It is more probable that Matthias continued to be recognized as one of the Twelve in Judean and Galilean circles of the Early Church and spent his life among them, as did others. So Matthias did faithful pastoral and missionary labours among the home Churches while Paul and Barnabas, Apostles to the Gentiles, wrought mightily in mission fields far away from the original birthplace of the Church.

The word Apostle means one sent forth, or one dispatched as an ambassador. The Twelve Apostles were so named by Jesus because they specially represented Him and went forth to preach His message. After His Ascension it was felt that the members of the Twelve should all have been witnesses of His resurrection, a logical enough conclusion if they were to continue as His representatives and ambassadors. Matthias was evidently one of the many believers who had seen the Lord after His resurrection, and also had companied with Him during His lifetime from the beginning of His ministry (Acts 1.21-22). Paul could claim by reason of his experience on the Damascus road to be a witness to the Lord's resurrection but not to have companied with Him during His life on earth. The Apostleship of Paul was exercised in a different sphere and it is possible that after all it was Matthias who completed the number of the Twelve, at least in the eyes of Jerusalem Christians. In any case the Twelve separated soon after Pentecost and were scattered over the Eastern world and they never functioned as an entity again.

AOH

"Go to the ant O sluggard; and see, and emulate his ways, and become wiser than he. For whereas he has no husbandry, nor anyone to compel him, and is under no master, he prepares food for himself in the summer, and lays by abundant store in harvest. Or go to the bee, and learn how diligent she is, and how earnestly she is engaged in her work; whose labours kings and private men use for health, and she is desired and respected by all: though weak in bodily strength, she is increased by honouring wisdom."

Prov. 6.6-8 Septuagint -- the italic passage is extra to the AV

The expression came as quite a shock. I was reading a church magazine, and there it was: that the Holy Spirit should 'become cold, dirty and stagnant'.

It must surely be impossible for God's Spirit to be ineffective and unpleasant as the phrase seemed to imply. Of course, it was a picture, a metaphor of a spiritual reality. But no! Impossible.

Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well about the water that He would give, a spring of water welling up in her, to eternal life (John 4.14). And on the last day of the feast in Jerusalem, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, *"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7.38.) Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."* This picture of the Spirit is of living water, clean, clear, fresh and moving. In John 6.63 He states *"It is the spirit that gives life ... the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."* The word of God is *"living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4.12-13). Nothing ineffective there. Christians are *"a letter from Christ, delivered by [the apostles] written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God"*, written on our hearts and not with a ball point on paper (2 Corinthians 3.3). For the Spirit gives life. *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you"* (Romans 8.11).

This effectiveness of the Spirit was seen in Acts in particular actions. The power promised by Jesus *"when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"* was demonstrated when they spoke in foreign languages (Acts 2.4); when they *"spoke the word of God with boldness"* (Acts 4.31); when Paul looked intently on Elymas the magician, and spoke to him and he became blind (Acts 13.9).

Having considered all of this, I had a creeping thought whether there might be a valid point lurking behind the unpleasant, and inaccurate and unscriptural expression in the magazine. After all, did not Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5.19 say, *"Do not quench the Spirit"*? A different picture obviously, the Spirit as fire and not water, but what would be the state of things in that fellowship if the Spirit had been 'quenched'? Or with Timothy if he failed to rekindle the gift of God that was in him through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1.6)? Why should Timothy bother to train himself in godliness (1 Timothy 4.7)? And what about the servant in Jesus' parable, who failed to make use of the talent he had been

given (Matthew 25.18)? In all these cases there is a coldness, an ineffectiveness, a stagnant faith. The deficiency is not in the Holy Spirit (perish the thought!) but in our response.

In fact, as I read the whole article, 'the constant flow of the Holy Spirit' was compared to having a shower. The water is pure, clean, and above all else, flowing ... not cold, dirty and stagnant, but enriching and prosperous. It is not the Holy Spirit that needs to be refreshed but ourselves, so that we are able to grow and be of use when this generously given gift is bestowed on us.

GC

ENTERING CANAAN

Entering the Promised Land was a significant part of Jewish history, and the phase has resonance in Christian thought. The Israelites had to face hard realities and they learned what it meant to be God's Chosen People. For us there is the experience of 'crossing Jordan' and there are comparisons we can make between their experience and ours, whether as 'types and shadows' or less precisely because they lived by faith just as we do. What are the moral implications in the lives of a people who God has chosen and are part of His purposes?

The long wilderness march was over and Israel stood on the banks of the Jordan looking across at the Promised Land. A generation before, they had escaped the fury of the Egyptian army and faced the hazards of the desert. Here they had learned to depend upon God for guidance and for their daily food and water. They went southward to avoid the recently settled 'Sea People' who we know from Scripture as the Philistines. Their way of life was efficient and they were good soldiers armed with iron weapons. Israel also went southward so that they could be established in their religion and covenant. It was at Sinai that they had learned about their Law and how obedience to it would mean prosperity and protection in the land to which God was leading them.

Israel discovered at Sinai, if they did not know it before, that they were a chosen people, God's own special people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.5, 6) This was a particular relationship that God had offered to the descendants of Abraham not because they were specially good or in prospect were going to be any better than other nations, nor because they were a numerous people (Deut. 7.6-9), but God in His love for the patriarchs and in His wisdom saw in this nation those qualities that would make them the most suitable people to bring salvation to the remainder of the world. During those years in the wilderness they discovered that they were the people of Yahweh and that their God was 'good', who loved righteousness and demanded the highest moral standard from His people. He punished as well as rewarded and He did this not for revenge or spite but because He loved them. By the time they arrived at the banks of the Jordan they had known rebellion and disobedience, idolatry

and failure, and the national character was beginning to grow by experience. Already a large land area east of the River Jordan was in their hands and had been allocated to some of the tribes as their inheritance. But things were about to change and they were to have a new leader. The mighty influence of Moses had gone. He had been a very great man who had reached high moral-spiritual standards. He had also had much conflict with his fellow Israelites because of their failure to reach God's standards. Now at their head stood a man whose name meant 'God saves' - the name of the 'Coming One', the Saviour of the world.

What lessons does Israel's entry into Canaan have for us? Can we learn from this momentous chapter in Israel's history. Traditionally, Israel's crossing of the River Jordan and their settlement in the Promised Land has been used as a picture of Christians transferring from Earth to Heaven. Hence the writing of such hymns as 'Guide me O thou great Jehovah' where spiritual Israel wanders through the desert in this life and at last enters heaven by passing over Jordan where all troubles cease. This experience inspired some negro spirituals. Joshua's life was viewed as one of victory followed by the 'rest'. It was a simple interpretation that gave comfort to the harrowed souls whose lives were so often miserable. Two things alter that way of looking at this history. One is that the Christian life has never been all victory and rest. The second is that a closer examination of the book of Joshua reveals a time of conflict and partial success and this aptly describes the Christian life that most of us know. It is easy to write and speak of the Christian life in glowing terms, where virtual perfection appears so easy and where joy and peace are enjoyed right from the start of the Christian life. Some authors and preachers give the impression that Christians should enjoy a life that is 'a bed of roses' and believers sit at the feet of Jesus and never do anything wrong. That is not the kind of life described in the New Testament - (see Romans 7). The Christian life often has conflict, with a measure of victory and rest.

Old Testament characters were more than puppets whose lives were a special pattern for our learning. Israel's great men and women were really alive, flesh and blood like us, whose experiences had a personal meaning for themselves. They too had the God-given faculty of choice in how they behaved, yet they were willing clay in the Master Potter's hands. Their failures are recorded as honestly as their successes and reveal to us how God can use 'failures' but He doesn't deliberately make them. In the records of the lives of Joshua and men and women of old there are principles at work which also work in our lives and it is in this way that God has used them and uses us for His great purpose.

Israel believed that they were the Chosen People of God. They have held tenaciously to that belief for thirty-five centuries and in itself it has been a means of retaining their corporate national identity. No other people has undergone such efforts to destroy and disperse them. Their existence spells out the

destruction of religions and philosophies that are false and defy the one true God. As Christians we share the 'election' of God. Just as Israel was told that its people were special to God, a people with a purpose, so are we, Christian followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant in His words at the Last Supper (John 14.23) *"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him."* In his first letter, Peter uses the very words of the Exodus covenant (Ex. 19.6) to refer to the people of God in the present time. *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Pet. 2.9, 10). It was this thought that enabled Israel to endure dark days in their conquest of Canaan when the foe seemed insurmountable and failure seemed to dog their steps. Do disappointment and failure cause us to stumble? Do we feel the problems against us are too great to bear? It is not arrogance or conceit to believe that we are the people of God. In later centuries when Israel believed that they could obtain victory in their own strength and wisdom, or that it was impossible to win, they not only failed but were severely punished by exile and suffering. Like Israel, we do not earn or deserve the progress we have made so far, but it is cause for comfort amid the fears and troubles. Our God knows our plight and what we suffer either because of our own sin or the sins of others, and permits it for our eternal good.

Before Israel crossed the River Jordan two of their number were sent across to the city of Jericho. They spied out the city and found lodging and hiding with a rather dubious character called Rahab. When her fellow citizens made enquiries about these strangers being in her house she deliberately lied and told them that she had seen them go out of the city before the gates had been closed at nightfall. She then went to the men who she had hidden under flax and made a bargain with them. It is apparent that she had some knowledge of who they were and how their God was giving them the land. Fear, wonderment or admiration may have caused her to betray her own people, but this she did trusting that the Israelites would save her when they took the city.

How should a Christian behave in such a situation? Is it right for Christians to take up the ancient and 'honourable' career in espionage? If we take up such work should we lie our way out of a difficult situation? Is not the very consideration impossibly abhorrent to us? Yet looking through history one wonders how many who have named the name of Christ have actually experienced this. In Israel their philosophy was based on simpler principles. Israel were in covenant relationship with God through the Law given through Moses. The people of Jericho were uncircumcised Gentiles and had no right to a place in the land - God's land. They worshipped idols and did all kinds of evil that was connected with their false religion. With this perspective all Canaanites

were to be destroyed. By the help she had given to Israel, Rahab was now under their covenant. Her trust was now in God and He could accept her as 'righteous'. Her treachery to the people of Jericho and her deception of the police were not moral problems for Rahab or the spies.

The story is all the more interesting because Rahab is mentioned in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrew 11.31 and James 2.25 and is referred to as one who was put right with God. She had shown kindness to two of God's people in their plight. But why was it necessary to send spies to Jericho? Was not its destruction a foregone conclusion? Whatever the answer to these questions Rahab had the supreme reward of marrying Salmon and thus was included in the ancestry of Jesus; one of the several foreign women used to bring the Saviour into the world.

DN

"The cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times." (John 13.38 RSV). Jesus was not referring to the familiar morning call of the rooster. In any case, it is said that no cocks were allowed to remain in Jerusalem during the Passover feast. What Jesus did refer to was the twice repeated Roman trumpet call signalling the changing of the guard, first at the third watch (midnight) and then the fourth watch (3.00 am). These two watches were called the 'cock-crowings', the trumpet or bugle used for the purpose being known as the 'Gallus' meaning 'cock' or 'crower' (see Ferrar Fenton footnote on Matt. 26.34). This is the meaning of the allusion in Mark 13.35 *"Watch therefore – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning"*. The second of the calls was habitually called 'the cock-crowing' by the people generally because it more noticeably heralded the coming of dawn within another two hours or so; Mark is the only one who speaks of the double cock-crowing and this is because he, as so often in his Gospel, seems to have preserved the actual words spoken by Jesus.

1 Kings 7.23 gives a detailed description of the size of the 'molton sea' (*the brazen sea*) of the temple. It has a diameter (*"from one brim to another"*) of 10 cubits and a circumference (*"a line ... did compass it round about"*) of 30 cubits. Remember your geometry. The formula for the circumference of a circle is pi times the diameter. According to this scripture the circumference of the brazen sea was 3 times the diameter. The value of pi is just over 3 (3.14159). As far as we know this scripture therefore contains the earliest approximation of the value of pi.

Larry Urbaniak – Berean News May 2003

FAMINE IN THE LAND

"The days come that I will send a famine in the land: not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord" (Amos 8.11).

That old Hebrew prophet was a far-sighted man. He knew that the course of history could end only in one way. The continued ignoring of God would at last lead to almost complete ignorance of His Word. The prophets of old had great reverence for much of the written Word as they had it in their day. There was much less than we have now but it became the rule of life by which they lived and the infallible authority on which they based their claim to speak. Some of the prophets added to the words of the Book for the benefit of those who were to come after them. Amos, the herdsman, who spoke and probably wrote the words quoted above, was one of these and in his denunciation of the rampant evils in his own lifetime we see a vivid picture of the condition of world society today.

"When the Son of Man cometh," asked Jesus of His disciples, *"shall he find faith on the earth?"* His words upon other occasions leave us in no doubt as to His answer to His question. In the wondrous wisdom of the Divine Plan, His return to earth in the power of His second coming was to wait until the world was near to self-destruction because its own wilfulness and selfishness. By then the world would have mostly rejected God and turned away from His Word. Jesus might readily have said that the Son of Man would not come until faith had been almost extinguished in the earth. So it has been. Events in the political, commercial and social spheres of the world for nearly a century past have so abundantly fulfilled Biblical prophecy that many believers have little doubt that the end of the Age is upon us. It is the time of God's intervention in the affairs of the nations. During this same period there has been a steady decline in religious belief and an increasing ignorance of God's Holy Word.

It is clear from surveys and quiz programmes that elementary knowledge of the Bible is much less common than it was a century ago. Younger people are less likely to recognize Bible names than a generation ago. The majority of people today are appallingly ignorant of the basic facts of Christianity, the nature of the Christian life and the contents of the Word of God.

The Hebrew prophets in their day found themselves faced with a situation such as this and never hesitated to draw public attention to the fact and to denounce it; but they also never failed to go on to the remedy. They did not interpret their mission as one of condemnation only. They set themselves up as teachers of the Word that had become almost universally despised, and out of that Word they brought all the assurances and the warnings that God had caused to be written concerning the inevitable consequences of continuing in a wrong course. They declared, on the authority of that Word, the way to be taken. If men changed their course, instead of disorder and unhappiness, they would be

peaceful and prosperous with the happiness of any people who recognize the Word of God.

The prophets' teaching was positive, even to the verge of dogmatism. There is no doubt or indecision in what they had to say. They were men who had already learned well the principles of the Word and applied the principles to the practical problems of life and knew how they worked. It was on that account they were able to stand before the people and speak, as did our Lord at a later date, *"as one having authority, and not as the scribes"*.

The reason that we enjoy today so clear a view of God's purpose, particularly in its prophetic features of the Time of Trouble and the Kingdom that follows it, is because these men were so clear in their understanding and so definite in what they committed to writing. The work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds has given us a sharp, well-defined understanding of God's purpose. *"Other men laboured, and you have entered into their labours"*. The question is what are we going to do about it?

To teach was the primary commission given to the Church. Those who are filled with the Spirit and thoroughly familiar with God's Word are teachers within the Church. Such must show that they have the gift of teaching clearly and understand God's purpose in mankind's creation and His desire for their ultimate happiness. These are not only diligent students of God's Word but have learned to apply it to their lives. They are ready to tell the things of God to those who will listen and are seeking to know more about what God is doing and is going to do in His Kingdom of righteousness. There is a need to help others to know the meaning of full consecration to God and a full realization of their calling in Christ. The message should, then, be built very largely around definite expository teaching of Bible themes.

None who are prepared to listen need be excluded from our evangelistic efforts. God is inviting and selecting the Church to work with Christ in the world's redemption in the Age to come. The message is to be preached to those most likely to respond, who already have a measure of Christian belief and who want to learn more. Such will be glad to learn that everyone is to have a full and fair opportunity to have life and to accept Jesus as their Saviour, those who perhaps have never heard of Him.

It is important that the way is seen as being hard. The tendency of this modern age is to make all things very easy for everyone. Whether it is in labour-saving devices in the home, information technology for every conceivable subject, or a State welfare system that lifts all personal responsibility from the shoulders of John Citizen and makes those interests the responsibility of the State. The universal appeal is "take this, it is easy". God's way is not like that, and the Christian way is not easy. Our message should stress the fact that its acceptance will cost something. The life into which it leads and

the benefits it brings will be found well worth the cost; but there is a price. Some may think those who take their stand on the Lord's side will be preserved from all physical harm in the evil day or that the Church will be "gathered home to escape the trouble coming on the earth." Whatever the truth in that understanding of God's Word, it is quite immoral and unscriptural to hold out that kind of inducement for people to accept Christianity and Christ. The early Christians certainly had no such bait held out to them. They accepted Christ knowing full well it might very easily mean wild beasts in the arena, or the stake in later days.

Our task, then, is to relate the understanding of Scripture and of the Divine Plan that is ours to the state of present day knowledge and the pageant of current events, so that those who seek a fuller understanding may continue to progress. In so doing, we shall be using our energies and abilities and resources to the best advantage, like the man in the parable who by the more judicious use of his "pound" eventually gained ten pounds. It would seem that his endeavours resulted in his attainment of qualifications for future administration to a higher degree than those of his fellows.

We are acquainted with the weak-in-faith brother who surveys the empty chairs and proclaims that the meeting will be a failure. So it will be with those who feel that Jezebel has slain all the prophets and pulled down all the altars and only we few are left. The Lord may well show us those whom he has kept, of whom we knew nothing. It remains true that there is a famine of the Word of the Lord in the earth, and if we are anything like the first disciples whom we claim to take for our examples, *"we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*

The Christian is a traveller, his life is a journey, heaven is his goal and his road lies through a wilderness. How earnestly and devoutly ought he then to pray *"O send out thy light and thy truth that they may lead me and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling!"* For surely *"the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the ways of life"*. The word of God discovers us to our errors; it shows us where we lost our way, and how we may find and recover it again. If we take this "lamp" in our hand, it will not only enable us to see the right course, but it will also direct us in every step, and guide our feet aright in the path of holiness and peace. Only let us apply our heart to the Word of life and walk with God, then we may sing His praises as we pass through every trouble, and we shall sing them for ever.

(Abridged from an article by AOH in 1950)

When we depend upon organisations, we get what organisations can do. When we depend upon education, we get what education can do. When we depend upon man, we get what man can do. **When we depend upon prayer we get what God can do.**

THE QUIET TIME

"My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places"

FAITH

*I know not the way that's before me,
The joys or the griefs it may bring;
What clouds are o'er hanging the future,
What flowers by the wayside may spring.
But there's One who will journey beside me,
Nor in weal nor in woe will forsake,
And this is my solace and comfort,
"He knoweth the way that I take."*

HAPPINESS

The early Franciscans were so happy that they laughed aloud in Church. They were called God's glee men. The early Methodists stole some of their best hymn tunes from the opera, and set the songs of Zion to dance music.

My God, I am Thine, What a comfort Divine!

And my soul it doth dance at the sound of Thy Name.

A man who met the Cliff College evangelists on the beach at Clacton-on-Sea, and who was converted through their ministry, said that their holiness was of the "radiant, rollicking" type. The early-day Salvationists danced for joy. William Booth said that if the Spirit moved them they could leap for joy in hymn or prayer. And they did.

FAMILY LOVE

It is in His Church that God's heart may be said specially to be, there it unfolds itself in a way such as it can do amid no other order of His creatures. There it shows itself in all its manifold fulness such as it has no scope for elsewhere. It is in the family alone that the one thing we call affection or love is divided and spread out like a sunbeam into the rainbow's sevenfold hues, there to display itself in all the rich tints of hidden beauty. So it is in the church alone that the love of God is fully seen, not merely in all its intensity, but in all its varied riches. All kinds of love are unfolded there, there is room for such wide variety of affection both between the Head and the members and between the members one with the other that it seems as if there had been given new powers of loving as well as new objects to love.

SELF-CONTROL

Who, of experience, does not know how great a matter a little fire may kindle; how much evil may be started by the fire of the tongue; how many unkind thoughts, evil suspicions, surmises, how much envy, malice, hatred and strife may be started by a mere insinuation? Since the Lord declares, "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,*" it follows that the hearts and lips, from which emanate these evil influences are not controlled by the wisdom that cometh from above, though they be in some measure consecrated to the Lord.

SPIRITUAL VISION

We have today in the advancement of art, in the increase of wealth, in better homes and better furnishings, in improved roads and landscapes and more artistic clothing, in pictures and music and conveniences and wider business prospects and opportunities, in the conveniences of mail, telegraph and telephone — in all these things we have a hundred-fold more to attract our minds and ambitions and desires to the earth and earthly things than had our forefathers of even a century ago. How needful it was that the Lord should open simultaneously to His faithful a clearer understanding of His Word and plan — of the riches of His grace and his loving kindness toward us. His wonderful provisions, that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of the natural man, but God has revealed unto us by His Spirit.

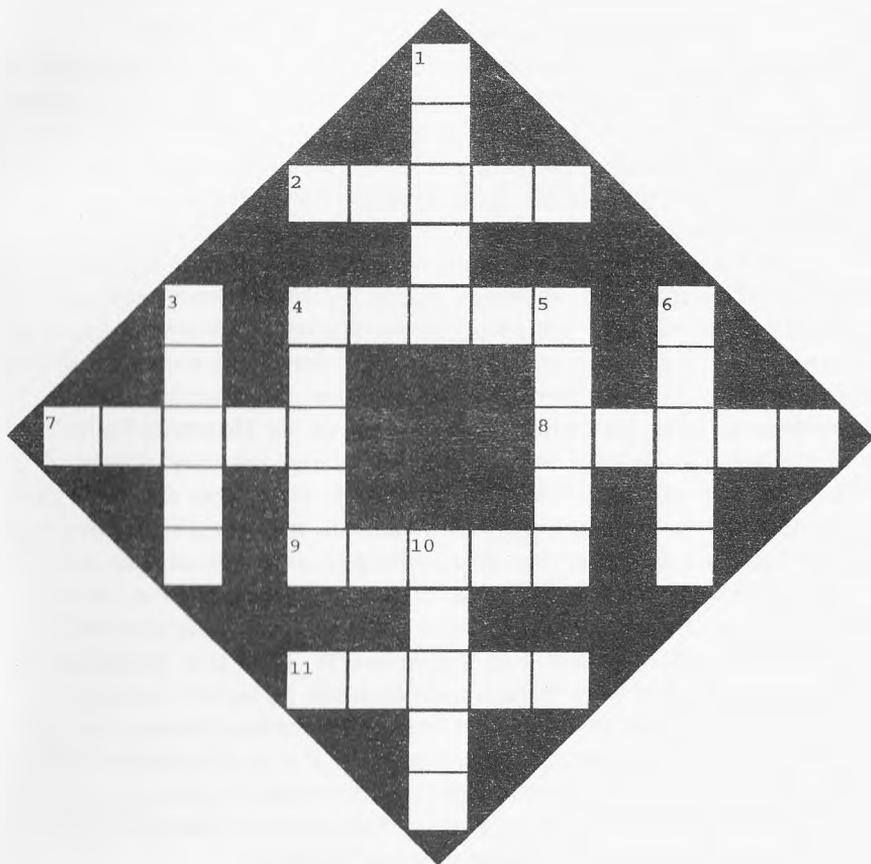
SPIRIT-FILLED

The Greeks used the word *euphoria* to express an immense sense of well being. The true *euphoria* is seen in a puppy which rolls over on the ground for the very joy of being alive; in the lambs gambolling in the fields; in a colt galloping along beside its mother; and in children who skip, dance and run because they cannot keep still. This is the true *euphoria*; and, we believe, should be the portion of those filled with all the fulness of God. Old age comes on far too speedily. The radiant morn of life is the continuous possession of those who are Spirit-filled.

(Reprinted from April 1950)

There will be no energy problems when mankind is reconciled to God and has learned the ways of the Creator. Like the seas that are constantly emptied and filled by the water cycle, so energy will be constantly recycled. People will learn to use God's resources a little less wastefully and a little more thankfully. There can be no place for fossil fuels to run out nor for endless piles of nuclear waste to be disposed of on land or in the sea. But what of the second law of thermodynamics and entropy by which the whole of creation appears to be 'running down'?

BIBLE CROSSWORD



Across

- 2 Heroine of Faith
- 4 Laughed
- 7 A stump shooting
- 8 Hosca's wife
- 9 Son of Ner
- 11 Philistine idol

Down

- 1 Anna's tribe
- 3 Son of Beeri
- 4 Had a famous queen
- 5 Egyptian maid
- 6 Samuel home
- 10 Where Abraham went with Lot

AS NEVER MAN SPOKE

"They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." (Mark 1.22 RSV)

Christ's teaching was warm, tender and vibrant with the love for people and compassion for their unhappy condition. Yet His words had a calm authority that carried conviction for *"no man ever spoke like this man."* As He spoke of things He had witnessed in the glory of that spiritual realm of which God is at once the centre and the all-in-all, Jesus spoke to the hearts of men and women and His words came with the inward power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Do our ears hang on the words of the Master in the Gospels as He spoke the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and as He drew lessons from every day stories and built up pictures of the Kingdom in His parables? No one knew what 'love' was until He told the parable of the Good Samaritan nor did they know what God was like until He showed us in the father of the prodigal.

Christians in every generation have rejoiced in our Heavenly Father's own way of imparting knowledge to mankind, knowledge not only of Himself and His Plan, but also of themselves, their relation to each other and their mutual obligations and responsibilities as fellow-citizens of the earth. But those who remain to listen are far fewer than those who turn away *"to walk no more with him"*. Men and women would rather listen to earthly leaders, the modern media or entertainment. But the day will dawn when He will be appreciated by all when God will judge the world in righteousness. Then that gentle, insistent teaching of the stranger from Galilee will come into its rightful heritage.

We can be confident of those who have accepted the Divine principles of God's teaching and have rejected earthly policies. But let us beware of listening to those who claim our attention by right to enforce their dogmas by appeals to the intellect. Let us beware in our Christian fellowship of that spirit that makes worldly thinkers apprehensive for the future of humanity.

Our salvation is in Christ's words for He said *"If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* In quiet discussion of Scriptural teaching, by the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, the word of old will be fulfilled, *"And they shall be all taught of God; and great shall be the peace of your children."*

CROSSWORD REFERENCES

Across

- 2 Hebrews 11.31
- 4 Genesis 18.13
- 7 Isaiah 11.1
- 8 Hosea 1.3
- 9 1 Samuel 14.50
- 11 1 Samuel 5.2

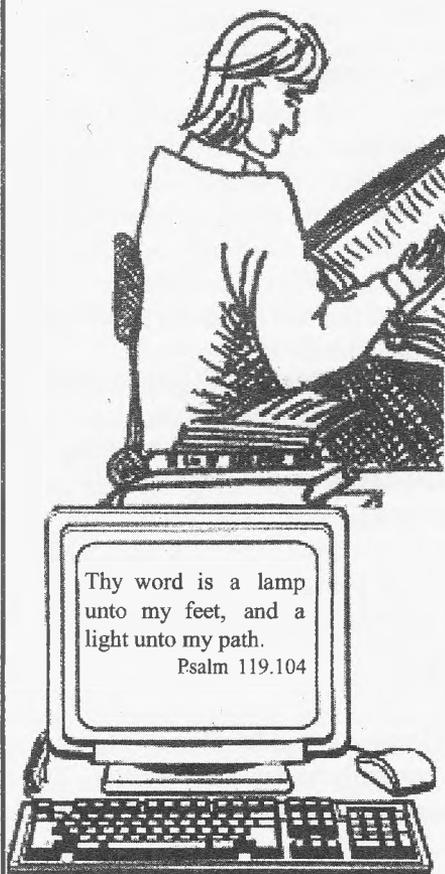
Down

- 1 Luke 2.36
- 3 Hosea 1.1
- 4 1 Kings 10.1
- 5 Genesis 16.3
- 6 1 Samuel 25.1
- 10 Genesis 13.1

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.) It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

We have been greatly encouraged by the kindly comments received in recent months. Feedback is always helpful, whether approval or criticism, because it helps us to assess the value to readers of material presented. So if you feel strongly about any aspect of the magazine please write direct to the editor about it. Beyond anything else, we seek the Lord's will and wish only to be obedient to Him. We try to act on His 'leading' whether from comments or articles received. Sometimes, material may be published that has a wide interest but may not necessarily be the opinion of those serving with BFU.

Doing God's will is a puzzle for many of His people. It is only as we keep in close touch with Him that we can hope to understand what He wants us to do. Constant attention to prayer, with the reading of His Word; listening and watching for His guidance as we walk with Him, does enlighten our minds because He does communicate His will to our hearts.

Many of God's children speak almost enviously of the way in which He spoke to His people of old in the days of the Patriarchs, Prophets and Jesus' disciples. Our privileges are no less - God still makes Himself known.

NOTICES

Literature

Booklets are being reprinted; 'Samuel, Greatest of the Prophets', 'The Cup of the Lord' and 'Bible Book for Today' are currently under consideration. There are certain constraints relative to booklets in stock mainly because of available space and the handling of heavy weights.

We send overseas to many countries. BFU normally handles only its own literature and we do not stock new Bibles. BFU does not supply literature in bulk to new readers and normally we only send sample copies for **such enquiries**. If readers send us Bibles and Bible study helps which they no longer use, we will gladly send them to readers who have a need.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 1 1 John 1.1-7

John's epistles were written in the serenity of old age. The words run on in undisturbed flow, with no outbursts of ebullient zeal or passionate declamation as might be expected if the pen was being wielded by a younger man. The great days of John's activity were over and his life was now given up to exhorting his brethren in brotherly love and Christian consistency. The doctrinal disputations and opposition of false brethren belonged to a bygone time. These letters were addressed, not to the immature in the faith who required care and attention lest they be ensnared by misleading teachings or drawn away by the persecution of civil rulers. They were to mature Christians of many years standing, men and women who had known and laboured with the "beloved disciple" over many years. It is very probable that he composed these gems of thought as his final exhortation before the Lord should call him home.

We do not know exactly when these epistles were written but it might have been about the year AD 90, when John was about eighty-five years of age, during a time when the Church had a rest from persecution of which there is no hint in any part of the epistles and no exhortations such as might be expected if the brethren were undergoing such trials. The time of writing must therefore have been some while after the terrible days of Nero and the destruction of Jerusalem (AD70). Sometime between 80 and 90, therefore, fifty years after the Crucifixion and twenty years after the death of Paul, John then the only surviving Apostle, sat himself down to write these precious words to the Church.

Where were they written? Again we cannot be certain. The tradition is that they were written at Ephesus. The New Testament tells us nothing about John's movements after the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, which would have been held about AD 51. He does not seem to have been at Ephesus when Paul took leave of the elders there for the last time, in AD 58 (Acts 20). But Ephesus was a notable centre of the Church for a considerable number of years afterwards. Timothy was its elder for a long time. Probably John took up residence there after the destruction of Jerusalem and spent perhaps twenty-five years there in devoted service before he died. He may have even written these epistles in anticipation of exile or martyrdom, and in such case he would obviously have expected these letters to constitute his final leave-taking of his brethren in the flesh.

Why were they written? That, at any, rate, is an easy question to answer. They were for the comfort and admonition of his brethren and for all that should come after them and read his words. They were written in fulfillment of his commission as an Apostle, not only to his own generation and people but also to all who in every place and in every time, call upon the name of the Lord.

They were written that we who live nearly two thousand years later may derive Christian instruction and enlightenment from the Spirit-filled mind of the "beloved disciple". *"He being dead, yet speaketh."*

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1. 1-3, omitting the parenthesis which is v.2).

"That which was from the beginning", not only Christ as a Person, but as the glorious Divinity Whom we acknowledge and revere. The use of the term 'that' instead of the personal pronoun 'He' indicates that John is including all that Christ stood for, all His Gospel, all the treasures of wisdom laid up in Him, all His reconciling power and all that His redemptive sacrifice will yet achieve for the sons of men. All of this was provided and foreseen in God's Plan for the *"Lamb slain before the foundation of the world"* and it is all this that John is going to declare unto us. But the centre of it all is the Person of Christ; the focal point of all that he is going to talk about and to which he is going constantly to point, is the Man of Nazareth, Jesus, Who gave Himself a Ransom for All and, being resurrected, is drawing all men unto Himself (John 12.32).

The beginning, then, to which John refers must be that beginning when the Son took His place beside the Father and commenced to exercise those mighty powers which have resulted in creation as we know it. *"Without Him was not anything made that was made (John 1.3).* The "Wisdom" passage of Prov. 8 has its application here. *"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old, or ever the earth was... then I was by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Prov. 8. 22-30).* The Jews of old looked upon this passage as describing the embodiment of the Divine mind and wisdom directed towards this earth, its creation and its affairs. We know that they were right, and that Jesus our Lord is the embodiment of the mind of God so far as this creation in which we live and move and have our being is concerned. In just what way the *"Logos"*, as the Jews termed this personification of Divine Wisdom, commenced to exercise the powers that we believe the Logos did exercise from the beginning of creation, we do not know. God speaks of Him as His *"only-begotten Son"* and that definition we must accept and there leave the matter. It touches upon mysteries too great for us. But John in his gospel brings it into the realm of understandable things when he says that the *"Logos was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth" (John 1.14).*

We may not easily understand just how the *Logos* was, in the beginning, the manifestation of God to His creation, but we do know that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth He appeared to us in form as a man, having laid aside the glory

which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17.5), taking upon Himself the bondsman's form for the suffering of death (Phil. 2.7) and moving amongst us, seen and heard of all. There was a heresy current among the early Christians of John's day called Docetism which claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was not really the Christ at all, that the Christ had entered into a human Jesus at Jordan, inhabited his body, phantom-like, for three and a half years, and departed from it when that body was nailed to the Cross, so that it was only the human Jesus who died. There are many varieties of such "phantom" theories in Christian theology and they are all wrong and dishonouring to God. Jesus Himself said plainly "*I came from the Father and have come into the world: again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father*" (John 16.28), and at that the disciples exclaimed "*Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not in any figure.*" They could understand that; so John here in his epistle is able plainly to say that this very One who was from the beginning is the very One Who, in the days of His flesh, we saw with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and handled with our hands. Acceptance of that plain Scriptural truth is essential to a right understanding of God's Plan of salvation.

"Of the Word of Life." How often it is that the Scriptures associate the three words – Word (or Logos) – Life – Light! "*In Him was life*", says John, "*and the life was the light of men*". That was the true Light, that lights every man that comes into the world. This is really a three-fold definition of Christ's appearing and His message. As the *Word*, or Logos, He came to us from the Father, speaking in the Name of the Father. As the *Light*, He is the Light of the world, enlightening men with the knowledge of His truth and dispelling the darkness of ignorance and superstition and fear. As the *Life*, He is the source of all that men have to hope for in the coming Age, when He is to be the everlasting Father (Isa. 9.6) giving life to the willing and obedient of all mankind. It might truly be said that in these three words is summed up all His great works of three Ages – in the *past*, He was the Word of God, the Logos, by which Word all that has been made was made, the all-sufficient agent of the Father, the personification of the Father's boundless creative energy and activity, of His infinite Wisdom and Power. In the *present*, He is the Light, shining first into our hearts to give knowledge of His glory and grace, and through us to pierce with its streaming rays the darkness of this world's sin and death, bringing comfort and hope to weary souls. In the *future* He will be the Life, calling all men from the grave. He will set their straying feet on the high road that leads to eternal life, revivifying with His mighty power not only the dead hearts of men but also the wasted and despoiled earth itself so that the desert may blossom as a rose and the land shall yield its increase. When death shall be no more and the heavenly Jerusalem reign supreme over the peoples, when the River of Water of Life glints its sparkling waters back to the blue sky of God's faithfulness above, and

the Trees of Life give their fruit for the sustenance of all men, then indeed will Christ be the Life in which all will move and find their being.

The subject is so entrancing and glorious to John, and he is so anxious to impart his assurance to his readers, that he has to throw in a parenthesis between verses 1 and 2, a parenthesis which does not break his chain of thought but intensifies what he has to say. He says, *"the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show to you, that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us."* He repeats himself time and time over in his eagerness to impress his points. The wonder of the revelation of Christ to the disciples was that they *saw: they heard*. To a Jew that must have been a tremendous thing. The nations round about them were accustomed to seeing the images of their gods, but the child of Israel grew up and lived all his life in the teaching that God is invisible and cannot be seen by mortal eyes. Even Moses was permitted but a glimpse of His passing glory, for *"there shall no man see me and live"* (Ex. 33.20) And now God had found a way to reveal Himself to His worshippers. The Word, made flesh, could be seen and heard of men, and it was a wonderful thing, Peter was smitten with the same awe when he said *"we were eye-witnesses of His majesty... and this voice that came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount"* (2 Pet. 1.18). The Logos was manifested, was seen and heard, and they would never lose sight of that great truth.

From verse six the beloved apostle begins to talk of fellowship. The theme is linked up with his previous words. In the first few verses of the chapter he has shown how the Word, the Logos, was manifested in the earth, that He was Life and the source of life, and then that Life was the light of the world. Now he passes on to show the connection between that life and that light, and the fellowship which we claim with God and with our brethren, and when truly entered into, is the hall-mark of our acceptance with God. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"* (1 John 3.14). But such a fellowship is not easily entered into nor lightly bestowed; and the word itself implies much more than is generally supposed.

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not tell the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (vs 6-7).

What is that fellowship with Him?

The word really means communion, and that in turn is the same thing as common union. The bread which we break, asks the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 10, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The same word in the original there, is here rendered "fellowship". *"By whom you were called to the fellowship"* - communion - *"of His Son Jesus our Lord"* (1 Cor. 1.9). This

fellowship with God is something much more deep than a mere feeling of oneness arising from our desire to work the works of God. Abraham was called the Friend of God; David a man after God's own heart; Daniel one "greatly beloved": and all of these entered into close converse with God and some considerable measure of understanding and knowledge of Him but none of them – nor any others in Old Testament times – entered into the fellowship with God which John is talking about here. This fellowship, this communion, is reserved for those who come to God and are included in that "people for His Name" (Acts 15.14) which He is taking out from the nations to become His means of world blessing and world conversion in the next Age. And the proof of this lies in the fact that the indispensable foundation of this entering into fellowship is that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son first cleanses us from all sin. We cannot enter into this fellowship with God until that has taken place. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand"* (Rom. 5.1). None of the heroes of Old Testament times even although they were justified by faith (Jas. 2.21) could know this reconciliation to God by faith in Christ, because Christ had not yet appeared and the Ransom had not yet been given. Even Abraham, and Samuel, and Daniel, must wait until their resurrection into the Messianic Kingdom for that justification.

John tells us that we cannot walk in darkness and have communion with God at one and the same time, and that if we say we can, we lie, and do not the truth. The fact ought to be self-evident; but of course we tend greatly to walk in darkness without admitting or even realizing the fact. We are so apt to make the best of both worlds, to reconcile the irreconcilable, to take the standards of God on our lips but in action to give tacit acceptance, at least to some degree, to the standards of the world. John condemns that. He demands nothing less than absolute sincerity; only thus can we hope to walk in the light. Paul too, is equally emphatic. *"What fellowship" he enquires "hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"* (2 Cor. 6.14-16).

There can be no two ways about this; if we would enter fully into communion – fellowship with God then we must renounce all those things which are not of God and give ourselves completely and unreservedly to His service, faithful to covenant for the rest of our days. That is consecration.

It is thus that we are enabled to walk in the light, for God is light, and he who walks in fellowship with God cannot help but be walking in the light. *"He that follows me" said Jesus, "shall not walk in darkness. But shall have the light of life"* (John 8.12). John's Gospel is full of these little sayings of Jesus concerning

light and the way of life: it is a theme on which his heart was evidently set. "If any man walks in the day, he stumbles not, but if a man walks in the night, he stumbles" (John 11.9-10); and logically "he that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes" (John 12.35). To have fellowship with God means to dwell, by faith and in the spirit of the mind, in 'the light which no man can approach unto' to be in the presence, again by faith, of Him "whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6.16).

This is the position we must occupy if we would have fellowship with God, and that is why it cannot be that we have fellowship with Him if we are still walking in darkness.

(To be continued)

AOH

A NOTE ON MATT. 6.27

"Which of you by taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" (Matt. 6.27). The word rendered "stature" has two meanings. It can refer to a person's height or to his age. In the case of Zaccheus (Luke 19.3) it denoted his height. In those of Jesus "increasing in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2.52), and the healed cripple who was "of age" (John 9.21, 28) it denoted age. In the example in Matthew 6 it is more likely that Jesus intended age rather than physical height. The question at issue was taking thought for the future (v.25), rather than seeking first the kingdom of God, and trusting him to "add all these things" according to need. By no amount of taking thought for the future can one increase one's length of life; that is what Jesus is intimating. Had he intended physical stature he would hardly have used the word for cubit, which was eighteen inches, an absurdity; more likely he would have used *daktylos*, the smallest measure, equal to three quarters of an inch, or *palase*, three inches. The Psalmist in Psa. 39.5 used a similar short measure, the *tepuach* of a little over three inches, when he says "thou hast made my days as an handbreadth." The length of our lives is in the hands of God and no amount of foresight on our part is going to make any difference to that.

Gone From Us

Rev. Dr. A. B. Bensusan (*Republic of South Africa*)

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Brother Larry Webster

"Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away"

THE PROPHET AND THE LION

This is a strange story of the man of God who denounced King Jeroboam for apostasy. Afterwards on account of an apparently trivial breach of instructions he was waylaid and slain by a lion in punishment. Some have asked if God is really so vindictive as the story, on the surface, would appear to indicate.

The scene is set almost immediately after the separation of the Ten Tribes and Two Tribes, consequent upon the death of Solomon, and the account is recorded in 1 Kings 13. Jeroboam had just become the first king of the newly constituted Ten Tribe nation, henceforward to be known as Israel. He had been told by Ahijah the prophet that if he and his people remained faithful to the Lord God of Israel their prosperity was assured. Notwithstanding this he had at once instituted what amounted to idolatrous worship and was actually engaged in personally officiating at the pagan altar when the man of God, sent from Judah for the purpose, publicly reprovved him. Jeroboam gave orders that the prophet be seized for punishment and at once the Lord gave a sign. The altar was torn down from top to bottom and Jeroboam's arm paralysed so that he could not move it. In sudden terror the king begged that his opponent would intercede with the Lord for him. His request granted, the prayer was answered and the king's arm made whole. Impressed with the miracle, and not a little subdued, Jeroboam invited the man of God to accept his hospitality and a fitting reward, but this the prophet declined, saying that he had been instructed neither to eat nor drink in the pagan land or to tarry for any reason, but to return home directly his mission was accomplished.

So far so good. He set out on the way to Judah, but before passing out of Jeroboam's domains sat down to rest under an oak tree. There he was found by an "old prophet" who in his turn invited him to accept the hospitality of his home. He gave the same reply as to Jeroboam, but the old prophet went further. He told the man of God that he also was a prophet of God and that an angel of the Lord had commissioned him to bring the traveller into his house and insist on his sharing a meal. "*But*" says the narrator "*he lied to him*". Willing to believe the story, the traveller gave way and returned with the old prophet. Whilst at table, the Spirit of the Lord came upon his host and under that influence he told the traveller that because he had disobeyed the commandment of God he would meet his death in a strange land. The narrative goes on to describe how, upon resuming his journey, he was attacked and killed by a lion, and his body buried in the old prophet's own tomb, with an expression of grief on the part of the latter and a declaration that the dead man's prediction concerning the fate of the nation would surely come to pass.

As related, the whole story seems so pointless, and the fate of its character seemingly so unnecessarily severe, that the reason for its inclusion in the record might well be queried. The man was so evidently deceived by the old prophet

of Bethel that the infliction of the death penalty seems out of all proportion to the crime. It is evident that a closer scrutiny of motives and implications hidden in the story is necessary.

The man of God was sent into an apostate land, to utter his message and depart, doing nothing whilst within its borders that would savour of participation in, or toleration of, its apostasy. Jeroboam had set up images of the golden calf, saying as did his forebears in the days of the Exodus "*behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt*" (1 Kings 12.28). No truehearted worshipper of God could tolerate or condone that blasphemy and in fact most of the priests and Levites and prophets among the Ten Tribes had left and gone into Judah. The Lord's word had been clear and explicit; he was neither to eat bread nor drink water with anyone in the land and he was not to linger or turn back whilst within its frontiers. So far as the prime object of his mission was concerned he had obeyed, flatly refusing Jeroboam's invitation and immediately setting out for home.

Perhaps his sitting down to rest under the oak tree, in still alien territory, was his first mistake. There was really no need for him to rest, or to eat, at all. Bethel is only twelve miles north of Jerusalem; from the hastily set up frontier between the two kingdoms he would only have about seven or eight miles walking to make the round trip. He could have been back in Judah within three hours of setting out had he been as zealous as he should have been to leave the land defiled by apostasy. He chose instead to take his ease under the tree and there the old prophet found him.

One might ask what this old prophet, if indeed he was a prophet of the Lord, was doing in Bethel, the centre of the apostasy? Why had he not accompanied his probably more God-fearing fellows to Judah? It is possible that he had compromised his conscience to the extent of tolerating the false worship that had been instituted and had no intention of leaving home. The fact that he deliberately lied to the traveller shows that in any case he was not a very good prophet. For what purpose did he thus seek to persuade the other to abandon his principles? The most logical suggestion is that he sought to obtain some concession, some outward sign from the traveller that a basis of fellowship or agreement might be possible between the rival faiths. It must not be forgotten that the sharing of a meal together meant a great deal more in the East in those days than it does today. It bound the participants together in a tie of friendship and even of brotherhood. It implied that neither would seek to injure the other and the two would make common cause against any external threat to either. For the traveller to eat bread in the house of any of the apostates meant that he was prepared to join with them in fellowship and make common cause with them. This is what the traveller did, and in so doing he greatly mitigated the effect of the message he had just delivered and the judgments of which he had been the agent. The people around might well consider that their position in the sight of

God was by no means so serious as had at first been suggested, if his messenger of condemnation was prepared to eat bread in one of their houses.

He did this thing in the assurance that an angel of God had told the old prophet the former command was rescinded. It seems very probable that the traveller wanted to believe it. As an instructed messenger of God he should have known better than to think that the Lord would change His mind after giving explicit instructions. He ought to have reasoned that even if the Lord had so decided, He was not likely to pass on His revised commands at third hand through a discredited prophet who was himself an apostate, when the original mandate had come direct to the traveller from God Himself. The whole setting of this part of the story seems clearly to indicate that he was only too willing to accept the explanation and to go with the old prophet, heedless of his original very definite instructions.

It may seem strange that after all this the Lord should in fact speak through this treacherous old prophet. The account says that "*the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back*". The Divine sentence was that because he had disobeyed, "*thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers*". It is not unusual, though, for the word of the Lord to be spoken by the mouth of an unworthy instrument. Balaam could well have been one such case. This might well be an instance where the man was impelled by the Divine Spirit to utter words despite his own volition and even perhaps against his will. The point should not be missed here that the traveller himself, because of disobedience, or more likely because of an inward unfaithful condition of heart which had now led him to his disobedience, had severed the link between himself and God, so that God had departed from him.

The meal ended, the traveller set forth again, riding upon an ass, the gift of which he had accepted from the apostate. He had only four miles or so to go but he must needs arrive in Judah with visible evidence of having accepted a present from the people of the land. But he did not get so far. A short way out of Bethel "*a lion met him in the way and slew him*". Speculation as to whether the Lord actually sent the lion or the account merely records an incident which was all too common in those days and this was an accidental encounter, is rather beside the point, for this, being the focus of the story, must enshrine the principle which its preservation in the Old Testament is intended to illustrate.

That principle is this. Whilst the prophet was faithfully discharging his duty to God in circumstances involving danger, not only from lions but from the wrath of King Jeroboam, he was under Divine protection. When he became faithless he lost that protection and must take his chance. From the moment he broke bread in the apostate's house he lost God, and when the lion met him he had no defence. So with Israel, the nation over which Jeroboam was at that moment king. If they continued faithful, Divine protection was guaranteed; if

they fell into apostasy they were at the mercy of their enemies, and eventually their enemies would destroy them, as in fact they did do some two centuries later. That was the object lesson which the untimely death of this unfortunate messenger presented to the spectators. That, perhaps, is why the story was recorded and has been preserved through the centuries.

The old prophet who had been the cause of the happening, buried the dead man in his own tomb, and mourned him, and gave instructions that he himself should be laid to rest beside him when his own time should come. Does this indicate a rather tardy repentance for the part he had played? Did this Divine judgment upon the traveller awaken him to a sense of his own false position before God? It might well have been so. The story closes with his admonition to his own sons declaring that the word of the Lord against the apostate nation would surely come to pass, so that he seems to have changed his attitude considerably.

The event must have produced an impression. Three and a half centuries later, long after the blow had fallen and the Ten Tribes taken into captivity, good king Josiah of Judah, coming into Bethel, found a monument by the wayside. Enquiring its significance he was told that it marked the grave of the man of God who had prophesied the downfall of Israel and had been slain by the lion for his own disobedience (2 Kings 23.16-18). That monument, then, must have stood near Bethel, a silent witness to the Divine condemnation, during the entire history of the Ten Tribe kingdom from the time of its organisation under Jeroboam to the day that Shalmaneser of Assyria carried them all away captive. It remained in the deserted area for more than another century at least to the time of Josiah.

So, even in his death, the man of God was a witness to the Ten Tribes through all their national history, of the fate they would incur by continued apostasy. But they did not heed, and so God executed judgment.

In later days the same principle holds good. "*Separate yourselves from the people of the land*" was the call in Old Testament times. Christians of this Age are under the same obligation. "*You ... saith the Lord God Almighty*". It is as necessary today as it was in the days of Jeroboam to be positive and definite in our stand for the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven and to admit no compromise that would appear. "*What concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel?*" asks Paul in 2 Cor. 6.15-18 "*Wherefore come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you, and will be a Father; says the Lord God Almighty*". It is as necessary today as it was in the days of Jeroboam to be positive and definite in our stand for the way of the Kingdom of Heaven and to admit no compromise that would appear to the unbeliever to condone his unbelief.

AOH

"AND PRAYER WAS MADE"

An intense persecution had broken out in the days when Stephen was arrested and stoned to death, and had continued with great ferocity through all the subsequent weeks and months. Many members of the mother Church had fled for safety to other towns and villages, and had been the means of spreading the gospel story over a wider field (Acts. 11.19) and of winning converts to the church of Christ. Some, if not all, of the Apostles had remained resident in Jerusalem, to keep the standard of the faith flying in the city which had raised its hand against the One through whom God had spoken to them, and against the first martyr who had been privileged to follow the Master in the way of sacrifice and death.

In view of the intensity of the persecution, instituted and conducted by Saul of Tarsus, it required a rare courage to stay on, even though maintaining discreet silence in public about the great things committed to their care. When the conduct of people is actuated by blind passion rather than cool reason, it calls for heroism of the finest quality to linger on under circumstances where misdirected zeal and burning fanaticism may, at any moment, kindle the fiery furnace. In spite of the fact that the hand of the Lord Jesus had plucked the chief of the persecutors as a brand from the fire, there was no respite from the severities of the persecution. Rather, that even fed fuel to the flames of wrath which burned in the cruel hearts of priest and Pharisee alike, so that to remain in Jerusalem became increasingly dangerous for the Apostles and for those stalwart souls who chose to remain with them in the metropolis.

To curry favour with the Jews, King Herod, while on a visit to Jerusalem, caused James the brother of John to be arrested and slain with the sword. This act gave great satisfaction to the Jewish hierarchy, a satisfaction which was openly made known to the royal murderer. Desiring to give further pleasure to the flattering Jews, Herod next proceeded to arrest Peter, and threw him, under guard, into prison. But because the Jewish people were engaged in the observance of one of their great feasts, Herod postponed the act of execution for a few days. When the solemn rituals of the Passover feast-days were at an end he purposed to bring Peter forth from prison and give him to the headsman's sword, and thus deprive the followers of the Nazarene of the second member of that favoured trio which had enjoyed the closest intimacy with their Master so many times.

Herod had done all that a royal despot could do to ensure Peter's safekeeping in custody. Two soldiers were chained to his wrists, and two others mounted guard outside his prison door, in relays, day and night. Also, his cell was deep within the building within the "*first and second wards*" (v. 10) and the guards were under strictest orders to keep the prisoner safe and secure, in readiness for Herod's act of appeasement when the appropriate moment should have come.

That was the royal position; what of the prisoner? Was he cowed and broken, ready to forswear his faith in the face of death? Three words only describe Peter's state of mind. "*Peter was sleeping*" (v.6). Not much is said, but enough to show that Peter's heart was at rest in the Lord. Without doubt, he knew of Herod's purpose on the morrow, for soldiers' tongues would talk! But Peter found a "power" in his heart, which enabled him to look death in the face without fear or dread. He had learned to live or die without regrets, submissive to his Master's will and providence.

Peter was "at rest"! What of his brethren? It could not have been wholly a happy Passover-time for them. Their fervent remembrance of the Master's death would be tempered by remembrance of Peter's plight. They would have remembrance of a long record of martyr sufferings, beginning with Stephen and ending, within recent days, in the death of James. They would be aware that God had permitted the persecutor to prevail and work his evil will upon the defenceless flock. Would He permit Peter to be slain? They did not know. The apprehensive little company had remained together in continuous session through all the days of the Feast. And now, knowing perhaps of Herod's intention to slay Peter on the coming day, with full heart they betook themselves to prayer. What else could they do? They had no one with influence at Herod's court. They could not expect a change of the Pharisaical heart. Save for God's intervention, there was no way out. Peter's deliverance was but a forlorn hope. "*But prayer was made*". It was the prayer of human extremity, prayer in the dark! For what did they pray? Was it for Peter's deliverance? Was it for the frustration of Herod's plans, and the return of Peter to their midst? It may have been, but it is somewhat doubtful whether that was so. Their reaction to his knocking "*at the door of the gate*" hardly gives that impression. They were doubtful even after Rhoda had heard and recognized his voice, whether Peter could have been set free. Their reply to the girl's joyful words reveals only too well how little they expected Peter's release. For what then, had they prayed, if not for Peter's release? Is it not more likely that prayer was for Peter's "faith" – that he might be faithful in the hour of death, that he would not retract one word, nor flinch his eye, when face to face with the headsman's sword.

God has His own way of teaching his children to trust Him. To Peter he sent that inward peace, so that on the last night before the fateful morrow Peter could sleep. Peter would never forget – could never forget – the holy calm that possessed his soul and closed his eyes in sweet repose. Then, after his restful sleep, came the unexpected release. God gave him deliverance from his foes. Can one wonder that it was Peter's hand which wrote the deeply confident words "*kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation*" (1 Pet. 1.6). The mighty power of God kept Peter from His own weaknesses, and from his enemy's sword, a lesson which influenced every word and thought from that day

on. Though long centuries have passed, that confidence "yet speaks".

The lesson for the little prayer-circle was that God can take man's extremity as His opportunity. In royal circles Peter's decapitation was as good as done. To the little assembly it was all but accomplished, but God decreed otherwise. The Divine caretaker allowed the peril to persist till the last night, till hope was all but dead, then, out of the "seemingly inevitable" God rescued his trusting child. Could the little band ever forget that God gave more than they had asked – *"exceedingly, abundantly above all they could ask or think"*.

Every circumstance of life is an occasion and an opportunity for the child of God to pray. He has causes without end to voice his gratitude to God. He has need more than he knows to utter his requests, but in all the changing experiences of life it is the prayer of the "extremity" and the "forlorn hope" that best shows the moral fibre of the soul. A weak faith may say "it is too late", a doubting heart could say "What is the use of it all?" A dauntless faith will say "But prayer may still be made". Thanksgiving and request are the appropriate prayers for the ordinary occasions of life. The *"but prayer"* is the prayer for the extraordinary times, when we have reached the end of our tether, and we can see no way through the tangled thicket that surrounds us. Like the little company in Jerusalem, we may not always word our prayer to the right end, but the essential thing is not the mere fact of asking, but the attitude of asking. *"Men ought always to pray and not to faint"* said Jesus, and it is when fainting seems the next obvious human thing to do, that "but prayer" wins the Divine reward.

"When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay."

When the Herods of this world have laid their evil plans and so we seem to have no way of escape from their toils, as may yet well happen amid the strains of the present life, we must not faint or fail, but remember that prayer can be made, and out of the dark scene the angel of the Lord will lead the way to the working of the Will of God. Let us ever remember that whether we are the "prayed-for" (as Peter) or of the praying Church, it is the prayer which rises from the edge of our extremity that will bring the Divine blessing in full measure into our lives.

Gainsborough House continues to serve its five permanent residents and any visitors that request accommodation. Milborne Port is a very pleasant centre to explore Dorset and Somerset including two coastlines. Many places of interest are within easy reach. Visitors are accommodated in self-contained flats and a mid-day hot meal is available if requested. Gainsborough House also has two communal lounges one of which has television. There are opportunities for formal and informal fellowship. All enquires should be made to the resident housekeeper, Mrs Corrinne Vaughan – telephone 01963 250684.

HAGAR THE BONDMAID

Part 2 – The Arrival of Isaac

TH

Something like sixteen or seventeen years had passed. Quiet years, in the main, for Abraham's settlement at Hebron, marked towards their close by two noteworthy events. The cities of the Plain, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, were destroyed by fire from heaven on account of their wickedness, and Abraham's wife Sarai, at last, presented him with a son. For a short time after the destruction of the cities, Abraham with Sarai and Hagar and Ishmael, and the household, had migrated to Gerar, not far from the spring where Hagar had talked with the angel, but now they were all back at Hebron again and Isaac was being weaned and there was to be a great feast.

The birth of Isaac had of course changed the situation as regards Ishmael. The son of the first wife automatically took precedence as the heir and Ishmael now lost all his rights of first born. At his father's death he would be entitled only to such provision as his father made for him. Whether the sixteen-year-old lad was unduly concerned about this is not related and in all probability he was not. At any rate his mother had automatically become a freewoman at his birth and could not be enslaved again, so that for sixteen years past Hagar had enjoyed an acknowledged position as Abraham's second wife and there was nothing Sarai could do about that. Whether or not any animosity existed between the two women is not recorded but in all the circumstances it is hardly to be expected that relations were of the best. Sarai must have found it galling to reflect that the position existed in consequence of her own act, and need never have been instituted since she had after all given birth to a son of her own. Perhaps there was a nagging feeling that Ishmael, when grown to man's estate, might try to trick her son Isaac out of his rightful inheritance. Sarai does not seem to have possessed the calm faith in Divine oversight that characterized Abraham. He appears to have been content to leave it all with God: in the meantime he probably had to step in to keep the peace at times.

All this is suggested by Sarai's evident vindictiveness at the time of the feast. Despite her fame as the wife of Abraham, the "father of the faithful", a dispassionate view of the record does not show her up in a very good light. The account says that she saw the son of Hagar "*mocking*". It does not say who was being mocked or what was the nature of the act but it is usually assumed that Ishmael was mocking or deriding Isaac, or the feast of which he was the centre. The word has a wide range of meaning, from the act of derisive or scornful laughter to that of making nonsensical sport or 'playing about' as we would say today. It is used in this latter sense of Isaac with his wife Rebekah in Gen. 26. 8 and of Samson "*making sport*" for the Philistines in Jud. 16. 25. It might well be that this is the sense of the word here, and that Ishmael was merely "larking

about" with his young half-brother. Whatever it was, Sarai's ire was aroused and she went straight to her husband and demanded that Hagar and her son be expelled from the family circle and sent away. "*Cast out this bondwoman and her son*" she said contemptuously "*for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son*". Sarai must have known that God had already told Abraham that Isaac was to be his heir; the established laws under which they lived guaranteed the same, but still she feared Ishmael as a possible supplanter.

Abraham was reluctant to agree. He loved his son Ishmael; he himself was the legal husband of Hagar as well as of Sarai, under the laws then ruling she was a wife and not a concubine, and his innate sense of justice and uprightness told him that whatever this lad of sixteen had done could not justify the action demanded by Sarai. In any case, under Sumerian law, Ishmael could not be disowned or deprived of his home. But Sarai was adamant and Abraham was evidently in great perplexity until the Lord spoke to him.

This is where God comes back into the story. Abraham was to rest this matter, as he had learned to rest so many other matters before, in the providences of the Most High. He was to assent to his wife's wish and send Hagar and her son away. God would look after them and in due time Ishmael would become the father of a great nation without affecting the destiny planned for the sons of Isaac. "*Twelve princes shall he beget*" the Lord told Abraham, "*and I will make him a great nation*" (Gen. 17.20). History is witness to the striking fulfilment of those words. Ishmaelite tribes spread over all Sinai and down the Red Sea coast into all Western Arabia; some of the great nations of Roman and medieval times such as the Nabatheans were Ishmaelites, and the prophet Mahomet, founder of the Mohammedan faith, was himself a descendant of Ishmael. Ethnologically, a large proportion of the Arab world owes its descent to the son of Hagar.

There is something missing in the story telling how Abraham gave Hagar "*a piece of bread and a bottle of water*" and sent her away into the desert. No civilised man would treat any woman like that; certainly not a man like Abraham. The family encampment was at Hebron. To the south lay the dry and treeless desert, sun-baked by day and bitterly cold at night, which is today called the Negev and cultivated by colonies of Israelis under arduous conditions. There were inhabitants, roving Bedouins of the desert, and nearer the sea-coast, Abimelech king of Gerar and his tribes. But to send a woman out into that waterless waste, alone and unprotected, was about as good as sending her to certain death. One might ask why, if Hagar had to go, Abraham with all his wealth and abundance of servants did not provide an escort with sufficient provisions to take her back to her native Egypt where she might expect to find friends. Nothing of this is suggested. The logical conclusion is that the Genesis story confines itself to the bare essentials and that if the full circumstances were

known the proceeding would not seem so heartless. A closer scrutiny of the background appears to be desirable.

Abraham was a wealthy and influential stock-breeder. His household was located at Hebron but various allusions in Genesis make it clear that his flocks and herds roamed over an extensive territory covering the Judean highlands between Hebron and Beer-Sheba, and westward to what is known today as Gaza. The area measured some thirty miles by forty. There were other inhabitants, Canaanites and Hittites. Abraham's friendship with Ephron the Hittite, another powerful stock-breeder, is well known and these all grazed their flocks and herds in the same land and got on fairly well together. Abraham, with his home and headquarters at Hebron, had shepherds and other workers scattered all over this country and there were probably settlements of these men and their families at strategic points. Almost certainly Beer-Sheba, in the far south, was one such point, for later on he transferred his headquarters to that place (Gen. 21). What more natural than that Abraham should have sent Hagar to one of his settlements, where she would have been provided for and their son grow to manhood, but out of the way of Sarai? According to the story Hagar departed from Hebron, and "*wandered in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba*", where she uttered her despairing cry to God and was heard. It might well be, then, that Abraham had instructed Hagar to make her way to Beer-Sheba and there settle with his herdsmen of that vicinity. According to the account he sent her away "*early in the morning*" which means at first light, about 5.00 a.m. The distance is twenty-six miles, through country where Abraham was known and respected and his employees to be found every few miles or so going about their business. Allowing for a rest in some shady place for the midday hours when the sun was fiercest, they could have been at Beer-Sheba before sunset. The piece of bread and bottle of water would then have been abundant provision for the day and all would have been well. Unfortunately Hagar missed her way. She may not have been far from the settlement at Beer-Sheba but she was in "the wilderness" and this would indicate that she had strayed from the haunts of men and was perhaps heading for the Negev desert beyond Beer-Sheba. The water was spent; perhaps in some panic she pressed on despite the heat of the sun, meeting no man and recognizing no landmark. The lad's strength began to fail first and he could not go on. In despair she laid him in the shade of "*one of the shrubs*", the low-growing desert scrub, went away and dropped on the ground "*a good way off*" in a paroxysm of grief, "*for she said, Let me not see the death of the lad. And she lifted up her voice, and wept*".

It is significant that no word of reproach on her part is recorded. There seems to be unquestioning acceptance of the fate that appeared to be facing them both, and she gave way to grief without rancour. There, alone in the desert and in her extremity, the angel of the Lord came to her the second time. *The angel of God*

called to Hagar out of heaven And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went, and filled the bottle, and gave the lad drink". All unknowingly, she must have wandered near a spring and in her distress not perceived it. So the promise was reiterated; Ishmael would live and inherit that which God had ordained for him.

It is a remarkable fact that of these two women, Hagar and Sarai, it was Hagar the bondmaid who on two occasions came in contact with the powers of Heaven for blessing; she saw God as it were in the angel in man's form and said reverently *"I have seen God"*. Sarai the freewoman, with all her advantages, only saw the angel of God once, laughed disbelievingly at his words, lied about it afterwards, and earned the angel's reproach. (Gen. 18.12-15). It would almost seem that the faith of Hagar, more simple perhaps, was at the same time more sincere and trusting. The Lord certainly spoke more tenderly to Hagar than He ever did to Sarai.

What happened next? The story leaves a gap. The succeeding verses in Gen. 21 tell of Ishmael's progress to manhood and a home in another part of the country. It is possible that Hagar did eventually find Beer-Sheba or whatever place to which she had been sent, and settled there with Abraham's workers. Abraham may well have visited his son there. But later on, perhaps as Ishmael grew to manhood, the question of setting up his own household must have occupied his mother's mind, and this may be the truth behind ch. 21.20-21. *"God was with the lad, and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt"*. Paran was a hundred miles or more to the south-west of Beer-Sheba, on the way to Egypt and in the Sinai desert. This looks as though Ishmael determined to make his own career in a land as yet not closely peopled and well out of the way of Abraham's far-flung interests. There, in the desert, Ishmael settled, and married, and begat twelve sons, and earned himself a name which in the Arab world at least has achieved immortality.

It must not be thought that Ishmael was cut off from Abraham in later years. There must have been communication, perhaps some coming and going, between the two, and between Ishmael and Isaac, with whom friendly relations must always have existed. Gen. 25.9 reveals this. Upon the death of Abraham seventy years later *"his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah"*. Isaac must have known exactly where to find Ishmael so that the latter could be present at the old home in time for the last respects. Sarai, of course, was long since dead.

Of Hagar we hear nothing more. Whether she ever saw her husband Abraham again we do not know. We leave her, the matriarchal head of a rapidly growing tribe of desert Bedouin, quiet and serene in her faith, perhaps always conscious of the goodness of God who had been to her all that He had promised.

In his book "*A Pilgrimage of Palestine*" Dr Harry Fosdick tells of his visit in 1928 to the High Priest of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. The tiny remnant of this people, who once had a Temple on the Mount in rivalry to that at Jerusalem, still holds to the traditions of their fathers and still treasures a copy of the Pentateuch – the five books of Moses – which dates from the time of Ezra. The point of Dr Fosdick's narrative is the striking resemblance between the complacent bigotry of the old high Priest and attitude of some Christians today, quite sure that they, and they alone, have the monopoly of Divine Truth and that all who differ with them must of necessity be in error. His narrative runs:

"As guests of the high Priest we sat in his tent and through a skilled interpreter talked with the venerable old man about his religion. His complacency, his sense of superiority, his certainty that these few Samaritans alone among men knew the truth about God and practised it, were fascinating. The millions around him, he said, were forgetting the Divine Law; only his little group of despised people were keeping it. He nestled comfortably into that conviction. From every point of view, he said, the Samaritan religion alone was perfect. Could Jews or Christians divide their edition of the Ten Commandments into two tables so that the same number of words and letters would be on each? Never! The Samaritans could do with their edition! He had visited, so he said, London, Paris, Constantinople, and had always tried with open mind to welcome new truth, but had come back to Gerizim certain that no new religion was so flawless as the Samaritan. All others were simply more or less pleasing superstructures; only the Samaritans had solid foundations in the Mosaic Law. So the old man, venerable of aspect, amiable in spirit, talked on into the night, archaic as the blood sacrifice he had just administered."

Surely we need to be watchful, that we, who have such wonderful opportunities for advancement in the knowledge of Divine Truth, do not fall into the same petty, narrow groove. How different the exultant words of the Apostle, when, comparing our position with the blinded people of old, he cried:

"We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3.18)

AOH

We work together, if far apart
Hands in unison, heart to heart.
We work as having one common aim
We work as bearing the same good name
We dare not loiter, but still pursue
The work of the Master, with Him in view.

THE ELEMENTS SHALL MELT

The vivid passage in 2 Peter 3 comparing the watery end of the world that existed before the Flood with the fiery climax to this Age which ushers in the Millennium has often led to the assertion that since it was literal water which ended that world it must be equally literal fire which ends this. The apparent logic of this argument has given rise to an insistence by some that the Second Advent of our Lord at the end of this Age is to be accompanied by the total destruction of this planet and everything on it in a holocaust of fire. The fact that nuclear warfare could very easily produce just that effect has given a kind of boost to this belief in modern times and forms the subject of many a sermon and tract in the endeavour to persuade the unregenerate to flee from the wrath to come. It is usually pointed out that Christians will escape all this, having been taken to Heaven before it happens, which is comforting to the Christians but not to anybody else.

Nevertheless, the passage in Peter stands, and what he really does say needs to be critically examined. It must be remembered that this is the same Peter who thirty years or so previously had spoken of the Age ending by the coming of Christ to inaugurate the Times of Restoration of all things, those times spoken of by all the holy prophets of the past, those times which are generally known as the Millennium, during which Christ will reign over the nations upon earth for the elimination of sin and their eternal blessing. From the practical point of view, if the earth is going to be reduced to a radio-active cinder, destitute of all life, it is going to be many thousands of years before the Lord can commence His Millennial reign. The glowing prophecies of Israel's restoration and deliverance from all enemies, their acceptance of their Divine King and commission to be ambassadors to the nations, will have no meaning in a world destitute of life. For this reason if for no other, it is necessary to look at Peter's words more closely than is usually done.

Let us look at what Peter says in 2 Peter 3.5-13. Firstly, notice that in vv 5-6 when talking about the first world and its ending at the Flood, Peter is quoting history. In vv 7-13 when talking about the end of the second world and the coming in of the third, he is quoting prophecy. These are two different things. The second thing to do is try to look at the matter through Peter's eyes while he was writing the words. He did not have the benefit of our modern knowledge of the earth and the universe; his theological knowledge was inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit but his scientific knowledge was necessarily limited to that of his own day, as indeed is ours at this present time. In our own time many older astronomical beliefs have been overturned. So Peter's background is that of the best scientists of his own day. It was believed then, as it had been for centuries, that the earth was a land mass surrounded by ocean, the whole forming a sphere

floating in water completely enclosed by a solid transparent shell, the heavens. On the surface was the abode of the gods, or of God, according to pagan or Jewish theology respectively. In the centre of the earth, below Hades - the grave, there existed a region of fire which the Greeks called Tartarus. Here were imprisoned the sinners who had rebelled against God in former times. This became the source of the fiery Hell of early Christian theology. Peter, like others of his generation, must have accepted this as the general thought of his day and in fact in this same epistle, (2.4) he tells us that the rebellious angels of Noah's day are confined in Tartarus (Hell in the A.V.) to await judgment. His reference to the earth standing out of the water and in the water is therefore an allusion to this belief. In fact Psa. 24.2 and 136.6 both allude to the same idea.

But Peter does not say that the earth was destroyed. What he does say is that the order of things upon it, the *kosmos*, the world that then existed, was overflowed with water and perished. What we would call the world of man was swept away by the Flood. All the works of man, all they had done and built up during the antediluvian era, all their attainments and achievements, their entire system and social order, founded as it was upon evil and lawlessness, was blotted out by the Flood. That world came to an end and after it was all over God made a fresh start with what was then a "new heavens and a new earth" and is now "the heavens and earth which now are" (v.7) doomed to a similar destruction and for the same reason. But the planet itself was not destroyed nor even unduly damaged. When Noah and his sons came out of the Ark after it was all over, they were able to pick up the threads of life and start planting and building. The earth itself remained intact; it was the world of man which passed away and was superseded by a better.

Now Peter turns his attention to prophecy. Just as truly as the old world order was brought to an end by the Flood in history, he says, so will the present world order be brought to an end by the fires of the Day of the Lord and so make way for the new world order of the Millennium. Peter does not say that the earth itself is going to be destroyed by fire; what he does say is that the heavens and the earth, which are now, the existing social order elsewhere called "this present evil world", have been kept in store, reserved for the fires of the Day of the Lord. The "new heavens and earth, wherein dwells righteousness" constitute the new social order of the next Age, but still on this literal planet earth. To claim that this destroying fire is literal involves an equivalent claim that the Devil and all not found written in the Book of Life are cast into literal fire (Rev. 20.10, 15)

This leads to the implication of vv. 10 & 12. The "elements shall melt with fervent heat" and "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up". The word "elements" (*stoicheia*) signifies the elements of knowledge, first beginnings, principles, rudiments. In the science of physics it meant to the Greeks the primary constituents of matter and they claimed that the whole of

creation was built up from four primary elements – earth, air, fire and water. Of these everything consisted. Now if Peter intended this very literal meaning to his words, he would have been saying that not only the earth, but the sun and moon, planets and stars and heaven itself, the abode of God and the angels, would be dissolved together. In Peter's day it was believed that heaven was a solid shell enclosing the earth with the heavenly bodies including the stars circling between the two. Peter obviously did not mean this; clearly his use of "heavens" and "earth" in this verse corresponds with that in vv.7, 10 & 13, in which the heavens denote the higher celestial ruling powers and the earth the terrestrial order of things. In the case of *"this present evil world"* those higher powers, the heavens, are Satan and his hosts, the *"god of this world"* of 2 Cor. 4.4, and this gives a clue to Peter's use of the fiery metaphor.

Tartarus, the fiery region below the earth, was the place where all evil and evil-doers were finally to be destroyed. The fires would burn until there was nothing left to burn. So it is with the end of this world-age. The world of man enters into judgment with God, not for their irrevocable doom without opportunity to repent, but for the destruction of the evil of this world so that they do have an opportunity to repent. So Peter pictures the swallowing up of every element of evil in this present world in 'Tartarus', the coming of a new heavens and earth, the celestial sovereignty of Christ, with his Church and a terrestrial kingdom of righteousness. The earth itself will become fertile like Eden and mankind learn of the ways of God, with no longer the Devil to deceive and ensnare.

An allusion to this ancient belief in Tartarus is found in Deut. 32.22. where the Lord says, in connection with His coming judgments upon Israel's apostasy *"a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell (the later Greek Tartarus) and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains"*. The Lord did not mean that He was going to burn up the literal earth at that time, and neither did Peter later on.

The final clause in v.10 *"the earth and the works therein shall be burned up"* is the subject of a textual corruption which was unknown to the translators of the AV. Earlier manuscripts not available to them show that the word they rendered *"burned up"* is one meaning to "lay bare, to discover or uncover, to reveal". Hence most modern translators have one of these words in their renderings. The meaning is clearly that the fires of the end of the Age will *reveal* the evils of this world and all the works of man. The *"hidden works of darkness"* will be laid open for all men to see. The Devil will be bound, that he may deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20.3) and the wreckage of this *"present evil world"* exposed and cleared away ready for the rebuilding and renovating processes which are to follow.

Thus the inspired Apostle clothed his description of the coming end of this Age in the imagery of the Old Testament, picturing the fires of God's judgments bringing to an end the edifice of evil men have erected during the thousands of years past, and clearing the ground for commencement of Messiah's reign, the Millennial administration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The fires of 2 Peter 3 are metaphorical not literal, and when they have done their work and are over, the earth will still be here with multitudes waiting to welcome their King. *"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him, and He will save us."*

AOH

CROSSBEARING

"Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." We who follow the Crucified are not here to make a pleasant thing of life; we are called to suffering for the sake of a suffering, sinful world. The Lord forgive us our shameful evasions and hesitations. His brow was crowned with thorns; do we seek rose-buds for our crowning? His hands were pierced with nails; are our hands ringed with jewels? His feet were bare and bound; do our feet walk delicately? What do we know of travail? Or tears that scald before they fall? Of heart-break? Of being scorned? God forgive us our love of ease. God forgive us that so often we turn our faces from a life that is even remotely like His. Forgive us that we all but worship comfort, the delight of the presence of loved ones, possessions, treasure on earth. Far, far from our prayers too often is any thought of prayer for a love which will lead us to give one whom we love to follow our Lord to Gethsemane, to Calvary – perhaps because we have never been there ourselves.

Lord we kneel beside thee now, with hands folded between thy hands as a child's are folded in its mother's. We would follow the words of thy prayer, dimly understanding their meaning, but wanting to understand. *"That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."* (Selected)

In fleeing from the rebellious Absalom, David went east over Jordan. His followers and he were weary and hungry but they were relieved by the kind generosity of a local landowner named Barzillai. Others were afraid to help but he was one of the few who remained true. The tide turned. Absalom was defeated. When David's exile was over he wished to honour Barzillai as his own guest in Jerusalem. The old man declined the honour, being glad enough to return home with the quiet satisfaction which comes to all loyal hearts who have done their duty without hope of reward. His wishes were respected, but still the honour of a perpetual place at the king's table was assured to the sons who bore his name. God's king is determined that the men who have been true to him in his rejection shall have a permanent place with him in his exaltation. (2 Samuel 19)

MEETING JESUS

"Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'. Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'". (John 12.20-23). Jesus went on to speak about the need for His death which precluded any conversation with the non-Jewish enquirers. But we must wonder why the 'god fearers' from among the Gentiles should approach Jesus?

What had they seen and heard which prompted them to speak to Jesus? He had just ridden on a young donkey into Jerusalem with crowds cheering Him all the way from the Mount of Olives.

Do we echo those Gentiles' sentiments and for what reason? Have we seen in Him the 'Hope of Israel' – and indeed much more than that, for in Him is the hope of the world. In Him is our hope – in Him is all that we have. Our reasons for wanting to see Jesus are much greater than those Gentiles of old. In the words of John in his first letter, our hope is to be *"like him, for we shall see him as he is"*. How much can we see Jesus now? How do we look at Jesus as we see Him in the Gospels? Paul in 2 Cor. 5.16,17 wrote, *"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer."* Since we came into Christ our viewpoint has changed and we see Him as our Saviour, our Lord and our daily companion. As we become saturated with the Gospel, we must let Him speak to us and the words of the old hymn become real for "He walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own".

The Quiet Time with Him each day sets the pattern for the hours to come. This is not a time to analyse and synthesise the Scriptures – there must be other times for the philosophy logistics of the Gospel. This time of meditation enables us to be aware of Him in every situation and decision through the day. He becomes alive in our lives as we watch Him at work in the lives of others as recorded in the Gospels.

There is a fascinating story in John 5.1-16 when Jesus was near the northern gate of Jerusalem. He came upon the sick and suffering at the Bethesda Pool, a name that means 'the House of Mercy'. It has actually been excavated in recent times and it is possible to see the remains of the five arches or doorways that had been adjacent to the pool. There, in the hot sun lay dozens, perhaps hundreds, of disabled folk, *"invalids, blind, lame, paralysed"* waiting for the movement of the waters. It was believed that the rippling of waters was caused by the visit of an angel although it was not included in the text by many authorities and modern translations tend to omit it with just a reference as a footnote.

It must have been a very sad sight, particularly as they would all rush forward, eager to be the one who was cured by being first in the water. The remainder would be restless, noisy, angry, elbowing each other out of the way. For some it would be a moment of merriment particularly if one helpless person got an unnecessary ducking. Others would be in complete despair. For many it would be their last hope of getting better.

So it was as Jesus walked through the paved area, he stopped at a man who had been there for thirty-eight years. He must have had an unimaginable life of distress. Was Jesus recognised as the teacher and healer from Galilee? He spoke to the man and asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" It may seem a strange question but there are some that nurse their disability – to be fit and whole again would mean facing life and all its responsibilities. While he lay there he could just rely on whatever was given him. We know nothing of his background or how he travelled to and from the pool each day. He certainly seemed a little startled by Jesus question and answered *"Sir I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled and while I am going another steps down before me"*. How did he receive Jesus command to *"Rise, take up your pallet and walk"*? It was the Sabbath and the Jews did nothing which remotely resembled work on that day. To have carried his "stretcher-like" carrying bed was to attract attention. Why should he obey a complete stranger to do something he had not done for so many years? Before moving, did he realise he was healed? Did he feel the energy enter his tired muscles and did the will to move all at once enter his hitherto helpless body? Whatever it was, he obeyed, he got up, found he could move and picked up the 'pallet'. It was a wonderful moment for the man and for those watching him. As he walked away through the crowded city he was accosted by some religious leaders who wanted to know what he was doing 'working on the Sabbath', that is carrying his bed. The man must have been mystified. Jesus had vanished into the crowds. The man who had been healed did not know at this point who had told him to carry his pallet and walk but later they bumped into each other and later still the man reported who had healed him to the Jewish leaders. It was all part of an on-going dispute that the Jews used to stir up trouble against Jesus.

We need to ask ourselves how Jesus handled people and why He said and did things in the way that He did. We can read about the healing of the man with leprosy in an account given in the three synoptic gospels (Mark 1.40-45; Matt. 8.11-4; Luke 5.12). As we read these records we cannot help wondering if it is the same story. The prologue, as it were, to each account is different. In Mark, Jesus has been having a quiet time of prayer and meditation away from the crowds before most people were up and about. The disciples found Him and urged Him to meet the crowds who wanted more of the miracles and teaching. Jesus however needed to go further afield and meet people of other towns.

A man with leprosy met him and said *"if you will you can make me clean."* In great compassion for the man's condition Jesus reached out and touched him. The Matthew account places the story immediately after the Sermon on the Mount – but we have the same response of Jesus for *"He touched him"* as He said the words *"Be clean"*. In Luke the story follows the large catch of fish in Galilee; but there is mention of being in the city – and again the response to the man saying *"If you will, you can make me clean"*. Jesus showed His willingness and touched the man. There are those, like Campbell Morgan who believe that Jesus would never have broken the Law by touching someone who had leprosy. But there are others, like Eddie Askew, who see this as an act of compassion – vital to show by touching. Leprosy in the 1st century included much more than the disease that now goes by that name. Today it is recognised that 'leprosy' is a disease affecting the sensory nervous system which destroys feeling. The damage is caused accidentally as a result of that loss of touch. The great Christian missionary surgeon Paul Brand did more than any other to uncover and put right the problems connected with the disease. But the awful stigma remains, particularly in countries where the disease is prevalent and it is the compassionate reaching out to the sufferers that is so important.

Throughout the ages until modern times, leprosy sufferers were isolated from everyone else. No one could help them, almost seemingly no one wanted to help them but rather protect themselves by keeping their distance from them. Jesus did what was unthinkable in any 1st century society – he touched the man – his compassion was stronger than the fear of contamination. The Law had been given to prevent infection passing but that didn't apply to the Son of God. As Jews feared physical contagion so most people fear moral contact with those who appear to be immoral. Jesus never condoned wrong doing but He really cared about all sinners – that's all of us and He was deeply concerned to make them whole in every respect – and He still is. He reaches out to us and touches our lives – but we need to know and to confess that need. And when we have been 'made whole' then we can be His hands that reach out and touch the lives of others. When we have really been with Jesus we want to be like Him, and do the things which He did -help others to be made whole.

Two Women who saw Jesus

"... a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment." (Luke 7.37, 38 RSV)

This is one of the most extraordinary stories in the Gospels. Here was a woman who so desperately wanted to see Jesus that she went against all the conventions of polite society in order to do so. Jesus had been invited to Simon's

house for a meal which by this time in itself might have raised a few eyebrows. It may have been one or two buildings to which a courtyard was attached and it might have been in that yard that the story was set. It was not altogether unusual that uninvited people wandered into the courtyard. But this woman was different, for she obviously came from part of the town that Simon would never dream of entering. The woman most likely had never been to this more 'respectable' part of town before either. She would find it rather embarrassing to enter this house; and from another angle, Simon would also find it embarrassing that she entered his house. But this woman had a mission – and almost certainly she had met Jesus before this.

The woman is unnamed in the Gospel and there is no need to confuse her with any named person. She stood behind Jesus as He reclined, with His feet projecting away from the table. That is why it was possible for her tears to fall on his feet. That she could wipe those feet with her hair indicates that she had loosened her tresses so that they fell rather unmanageably in all directions. This was very unusual and normally regarded as incorrect behaviour in public. The tiny phial of perfumed ointment would have a breakable seal which could access its contents to those same feet. It was all an expression of affection for one who had freed her from the burden of sin. But to Simon, host with guests, member of a select group of very religious Jews, this was outrageous and embarrassing. He could not understand how Jesus if He was a prophet should allow this woman to do such a thing. He was devoid of compassion for the weak and fallen; Jesus was driven by that compassion. For all his knowledge of the Scriptures, Simon had forgotten that Moses greatest teaching was of God in Exodus 34.6,7 about Him being *"merciful and gracious, slow to anger ... forgiving iniquity"*. Then Jesus went on to show Simon how he had even forgotten to show the normal courtesies as a host to a guest. Now this woman, in spite of all the things she had done wrong in the past, this woman who he despised, had perhaps without realising it, done for Jesus what Simon had failed to do. He should have welcomed Jesus with a customary cleansing of the feet from the dust of the journey; given Him a welcoming embrace and removed the odours of the streets with some perfume. This woman, at great cost to herself had shown Simon the way to treat guests. Then Jesus helped Simon to draw the lesson. The proud Pharisee felt he had no need of forgiveness for any wrong doing and he probably didn't approve of Jesus expressing forgiveness on God's behalf. The woman had much to be forgiven and that made her all the more lovingly grateful for what Jesus had done. For Simon, Jesus could do nothing, because he believed he had no reason to receive the loving forgiveness of God through Christ.

There is another story of unspoken forgiveness in John 8.1-11. Although not in the best manuscripts, it is normally accepted by scholars because it is so in keeping with the spirit of Jesus actions. It was also accepted as part of the

Gospel by the turn of the 1st century by Papias as part of the oral tradition. The story is about a prostitute caught in adultery who was brought to Jesus to see what judgement He would make of her breaking of the Law (Lev 20.10, Deut. 22.22-24). That Law required that she should be stoned and if Jesus took His usual forgiving attitude then they could condemn Him for not keeping the Law. The whole episode may have been 'set-up' for that very purpose. If Jesus did condemn the woman and she was killed, Roman law would be broken. Interestingly, they did not bring the man involved in the illegal action.

When they had asked him what He would do about the problem Jesus began to write in the dust with a stick. They pressed the matter so Jesus told them that the one among them who was without any sin should be the first to throw a stone. Then He continued His writing. What did He write? Did He write the names of the men present with some of their sins listed? Did the oldest go first because in their long lives they had committed more sin than the younger ones? They all departed leaving just the woman with Jesus and so He turned and asked her about her accusers. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world but to save it (John 3.16,17), even those we think are the worst of sinners. Have we seen Jesus at work in the world of the 1st century or the 21st? Might He not say to us now, 'Go and do likewise'? Are we ready to rush in with our condemnation- with our accusations- with our 'holier than thou' attitude? How do we look at sinners - the world is full of them? How do we look even upon others who name the name of Christ?

Jesus went in and out among men and women and children clearly to help them positively. It's a sad old world and its people are in desperate need to recognise their Saviour. But they are blind until Christ through us can open their eyes. Have we seen Jesus ... at work in our own lives making us compassionate and patient and gentle? We may know a lot of things about the Bible but have we learned how Jesus treated others - and do we do the same?

DN

Even the most courageous man has his moments of doubt and depression. In prison or out of it. Baruch had never failed Jeremiah; he had even risked his life to serve him. One day, however, he gave way to self-pity in the presence of his great colleague, who himself had sometimes felt and spoken in just the same way. Jeremiah must have seemed very unsympathetic as he put his finger on Baruch's weak spot. Could not the prophet have said something softer and more soothing? No, we are not saved from self-pity by smooth words; they only make us more sorry for ourselves. Jeremiah administered the same shock treatment which God had given him in his depression. It hurt but it worked. It uncovered the hidden self-seeking which was the cause of the trouble and which is usually the cause of self-pity. God's servants must not expect to live softly. (Jeremiah 45)

IN DAMASCUS AND ARABIA

It was not that Ananias doubted the Lord, or questioned His wisdom, or wondered if he had interpreted the mind of the Spirit aright. It was just that the message and the commission was so unexpected and incredible that he was surprised into faint expostulation, almost as though all the ethics of the case were suspect. As a servant of the Lord he was prepared to go anywhere and do anything that he was bidden, but normally he was able to see the end to which his efforts were tending. As a Christian, his work was to convert men to Christ and then act as pastor to lead them in the way of Christ. Ananias had been long enough in the Way himself to know that the essential prerequisite of all to whom he thus ministered must be repentance, and the full, wholehearted acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His power in the life. There must also be a fixed conviction that all salvation is through Christ and that one day Christ would return to earth in the glory of His Kingdom to reconcile to Himself everyone of earth's multitudes who could possibly be persuaded to turn from their evil way and live. For the present a relative few gave themselves wholly and unreservedly to the service of the Master, that they might live and reign with Him in the administration of His Kingdom when the blessed day should come. So it was with astonishment and perhaps dismay that His Lord in the familiar vision gave him a totally unfamiliar and unexpected instruction. "*Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying and has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.*" (Acts 9.11-12 RSV).

Saul of Tarsus! Ananias was thunderstruck. This was the man who had come into Damascus with the avowed intent of harrying and persecuting the disciples of Jesus and taking them prisoner to Jerusalem. In his own congregation Ananias had some who had fled from Jerusalem to escape the terrible evils that were being inflicted upon the Christians there by this same Saul. Whether Ananias had heard anything of the circumstances of Saul's arrival and of his blindness does not appear but that he knew of his reputation and of his mission is plain. "*Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name*" (13-14). Ananias was a man of faith and of trust; he knew and served his Lord in implicit confidence, but this mission cut across all that he knew or could imagine of the Master's actions and interests. The less any of them had to do with this arch-persecutor of the saints the better. To go and seek him out was only asking for trouble. Surely the Master knew how inveterate an enemy to his cause was this man!

Jesus' words cut across his thoughts and words which must have enshrined a great deal more information than is recorded in the short account of Acts 9, for

when Ananias did at last go to Saul he knew what he evidently did not know at this moment, that Jesus had appeared to Saul in the way. *"Go thy way"* was the calm rejoinder *"Go for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name"*. And at that Ananias hesitated no longer. If Saul was indeed a chosen instrument then, despite all outward appearances, he was the Lord's and Ananias must hasten to receive him into the community of the faithful. Explanations could wait; the Master knew what He was about, and the servant could do naught but obey.

So it came about that the blind Pharisee, sitting quietly in the house of Judas as he had sat, silent and fasting, for three days past, heard an unfamiliar voice, a voice of calmness and sweetness, uttering words that he had never heard applied to himself before. *"Brother Saul"* they said *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me, that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."* How did this man know – how did any man know – that Jesus had appeared to him in the way? That must have been the first thought which flashed across the keen, perceptive mind of Saul. That he had been led into Damascus a blind man might well have become generally known, an item of gossip. Something of the vivid light and thunderous noise out there on the hills above the city might have been recounted by the men of his party; but none of them knew of his sight of the risen Lord or of the words he heard. How then did this stranger know anything about it? *"That appeared to you on the road by which you came"* If, during those three day's meditation, Saul had wondered whether after all the whole thing was a chimera of his imagination, Ananias' words must have settled the question for him. Only the Lord Himself, the One who had appeared to and spoken to Saul, could have imparted the information to this Ananias. There was no alternative; he could only accept the fact, and believe.

What went on in Saul's mind during those three days can only be surmised. His creature comforts would be well looked after by Judas, who was evidently his pre-arranged host in Damascus and sure to be, like himself, a Pharisee and in sympathy with his mission. What Judas thought of receiving a Nazarene into his house and watching him receive his fellow-Pharisee as a convert to the hated faith can only be imagined; it may be that Saul did not continue in the hospitality of Judas beyond that point. But during the three days his mind must have been exclusively concerned with the amazing thing which had happened to him and all that it implied. The Old Testament prophecies must have come to him in a new light. The baffling questions which had tormented his mind during the journey were baffling no longer; the answers were all falling neatly into place. He began now to see what was meant by the sufferings of Christ which he must undergo, and only afterward enter his glory. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah

became luminous and full of meaning, the blindness and hardness of heart of those who had rejected the Lord's Messiah stood plainly revealed to him and he realised how he had been one such blind and hard of heart. Those three days were by no means the end of Saul's soul-searching and he was not yet ready for the work of his life, but he was prepared to accept induction into the Church of Christ at the hands of the saintly Ananias and that was a momentous thing.

So he listened to the quietly spoken words "*Brother Saul ... be filled with the Holy Spirit*" and as he listened, a peace came over his soul such as he had never known and something like scales fell from his eyes and his sight returned and he looked up into the face of the man above him and he knew that his past was over and done with and he was now Christ's bondsman for ever and he rejoiced, with a humility that was new and strange to him. Saul the leader became Saul the led. He came into Damascus to take Ananias and bring him to the Sanhedrin but Ananias had taken him captive and was bringing him to Jesus. He had lost Moses and the Law, but he had received Christ and the Spirit. His thoughts were still in a chaotic jumble, but even as he began outwardly to behold his surroundings, so inwardly he began to glimpse something of the things of the Spirit.

A certain amount of quasi-medical speculation has centred upon the "scales" which fell from Saul's eyes. The Greek word indicates something which stripped or peeled off like a skin. Something of a similar nature is recorded in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit in Nineveh who likewise was blind and received his sight. It is said that records of the same affection were left by Hippocrates, the reputed founder of medical knowledge, who lived in Greece about 400 B.C. Suggestions have been made that the physical effect of the blinding light shining upon Saul's upturned eyes out there on the Damascus road was to cause some disease of the eyes which resulted in the formation of the scales which afterward fell away. Some have connected this possibility with Saul's "thorn in the flesh" and hazarded the suggestion that he afterward suffered from glaucoma or other affliction affecting his sight: several allusions in his epistles do support the likelihood of such being indeed the case. Saul's weak eyesight might well be attributable to more normal origins and although his eyes might quite possibly have been inflamed and temporarily injured by the experience. Could those of any man exposed to intense and searing light, the three days' blindness could conceivably have been, in part at least, of a psychological nature, and the emotional effect of the coming of Ananias, his words and his actions all that was needed to complete the cure and give Saul his sight again.

For a short time, "certain days", Saul remained with the disciples at Damascus. Of Judas, his erstwhile host, we hear no more. He had evidently washed his hands of the renegade. But Saul had found new friends and was rapidly assimilating himself to their fellowship. He was baptised at once: his

strength of character and firmness of decision shown in his insistence upon that act before he so much as broke his three days' fast. The same resolute pushing forward which had made him so dangerous an enemy to the Christian faith was now being turned to good account and was very shortly to make him an even more dangerous enemy to the opponents of Christianity, first in Damascus itself, and then in the outer world.

There is uncertainty about Saul's next move. According to Acts 9.20 he "*straightway preached Christ in the synagogues*" that is, to the orthodox Jewish community, and to such good effect that the Jews took counsel to kill him and he was let down by night over the city wall in a basket and escaped to Jerusalem. After a short time at Jerusalem he aroused the enmity of the Jews there and had once again to escape, this time going to his native city of Tarsus, where he drops out of the New Testament story for a time. On the other hand he himself, writing to the Galatians many years later (Gal. 1.17) says that immediately after his vision of the risen Lord he went into Arabia for three years and returned to Damascus, then going to Jerusalem to see Peter and James. It seems evident that this three years in Arabia must have come immediately after his reception into the fellowship of the Damascus disciples but before he started preaching in the Damascus synagogues, and therefore should be placed between verses 19 and 20 of Acts 9.

Where was the "Arabia" into which Paul went and why did he go there? Perhaps the second question is easier to answer than the first, and of greater importance. Almost certainly Saul, after his conversion, impressed with the magnitude and majesty of the Divine commission he had received and conscious how much he had yet to learn, felt the need for a prolonged period of meditation and study. "*I conferred not with flesh and blood,*" he wrote to the Galatians "*but I went into Arabia, and returned after three years*". Those must have been three years of quiet but intense study and thought, going over the whole of the Old Testament prophecies, already so familiar to his mind, but now in a new light and against a different background. Formerly he could only see Moses, now he could see Christ in all the Scriptures. There is not much doubt that the outlines of all those brilliant arguments and expositions of the Pauline books in the New Testament – Romans, Ephesians, Colossians and so on – were drawn during those three years in Arabia. The location was vague at the time, and it covered a long stretch of territory from the wilderness east of Damascus right down through Edom into Sinai, and Paul may, as has been so often suggested, have spent the time on the slopes of Mount Sinai itself or he might merely have lived a secluded life, unnoticed and unknown, in one of the country villages or Bedouin encampments on the east side of the Jordan not a hundred miles from Damascus itself. It matters little; there, in the place of his choice, he came to know the leading and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and there he was

transformed from the efficient organiser and bigoted zealot he had been in former days, to the most indefatigable missionary and profound theologian the Christian Church has ever known.

And so, when he was ready, and the Holy Spirit so directed, Saul came back to Damascus.

AOH

Editorial note – it is just possible that the experience narrated in 2 Cor. 12.1-4 occurred in the three years in Arabia – it is not easy to fit into Conybeare's chronology of Paul's life.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

The "*Tower of Babel*", the story of the building of which is narrated in Genesis 11, stood for something like two thousand years. Known to the Babylonians as "E-temenanki," the "house of foundation of heaven and earth," it was repaired, renovated and rebuilt by successive rulers until by the 6th century BC it reared its topmost pinnacle 600 feet above the ground – nearly twice the height of the cross on top of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Its lowermost platform occupied six times the ground space of St Paul's. The value of gold and silver and precious stones with which the Tower and its associated Temple were adorned at the zenith of its glory was estimated in the early years of this century at a figure which in 1977 would be equal to four thousand million pounds. It was destroyed in the 5th century BC; thus it endured throughout practically the whole of the Old Testament historical period. Of all monuments erected by man, the great Tower of Babylon is the most symbolic of man's reliance on his own power and determination to live without God – and today there is nothing left of it but a few pieces of broken brickwork and the remains of one corner of the platform on which it stood, about four feet high. "*Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be broken down and shall be found no more at all.*"

Is the lack of growth in our lives of the love of God been due to neglect? Oh the wonder of that blessed intimacy of heart and mind and thought, that unveiling of the innermost secrets of the soul to the one who loves in return. "*He that loves me*" says Jesus, "*I will love him and show myself to him,*" – I will unveil to him my very heart. And in our fellowship with the Master our love will grow, the river will deepen. 'Tis not in the shallows that we see Him best but in the deep waters of life.

Jesus and His Apostles after Him spoke of many things concerning His Second Advent. But when He was conversing with His disciples He had but one aspect in mind that concerned them particularly – "*I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself.*" He loves each of us with an undying love; and will never forget to take us to Himself.

"THE AMEN"

In most Christian communities it is usually the custom, at the close of a fervent prayer, or at the end of a great exhortation, for the congregation to express appreciation by a devout "Amen", from all whose hearts are warm towards God and His Son. There may be differences in the volume of this expression and endorsement, according to the occasion, or the canonical laws governing Divine Worship.

This word, in and around which such sacred associations are woven, is not a native English word, nor is it even a modern word. It dates from distant antiquity. It is derived from an ancient root which was common to several of the primitive Semitic languages, the original meaning of which was "to prop" or "to support".

As time elapsed it took on new and wider meanings. It came to carry, also, the thought of verbal support, "assent" or "endorsement" of some spoken word, as for example, in the people's response to the Leviticus charges in Deut. 27.15-26. Here it bears the thought "so let it be". Again, when Nehemiah made an appeal to Israel to discontinue taking usury from a poorer brother in Israel, the whole people gave assent by a mutual "Amen." Here it would carry the thought "so will we do". (Neh. 5.13). When the Ark was taken to Jerusalem and the sons of Asaph sang the anthem of thanksgiving composed by David for the great event, the people responded by a great "Amen" – so say we all.

In seasons of devoted worship, or times of national crisis, the fervent "Amen" of the whole nation (or congregation) was the response to the fervent appeal made by the appointed servant of the Lord, to "do" what the Lord would have them do or "be" what He would have them be.

When the centralized form of worship at the Temple gave place to the widely distributed worship of the synagogue, every appeal by the synagogue authorities was answered by the local congregation's 'Amen'. In this way every responsible citizen of Israel admitted and acknowledged his or her responsibility before the Lord, and reaffirmed the desire to live at peace with God. Having been reminded of Israel's unique prerogatives, and of her special standing before the Most High God, every acclamation of the "Amen" was tantamount to a solemn vow, renewed, by every member of the congregation. It carried with it the prayer "so let it be" – "so will we all do" From the Jewish synagogue this conception passed into the Christian Church:

"It was a custom which passed over from the Synagogue into the Christian assemblies that when he who had read or discoursed had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the others in attendance responded 'Amen', and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own." (*Thayer's Lexicon, p.32 under word 'Amen'*)

In this way, the Jewish ceremonial practice, epitomized by a word far older

than themselves, found an entrance into the Christian communities everywhere. It is thus an ancient word heavily encrusted with reverential thought that finds expression on our modern lips whenever we respond to the spirit of the prayer or exhortation.

In the days of the early Church the place of the 'Amen' in the act of worship was a most important one. It was no mere trifling part of the ceremony to be performed or neglected at will. Even Paul, opponent of formalism, calls it 'The Amen' (1 Cor. 14.16). The mutual response, at the right moment, of every heart and voice, in unison, was accounted to be of greater importance than the exercise of the gift of tongues, if for the time being, in an unknown tongue. Better to have the whole audience answer with its 'Amen' because it understood than to listen to the incomprehensible. "*How can anyone in the position of an outsider say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?*" (1 Cor. 14.16 RSV).

According to the testimony of some early Fathers in the Church, the congregation's expression of 'Amen' was by no means a feebly-whispered response but a mighty shout that made the rafters ring – a tide of sound that echoed and re-echoed, back and forth, till the very building shook. It was gratitude for what the Lord had done for each and released the pent-up feelings of the whole person in a great shout of such lusty magnitude, that might well be called a 'Grand Amen'. If these records present a true picture of the scene, no wonder Paul, in words both simple and profound, depicts it as "*saying the Amen*".

Early in the second century Elders and Bishops in the Church began to claim the right exclusively to expound the Word. Her ablest scholars – so they said – must be thus authorized to enable the universal Church to withstand the assaults of pagan foes. But, while conceding this, for the common good, there was one thing the congregation would not concede. It would not relinquish the privilege of voicing its great 'Amen'. Call this vocal climax of the worship 'formalism', if we will, but, we must not forget that the 'Amen' seemed to mean much more to the early Church than it means today. To us the force and meaning of the word 'Amen' has been whittled down and almost lost. It has come to mean, with passing years, little more than 'so be it'. It expresses the responsive assent of the congregation to the spoken word, the hearer's response to the prayer, the benediction, the doxology, or the personal appeal.

This definition has not the ancient force of that which inspired the early Church, nor even the Jewish Synagogue. To them the sharing of the great 'Amen' was tantamount to making a vow to the Lord. He who says 'Amen', writes one commentator, regarding both the Synagogue and the early Church, thereby asserts that his statement is binding.

Perhaps we may better understand what the "Amen" meant to the early Church, if we consider this forceful word as it fell from the Master's lips. Jesus

used it as no other man had used it before His day. With Him, it never came as a climax to a statement or to a prayer. Always, it preceded some solemn utterance. With Him, it was not used responsively to what another said, but only to emphasize what He was about to say. "Amen, Amen, I say unto you" was His usual mode of stressing some great truth. To Him it meant, this is the truth, this alone is truth, and this is the whole truth.

Customarily, a teacher reasons his way from the circumference of a topic towards the light at the centre of things. Jesus went to the centre in one step and spoke there in the full blaze of the Light. He had no 'ifs' nor 'buts' nor qualifying phrases to introduce. He could use the imperative, and say 'it is thus and so'. He spoke with authority, infallibly, knowing the 'truth absolute'; stating it with emphasis. He said to Nicodemus *"Truly, truly (amen and amen) I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen"* (John 3.11 RSV).

How authoritative and awe-inspiring, therefore, were those themes to which Jesus linked this solemn affirmation. Here are a few. *"Truly, truly, (amen, amen) I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live"* (John 5. 25). *"Truly, truly, (amen, amen) I say to you. I am the door of the sheep"* (John 10.7-16). *"Truly, truly, (amen, amen) I say to you, he who believes has eternal life"* (John 6.47-51). Always it is truth absolute, spoken by the voice of absolute authority. How feeble, against this weight of emphasis is the word "verily", or our own phrase 'so be it', or more recently 'indeed and indeed.' Truly we have lost much of the force and meaning of the Master's "Amen".

The early Church, at least in apostolic days, was not permitted to forget this emphasis and there is an example in 2 Cor. 1.15-22. Paul had been charged with prevarication; with saying one thing and meaning something else. He had intimated that he might call at Corinth on his journey into Macedonia (1 Cor. 4.19), then, when his visit there was accomplished, return again to Corinth and probably winter there (1 Cor. 16.5-6). Circumstances had made the two visits impossible and thus the cause of the accusation arose. In self-defence Paul says *"Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man ready to say Yes and No at once?"* (duplicity of the double tongue). For Paul the course of life was mapped out by the Lord – *"if the Lord wills"* (1 Cor. 4.19) *"if the Lord permits"* (1 Cor. 16.7), and he knew it was not for him, without the Lord's approval or ordering, to take one step here or there, or bind himself to take this course or that. He may form a preference, or even express a fond desire (Acts 19.21), but it was not for him to bind himself by emphatic promise, or excuse himself by definite refusal to do this thing or that. All the supervision of his life was the Lord's prerogative, and subject to His oversight.

The Corinthians had not learned this truth sufficiently to bow to the Lord's control, and were blaming Paul for breaking his word. It did not seem to have

occurred to them to blame the Lord who had supervised Paul's course. He wanted them to know that as they accounted God to be faithful (actuated by a singleness of purpose) so, in like manner, "our word to you is not 'yea and nay'", and that he was not unmindful of the promises He had made. Then on to higher ground he cites the facts of the Saviour's life to prove that the Christian life is not based on irresolution or inconstancy. "*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always yes*". Indeed, had Jesus of Nazareth, at any stage of His exacting career, been of an irresolute or inconstant disposition, He could never have won through. Had there not been firm determination to do the Will of God, at all costs, and against all who would oppose, it could not have been said of Him that He had been "*declared to be the Son of God ... by His Resurrection from the dead*" (Rom. 1.4).

Surely, not less positively, is the exalted Son of God than was the Man of Nazareth! There was, therefore, no ground for asserting vacillation by the Lord, and since the oversight of Paul's life was in that Lord's hands, there could be no charge of inconstancy laid against His "orderings". Paul wanted these meticulous brethren to understand that every promise or proposal made by one to another should be made subject to God's control, and accepted without recrimination, even if they could not be fulfilled, provided always, that such non-fulfillment was in full accord with the will of God.

Again Paul moves to higher ground, and brings to their attention the universal aspect of the Word of God made certain by the unchanging constancy of the Son of God. "*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him*". There were promises to Eve, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to David, and to Israel. God had made many promises, assuring them that they should yet attain their place among the nations of the earth. And to the Church of Christ, exceeding great and precious promises have been made. The condemnation of Adam's race stood in the way, and few indeed of these promises could be realised and inherited till that condemnation was taken away.

By His sacrifice at Calvary, and presented at the Throne of God, that embargo was removed, and the whole wide range of promises was confirmed and made unfailingly sure (Rom. 15.8). Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God, now stands forever as the "confirming Yes" to every promise of the Most High God, to whomsoever made. His glorious exalted life, following his vicarious death, is the sure pledge that all God's purposes will stand, for the same constancy that prevails in Heaven and as prevailed between Jordan and Calvary.

Then by a few well-chosen words Paul shows the great sequel to, all this constancy. "*That is why we utter the Amen through Him to the glory of God.*" Today the "Amen" rises from His people, in smaller or greater congregations but its volume will swell to the ends of the earth, as first, the Seed of Abraham enters into its inheritance, and through them, the nations of the Earth find their way into the City of God. All the wide world will make the rafters of the universe

echo and echo again as they volley forth the "Grand Amen".

There is one further aspect of this ancient theme in which a universal fact becomes also an incomparable Name! Jesus illustrated this extension of a fact into a Name when He said "*I am the Truth ...*" (John 14.6). Jesus had stood forth as a Teacher of truth, presenting to all who could hear it but in reality, He was more than a teacher of truth. All truth met in His person. All the facts of man's alienated life pointed to their need for Him. All the aspects of His spotless nature and sinless sacrifice pointed to His ability to meet man's need. All man's need, and all God's provision met in Him. He was the consummation, indeed the Living Truth.

Finally through Him shall yet be "*These things says The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness*" (Rev. 3.14). Exactly as the Name given to Him at His birth (Jesus) was an indication of why He came to Earth (Matt. 1.21), so also, the Name given Him in His exaltation is an indication of what He has done. It has a sense of finality and completeness about it. It tells of a task completed in the interests of a purpose that for ever "is" – a purpose that knows no change or variation, worlds without end, of which every segment is certain and sure, because of what He did.

God only is competent to confer such a Name, for none but He can fully understand the greatness of the task that has been done. By giving that Name, God has set forth His estimation and approval of the universal work that was achieved, and of the certainty that exists. It is as though the Eternal One, to sustain our faltering faith, has said, through the giving of that Name "Yes, it is so, it is sure, it cannot fail; in Him is the final word". He knows His worthy Son is constant and true, and so He speaks accordingly. To the Most High that worthy Son is the 'Amen', the climax of every hope and good intent.

TH

A Christian Church ought to be an exhibition of heaven upon earth – a manifestation of Christ below – a witness for God in the midst of the world, so that the world looking at the Church may be able to say: "This is a specimen of that which is called the Gospel, can do; this is a model of what Christian teaching can achieve." And so all with whom we come into contact in our daily life will say: "That person does not say much about his Christian beliefs when transacting his business, but there prevails in all that he does an integrity, a singleness of eye, a simplicity of purpose, a faithfulness to his engagements, and a strength in trial, that proves he must have some fountain of peace and comfort and joy that we have not. We will go and hear what he hears, learn the lessons he has learned, and taste, if it be possible, the happiness which we see in his character." Such a one becomes to mankind either the salt that silently keeps a society from corruption, or the light shining on the hilltop that illuminates the earth with a ray of the glory of heaven. (Forest Gate Bible Monthly)

HOUSE OF MY PILGRIMAGE

"Thy Statutes have been my song in the House of my Pilgrimage!" (Psa. 119.54)

"House of my Pilgrimage" – What lies before me?
As milestones are passed – be they many or few –
Storm-clouds and grey skies may be hanging o'er me;
The Light of the New Day we see shining through.

"House of my Pilgrimage" – Lonesome and dreary –
Brambles and thorns beset the poor "Feet",
Yet there is comfort to those who grow weary,
When on the way Fellow Pilgrims we meet.

"House of my Pilgrimage" – I must hie onward!
Rough and steep is Life's winding road –
A rose-strewn path might lure us to linger;
Briars and thorns may serve as a goad.

"House of my Pilgrimage" – still pressing forward,
The struggle gives strength as we climb the Hill;
His Promise sustains us – whate'er be the conflict –
That "Mercy and Goodness shall follow us still".

"House of my Pilgrimage" – soon to lie shattered!
A permanent *Home* await the dear "Feet",
Wayworn and weary – by distance now scattered –
Joy of re-union will *then* be complete.

"House of my Pilgrimage" – Glad Compensation!
When the warrior wins the Victor's Palm –
And those who went forth to toil, or suffer,
Find their reward in rest and calm.

"House of my Pilgrimage" – Calm retrospection!
If the Fight was fierce and the way seemed long,
We surely can say:- "Jehovah hath led me –
His statutes have been my Pilgrimage Song."

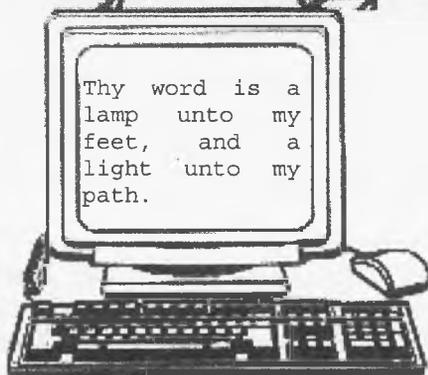
"House of Jehovah" – O, blest Habitation!
No longer in "Pilgrimage House" to dwell –
Our "Feet" shall stand in that long desired Haven –
And give Praise to him Who hath done all things well!

RW

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)

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WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

As we read through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians we find extraordinary breadth of vision and clarity of understanding. He wrote to a church that had remarkable diversity of blessings but had deep rifts between its various groups. Paul as a Jew, brought up in a Greek-Roman environment, was also able to call upon a remarkable understanding of the world around him. Examples of this are his references to the Isthmian games which Jews in Judea shunned. Paul wrote of the training for a race in 9.24-27; of the whole hearted effort needed in boxing and in running for a prize. There are similar references in some of his other letters.

Paul could use illustrations from Roman soldiery and earnestly sought the brethren to pray for political leaders. He valued his Roman citizenship as well as his Jewish background. What would he make of democracy or the abolition of slavery? He did have something to say about the paid ministry! As we look across the vast areas of thought that he covered (not to mention vast geographical areas) did he give absolute rules that the Puritan way of life or the monastic orders seem to indicate? Did he not rather offer principles that needed appropriate application in a variety of circumstances, situations and time periods? *"I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings"* (1 Cor. 9.22, 23 RSV).

We build up our own mental structure of what the Bible says and then squash every statement and description into it. Pilate asked "What is truth?" and because nothing is recorded, we may assume that he was in too much of a hurry or didn't really care; but is that so? Do we lose more than we gain by a mind set?

RELATIONSHIPS

In every part of the Earth, wherever there are living things, there are relationships, because all organisms, plant, animal or other, are dependant on one another and upon their environment. Ecology is a method of describing those relationships.

Relationships are more important to humanity than anything else. Firstly, it appears that the Creator made us so that we need complex relationships between us. Even more important, He made us so that we can have a relationship with Him. He has gone to considerable trouble to lay down the ground rules for such relationships and the whole process is described in the Bible as a 'Covenant'. It is also clear that God enjoys such relationships and gives them every possible encouragement.

The covenants began, so far as our record shows, with Noah after the Flood (Gen. 8.9-11). The concept became enlarged in the life of Abraham and his family and that great patriarch was described as a friend of God (Gen. 15, Isa. 41.8). We learn even more from the time of Moses when God made a special relationship with all the living descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob (Ex. 19.6). We do not know all that went on in those relationships and how God cemented the relationships by the expressions of His love, but the revelation of these friendships, recorded for our benefit, gradually unfolds, enabling us to know what God is like. From patriarch to prophet and on to John the Baptist, the wonder of God's character is shown to us.

The coming of God's Son opened a totally new chapter in the understanding of the Creator, for Jesus was the exact reflection of the glory of God, bearing "*the very stamp of his nature*" (Heb. 1.3 RSV). Jesus went a stage further than those who had gone before, not only showing us what God is like but opening the way for His followers to enter into the kind of relationship with the Father that He enjoyed (John 17.21-23). This was made all the more realistic because Jesus' life, in word and action described for us just what our Father really is like. It was Jesus who much encouraged His people to regard God as their Heavenly Father, which immediately brings the Everlasting Almighty Creator into the closest possible relationship. This became clear at the outset of His ministry. In Jesus' basic teaching, laid down in the Sermon on the Mount He refers to 'your Father who is in Heaven' in Matt. 5.16; 5.45; 6.1; 6.4; 6.6 (twice) 6.9 (prayer); 6.14; 6.18 (twice); 6.26; 6.32; 7.11; 7.21. The Sermon on the Mount is a wonderful discovery of the Father in Heaven and to Jews who inherited a twisted view of the Old Testament via rabbis, scribes and Pharisees, it must have been a very surprising revelation. But to the vast majority of mankind, spiritually blind pagans, it must have seemed impossible. The great God of the Universe is more loving, gentle, forgiving and tender than the most wonderful father and mother

that any person could imagine. This is the God who is looking for a relationship with each one of us. He knows us well and He wants us to know Him and spend time with Him.

This is a relationship that demands everything – total commitment – yet it is a relationship that has everything to give. But being devoted to God in no way hinders relationships with others provided other friends do not interfere with our friendship with Him. In fact our relationship with God motivates toward good friendships with others because God is love and He wants us to have strong bonds of love with others. What a challenge this is to the children of God for it should mean that they should be the most friendly people on Earth, rich in friendship and enjoying strong bonds with those who are close to them.

The relationship with God can be broken, as it was in Eden, and for the same reason. Sin cuts us off from God and also from others who love Him. This occurs when we break God's law and are disobedient to what we know He requires of us. As we look through history from the days of Adam and Eve to this present time the principle has always been the same - as it was in the time of Israel "*See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*" (Isa. 59.1, 2 NRSV). God is wonderfully patient with human weaknesses and ignorance. Our obedience is subject to our understanding, but the ethical objective is that we are obedient to the light we have and this is so vital in our relationship with a holy God. But like the prodigal, we can walk away from God, by our behaviour, and we can return, seventy times seven and still we find the Father waiting to receive us back with open arms. But as with our first parents, human nature finds obedience difficult and not everything the Lord has asked us to do is attractive. But Jesus asked us to love each other. How strange that some of His brothers and sisters fall out and leave each other. It is quite impossible to express love for fellow Christians if we turn our backs on them. Of course, we can still pray for them, but do we do so in a sympathetic, even forgiving way?

It is wonderful that the Saviour, who died for us, is also the close friend who is with us every moment of every day. Many Christians find it easier to identify with the Lord Jesus than with God because of the wonderful records of His earthly life which the Gospel writers have left to us. Those who have walked with the Lord for many years have become familiar with the way that Jesus operates in their lives as He did among men and women when He walked the roads of Galilee and Judea. He demands the same strong, upright behaviour as well as the gentle forgiveness for those who stumble.

Friendship is one of those most wonderful aspects of life on Earth. Observation of animal life provides many touching examples of strong bonds between mating pairs. Human friendship is about sharing life in its many

aspects, the joys and sorrows, the times of plenty and times of frugality, the elation of success and disappointment of failure; these are the shared experiences of friends. There can be little in human experience more delightful than the development, from birth, of happy, healthy family life. The bonds between siblings reflect the relationship of parents. This is friendship and echoes the beauty of our relationship with the Heavenly Father and with our Lord Jesus.

Just as a human family should be one of love, often sacrificial love, so it is in God's family upon Earth. *"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another."* So said Jesus of His brethren, this is how it must be if we are part of God's family. A loving relationship is expressed practically and demonstrated in kindly actions and encouraging words. Family life is betokened by willing and generous helpfulness and by sympathetic forgiveness. Real friends are patient and gentle with each other, ready to support in time of need.

Christians also have a relationship with the rest of human kind. *"God so loved the world that He sent His only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* We too must love the world as our Father and our Saviour do – love enough to die for it. But we may not love the world for its 'worldliness'. Expressions of helpfulness do not require imitation of those who are helped.

This was in some respects Israel's great failure. When they eventually came to terms with their neighbours, they decided to adopt their ways and their daughters and eventually their gods. The Christian Church had a similar history. For the first two centuries Christians slowly made their place in society and earned grudging admiration from their pagan neighbours. But the Christian faith became more popular and eventually became the official 'religion' of 'the Empire'. While the spiritual morality was being taught to the heathen, all went well but standards fell when the heathen started to dictate the ethical standards. Christians became high officials – even becoming Emperor. Followers of the Carpenter of Nazareth became rich – people of influence – officers in the Roman army – and eventually turned the tables on the Jews and became anti-Semitic. The Church itself became socially strong and materially wealthy. Ultimately the Church violently and cruelly treated any of its own brethren who refused to toe its line. Did they ever ask the questions 'Is this what Jesus would do? Is this what He wants me to do?'

What did all this do to relationships in those darkest years of Christianity? Given the circumstances, how much better would we do? How much better are we doing in this twenty-first century of the Christian faith? It is for us to determine, every day, as we speak to the Lord, that as a day unfolds, it will be a

better one than the days that have gone before, as we relate to God, to our Saviour, to His brethren and to His world – He died for all.

These relationships can be broken. Sin, in some form is the cause of relationships being broken. Sadly we do not value relationship enough. Can we not see the logic – is it not true – that a relationship is more important than any reason whatsoever for breaking that relationship. Friends, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters in Christ, often allow a quarrel to jeopardise a relationship yet the reason for the dispute – the 'row' is not so important as that relationship itself. Love is the most important thing, it is the goal in life, and it is more important than knowledge in the Church (1 Cor. 8.1; Eph. 4.15).

Ponder afresh the relationship that existed between Adam and Eve as they walked their own cultivated garden; or the eight in the Ark, or Abraham and Isaac as father taught son to supervise their large 'staff'. What was the relationship between Miriam and her brother Moses; and were there no disputes between Naomi and Ruth or David and Jonathan? So we might go on through the Scriptures, perhaps discovering new aspects of these remarkable characters. How fruitful were those relationships and how much did they interfere with their relationship to God? Did they dispute who was the greatest like the twelve apostles? Or like them do we sometimes want to bring down fire from Heaven?

The nearer we come to God, the nearer we come to those around us. The further we distance ourselves from others, the more likely we are to distance ourselves from God.

DN

“I HAVE FOUND A RANSOM”

Elihu's discourse to the friends of Job includes a reference to the redemptive work of Christ so remarkable for so early an age that many commentators refuse to interpret the words according to their plain meaning. It is only when the knowledge of the Divine Plan reveals the literal truth of Elihu's statement that as a result of this "ransom" the flesh of man shall be fresher than a child's and he shall return to the days of his youth, that the beauty of this passage is fully appreciated. *"If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him and saith 'Deliver him from going down into the pits. I have found a ransom'"* (Job 33.24). The word translated "deliver" means "To buy back for a price"; having much the same meaning as "*anti-lutron*" in the New Testament; and the word "ransom" has the significance of "atonement". Thus in those far-off days when the world was young we have a plain statement of earthly restitution to be effected as a result of the giving of a "Ransom for All."

ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS

A Story of Paul

A ripple of indignation passed over the synagogue. This man was voicing the most outrageous heresies. It was not that he had espoused the cause of the crucified Nazarene. These orthodox Jews of Damascus knew that several prominent Pharisees of Jerusalem had already done that. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, Jerusalem Pharisees both and members of the Sanhedrin had acknowledged their belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. For all its bigotry and formalism, organized Judaism allowed considerable latitude in matters of belief to the individual, and it was possible to be a passive believer in Christ without risking excommunication or loss of office. At Jerusalem in fact, a *"great company of the priests were obedient"* to the new faith (Acts 6.7). But no one had as yet suggested this to be anything else than another new sect of Judaism. It had a few peculiarities, an undue and altogether mistaken reverence for the man who had been crucified, but, now that He Himself was safely out of the way it was unlikely to threaten any established institution. The top ecclesiastics in Jerusalem, the High Priest, the Sanhedrin and some of the more prominent Scribes and Pharisees, seemed most unaccountably disturbed over the development and were doing all they could to suppress it, but really these Jews who accepted the claims of Jesus seemed in all other respects orthodox enough; they upheld the law of Moses and refused to have anything to do with Gentiles. They kept the feast days and observed the usual customs. So far as the synagogues up and down the land were concerned there was nothing to bar a "follower of the Way", as they called themselves, from participating in the worship or taking a leading part. But this man was going beyond all that others of the persuasion had so far practised, and beyond all the bounds of decency. The Galilean disciples had proclaimed, as the basis of their faith, their belief that they had seen the crucified Jesus walking the earth after his death, talking with them, eating with them, and behaving generally as a man behaves, a thesis which could be tolerated on the basis that Elisha had been known to restore a man to life and what had happened once could happen again. Saul the Pharisee had shifted the grounds of argument to something much more dangerous; he claimed to have seen this same Jesus resplendent in heavenly glory, standing at the right hand of power, and was making it all too obvious that the new faith so far as he was concerned was not going to be a divergent sect of Judaism but was going to challenge Judaism, overthrow it and supersede it. They were compelled to sit in their own synagogue and listen while the man before them *"preached Christ that he is the Son of God"* (Acts 9.20).

This was quite a departure in Christian evangelism. Peter and John and the others in their public ministry had not stressed the Divine sonship of Christ; rather they had dwelt upon His office as the Divine Messenger, the One that

should come. *"This man hath God raised up"* they said. God had exalted him to be a Prince and Saviour. He was the foretold prophet like unto Moses; when they did use the term 'son' they softened the effect by referring to him as *"his Son Jesus"* without any inherent suggestion of Divinity. Perhaps at that early stage they had hardly grasped the deeper truth themselves, but Saul had. His experience on the Damascus road, coupled with three years' study and meditation away in Arabia, had shown him in crystal clarity that this One who appeared on earth in form as a man and after His death revealed Himself at the right hand of God could be no other than the pre-human Word. He is the manifestation of God to man, the heavenly Son of God. Upon that basis Saul built his message and his listeners knew that here was a challenge to their whole system of belief and way of life, and they bristled with anger.

Neither indignation nor anger availed them against the remorseless logic of the arguments which Saul had at his command. The word used in Acts 9.22 *"proving that this is very Christ"* comes from a root implying the accurate and intimate fitting of one part to another; in this connection it describes the building of conclusions upon arguments, the erection of doctrines upon underlying theses. Without doubt Saul brought to bear all his own not inconsiderable knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and when to that was added the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit by which he was guided the result was a dynamic which could not be resisted. Even before his conversion Saul would have been a formidable antagonist to engage in debate, but now there was more than a keen, intellectual mind buttressed by the gift of rhetoric and profound knowledge of the subject. Behind Saul stood his unseen Master, imparting to him a spiritual discernment and a force of conviction which nothing in Damascus could hope to withstand. So the more extreme among the leading Pharisees and Scribes plotted to solve the problem by deliberately encompassing Saul's death.

How they planned to carry out the assassination is not stated. Saul became aware of the conspiracy; he knew his men well and was probably only too familiar with similar scheming in previous days, and decided that it was time to leave Damascus. To do so openly was impossible; the city gates were being watched and Damascus was completely surrounded by a high wall. The Christians were equal to the occasion; dwelling-houses joined to the inside, with windows piercing the wall, were not uncommon. Through such a window the Apostle was put and lowered to the ground outside; thus alone and without possessions, in the darkness of the night, he stole away from the city and headed on foot towards Jerusalem.

This was not the return journey he had planned. More than three years previously he had set out from Jerusalem expecting to be back in a few weeks at the head of a procession of captives, entering the city amid the plaudits and

congratulations of the ruling officials and doubtless in expectation of further honours to be bestowed in recognition of his services. Now he was making his way back alone, unknown and unrecognized, with small prospect of any better treatment at Jerusalem than he had received at Damascus. In all this experience Saul must have perceived the Divine law of retribution in operation. He condemned Stephen for declaring that he beheld heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; he saw the same thing himself not many weeks later. He went to Damascus the persecutor; he left Damascus persecuted. He purposed to take Christians bound to Jerusalem for punishment; he began to realise now that in all probability bonds and imprisonment were to be his own lot before Jerusalem had finished with him. But he did not falter; he knew that his path must inevitably take him to Jerusalem. His departure from Damascus was not a flight; he journeyed now to meet the next stage of his experience as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

That experience opened with a crushing disappointment. Of course Saul expected to be cold-shouldered by his former friends and associates. He was to them a renegade, a traitor, and they wanted nothing more to do with him. His career lay in ruins, his reputation and influence gone, and no door even of hospitality open to him. He entered Jerusalem penniless, friendless, alone, without even knowing where he would lay his head that night. But he must have consoled himself with the thought that he could claim the fellowship and hospitality of his brethren in the faith, those whom once he persecuted but now recognized as fellow believers. He thought of the friendliness and Christian love extended to him by Ananias and his fellows at Damascus, their solicitude for his safety, and zeal in aiding his escape from that city, and he must have looked forward to a similar fellowship in Jerusalem. So immediately upon his arrival *"he assayed to join himself to the disciples"* and in that effort, educated and shrewd man of the world that he was, he manifested an unexpected ignorance of human nature. Even although the bitterness and terror of his persecuting was three years in the past, how could he have expected them to receive him? He had no sponsors; none to speak for him or endorse his claim to discipleship. The story of his conversion three years previously would certainly have come back to Jerusalem and be known to the brethren, but Damascus was a great distance away and how could they be sure they had the story aright? Much more likely that this was a trap of some kind into which they could easily fall and be taken. So *"they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple"*.

Did that bitter experience break down the last remnant of the one-time arrogant Pharisee's personal pride and self-will, and bow him to the dust that he might become the submissive bond-slave of Jesus Christ for ever? It was now three years since he had seen the vision and counted himself commissioned an ambassador for Christ, and what had he achieved? His preaching at Damascus

had ended in an ignominious flight from the city; a similar endeavour to preach to the Jewish upper classes here in Jerusalem was clearly out of the question; now even the believers themselves wanted nothing to do with him. Not only was there no shelter for his body, there was no prospect of an opening for the exercise of his mind and his talents in the one cause which meant anything to him. Discouragement and frustration oppressed his mind. The work of three years appeared to have been wasted, and to a man in his middle thirties, three years is a long time when that man is aching to make of his life a thing mighty in the service of the purposes of God.

This was Paul's darkest hour and the dawn was not far away. Seemingly by accident, but of course in Divine Providence, and without doubt precisely at God's appointed time, he met an old acquaintance, Joseph Barnabas, himself a Christian and well known to the Christian community in Jerusalem. Where and how these two men first met is not known. Barnabas hailed from Cyprus which is not far from Saul's birthplace, Tarsus. Barnabas could probably, in earlier days, have had business on the mainland which would take him to Tarsus and in such case he would certainly have contacted the Jewish colony there and could thus have known the youthful Saul. Barnabas was one of the earliest converts after Pentecost and was in Jerusalem at the time – Acts 4.36, 37 records how he sold land and donated the proceeds to the needs of the fellowship. It is perhaps more likely he was in Damascus during Saul's sojourn in that city and knew him there. He appears from Acts 9.27 to have been quite well-informed on the details of Saul's conversion and work at Damascus. At any rate, Barnabas proved a real friend in need. He took Saul to the apostles and certified his sincerity. With that recommendation the church was content to receive the newcomer into their fellowship and Saul found at last the haven his soul desired.

He only stayed in Jerusalem fifteen days (Gal. 1.18). Saul's turbulent spirit, allied with his irrepressible zeal, quickly got him into trouble with the Jews, and here again, as at Damascus, they plotted to kill him. He had to flee for his life; once more the brethren rallied round to assist him and got him away to the seacoast where he could get a boat to his native Tarsus. It is possible that the Christians at Jerusalem were not altogether sorry to see the back of their rather embarrassing new convert. They had been enjoying a relatively peaceful time, free from persecution, prior to Saul's arrival, and the commotion he was creating in the city was not likely to be appreciated by those who knew what persecution meant. Luke was probably quite unconscious of a certain unintended humour in his narrative when immediately after his account of how the brethren succeeded in getting Saul out of the country, he says *"then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria"* (Acts 9.30-31). Really the brethren had seen very little of Saul; he says himself that he only saw Peter and James the half brother of Jesus among the leaders. Peter seems to have given

him the hospitality of his own home and the two men must have had much to say to each other. Saul must have learned a lot about the Lord's life and sayings from Peter on this occasion, and fifteen days seems a remarkably brief time for Saul to confer with him and also whip up Jewish opposition to the point of plotting his death. Perhaps as the boat sailed away from Judea he reflected that twice now his life had been saved by men and women whom once he had persecuted unto the death; he was being given a lesson on returning good for evil.

So, for the second time, Saul was to be laid aside from the work he had been commissioned to carry out. He remained quietly at Tarsus, learning to wait upon his Lord for instruction and guidance, probably wondering why he seemed so definitely to be obstructed and frustrated in every endeavour to commence the work to which he had been called. Maybe a lesser man would have grown tired of it all by now and concluded that he was not really called to this work after all, and turned aside to some other interest. Not so Saul; the vision he had seen on that memorable occasion outside Damascus remained with him still; he knew on whom he had believed, and waited now in quiet submission for the summons to action which he felt sure would eventually come. Although he could not possibly have known it at the time, forces were already in operation in a completely new centre of missionary activity that would very shortly demand of him all that he had to give. Those few months in Tarsus were the last quiet, peaceful days the great Apostle was ever to know.

AOH

THE RIPER YEARS

A little more tired at the close of the day
A little less anxious to have our own way.
A little less care for gain or gold:
A little more zest for the days of old.
A broader view and a saner mind;
A little more love for all mankind.
A little more love for the friends of youth
A little more zeal for established truth.
A little more charity in our views,
A little less thirst for the latest news.
A little more leisure to sit and dream
A little more real the things unseen.

PH

STEADFAST, IN SERVICE ABOUNDING

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15.58).

These are virtually the closing words to the Corinthians. It is noticeable how frequently Paul refers to them as his brethren; and recalling that he often reproved them, one may question why he consistently so addressed them.

The early verses of chapter 1 describe their advantages in Christ; their riches, their security, their prospects in the day of Christ, and to crown all, the faithfulness of that God who called them. There we find that their blessings are the same as Paul's and this is why they are brethren. But immediately following this introduction comes Paul's correction for their failings (v10). It is clear from chapter 3 that Paul wants to speak to them of higher things but they are not yet in a fitting heart condition. There are practices in the Church unworthy of their standing in Christ; practices which if continued will prevent them being steadfast and unmovable.

Another and particular reason why Paul addresses them as brethren is seen in chapter 9 vv 1 & 2. The Corinthian church was founded as the result of Paul's eighteen months' ministry there. He had just left Athens and on arriving at Corinth he went, as usual, to the synagogue. A handful of Jews accepted his message, but the synagogue as a whole rejected him, thus incurring his rejection of them. Then the Lord spoke to him in a vision and caused him to prolong his stay in Corinth; for the Lord said *"I have much people in this city."* The story of his ministry there is recorded in Acts 18. Note those encouraging words from the Lord in vv 9 & 10. Are they not, in effect, the same as Paul exhorts these brethren in 1 Corinthians 15.58? Thus, the charge from the Lord that prolonged his stay in Corinth, he passes on to them.

And there is compensation in all this for Paul. If, by his exhortation, these brethren become steadfast, Paul will know that his labour is not in vain in the Lord; and hearing that his work is prospering, he will himself be impelled to further steadfastness. This is another reason why they are brethren – the loyalty of one is an incentive to the other, for they are all members of one body.

It is in this epistle that Paul gives the figure of the body, which teaches, among other things, that the Church exists on a mutual basis. Exploring the Corinthian field we might think it unprofitable ground to till and plant; but Paul, encouraged by the vision, puts into effect his own admonition of 1 Cor. 12.22-23 and gives more honour to those members which seem to be more feeble.

Now let us regard the text as an admonition to ourselves today. The exhortation may be divided into two parts which seem at variance with each other. The first part urges "immovability", whereas the second urges "activity".

Again, the former concerns the work 'within', the latter speaks of the work 'without'. Upon which do the Scriptures lay most stress? Some stress that part that they think is the Divine Will. Some appear steadfast, but they do not serve. Others appear very active but are not concerned about their standing. Let us be true to the text by giving equal weight to each portion of the admonition. We can with propriety follow the Apostle himself as an example of steadfastness with activity.

Let us consider how steadfastness arises. Its obvious basis is faith. They are steadfast who are convinced that their standing in Christ is solely of grace. They know themselves to be sons of God, not by acquiring a place in the Divine family but by adoption into it. They believe that they were chosen in him before foundation of the world and that God has predestined the eventual state of these He foreknew. Therefore in due time He called and justified them; and they believe that in the day of Christ, God will complete His purpose in them by glorifying them. Thus they see that all things are working together for their good; and resting in their sonship and prospects they become steadfast, immovable.

Referring to our text with these thoughts in mind, we see that the first half of the verse speaks of sonship and the other tells of service. Sons and servants. Let us ask ourselves a few questions to find our true position. To the query "are we sons or servants?" some cautiously will answer "both"; so let us ask further. Do we say "If I serve well I shall be made a son?" No amount of service will secure us sonship, for it is a gift, not a reward. Do we say "If I serve well I shall prove I am a son"? This is hardly correct. Faithful service will only prove that we are good servants, no more. Do we say "I know that I am a son, and therefore I serve"? This is a far better affirmation.

We can now read our text "*Be steadfast, immovable (as sons), always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (as servants).

The Holy Spirit has caused the words to be written in the right order, sonship first, followed by grateful service. They who are steadfast in their sonship make the best servants, because they serve through gratitude for grace received and not for reward for services rendered.

The two parts of our text are to be found together elsewhere. In Phil. 1.27. Paul is trusting to hear of the Philippian brethren, the same two facts, "*that they stand*" and "*that they strive*". Here again are these two points of Christian life, fixity, yet activity; the work *within* and the work *without*. And again we may ask ourselves which is the more important, to stand or to strive? All will agree it is imperative that we *stand fast*, but are we equally as ardent in *striving* for the faith of the Gospel? It is so easy to say that as God will surely accomplish all his purposes very shortly, there is no need to strive for the Gospel. If we think so we are partial and are not giving equal weight to each part of the admonition.

It is providential that Paul was set for the defence of the Gospel and actually strove for the faith. If he had failed in this part of his ministry where would have been Philippi or Corinth? To Paul the work of the Lord is the *outside* declaration of the faith; yet while urging it he did not forget the *inside* position of steadfastness. He preached the word and did not make the plausible plea that it would be useless to preach in Corinth because of their Grecian practices. And later he was rewarded by finding that his labour was not in vain in the Lord.

We also read in Phil. 2.15-16 "*That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation*" (our standing), "*among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*" (our service). If this is done, Paul will rejoice in the day of Christ, knowing that he did not run in vain and that his labour was not in vain in the Lord. And so we see in this and other texts that the two points of sonship and service, steadfastness and work, go hand in hand; and that Paul does not emphasize one at the expense of the other.

Let us think also of the import of Paul's second letter to Timothy, whom he wishes shall continue the spread of Gospel now that his departure is at hand. While exhorting Timothy to personal steadfastness he joins with that an exhortation to preach the word. Paul knows that by personal fortitude and steadfastness Timothy will be best equipped for evangelical work; and that by preaching the word he will impress upon his own mind Bible truths and so become more established and immovable.

Each of these is valuable to the other, and it is one of the Christian's requirements to give equal adherence to each, sonship and service. Some will contend that the work *within* is the more important, while others will affirm that *outside* work is God's will. We shall not underrate either if we recall that each has its sphere in Christian life and each assists the growth of the other; and that it occurs by Divine overruling that outward declaration encourages inward steadfastness, and that true steadfastness in sonship impels service.

BJD

“SHONE FORTH”

“*They that be wise*” said the revealing angel to Daniel “*shall shine as the brightness of the firmament*” – the sun (Dan. 12.3). It is of some interest to note that a small Babylonian clay tablet recovered from the ruins of Nippur – the Claneh of Gen. 10 – expresses exactly the same sentiment “*whoever distinguishes himself at university shall shine as the day.*” The tablet dates back to the time of Abraham; the angel declared the same thing to Daniel. Our Lord told his disciples that they, the righteous who embrace the heavenly wisdom, that which cometh from above, at the end of this age “*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Matt. 13.43).

SUMMONED

Anyone who has been summoned before authority will have a feeling for the emotions aroused. A student, called to the Head's study, an employee called before the boss – there may be a degree of apprehension, and fear of what might be coming. On the other hand, it may be an occasion for praise, or to discuss the work in hand, or to be sent out to do some special task. There is a Greek word, 'proskaleo', used in the New Testament to refer to cases of this kind of summons, often when there are important issues at stake.

The centurion on duty at Calvary was summoned to Pilate (Mark 15.44), for him to be sure that Jesus was already dead. This incident is just one link in the chain of evidence that Jesus' death and resurrection were real historical events – and upon these events our faith is founded. On one occasion, as the apostles went out making these facts known, Paul and Barnabas were summoned to speak to the governor in Cyprus, one Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man who wanted to know about the word of God. Learning about the faith does involve taking the trouble to find out (Acts 13.7). The consequences may be unexpected. John the Baptist summoned two of his disciples (Luke 7.19), and sent them to make a check on Jesus – was He really the One that had been expected? Jesus showed them what He was doing teaching the crowds about the kingdom of God, and demonstrating by His healings what sort of kingdom it is.

Jesus Himself would often call His disciples together for some special purpose. There must have been some excitement or apprehension perhaps among them, as word got round that 'the Master wants to see us'. He summoned those He wanted, choosing the 12 and then sending them out on mission (Mark 3.13) for the kingdom – change your hearts and your ways, be healed! Not that following Him was to be thought of as an easy option or something that would bring long term popularity – He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and told them emphatically that to follow Him means self denial and accepting suffering. In one of the stories Jesus told, a steward facing dismissal summoned his master's debtors one by one to falsify their debts and gain for himself their friendship – by contrast we are to conduct our lives to please the One who offers us friendship into eternity (Luke 16.5).

There were special occasions or incidents when Jesus called the disciples together. When there was a crowd of four thousand hungry people, He called them into conference and asked them what they were going to do about it (Mark 8.1). When He noticed a poor widow putting her mite into the temple treasury, He called them – "See what she has just done!" – a lesson about sacrifice and stewardship and loyalty to God (Mark 12.43). When the disciples sent away the little children that threatened to pester Jesus, He summoned the children back. "Those who belong to the kingdom are like these kids!" (Luke 18.16). When the

disciples got above themselves, He called a child into the middle of them – it was not a case of who is the most important, it is being humble as a child (Matthew 18.2). When the 10 got cross with James and John, he summoned them and explained that we are all called to be servants (Matthew 20.25) Once He called all the people together to explain about law and character; God is less interested in our keeping food rules than in the way we express His love in our outward lives (Matthew 15.10). He also called together the scribes from Jerusalem who had come to vet Him, and put them right about being consistent in their judgments about good and evil (Mark 3.23).

In the record of the early church, there are more instances of a summons. James at one stage faces the problem of believers who are ill. The solution is to summon the elders of the church, who will anoint with oil and pray. Faith is essential. (James 5.14). Another form of suffering was persecution. The Jewish Council imprisoned the disciples (Acts 5.40), then called them forth, and had them flogged, and forbade them to speak any more about Jesus. They rejoiced in their suffering for Christ. This was often Paul's experience, and there was that notable occasion of a riot in the great city of Ephesus, which made it necessary for Paul to leave. Those who had become believers were precious to him, and when he left he called them all together, and 'exhorted' them, one can imagine his reminders and his explanations of all the things he had been teaching them for two years, and the love and mutual concern with which they parted.

In Acts 13.2 we read of Paul and Barnabas being called by the Holy Spirit. They were part of a vibrant, capable Christian community, and the word was for them to be set apart for a special task, to which they had been summoned. The message came through a worshipping group of believers, who fasted and prayed and laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them away, but the call was in the hearts of the two. Later, when Paul was working with Silas, Luke and Timothy, he had a vision of a man who was standing and appealing to him (Acts 16.10), "Come over to Macedonia and help us." This vision the group understood as a summons from God, which showed where they were to go and preach. It was all part of the work that God is doing, the calling to Himself of people who will believe.

Luke, when he records Peter's words on the day of Pentecost, uses the word 'proskaleo'. Peter had been explaining to the Jewish people around him that the actions of the disciples were a case of Joel's prophecy being fulfilled, "I will pour forth my Spirit upon all mankind" "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." They had killed the Christ, but it was impossible for death to hold Him, and He was pouring forth the Holy Spirit, at that moment. "What shall we do?" "Repent be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the

promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off..., as many as the Lord our God shall summon." (Acts 2.39)

Peter may not have realised the full universal implications of what he was saying, and later on he had to be persuaded again of the acceptability of non-Jews in God's purpose. Doubtless we too have our preconceived ideas of whom God finds acceptable. We need to trust that God knows what He is doing, have faith that His call is based on complete knowledge and leads to glory, and, for ourselves, as we live in His love, be ready to listen and to obey when He summons us.

GC

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 2 The Doctrine of Sin

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1.8-10 RSV).

Now John verges on important doctrine. He begins to talk about sin. Sin is a dread reality in the world and in our lives. Men today decry the idea and even Christians are oft-times disposed to treat sin as something inherent in our nature which we will one day outgrow. Human development will leave sin and the effects of sin behind, say some. That is a dangerous error. There is no substitute for the plain Bible teaching that man was originally created perfect and sinless, that sin came in from outside and was willingly received, and that in consequence all men are born under the reign and power of sin, with the effects registered in their minds and bodies. Therefore from their very birth all men are sinners. And just as sin came in from outside, so only from outside may come deliverance from sin. The way back to the perfection and sinlessness of the first man can only be by the power and help of One Who Himself was never sinful, who knew no sin, but who is *"able to the uttermost to save those who come unto God by him"* (Heb. 7.25). Not unless we recognise the fact that we are sinners and that all the world stands guilty before God can we honestly and sincerely accept the only way of freedom from sin that is possible. Only so can we attain, at length, to the perfect state that is the Divine desire for us.

Some there were in John's day among the ranks of the Christians who began to argue that those who had been justified by faith in Christ and freed from Adam's condemnation were on that account without sin. They also said that the indwelling Holy Spirit constituted their bodies' sinless vessels, perfect, holy unto God. Therefore, they argued, there could be no such thing as sin in the life of the child of God. This is a specious argument, having a semblance of truth,

but truth misapplied. How easy to go on and assert that the body's imperfections, the slips and stumbling and faults and the things that in other men would be counted as sin, were on this account altogether ignored by God and therefore whatever was done in the body was of no consequence. So, in a very short time, it fell out that some among the Christians became guilty of the grossest acts of sin under the impression that since it was only the body that thus transgressed it was not the believer who sinned at all.

John cuts through all the theological argument and gets right down to the root of the matter. We are still in the flesh, subject to weaknesses and imperfections of human nature. Although we have been justified and are no longer under condemnation and although we have been accepted as sons of God and He esteems us according to the intentions of our will and not according to the deeds of the body, we still stumble and fall. We have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and King and endeavour to put His principles into practice in our daily lives. There is, however, always the possibility that in consequence of an influence that bears upon us in the ordinary conduct of life, we may become temporarily blinded to, or diverted from, our course. Thus we become guilty of an action that is sin because it is out of accord with what we normally realise is right. There are many misdemeanours of which we are liable daily to be guilty that in the Lord's pure sight are classed as sin, because they constitute violations of Divine law. That is why we have a throne of grace to which we may come daily in time of need. That is why we have an Advocate before the Father, a helper who stands by our side, as John tells us a little later. A sinless person needs none of these things. A sinless man needs not to come before the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, or to claim access to the Holiest of All by faith in Him. He can come as of right, for a sinless person is the completeness of God's purpose with any individual. When he is sinless and has demonstrated that he will always remain so, he takes his place in God's permanent creation, on his own merit and has the fullest of fellowship with his Creator and Father. Paul was in no doubt about this matter. He found a law in his members (Rom. 7.17-23) that, when the will to do good was in him, evil was still present with him, so that the good he would do, he often failed to do, and the evil he would not do, that he did. Paul knew full well that despite his wholehearted allegiance to his Lord and the inestimable gift of justification which was his, the processes of sin were still at work in his body and that until the day of his death he must carry that burden. *"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* he cries, and gives the answer to his own question *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. In the comfort of the assurance of certain deliverance at the end of his earthly course he reconciles himself to the knowledge that in the meantime *"with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin"* (Rom. 7.25). It is in this sober appraisal of our true position as men and women of this world whose hearts the

Lord has touched, that we find our true strength. We do not delude ourselves with the false security of a fictitious perfection and righteousness that we do not possess, neither do we suffer ourselves to be cast down at the thought of a weight of sin and imperfection of which we cannot be relieved. Our sins exist truly enough, but God has cast them all behind His back (Isa. 38.17). Our bodies are imperfect and frail, without strength, mentally and physically, but God has promised to clothe the mind with a new body, which is neither imperfect nor frail, in due time. Our character development, our growth into the likeness of Christ, the result of all our strivings and efforts and prayer in our walk before God, will all be carried over into the spiritual world and impressed upon the new spiritual body, but the weakness of the old human body will be left behind. Then we shall indeed be able to rejoice in the fact that we are without sin; but as for the present, if we claim to be without sin, we both deceive ourselves and make God a liar. On the other hand, if we recognise the true position, and remain contrite and repentant before God for every respect in which we fall short of His ideal for us, for the little failings as well as the big faults, then He is indeed faithful and just to forgive us those things and to cleanse us from all the unrighteousness which must inevitably cling to us if we fail thus to walk in holiness before Him. The Word that is life and light to us can only remain so if we prepare the way and maintain the way by repentance and confession. That is the privilege and responsibility of the disciple; the heart thus open to the power of the Holy Spirit becomes a receptacle of Divine life and a medium for the shining of Divine light.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (ch. 2.1). For the first time in his epistles John uses a personal mode of address. *"Little children"*; it is a tender and appealing word, one that must have been specially close to the heart of the beloved disciple, for he adopts it more than any other. He calls his readers *"young men"* and *"fathers"* once each, he calls them *"brethren"* twice, he calls them *"beloved"* four times, but this term *"little children"* is used no less than nine times. No matter how far advanced in the worldly tale of years, no matter how mature and advanced in the Truth, to him they were all *"little children"*. He had known them from their early days in the faith, and ministered to them, taught them and watched over them; many of them he had watched grow up from childhood into youth and from youth into middle age. Dark hair turned to grey and fair hair to snowy white, the fresh bloom of maidenhood and early manhood became faded and the smooth skins wrinkled and old, but still they were to him what they had been at the beginning – little children – and he loved them. So now, when the light was beginning to fade out in his own sky and the end seemed very near, he summoned his remaining

strength to set down on paper the exhortation he had given so persistently in past years *"these things I write unto you that ye sin not."*

Perhaps he felt as Paul had done thirty or forty years earlier. *"As my beloved sons,"* Paul had written, *"I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel"* (1 Cor. 4.14-15). There were so many who would gladly assume the duty and privilege of instructors and teachers, discoursing, expounding, lecturing to the flock upon the various features of the God's Word and holding their hearers' interest by the eloquence or force of their utterances. There was apparently no lack of that kind of ministry in Paul's day even as there is no lack of it today. What was more sorely needed for these immature babes in Christ, and for all the community of believers whether babes or mature, was the loving care of a father in the faith. They needed one who could discern with unerring eye the varying needs of each member of the family and see that the need was met. That was John's preoccupation too. He had stood by on one memorable occasion and heard the Lord give his fellow-disciple Peter a commission; *"feed my lambs"*: but he had never interpreted that injunction as being obligatory upon Peter alone, and now, sixty years after the words had been spoken, and all his companions in the joys and sorrows of those early days were lying in the grave, he was still continuing in the spirit of those words: *"My little children"*.

"That ye sin not." It seems a strange injunction to lay upon a community of Christians. Evidently there was the possibility of their sinning, otherwise the words would have no meaning. It is clear that John was fully conscious of the likelihood of some of them being so overtaken, if he uttered no warning. The whole of this second chapter is written under the burden of a great urgency: there is an intense awareness of the necessity of a plain statement of the position, and an impassioned appeal for the viewing of the matter from John's own standpoint and to hear his advice. The closing words of the chapter breathe his confidence that those to whom he writes will profit by his words and not fail him. In the meantime he spares no pains to make plain to these his *"little children"* the ever-present menace of sin and the many unsuspected forms in which it makes its insidious approach to the believer.

John could not but have felt something like Ezekiel of old. *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned"* (Ezek. 3.17-21). It was the mission and the responsibility of John to watch for the lives and the souls of these his *"little children"*, as *"one that must give account"* (Heb. 13.17) and he was by no means unmindful of his responsibility. Just as Ezekiel of old spoke the message that was in him without fear or favour, crying the word of the Lord to all who would

listen, so did John seek with entreaties and persuasion to exhort his flock to that constant vigilance which alone would ensure their freedom from the delusions and the subtleties of the Adversary.

Here is a theme that it is well should be laid on the hearts and minds of everyone who is privileged to be a servant of the believers in spiritual ministry. How often do the Scriptures exhort all such to feed the flock of God with all that is pure and holy! How often, too, is this fact, of the ever-present danger of falling away from the faith, stressed as being an important aspect of such acceptable ministry. The work of the Christian elder today must needs include the uncompromising warnings so characteristic of the Hebrew prophets of old, for the same sins are with us in our world and human nature is still the same and ever prone to fail. Is that why Paul, writing to his son-in-the-faith Titus, defined in unusually clear and definite terms just what are the duties of an elder in this connection? "*These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke, with all authority. Let no man despise thee,*" he said, and went on to list out those things in detail. They are: "*denying ungodly and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*" (Titus 3.15).

That is a summary of God's Plan as it affects the Church: an abstract of all that the Apostles have said in all their epistles to guide the Church in its progress through this world and to the end of its course. In all of this, even although sin is not so much as mentioned, the thought of the constant conflict against the evil forces that would rob the Christian of his inheritance is implied, and the implication heavily underlined.

Suppose, in spite all the fatherly care and all the instruction and all the warning, someone *does* sin. The "*sin*" that the Apostle has in mind is one of deliberate, flagrant defiance of God, one of outrageous and blatant immorality. To go to the other end of the scale, it may be some petty failure to live up to the standard of Christianity or a temporary indulgence in some weakness of the flesh. John does not define what he means by sin. Suppose one does give way before the machinations of the Evil One, or perhaps, is "*drawn away of his own desires, and enticed*" (Jas. 1.14). The possibility of disregarding the Apostle's advice and falling into the snares from which he would save his readers is clearly implied in these verses; but if so, is the case then hopeless? Does the faithful father in God wash His hands of the erring one and does God reject him for ever? This is a question of doctrine and the answer is important!

It is because the answer is so important that the Apostle is so definite in his ruling. "*If any man sin,*" he says, "*we have an advocate with the Father.*" For the moment we will go no further than that statement. What merit is there in this

office of advocate with the Father that it should be invoked here in the case of the disciple who has sinned? Remember at this point that at our consecration, condemnation in Adam was removed. There is no question of the previous sinful condition being imputed to the repentant believer. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit"* (Rom. 8.1). No advocacy with the Father is needed for those things, for they have already been done away in Christ. This Advocate stands ready for the aid of the believer who, in spite of his consecration to God and his acceptance into the High Calling and his possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit, has nevertheless come short of the standard, has sinned. John tells us in chapter 1 that not one of us can claim to be free from that handicap and that if we do so claim we deceive ourselves. Not one of us can say we are without sin. For all of us, therefore, the Advocate must stand ready, for every time of need, throughout the span of our life in the flesh.

(To be continued)

AOH

“THAT HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS” (Eph. 4.10)

There is a world of meaning in the Apostle's words here. The Greek is *plerose ta panta* - 'fill the all-things' ie the universe. *Plerose* means to fill by diffusing a thing throughout, as by filling a room with smoke, for instance, and, also to flourish abundantly, as by filling the sky with stars or furnishing a garden with plants. It is derived from a word which has the significance of filling a vessel or a hollow place. Consider the aptness of the word. Christ, after His ascension, is to fill the universe, but not with stars, for that has been done already. What more appropriate than that He shall furnish it with living beings all in harmony with God and living to His praise. The universe as we see it through our telescopes is but the empty framework of that which shall be when the work of Christ as regards this earth is finished and in company with His glorified Church He commences his eternal work of "*filling the all-things.*"

ON PROBATION

William Burt Pope, 1822-1903, was a Methodist theologian and minister of considerable repute, sometimes claimed to be the greatest of Methodist theologians. On the question of human destiny he had this to say: "*The fixed and unalterable state of man is always associated with the Day of judgement and not with the day of death. We must not prejudice these issues or interfere with the full work of probation.*"

Jesus does not discriminate in who He accepts into His service – it was just a lad who brought Him fish and bread.

AUTHORITY

"Lord do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word and let my servant be healed. For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes; and to another, 'Come' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it. When Jesus heard this he marvelled at him" (Luke 7.1-10).

This centurion was a very unusual man. Jesus was amazed at his faith. The only other record of Jesus being amazed was at the absence of faith among the Jews in Nazareth recorded in Mark 6.6. How sad is the contrast between this man, a Gentile, and God's people among whom Jesus had been brought up.

Centurions

Centurions were the highest non-commissioned officers in the Roman army with nominally one hundred men under their control although that number could vary. They did not rush readily into battle, but if called upon to do so they were unflinching in their bravery. They were expert in both military and civil strategy, often acting as trusted diplomats in an occupied country as here in Israel, part of the Roman territory of Syria. They were role models for the men or the populace under their control, often conveying the orders of the senate and having the oversight that the orders were carried out.

Centurions played an interesting part in the New Testament stories. Perhaps the most remarkable man was the one in charge of the soldiers that led Jesus from the judgment seat of Pilate to Calvary. He would have controlled the soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross and all that was done at that time. He witnessed the death of Jesus with a valued comment and reported to Pilate that he was definitely dead (Luke 23.26-47; Mark 15.44).

Centurions were involved in Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, in his transfer to Caesarea and most importantly in the Apostle's voyage to Malta – one Julius. He was instrumental in saving Paul's life and there appears to be something of a friendship between them (Acts 22.25, 26; 23.17, 23; 27). Most noteworthy of all centurions, in the New Testament, was Cornelius who became what is regarded as the first Gentile convert and to whom Peter went at Caesarea (Acts 10).

The centurion that requested Jesus to heal his slave (Gr. *doulos* in Luke) had already given evidence of being a 'God-fearer' – a Gentile who admired and followed the ethical teachings of the Law but did not go so far as becoming a proselyte. The Jewish leaders seemed to have shown much concern that Jesus should help him. For his part this extraordinary man expressed love for a slave, who to most Romans was no more than a chattel, no better than a piece of furniture, to be used and discarded with less consideration than their armour. The expression 'slave who was dear to him' really means one that is valued or even honoured.

As Jesus approached the house the centurion sent word that Jesus need not even go as far as his house. He may have had regard for the fact that Jesus, a Jew, might not wish to enter his house because Jews avoided entering the houses of Gentiles. But with astonishing humility he expresses such faith that Jesus has not even witnessed among Jews. This man, used to handling things by remote control, knew that Jesus' power from God was able to operate even without Jesus being present at the miracle.

There are one or two differences between the accounts of this incident given by Matthew and Luke (something not unusual among the synoptic writers). It does not in any way reflect inaccuracy on the part of Gospel writers, but rather tells us what they were most interested in. Luke uses a medical term for 'heal' and emphasises humility as an interest in character whereas Matthew speaks of his faith and nationality. Jesus is amazed at the Roman's spiritual insight sadly lacking in the religious leaders of God's people Israel.

What is 'authority'?

It is translated from the Greek word *exousia* - and means lawful permission or the ability to do something. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines it as the power or right to enforce obedience, - political or administrative; a recognized influence or opinion; knowledge; expertise and experience. It is necessary to differentiate between

'authority' and 'power' from the Greek word - *dunamis* similar to our word 'dynamo'. Power is physical might and is associated with 'miracle'. The two words are allied but not the same.

A government surveyor may have the authority to enter a farmer's field but he does not possess the power of the farmer's prize bull.

God – the ultimate authority

All are responsible to God – everything and everyone is at His command for He has power and dominion over all His works – all are subject to Him. Paul clarifies this in his resurrection chapter 1 Cor. 15.28 *"When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one."*

David and Solomon gave wonderful expressions of worship in their preparations for and dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. *"Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said 'Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours, yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.'" (1 Chron. 29.10-13 NRSV)*

"But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built" (2 Chron. 6.18)

Paul discusses God's prerogative in Rom. 9 (v21) *"But, who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded says to its moulder 'Why have you made me thus? Has the potter no right over the clay'"* Paul is not referring to Jer. 18 where the prophet condemns apostate Israel so that God must destroy them. The reference may be to Isaiah 29.16 which says that God has the right (*exousia*) – authority over all His works like the potter over the clay. We must acknowledge with Job that we can't contend with God because he has the expertise to make of us, in love, what is best. But God in His mercy does not punish us for asking questions for He knows that we find some things perplexing and difficult to understanding.

There was one who rebelled against the Most High and wished to usurp His authority. He tempted the Son of God to rebel, recorded in Luke 4.6-8. He promised to give the *"glory and all this authority"* of all the kingdoms of the world to our Lord; but He rebuked the Devil in the words of Deut. 6.8 *"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."*

Jesus' authority	<i>"the crowds were astonished as at his teaching for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as Their scribes"</i> (Matt 7.29).
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This was at the end of Jesus 'Sermon on the Mount'. So how was He different? The teachers of the Law in Jesus' day taught by constant reference to the rabbis of the past; they were the 'authorities'. Sadly, rabbinical interpretations of the Law had replaced the authority of God. Jesus' teachings and life style did not match their interpretations so they rejected Him. He said of Himself *"He whom God has sent speaks the words of God"* (John 3.34 NRSV) and again, *"I declare to the world what I have heard from Him."* (John 8.28 NRSV) Jesus was the 'Logos' of God which, according to one scholar, literally means 'the sayings of God'. But ordinary people *"were all amazed and said to one another 'What is this word for with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out'"* (Luke 4.36) and in this verse there are the Greek words *exousia* and *dunamis* together.

It was strange that the Jewish religious leaders asked Jesus to show them a sign. Perhaps it was even more astonishing that John the Baptist should ask whether Jesus was Messiah. He evidently believed that Jesus would give an honest answer. He had heard the voice of God when he baptized Jesus. Had the months of solitude in the castle disturbed his thinking? Whatever had shaken John's earlier conviction Jesus quietly answered him with a testimony from

John's disciples of the signs which Jesus was doing. His authority was clearly seen in those signs; the blind saw, the lame walked, leprosy was cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised and the good news was preached to the poor.

The authority from God was passed to the disciples who went out to preach the Gospel. Mark 3.15 records that the disciples were "*sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons*". Many years later Paul demonstrated at Philippi the reality of the authority Jesus gave to His followers. A girl, possessed by a demon, called after Paul and Silas and so Paul expelled the evil spirit from the girl.

Jesus further said to the disciples "*See I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10.19). It was on the Island of Malta immediately following the shipwreck that Paul escaped snakebite as he put wood on a fire that they had kindled to dry their clothes.

But the most important aspect of this text in Luke 10 is the last phrase because however great or seemingly insignificant our lives and activities, we must all have the assurance, "*rejoice that your names are written in heaven*".

Jesus authority was shown again and challenged when some friends let a paralysed man down through the roof of the house which was full of people and He was preaching. The Pharisees said that He had no right to forgive sins because that was God's prerogative alone. So Jesus said to them "*so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the one who was paralysed, I say to you, stand up, take up your bed and walk*" (Luke 5.17-26).

On yet another occasion the leaders said "*by the Prince of Demons he casts out demons*" (Mark 3.22). Jesus silenced them with His logic and showed that their assertion was self destructive and silly. Let us be wary that we do not make the same mistake.

Jesus demonstrated His authority over creation on one occasion by feeding more than 5000 people, and 4000 on another. He showed His authority over the wind and waves by the way He stilled the storm on Galilee. Perhaps the most important lesson came from His lips when His disciples took Him across the lake in a boat but had forgotten to take anything to eat. He spoke about the leaven of the Pharisees. They thought He referred to their forgetfulness of bread. Why did they worry about forgetting bread after seeing Him feed 5000 and 4000 people? In spite of those signs they still doubted His ability to provide? Jesus asked them if they too were hard hearted. So what of us? Do we fail to see signs because we doubt and our hearts are hard and stubborn?

Jesus exerted His authority in a very unusual way as He approached the cross. He drove the traders out of the Temple courts, quoting Jer. 7.11. He said "*My*

house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers" (Lk. 19.45-47). Next morning the Jewish leaders challenged His authority with the question "By what authority do you do these things" Jesus countered the question with another but He was answering their question and not avoiding it. Jesus' authority was direct from God like the authority of John the Baptist.

During Jesus' hearing before Pilate the governor said, "*surely you know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?*" *'You would have no authority at all over me'* Jesus replied, *'If it had not been granted you from above.'*" (John 19.11, 12 REB). Many of the well used modern translations use 'power' in this text but it comes from the Greek word 'exousia' and should be 'authority'. We may take heart from this text for no one on Earth has the authority or the power to override that which is from Heaven. We are in God's hands and are immortal until our task is done. After His resurrection Jesus declared that *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt 28.18). It may be of interest that the early Church always baptized in the name of Jesus. Peter and John made the lame man who lay at Beautiful Gate of the Temple to walk *"in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"*. In keeping with the Lord's commission in John 21, Peter became a wonderful under-shepherd within the Early Church, no longer vying with his brethren as to who was the greatest but obedient to the Lord's words *"Those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them ... but it shall not be so among you."* For Jesus *'came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as ransom for many'* (Mark 10.45)

Authority from God is controlled by love and not violence. Humanity have yet to learn that lesson.

"To the King of the Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever Amen."

DN

Avoid the spirit of fault-finding, criticism, being uncharitable and anything inconsistent with perfect love. God is most likely to be found either where two or three of His children are gathered, or where the lost sheep is straying. Ask Him to wake you morning by morning for communion and Bible study. Make other times in the day when you can get alone with Him, telling Him all things and reviewing the past under the gentle light that streams from His eyes.

"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."

(Job 42.2 NIV)

NOAH AND THE FIRST CITY

Someone once defined history as "the consolidation of doubtful tradition into undisputed fact". That remark has proved a truism in the case of the alleged activities of Noah after he left the Ark. Hoary with age, some of these legends have lingered through the centuries, reappearing in different localities, repeated and believed to this day.

The credit for much of this latter must go to the Chevalier Chardin, a credulous Frenchman who travelled in Armenia in 1671 and recorded in his "*Journal of Travels*" (1711) all that the monks of the Armenian Church had to tell him – and that was plenty. The Armenian Church was founded in the 3rd century. Many centuries later they decided that the mountain thirty miles from their centre at Etchmiadzin was in fact the Mount Ararat of Genesis and that the Ark was still there on its summit. In the early 14th century and onward they began to tell this story to various European travellers who came their way, adding that the village of Arghuri on its slopes was founded by Noah when he emerged from the Ark. How they knew all this does not readily appear since the Flood was a long time before the 3rd century AD. Ararat was not and is not now, except to Western Europeans, the true name of the mountain. Chevalier duly noted all this in his little notebook and when he arrived at the Russian town of Nakhidshevan seventy miles away the monks there informed him that their town was actually the one that Noah founded. They said that its name signified "the Place of Descent" (from the Ark) and that they possessed a piece of the Ark and the tomb of Noah to prove it. He put that down also. To buttress their claim they took him to the neighbouring town of Marand south of Lake Urmia to see the tomb of Noah's wife, whose name, it appeared, was the fairly modern one Marian, hence the name of the town. All these assertions have been quoted and copied from one Christian periodical to another ever since.

Upon the other hand it is true that legends usually rest upon a basis of fact and this is of importance to the Scripture student. Many Old Testament personages and narratives formerly dismissed by critics as mythical have in more recent times been established as perfectly historical. A search into the origin of these stories about Noah might therefore be of some value. During the 13th to 15th centuries there were a good many travellers, mainly European government officials on missions to the Far East, who passed through Armenia on their journeys, and were regaled by the monks with the story of Ararat. This was the commencement of the identification of this particular locality with the Genesis story. First came the Venetian Marco Polo and the French Franciscan Friar William of Rubruk, followed by Friar Odoricus (Italian) and Jordanus Catalini, Bishop of Colombo, with Ruy de Clavijo of Spain bringing up the rear in the 15th century. Each of these included in his book of travels what he had

learned about Ararat and this fixed the idea in Western minds. It was perhaps unfortunate that the local people in their enthusiasm showed these worthies several other towns beside those above-named as being the one founded by Noah. We therefore have in addition to Arghuri and Nakhidshevan, the one-time medieval town of Surmari (meaning Saint Mary and now the village of Surmalu forty miles north west of Ararat). Also the present Russian village of Nakhchevan, then a flourishing city fifty miles northwest, another called Nanjua ten miles from Surmari and a ruined city (of which no traces now remain) on the west flank of Ararat shown to Clavijo. Various names such as Calmann, Cemanum, Cemaurnum, were recorded by some of these travellers to designate these places. It might possibly be thought that the choice of six towns for the site of the one allegedly built by Noah rather weakens the force of the argument.

Out of all this two clues emerge. One goes back to Arabic historians of the 9th/10th centuries AD and the other to Josephus. Long before Mount Ararat was connected with the Flood story the mountain held by the Jewish, Christian and Moslem peoples of the Middle East to be that of the Ark's landing was Mount Djudi. This is at the point where the River Tigris crosses from Turkey into Iraq, about two hundred miles from Mount Ararat. This belief dates from the time of the First Advent and probably several centuries before that and is still held by the Middle East peoples generally. Arabic and Jewish travellers and writers of the 9th to 11th centuries recorded the same type of legend about Mount Djudi as their Armenian counterparts did five centuries later. Thus Masudi and Ibn Haukal in the 10th century said that Noah built a village at the foot of Djudi called Thamanim (Arabic for eighty, the Koran says that eighty people were saved in the Ark on Mount Djudi) and that the village still existed in their own day. The village of Hasana, in the same district, claims at the present time to be the one founded by Noah, and still exhibits his vineyard, which still produces grapes. Two other villages, Am Sufni and Sheik Adi, claim to be the building place of the Ark. The names Calmarin, etc., associated with Ararat, have been recognized to be attempts to Latinise the Arabic Thamanim (Hebrew Shamanim), indicating that the Ararat legend was derived from the earlier Djudi one.

The second clue is the assertion that the name Nakhidshevan means "the place of descent". This is evidently founded upon a statement by the Jewish historian Josephus of the First Century. He says (Jos. Ant. 1.3.5) "*After this the Ark rested on the top of a certain mountain in Armenia ... the Armenians call this place Apobaterion, the Place of Descent, for the Ark being saved in that place, its remains are shown there by the inhabitants to this day*". This word is derived from *Apobathra*, steps or ladder for disembarking from a ship, a gangway, and *Apobasis*, the act of disembarking. But Josephus was alluding to Mount Djudi,

which was in the Armenia of his day. This is evident from his further description of the country in which the Ark came to rest.

But just as the Ararat legends are not met with prior to the 13th century, so those relating to Djudi are not found before the Christian era. Still earlier writers tend to place the celebrated mountain farther south. Nicolaus of Damascus, in the 1st century BC, spoke of a mountain in Armenia beyond Media, called Bans, (Greek for "boat"), on which the Ark rested. This places the site somewhere in northern Iran and the mountain Al Bans (modern Elburz). The Book of Jubilees, 150 BC, says the Ark grounded on Mount Lubar in the land of Ararat (Armenia is the Greek equivalent of the ancient name Ararat) and Lubar is most likely a corruption of Al Bans. Julius Africanus in the 2nd AD century placed the mountain in Parthia, which in his day occupied the same region. Berossus the Babylonian historian, in the 3rd century BC, had it in the vicinity of Babylon and said that that city was built by the Sumerian equivalent of Noah, taking his information from ancient Babylonian records no longer extant. The Mount Nisir of the 8th century BC Assyrian accounts is two hundred miles southeast of Mount Djudi. All the indications are that in pre-Christian times the site of Noah's landing was believed to be in southern Iraq or north-western Iran. Once again there appears the same type of story. The town of Nuhavend in Iran is claimed to have been built by Noah (Nuh is the Arabic form of Noah and "avend" means a building). It has to be remarked though that several Arab notables in medieval times also bore the name of Noah. The natives of Sulimania in eastern Iraq claim direct descent from Noah. A range of mountains in Iran is called the Kuh-i-Nuh, the mountains of Noah (Chardin said this was applied to Ararat but he was mistaken). The Iranian town of Isfahan was built by Ispahan the son of Shem. The Ark was built at Kufah in Iraq, and so on. That the sons of Noah each built a town near the mountain is asserted in the Book of Jubilees.

The "land of Ararat" in ancient times referred to the whole of the mountainous area from Turkey to almost the head of the Persian Gulf. Hence the mountains due east of Babylon were in the land of Ararat, and are so referred to in the Book of Jubilees, 150 BC.

The whole edifice of these legends seems therefore to be traceable back to the four earliest writers whose records remain, Josephus (AD 90), Nicolaus of Damascus (30 BC), the "Book of Jubilees" (150 BC), and Berossus (275 BC). The latter three concur that the place was in the extreme south; only Josephus places it at Djudi. The first three give the mountain a name associating it with a ship or the disembarking from a ship. Three speak of a town being erected near the mountain by Noah or his sons. Only Berossus gives a recognisable name to the town; he says it was Babylon.

Of all the early writers Berossus was the only one who had access to, and was able to read, the ancient Sumerian and Babylonian tablets relating to the Flood.

What he has written, and what such tablets as have been recovered in modern times have revealed, is in accordance with the Scripture. The Genesis account says that the Flood survivors came from the east and built Babylon. Berossus says the same. The Sumerian "King Lists" say that the first city-state to rule Sumer after the Flood was Kish, six miles from the known site of the Tower of Babel. In Gen. 11 the people aspired to "build a city and a tower". Research has shown that Babel (Babylon) was originally a religious centre and a neighbouring town housed the general population so that Kish and Babel together might well have been the project described in Gen. 11 and the first united centre of population. In which case the Genesis record and the Babylonian tablets both agree that after the Flood the survivors left the mountain, and coming from the east, found a fertile plain and built Babylon. All the later stories stemmed from that.

AOH

It is hoped that the map below may give some indication of a few places and a little more help may be derived from the Times Concise Atlas of the Bible pages 8-9 and 12-15.



TWO VIEWS OF BIBLE STUDY

Though you don't go to college
You still need the knowledge
Of Hebrew and Greek and translations,
And the text Masoretic
In all things prophetic
Peruse with phenomenal patience,
And each modern version
You study with caution
GNB, NIV, RSV,
But the Textus Receptus
Some scholars accept as
The best basic text there can be.

*Break Thou the Bread of Life, dear Lord to me
As thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page I see Thee, Lord,
My spirit pants for Thee, O living word!*

Your belief in salvation
And propitiation
Define with due care in theology;
Myths avoid with care total,
And things sacerdotal,
And considering new archeology.
Types and words parabolic
And visions symbolic
Require cerebration and clarity,
While words of devotion
Imbued with emotion
Inspire a response of full charity.

*O grant thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,
Enlighten Thou my eyes that I may see,
Show me the truth concealed within Thy word
Then in thy book revealed, I'll see Thee, Lord.*

GC

CAIN AND ABEL

The story of Cain and Abel is the beginning of sin and death amongst mankind. The earlier narrative of the Fall in Eden is concerned with the sin of man against God. This story deals with the sin of man against man, and the sorrow and suffering that results. As a parable of man's relationship to God this vivid story of the early days of the world has tremendous value.

So the first human child was born. "*I have gotten a man from the Lord*" said Eve reverently, according to the A.V. of Gen. 4. 1. It seems that there is another shade of meaning in her words which is difficult to recover now, due to the fact that the Hebrew text of Gen. 4 is derived from a much earlier Sumerian language which recorded the original story. Repeated translation from earlier archaic tongues has rendered some words obscure. It is considered that the original expression meant she had "acquired a man" with the help of, or by the power of, the Lord. Now Eve must have been perfectly familiar with the processes of birth among the animals with which she was surrounded, yet upon the birth of her own child she immediately gives the credit to the Lord. There is an indication here that despite the tragedy of the Fall and the measure of alienation from God which resulted, the first human pair had retained some reverence and loyalty toward God. So, the first impulse on the birth of the child was to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in the event. God had already promised Eve that her seed would become the means of undoing the damage that had been done in Eden, and that he would "bruise the serpent's head". That could only mean the overthrow of sin and the restoration of primitive sinlessness, and without any doubt, she saw in the birth of this child the first step to the fulfilment of that promise.

Hopes must have run high as the lad grew to manhood's estate, joined later on by his younger brother Abel and sisters. With the elder devoting his energies to cultivation of the soil and the younger to the raising of sheep and goats the family must have been reasonably happy, waiting for the next move in the Divine purpose, and with no indication of the tragedy soon to come.

There is very little guidance as to the time scale of these events. The genealogical tables in Genesis state that Seth, the third son, was born when his father was one hundred and thirty years old according to the Masoretic, or two hundred and thirty years according to the Septuagint. Ignoring these for a moment, there is evidence from sources outside the Bible that the life-span of early man was inordinately long compared with modern experience, and it is probable that both Cain and Abel were grown men, perhaps married – to their sisters – at the time of the tragedy. The one chronological fact that stands is that Seth was the third son and Abel was already dead when he was born.

The Offerings
perhaps anything
up to two centuries
after the Fall

"In process of time Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord and Abel brought of the first-fruit of his flocks and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." (Gen. 4.3-5).

Some thought must be given to the purpose of these offerings. It has been suggested that Abel offered slain lambs on an altar and that this prefigured the shed blood of Jesus after the manner of much later Leviticus ceremonies. This was because Abel's offering was acceptable to God but Cain's offering of agricultural produce was not. Thus, it is suggested, Abel prophesied the death of Christ. It is not likely, however, that anything of this is inherent in the story. This is the first recorded instance in history in which men brought a spontaneous offering of the fruit of their labour to God. To suggest that on such a significant occasion, God should reject one and accept the other in the interests of an academic illustration of theological philosophy which neither of those men in their very primitive condition could have been expected to understand in the slightest degree, is not very reasonable. And there is an important element in the text that disallows the idea completely. Abel brought the first fruits of his flock and the text has "*bekorah*" which means female first born of either sheep or goats. But female lambs were not permitted as blood sacrifices prefiguring Christ in the ceremonies of Israel – Passover or Day of Atonement. The Passover lamb must be a male, of the first year. Had Abel been Divinely led to enact a prefigure of the later rituals he would have been told to bring a one year male and not a firstborn female. But there was a place for firstborn females in later Israel ceremonial. They were specified, not for sacrifice, but to be included with the first fruit of the ground – fruit and crops – as thank-offerings to the Lord. Our modern harvest festival is the lineal descendant of such ceremonial (Deut. 12.6). Deut. 14.23 and Neh. 10.36 are examples of *bekorah*, female firstlings, being thus employed. Lev. 27.26, Num. 3.41, Num. 28.17 and Deut. 15.19 tell of *bekor*, male firstlings, treated similarly. Thank-offering had to be the firstborn, whether male or female, animal or vegetable, on the principle that the firstborn of anything is peculiarly the Lord's and should be given to Him (Exod. 13.2).

When it is thus realised that what these two men were doing was quite spontaneously bringing a thank-offering to the Lord as recognition of His overruling power in giving them success in their respective spheres the story begins to take shape. A further examination of the Hebrew text offers a reasonable explanation why Cain's offering was rejected. Dr. Young's translation says that Abel brought "*the female firstlings of his flock, even from their fat ones*". In other words, rightly surmising that God should have the first

and the best of his flock, he chose the fattest and best of the firstborns as his contribution. Why he chose female instead of male, thousands of years before the Mosaic Law provided for female offerings, is a point of interest. For some reason Abel must have considered female the more appropriate, as, in some sense, better than the male. Perhaps, in the rudimentary state of knowledge of that first family, the female was considered the channel of life, life that came from God. That would explain Eve's crediting the coming of Cain to God rather than to her husband. It is significant that it was Eve and not Adam who named Seth, and perhaps the other sons too. But Cain did not bring the best of his produce. This is shown by the words used. The 'first-fruits', in the sense of the earliest to ripen, is *bikkar*. The "first-fruits" in the sense of the best of the produce is *reshith*. Both these terms are used in the O.T. to refer to the offerings of first-fruits in Israel. The term for fruit in general is *pen*, and this is the word used in Gen. 4. 3. Cain did not bring 'first-fruits' as did Abel; he brought of the fruit of his labours but it was not of the best or choicest or earliest, and that was why his offering was rejected. That was why "*Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*" (Heb. 11.4). The Almighty can only accept of our best, and Cain did not give of his best.

The Almighty gives Cain a warning

"Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell. If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not well sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4.7 RSV).

Here is the first intimation that man has a positive responsibility to strive against sin. The basic promise that sin would one day be undone because the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head did not authorize man to adopt a static and non-committal attitude, passively waiting for the Lord to execute His word. Sin was an active reality, waiting to ensnare men. It was imperative to give heed and not be entrapped. God apparently passed over Cain's failure to offer of his best, and stressed as of greater consequence his unjustified wrath, that could so easily and quickly lead to jealousy, violence and finally murder. The Lord exhorted Cain to take stock of his position and fight the dark thoughts that were crowding into his mind before it was too late. Cain did not heed the warning.

Tragedy followed swiftly.

According to the Septuagint, Cain invited his brother into "the field", from the Hebrew word denoting cultivated or irrigated land as distinct from pasture

or wild land. Abel was enticed away from the family home into Cain's own area of labour. There, in the field, Cain slew his brother. It may have been a pre-meditated act; it may have been a sudden uncontrollable upsurge of jealousy. In any case it is a sad commentary upon the ease with which human free-will, undisciplined by loyalty and allegiance to the Divine way of life, can sink to actions so contrary to the basic instincts of man. These two must have grown up as boys together, in the wonder of a world revealing ever new and increasingly exciting discoveries. The knowledge that death must one day come, because of the original sin, was with them but in the vigour of their near-perfect manhood the event must have seemed almost inconceivably far away. It is not likely that Cain intended the death of his brother but rather that in the intensity of his resentment he struck a blow that proved fatal. But the sequel of his animosity proved the reality of the Lord's warning. Sin was already there, crouching at the door, waiting to obtain the mastery. He could overcome it if he would, but he must exert his will so to do. And Cain, like Eve his mother before him, failed to do so.

Judgment

His immediate reaction was fear, a futile endeavour to avoid the consequence. In what manner the Lord spoke to Cain we know not, but the dialogue between the two must have been real in Cain's mind. "*Where is Abel thy brother?*" came the accusing question from Heaven. "*I know not*" was the surly yet apprehensive reply "*Am I my brother's keeper*". Then was pronounced the fearful condemnation before which Cain quailed and was broken. "*What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth*". The "ground" and the "earth" from which Cain was banished is *adamah*, the land of their habitation. The "earth" in which Cain was to be a fugitive and vagabond is *erets*, meaning the earth as we use the term, the whole extent of the world, the earth as a planet. Cain was to be exiled from his home, his family, and his land and doomed to wander – "fugitive" is a wanderer fleeing as from an enemy or from justice; "vagabond" a wanderer as having no home – an exile in the earth.

Response to Judgment

"*My punishment is greater than I can bear*" cried Cain. The Reviser's marginal alternative "*mine iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven*" is a possible construction of the Hebrew but the general assessment of scholastic opinion is that the traditional rendering is correct. There is really no indication in

the story that Cain felt any remorse or was in any way repentant; his concern appears to be only with the consequence upon himself. He was to be cast out into the desolate earth with no means of subsistence, he was to be hidden from the presence of God; and he was to be in danger of death at the hands of his fellow men. *"Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth"* he cried *"and from thy face I shall be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me"*. His dismay at being banished from the Divine presence is thought by some to be an indication of some residual reverence for God that led him to lament the separation. It is more likely, perhaps, that it reflected a fear that banishment from God's presence implied withdrawal of Divine protection, leaving him with no shield against possible avengers. There is a fundamental principle here. Fear of the consequence of sin is no basis for acceptance with God. An upright life gains no credits in the books of Heaven if that uprightness is dictated only by fear of the alternative. The Almighty does not want that kind of allegiance. The man who eventually gains his place in the Divine scheme of creation will gain it because he has fully and completely given himself willingly to the Divine way, not because he is afraid of what God will do to him if he does not. He recognizes that he owes life and all that life means to his Creator and wants nothing better than to place himself in that Creator's hands to be used as He wills. Had Cain admitted the enormity of his crime, given evidence of sincere contrition, and placed himself in the hands of God for judgment, the outcome would have been different. But he did not, and he went out into the wilderness unrepentant and resentful.

Critics of the Bible have scoffed at this story on the ground that since Cain and Abel were the only sons of Adam at the time there could not have been anyone else to meet Cain and slay him, so that the narrative is inherently inconsistent. None of these critics appears to have done more than hastily read the Authorized Version before making a pronouncement. A little greater care in examining the position yields a much more informative presentation.

The birth of Seth was the next event recorded as worthy of note following the death of Abel. It has already been suggested that on this basis the tragedy may have occurred two centuries after the Fall so that Cain may well have been ninety years of age – comparatively young against the time-scale of life-spans stated in Genesis. Since the story must be considered against its own claimed background it is logical to accept these long life-spans as part of the picture presented. Cain and Abel, then, might well have already become the fathers of several sons and daughters so that the family springing from Adam and Eve already numbered grandchildren. There is however, no mandate in Genesis for thinking that other human beings, not derived from Adam, existed in other parts of the earth. The whole Bible stands or falls on the position that all humanity came from Adam.

It becomes necessary then to examine the hypothetical "every one" that meeting Cain, might conceivably slay him. Cain's fear in v.14 is usually understood in English as that any individual man of all possible men might be the slayer. Verse 15 supports this by saying that the Lord set a mark upon Cain lest "any" finding him should slay him. But the Hebrew in both cases is the same, "chol", which in the grammatical case here used means, "everyone" in the sense of a whole or a totality. Cain's fear, and the Lord's action, both presupposed the whole of the race of mankind then existing acting together as a unit, as a single body, in this matter of slaying. The narrative therefore implies, not that he might meet death at the hands of some stranger in a chance encounter. Rather that his own family, in the face of this crime that he had committed against them all, might consider it imperative to capture or seize or fall upon him and put him to death. This is the meaning of *matsa*, rendered "find" in this context. It is impossible to conjecture what was the reaction of Adam and his family to this terrible calamity that had befallen them, a circumstance for which no precedent existed. It is not likely that any kind of Divine law had been given them to deal with such a contingency. It is conceivable that they might reason that Cain, who had shown himself capable of destroying one life, might well do the same again, and must himself be destroyed to avoid the possibility. Hence God stepped in with His prohibition. The "mark", Hebrew *oth*, meaning a sign, set upon Cain, need not have been a physical disfigurement, as is often popularly thought, but an indication of some kind to his fellows that he must not be interfered with, but left to go his own way into exile.

So Cain departed, taking his wife, "and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden". This is one of the geographical indications that date the first writing down of the story, for the Hebrew "Nod" is the Sumerian land of Nadu, on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf (modern Iran), as it was known twenty five centuries before Christ. (Later on the land became known as Manda and this name survives to this day as that of the main river of the district). The Sumerians believed that the primeval Eden was an area now covered by the waters of the Gulf so that the whole story is geographically consistent. Cain went east, out of the valley into the mountains where his descendants were afterwards the first men to work in metals – metals that are still mined in those same mountains.

There he disappears. His descendants to the eighth generation are recorded, and then there is silence. The man who was the firstborn of the first family, peculiarly one who was God's own, so far failed to appreciate the goodness of God that when he came to make his acknowledgement he only brought second-best. He might have become the first link in the line leading to the promised Seed through whom all the families of the earth shall yet be blessed ... God inevitably rejects second-best and so Cain allowed resentment, jealousy, hatred to take possession of his soul and drive him into the commission of sin of which he

never repented. This brought alienation from God and loss of the future he could have had.

The lesson of Cain's tragedy is that the placing of God first in the life, the giving of one's self unreservedly to Him for His purposes and the best of our abilities and talents and achievements to His service, is a sure defence against the 'wiles of the devil'. Satan cannot gain entry where God already reigns. Sin is ever crouching at the door, ready to spring – but in the power of God we gain the mastery. And it is all really so simple. Micah knew the secret. *"He hath shown thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"*

AOH

FAITH ON TRIAL

The trial of our faith, to which the Lord and the Apostles refer, is a trial, not only of our intellectual recognition of Divine Truth, but also our heart reliance upon God. In both respects every true child of God will find his faith severely tried. If an attack is made upon the intellectual foundation of our faith we should see to it that we have a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of our belief. If the foundations of faith become unsettled, the superstructure cannot stand when the winds and floods of adversity and temptation beat against it. It is your faith that is on trial now. In the calmer days when the sun of favour shone brightly upon you, you were quietly laying the foundation of a knowledge of the truth, and rearing the superstructure of Christian character. Now you are in the furnace to be proved; summon therefore all your courage; fortify your patience; nerve yourself to endurance; hold fast to your hope; call to mind the promises, they are still yours; and cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,"* and faith has gained her victory.

"Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." The expression "blind leaders of the blind" was an everyday catchword in Israel. The Pharisees and Rabbis were often referred to, quite respectfully, as "leaders of the blind" in recognition of their reputed ability for leadership in things of God. The fact that these dignitaries had moved largely out of touch with the common people and their problems, resulted in their being often referred to in popular conversation as "blind leaders of the blind". So Jesus quoted this every day proverb in His teaching, adding His own telling comment about them both falling into the 'ditch'. In Matt. 23.16 He says "Woe to you blind guides" and it would almost seem from the words of John 9.40 that the Pharisees knowing of this customary saying aimed at them, asked Jesus if He thought they were blind. It is certainly clear that Paul in Rom. 2.19 makes allusion to the same proverb that he, as a Pharisee, must have good reason to remember.

NOTICES

LITERATURE

We regret that several booklets are out of print. Reprinting is slow but BFU is currently considering 'Samuel, Greatest of the Prophets' 'The Cup of the Lord' and 'Bible Book for Today'. There are certain constraints relative to the amount of literature stocks we can hold mainly because of the available space and those handling them are not able to lift more than a few kilograms at a time.

BFU will gladly send bulk supplies of 'Future Probation in Christian Belief' to those who can use them. All BFU dispatch parcels must be limited to 5 kgs. All literature is sent 'surface - printed paper rate' which may take several weeks to reach readers overseas. Help with postage on literature dispatched will always be appreciated.

Literature sent Overseas is sent to many countries. BFU normally handles only its own literature and we do not stock new Bibles. BFU does not supply literature in bulk to new readers and normally we only send sample copies to such enquirers.

If readers send us Bibles and Bible study helps which they no longer need, we gladly send them to readers who have a need.

TELL A FRIEND

Many readers of the Bible Study Monthly have passed the magazine to a friend and suggested that they become readers. BFU will gladly send the magazine to any address on request.

Another way of sharing your blessings with a friend is to draw their attention to the BFU WEB-SITE www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk where they can have a taste or catch a glimpse of what BFU has to offer.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE continues to serve five permanent residents and temporary visitors needing accommodation. Milborne Port is a very pleasant centre to explore Dorset and Somerset including north and south coastlines. Many places of interest are within easy reach of Gainsborough. Visitors are accommodated in self-contained flats and a mid-day hot meal is available if requested.

Gainsborough House also has two communal lounges one of which has television, There are opportunities for formal and informal fellowship.

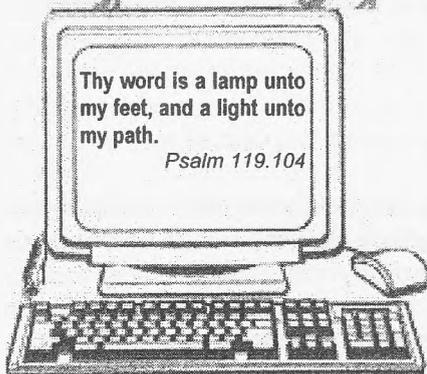
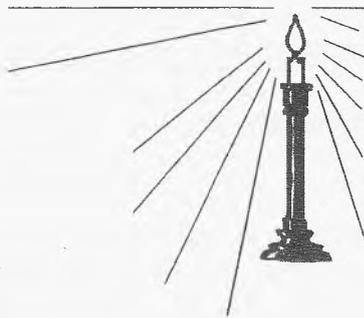
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)
It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

With the coming of Christmas it is good to take stock of what it is all about. The actual events surrounding the birth of Jesus have been so warped and twisted by tradition that most people have little idea exactly what the Bible tells us even if they read the story or have it read to them.

We know very little about Mary of Nazareth. She was entrusted with the task that every pious woman in Israel longed to do – give birth to and bring up the Messiah. Mary was devoted to God and had a wonderful poetical gift. Her husband, Joseph was an honest, hard working man and they almost certainly lived in a very small simple home. Jesus was born in some place that had a manger – a peasant cottage like their own perhaps or in some form of stabling but we are not told. While at Bethlehem, participating in the census, they entertained shepherds from the Judean hillside and magi from a far off land. These wise men from the east visited them at a house when Jesus was already a young child of 1-2 years. Who were these men who had come so far to see Jesus and what were their religious beliefs? Why did they need to ask the way to the royal palace in Jerusalem? Was Herod such an evil man compared to the rulers of his time – or at any time in history? Something had caused men to call him 'the great'.

Mary treasured much in her memory as she went about her household tasks taking care of a lively family of boys and girls. Luke captures the story well and preserved some wonderful material which Mary and perhaps others had told him. In spite of all the tradition it remains a lovely story and a wonderful token that God cares about the human race and is doing something about its plight.

We know tantalisingly little about Jesus' early life but the one record of the trip to Jerusalem when He was 12 years old is quite revealing but still leaves us asking many questions. Was He excited at the prospect of such a journey? Did His brothers and sisters go too? However does one lose a 12 year old intelligent boy? How did they view the idea that God was 'Father'?

We know enough. If more facts had been given the traditions would have multiplied still more. The Gospels, like the rest of the Bible are teaching books and not text books or autobiographies. They tell us enough to teach us how to live to the Glory of God; how to come to know Him and how to follow Jesus. They are Gospels of salvation and tell us enough of how our Saviour came to be like us so that we might become like Him.

We wish you a very blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with His joy.

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8, 9).

'HE SHALL BE GREAT!'

A Christmas Message

"He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest." (Luke 1.3, 2).

In this world men are accounted great because they have achieved some noteworthy thing that has produced immediate results. A skilful general wins a crucial battle – he is accounted a great soldier. A commercial magnate welds a number of trading organizations into one enormous unit, controlling a major part of some vital commodity, he is a great business man. A shrewd and plausible politician rises to the top by his astute handling of foreign affairs, he is a great statesman. None of these is called great while as yet he is in the state of progress towards his goal, while his plans are developing, but only when he has 'arrived'. The world demands, not only success, but the visible evidences of success, before it will bestow its diploma. The man who patiently and zealously builds for the future, knowing that his goal will not be reached in his own lifetime, and that the fruit of his labours will only be reaped by posterity, is never esteemed great whilst yet he lives, even though recognition may come after his death, when at last the realization of all his dreams is there for all to see.

So be it then, with our Lord Jesus Christ. Of all great men He is the greatest. He came down from Heaven to achieve the greatest work of all time, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind and the consummation of God's creative Plan. His greatness was not recognized then, but in days to come it will be plain for all to see. "He shall be great" – that is the promise and it cannot fail of fulfilment. Men, and angels too, will join together in worship and adoration, praising and blessing the name of the Son of God. That name is exalted above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the time of His birth there was no evidence of coming greatness. He was born in the meanest of mean circumstances, his mother a lowly descendant of a once kingly line from which all the insignia and trappings of kingship had long since departed; born citizen of a conquered and subject people; born into a

humble workaday environment. What promise of greatness reposed here? His only credentials were those declared by an old priest and an aged women Temple attendant, neither of them of any moment or influence in the world of big things. Who would have thought that this infant son of a village maiden would start a fire that was destined to sweep the world and never be put out? Who would have thought that this tiny babe was foreordained to outlive all the kings who ruled at his birth and to succeed to the kingship of the world when all their thrones had been swept away? Who would have thought that this little life that so quietly and unobtrusively came into the world would catch up and knit together so many other lives? Through generations yet unborn He makes of them a mighty striking force, a power so great that even the proud gates of hell will not prevail against it. That was to be the outcome, an outcome that has not been fully realised even as yet, but an outcome that will surely one day cause all men to recognise the true greatness of that Light which two thousand years ago came into the world.

We do perceive that greatness. To us He is already great. How could it be otherwise? We know of the mighty power that descended upon the Church at Pentecost and has remained since with all whose lives have been given to him. We do not yet find it possible to perform mighty outward works and so far as the world is concerned there is still little evidence of the power working within. But the power is there, a power that is preparing us and fitting us for the full revelation to all men that is to come "at His appearing". Without the long years of that inward working in our hearts and minds we would be quite unready for the duties and responsibilities which will devolve upon us directly the Messianic Kingdom is established in power and the Word of the Lord begins to go out to all people.

During the first few years of the twentieth century a young man in his early thirties resided in London. He was poor, made so by his chosen way of life, for he was a student, studying and equipping himself with the intention of one day delivering his people. Day after day he could be seen in the reading-room of the British Museum, groping after the knowledge that was to give him ability to choose and judge aright when the time of power should come. No one who came in contact with him took him very seriously; he was just an enthusiast riding a hobby horse of his own and he would never achieve anything great in this world. His name was quite unknown to the people who mattered, and only a very few people knew he existed at all.

There came a day when as a mature man of forty-seven he stepped to the front of the dais before a wildly cheering crowd of elected representatives packed into a great hall in one of the world's capitals, and uttered a few simple words. "*We will now proceed*" he said "*to the drafting of the constitution of the new Republic*". From brief notes on a few papers held in his hand he sketched the outlines of the creation which he had been planning and for which he had

been equipping himself through those arduous years of study in London and Paris. Today, less than one hundred years later, the power set up by Vladimir Lenin, on that historic night in 1917 controlled nearly half the world, and transformed a feudal, benighted, ignorant people into a community of States which together at that time formed one of the world's great Empires.

Lenin is rightly esteemed one of the world's great men. Whether the social system he founded was a good thing or a bad thing for the world does not alter that fact. He was an atheist and his achievement was a purely material one, but from the world's standpoint he was a great man. But no one esteemed him such in those early student days; only after the fruit of his labours appeared in the creation of the Soviet State and its continuance against its enemies was that recognition granted.

So will it be with our King. He was despised and rejected of men, accounted a dreamer and an enthusiast, ignored and unheeded, in the days of his flesh. His followers too, in like manner, are accounted fools, for his sake. The world does not really believe that the saints are going to reign. Men do not take seriously the oft-repeated declaration that in a day yet to come the Lord Jesus will assume His great power and command all men's obedience. The disciples of Jesus go about their studies and their training, conspicuous only by their poverty in the things of this world, and their absolute devotion to the ideal they have set before them, and the world smiles tolerantly and takes no further notice.

One day our King will stand up, disregarded in the counsels of the world no longer. He also will proceed to the creation of a new social order, one which will embrace, not half the world as did the Soviet system, but the whole of the world. *"His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."* The kings of the earth will fight against it, just as the Western powers tried to fight at first against the new Russia, and they will fail to arrest its progress. The Rider on the White Horse will cleave the heavens in his descent to the last great battle and the powers of this world will give way for the last time. The kingdoms of this world will have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever.

"He shall be great!" The promise stands, disbelieved and disowned by the world of men. They will believe, in that day when He stands up to command obedience. There will be no uncertainty about the matter then, no disputing. The benefits of that Kingdom will be abundantly manifest to all, and in their joy and exaltation of spirit men will declaim to the heavens *"This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

AOH

The above article was written 50 years ago and has been updated. It stimulated the following little study:

"WHO WAS THE GREATEST"

This was the subject of an argument of the disciples. It reveals how far from the Lord's way of thinking they were at this time. It might have been more edifying to look back in the history of Israel to ponder the lives of their truly great men and women. For them and all Israel, their greatest man had been Moses, the only man who had talked with God 'face to face' as with a friend. This great leader and founder of their nation, the man who had mediated the Covenant and the giving of their Law, was also 'the meekest man in the all the earth'. There was nothing about him that was bombastic, arrogant or conceited. He never aspired to be Israel's leader and he showed contrition of heart that could intercede for Israel, and for his sister when she was being most unkind to him.

Others followed Moses' example – their leadership exemplified humility. They often discovered that the way to the top was only through obscurity suffering and rejection. They achieved leadership in acceptance and acknowledgement of God. To a degree they reflected the character of Moses - and that of their God.

So it was with our Lord. The child of a peasant family in Nazareth, born in a peasant's home in Bethlehem, a fugitive in Egypt, unwanted by the people of His own town. In His ministry He seems to have spent most time with those of the lowest point in Jewish society, helping those whose need was greatest, living and dying with the rejected of society. Yet in the courts of Heaven He was given the greatest honour. He was great because He humbled Himself; He was great because He was willing to take the lowest place; He was great because He truly reflected the image of His Father. He spoke most against arrogance and hypocrisy – that which characterizes the 'great ones' of the Earth. He set the pattern for us; how close have we come to following His example?

DN

While we must hold to the truth that "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*" and that only through faith in the saving power of His death can we attain reconciliation with God, it also remains true that unless we give due heed to the lessons of His life and learn to walk as He walked, we shall never progress beyond the immature stage of personal adoration which was all that the hree Wise Men achieved.

Father cares about every situation in our lives – when we are born and when we die – when we are 'fighting fit' and when we lie helplessly sick – when we've got a few pounds to spare or when we haven't got a penny to our name – when friends are rallying round and making a fuss or when no one wants us – He cares and will provide just what we need – even though it hurts.

THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

Something like five years had elapsed since the martyrdom of Stephen and the journey of Saul to Damascus that resulted in his conversion. For Saul they had been five eventful years. First, there was his short time with the brethren in Damascus, then his three years in Arabia preparing himself for his life's work and after that his equally short stay in Jerusalem and his flight. For the remainder of the time he had a quiet residence in his native town of Tarsus in Cilicia. Five years gone, and as yet nothing definitely achieved and still no positive lead as to the future. The Apostle must have been sorely puzzled; the circumstances of his call were such as to indicate in no uncertain terms the importance of the Lord's purpose for him. The need was so obvious, the gospel of the Kingdom was to be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations and he was ready to play his part in that preaching. This was specially so since it did not seem as though the other disciples, still at Jerusalem, were particularly concerned about leaving that centre of the faith to extend its power and influence into the farther territories of the wider world. The ways of God are passing strange, Saul must have thought. The harvest was great and the labourers few. Even Jesus had bidden His disciples to lift up their eyes and look on the fields, and see that they were white already to harvest, and exhorted them to pray that God would send forth reapers to gather in that harvest. Here he was, an ardent reaper, burning with desire to take the message of life and salvation to all whomsoever he could persuade to listen, wherever he should find them. Yet for all his zeal and eagerness and readiness the door remained obstinately shut; the word to go forward remained unspoken. Nothing is said as to the results of such missionary work as he may have carried on in and around his home-town of Tarsus. He was well known there and he may have been tolerated because of his connections and friends in the city. It was also probably true, as it was of Jesus in Nazareth and Capernaum, that no prophet has honour in his own country. So Saul must have remained, frustrated and yet, we must believe, assured that God would reveal His will in his own due time and that as a faithful servant he must patiently bide that time.

Now, at last, his faith and trust were to be vindicated and his eager spirit given the sphere of action he so ardently desired. For five years past the stage had been in process of being set, the place of his service being prepared. Right back at the beginning, when the persecution he instigated in Jerusalem at the time of death of Stephen led many Christians to seek refuge in far off lands, that preparation had begun. A few of those Christians from Jerusalem had reached Antioch, third city of the Empire and political capital of Syria, some four hundred miles from Jerusalem. There they had settled and there they had exemplified and preached their faith to such good effect that within that five years there came into being a flourishing Christian community which had the distinction of including within its numbers a substantial proportion of Gentiles, pure-blooded Greeks. The

account in Acts 11.20 uses the term Grecians, *Hellenistos* meaning Jews of the Dispersion, Greek Jews but the AV is at fault and the correct term is Greeks – *Hellenes*, definitely indicating true Gentile Greeks. It would seem from vv19-20 that at most places in which they found themselves the refugees from Jerusalem confined their missionary activities to their fellow-Jews. However, those who settled at Antioch, perhaps because it was so predominantly a Greek and Roman city, extended their preaching to include non-Jews, with a spectacularly successful result. "A great number believed, and turned to the Lord." (v 21).

Antioch was at that time a magnificent city of half a million inhabitants, ranking politically next to Rome and Alexandria in importance, the official residence of the Roman governor of Syria and a busy commercial centre. It was adorned with many handsome buildings and public monuments and was in no respect inferior to Rome itself in splendour and luxury. It is not surprising therefore that all the pagan religions of the world were represented at Antioch. The city boasted temples to every deity known to the Greeks and Romans and many others too, among which the synagogues of the orthodox Jews stood in almost equivalent splendour for the Jews of Antioch constituted a wealthy and prosperous community. It was in no mean city that the first Gentile Christian church had its birth and rose to a position of influence among the general community of believers.

It was inevitable that news of these developments should reach the Church at Jerusalem, still recognized as the central authority by virtue of the continued residence there of the twelve apostles. The acceptance of Gentiles as fellow-believers and fellow-heirs was as yet an unacceptable proposition to the Christians of Jerusalem, brought up as they had been under the discipline and restrictions of the Law of Moses, and further investigation and consideration was obviously indicated. So they determined to send a commissioner to Antioch to find out at first hand just what was going on and report the position. The mission was evidently projected in a spirit of love and helpfulness, for the messenger chosen seems to have been under no obligation to return at all quickly – in actual fact he was away more than a year.

The one chosen was Barnabas, Saul's old friend. He was a Jew of the Dispersion and a native of Cyprus, he was probably better fitted than most of them to undertake a mission like this to a virtually Gentile city where his contacts would be mainly with Gentiles. Barnabas is described here as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." It is evident from various references in the Book of Acts that he was held in high esteem by his brethren.

So Barnabas went to Antioch and joined himself to the Church there and laboured with them. Continued success crowned their efforts and again "*much people was added unto the Lord*". Barnabas began to feel the need for more help – perhaps the high degree of culture and education in the city, the intellectual

level of many of the potential converts, so different from the simple peasantry of Galilee and Samaria, or the insular Jews of Jerusalem, pointed to the desirability of an apologist having greater educational attainments than Barnabas felt he himself possessed. At any rate, he thought of his friend Saul, living in obscurity in Tarsus, and determined to bring him to Antioch to assist in the growing work. Without much doubt the thought was instilled into his mind by the Holy Spirit, for the time had now come when Saul must take up his destined vocation. The long time of training and preparation was ended; now the call to action was to be given. So Barnabas made his way the sixteen miles to the seaport of Seleucia and found a ship which would take him the hundred miles across the Mediterranean to Tarsus in Cilicia

The day had been much like every day for a long while past, Saul reflected as he sat, quietly reading the Holy Scriptures. His work for the day was done – his trade of tentmaker was standing him in good stead in these days and although it was commonly only a meagre remunerative occupation he was able to provide for his modest needs and still leave time for further study and consideration of God's Word. Some day, he firmly believed, all this study and meditation would prove to have been worth while and have fitted him for whatever work it was that God would ultimately direct him to do. The waiting time seemed long and unnecessarily protracted, but the One he served knew best and would reveal his will in due time. His thoughts strayed for a moment to that last night of his short visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. He was in the Temple praying, and saw in a vision the Lord Jesus commanding him to make haste and get out of Jerusalem and giving him that staggering promise "*Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.*" He departed and came to Tarsus, and for two whole years now had watched and prayed and waited but no indication had come. Sometimes he had gone down to the sea not far from the city and looked across the sparkling Mediterranean. He had watched the merchant ships coming in and going out, bound for Alexandria and Rome and the cities of Greece, fascinating lands of the Roman Empire with peoples of many races, none of whom had heard the only Name by which men may be saved. Sometimes he had climbed the slopes of Mount Taurus behind the town and looked inland across the mountains and valleys of Asia and wondered if that was the way he was going to be called to go. But no word had come and he was still reading of God, the Author of salvation and still harbouring within his breast the burning message of the One who came to earth to bring the word of salvation. He felt like Jeremiah of old "*his word was as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*" Saul stirred in his seat as a knock sounded on the door of the house. He heard voices, that of his housekeeper alternating with deep resonant tones which somehow sounded vaguely familiar. His own name was being mentioned. He looked up as the door

of his room was flung open and his eyes took in, with astonishment and then warm pleasure, the stalwart form of the man who had befriended him in Jerusalem those two years ago.

It is not likely that Saul hesitated before agreeing to accompany Barnabas back to Antioch. His alert mind would discern instantly that here was the call he had been awaiting; here was the commencement of his being sent "*far hence unto the Gentiles*", there in a city through which Gentiles of all nations were constantly passing. There was probably a hurried leave-taking of relatives and friends, a quick packing of a few essential belongings, and then Saul was onboard ship and on the high seas again, not as a fugitive this time but a man setting out on the greatest adventure of his life. When the ship reached the Antioch port of Seleucia and the gangplank was thrown across it was almost certainly Saul who was first ashore.

So, at last, Saul was fully accepted into the community of the believers. The greater part of his newly found brethren knew nothing of the old persecuting Pharisee. The few at Antioch who had originated from Jerusalem and remembered the martyrdom of Stephen and the havoc their new leader had then made in the Church were by now fully reconciled to the evident fact that this man was a chosen vessel unto God to preach His Word among the Gentiles. They were thankful for his fellowship and his help. For an entire year the work proceeded without interruption and with continuing success and steady increase in the number of the believers. It is remarkable that no indication of hostility on the part of the orthodox Jews of Antioch is given. Unlike almost every other place in which the Apostle afterward laboured, Antioch seems to have tolerated and accepted him. The fact that this city was the political capital and seat of Roman government and that any kind of public disorder would have been more sternly and ruthlessly repressed than elsewhere probably had something to do with it. So might the greater pre-occupation of Jews at Antioch with commercial activities and money-making. Religion, other than the purely formal kind, most likely played only a secondary part in their lives.

It was at this time and in this city that the name "Christian" was coined and first used. It was not originated by the believers themselves; the form of the word is Latin and not Greek or Hebrew and it is more likely that the term arose among the general population of the city in reference to the constant dwelling of the believers upon the name of Christ. The name at that time had not attained the status of a proper name; the word means "the Anointed" and conveyed that meaning to Jewish Christians. The only proper name by which the Lord was known was the one given to Him at His birth, Jesus, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua, a name which was common in Israel anyway. The believers themselves still referred to their faith as "the Way" and if they called themselves anything at all it was "brethren of the Way". The usual term applied to them by

others was "Nazarenes" but from now on the word "Christian" began to come more and more into common use. Perhaps the greatest memorial to Saul's twelve months' labour in this Gentile city is the fact that *"the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"*.

It was at some time during this period that a further commission came to Antioch from Jerusalem and Saul met some of the brethren whose doubts upon the occasion of his last visit to the Holy City had precluded their acceptance of him. Now there were no doubts; they knew him to be one of themselves and fellowshipped with him accordingly. These men possessed the prophetic gift and during their stay one of them, Agabus, his perception of the future sharpened by his spiritual attunement with the Holy Spirit, declared that a wide-spread and serious famine was imminent and would affect all the Roman world. Such happenings were not infrequent; it only needed a year of bad weather over Egypt and the Middle East to throw the whole grain-producing economy of the Roman Empire out of gear and something like near-starvation for much of the town populations was the result. Luke records the realization of Agabus' prophecy in the same verse by the terse comment *"which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar"* (Acts 2.28). Claudius reigned AD 41-54 and his reign saw several famines, a notable one affecting Judea and Syria being recorded by Josephus as occurring in about A.D. 45. The visit of Agabus to Antioch must have occurred in A.D. 41, and the immediate response of the church was to build up a relief fund for the benefit of their poorer brethren in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul were appointed to carry the money to Jerusalem evidently with the idea that the recipients would have time to buy in stocks of food before the famine came upon them.

So Saul returned to Jerusalem the second time. There was no opposition and no incident; evidently the two messengers did not engage in any kind of preaching or evangelism. They may not even have met the church. Their mission was to the elders, and having delivered the gift and the greetings of the church which sent the gift, they probably were eager to get back to their own sphere of labour and did not delay to depart.

They took back with them a companion, John Mark, nephew of Barnabas and son of his sister Mary, in whose house at Jerusalem, tradition has it, the Last Supper was held. Mark would be about twenty-four years of age at this time, probably already collecting the material for the Gospel which bears his name. It would be many years before the first of the four Gospels was to be written. Why he decided to go with them is not stated. In all probability he also wanted to have a part in taking the Gospel to the far places of the earth and the opportunity of joining up with Saul and his uncle, and labouring with them in a virile and active community like Antioch, was too good to miss. So, three earnest and zealous men travelled back the four hundred miles to the northern city to take up their

places in the expanding work of the first church to send out missionaries to the Gentiles.

AOH

ON JONAH

In December of 1946, fishermen in the Indian Ocean, thirty miles out from Bombay, captured a twenty-foot tiger shark in the stomach of which they discovered the complete skeleton of a man and some clothing. This occurrence illustrates the story of Jonah and is of interest as indicating the possibility of a man being swallowed whole by a large fish.

Bears – “mentioned 13 times in the Old Testament, suggesting bears were quite common then ... Bears lived mainly on fruits and roots, but might be driven by hunger in early spring to take a lamb.”⁽¹⁾ There are references to bears in 1 Sam. 17.34; 2 Kings 2.23; Isa. 11.7; Amos 5.19.

Dr. W. M. Thomson writes “The Syrian bear – still found in the higher mountains of this country – is perhaps equally to be dreaded in a close personal encounter ... The stoutest hunter will not venture to attack him alone nor without being thoroughly armed for the deadly strife.”⁽²⁾

The Revd. J. G. Wood writes “the Syrian bear changes its colour as it grows older. When a cub it is darkish brown, which becomes a light brown as it approaches maturity. But when it has attained its full growth it becomes cream-coloured, and each succeeding year seems to lighten its coat so that a very old bear is nearly as white as its relative of the Arctic regions.”⁽³⁾

(1) The Bible Lands Society – The Star in the East (2) W. M. Thomson – The Land and the Book
(3) G. Wood – Bible Animals

True nobility is more often shown in the little things of daily life than in the great things. When a man lives in the full view of public opinion he is keyed up to create a favourable impression. But it is the nature and temperament shown when the lime-light is withdrawn, when there is no inducement to wear a mask, which reveals the true man and what he really is.

“The safe position in Christian thinking is to remember that there are deeper depths that we can fathom, higher heights than we can know; it keeps us reverent, keeps us from hardening off into a confined, cabined experience of our own.”

Oswald Chambers

A NEW COMMANDMENT

Part 1 of a conference address

Reading: Luke 10.25-37

The Pharisees were always trying to trap our Lord into saying something that they could use to discredit Him or even to justify having Him killed. When, in answer to their latest attempt, Jesus gave the commandment contained in our reading, He wasn't telling them something new. His intention was to remind them (and us) of God's instruction, given through Moses and recorded in Leviticus 19.18 that, *"You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people; but you shall love your neighbour as yourself."* And to remind us of how our attitude should be towards other people, especially towards those who, in our eyes, are not behaving in what we consider a sensible, respectable or responsible way.

It is so easy to judge people by appearances. We pigeonhole them, and condemn those who behave differently from the way we believe that they should - without trial, and without even trying to understand why they behave as they do. Unless someone, in a spirit of love, has the courage and the humility to communicate with them, to show them some understanding, they will forever remain condemned.

Our Lord gave some timely advice in Matthew 5.43, 44, part of the sermon on the mount, about how we should really behave, when we feel critical about someone. He said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. Whatever you want people to do for you, do the same for them.'"* It is our duty as Christians to bless those that curse us -- to speak all the good we can to, and of, the ones who speak evil to, and of, us. To repay with love in thought, word, and deed, those who hate us, and show it both in our words and our deeds. Luke adds to this these words of Jesus recorded in chapter 6 verse 36, *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."* However, these commands are not always easy to obey and we all fail to follow them at times.

I want to tell you a story that illustrates what we've just been saying. A student, let's call him Jack, was enrolled at one of the big universities and when he arrived for the first session his hair looked as if he'd been 'dragged through a hedge backwards'. He was dressed in a tee shirt with holes in it, faded jeans and a rather scuffed looking pair of trainers. And during the entire four years that he was at the university his appearance hardly varied. His unusual behaviour, of course, caused various reactions. The lecturers tried to persuade him to dress more decently, while quite a lot of the students said that, either he must be a bit stupid to behave in such a way, or else he was so poor that he had no other clothes. The first of these accusations, however, was shown to be wrong by the

first year's results when Jack came top in his year. In fact he finished university with First Class degrees in his chosen subjects.

During this first year Jack, who until now hadn't bothered very much about religion, was persuaded to go to the Christian fellowship at his college and he soon became a committed Christian. Now across the road from his college there was a church: it had a very conservative, intensely formal and extremely well dressed congregation. The minister of the church wanted to establish a ministry to the students but, because of the unswerving traditionalism of his flock, he was not quite sure how to persuade his rather unprogressive congregation to get involved. One Sunday, Jack decided to go to the morning service at this church. It had already started when 'our hero' arrived, dressed of course in his usual 'elegant' way. The church was full because it so happened that there was a special service of Thanksgiving that day, and so he started to move slowly down the aisle, looking for a place to sit. When he reached the front without finding even one seat that was empty he looked around as though he was unsure what he should do, then he shrugged his shoulders and squatted down on the carpet.

This unconventional behaviour would have been quite acceptable in a college fellowship meeting but for this very prim and proper congregation it was just too much. They had looked on in horror as this 'hippie' – or so they thought of him – had moved through their church. They had no understanding of, or sympathy with, the lax ways of the younger generation, and it was only their strict sense of propriety that had stopped some of them from forcibly ejecting him.

Then the minister stopped speaking. The congregation saw that he was looking up towards the back of the church. Turning their heads, they saw that one of the church deacons, a tall, very erect man of about eighty, immaculately dressed, with white hair and walking with the aid of a stick, was coming slowly down the aisle. A good thing too, you could almost hear them thinking, he's going to tell this repulsive individual to leave. However, when the deacon reached Jack, who by this time could sense the hostility of the congregation, he didn't say anything, but he dropped his stick to the floor, with a clatter. Then he showed the understanding, humility and generosity that the others should have shown. He smiled at Jack and, with considerable difficulty, lowered himself to the floor and squatted on the carpet beside him to worship with him in loving fellowship.

Just one man had the courage and the feeling of love for his neighbour that our Lord spoke about. In spite of the considerable difference in their ages, and the marked difference in their chosen modes of dress, he showed the understanding that was necessary in making the unusual young visitor feel welcome. He acted in the way that he would have liked someone to behave towards him in a difficult situation: whilst the attitude of the people in the

congregation was similar to the one described and condemned by James in the second chapter of his letter. James said, if I may paraphrase his words, that *"We should not practice our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ by showing partiality. If an unknown, but obviously influential, man came into the church every one would fawn over him and find him a special seat, but if a poor man came in they would just tell him to sit in a corner out of the way and ignore him."*

Those of us who maintain that we have faith in Christ, says James, must not allow our behaviour towards others to be affected, one way or the other, by mere outward appearances. To do this would not be consistent with our claim that we are disciples of Jesus. Moreover, it would mean that we were making no genuine efforts to prepare ourselves for Christ's return.

To act in this way not only casts a question mark over our faith, it is failing to keep 'the Royal Law that we love our neighbour as ourselves' and it shows that we're being guided by the wrong motives. To behave in this way is certainly not the way of a Christian, and this isn't the way our Heavenly Father treats people. He will show the same love and generosity to everyone who comes to Him no matter what their station in life. He is no respecter of persons.

The apostle John goes even further. He sees things as either black or white and says that it's only by showing love to others that we can make any progress in our spiritual life. If we fail to show love to our neighbour we are in fact showing hatred to him and to hate means we are in the dark and that if we're in the dark we're enemies of Jesus and blind to the needs of anyone but ourselves.

Jesus came to demonstrate the love of His Father who, as John tells us in the third chapter of his gospel, loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son, so that all who would believe in His teachings - should have everlasting life. Our Lord always described God as a loving Father and illustrated that love by telling us the stories of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Son. The first - the Lost Coin - shows the love of God for those who have never known Him, but whom He still wants to bring into the circle of His love. And the second - the Lost Sheep - shows how He will keep searching until He finds the ones who through their own stupidity have lost their way and wandered away from His care. While the third - the Lost Son - shows that, even when someone deliberately and of their own free will chooses to leave the circle of God's love, when they do come to their senses and decide to return, our Heavenly Father will welcome them back with open arms. The point of each story was to show God's unconditional love.

The father, of the Prodigal, was always looking out to see if his wandering son would come home. Then when he saw him in the distance he was so happy that the lost one was coming back to him that he actually ran to meet him and lovingly wrapped the prodigal in his arms. Jesus wanted us to know that this is the way that God feels about us and behaves towards us, His wayward children

and that He will not rest until all His children are safely back home and in a proper relationship with Him. We may have turned away from Him but when we do, He waits for us to realise that our Father's home is where we really want to be. He will not put any pressure on us but He waits for us to be fully convinced, in our own minds, that being home with Him is best. Then, when our face is turned homeward again, even though we may as yet be far away, our Father recognizes His own child in us. And as soon as He sees us returning He will hurry to meet us. He does not say that first the wanderer must come pleading to him and beg to be forgiven, then He will welcome him, but He Himself takes the first step towards him and gives forgiveness.

God has adopted us into His family as sons and co-heirs with Our Lord, and in the third chapter of his first letter, John says, *"See what kind of love the Father has given us in letting us be called God's children. And that is what we are!"* Jesus is telling us in the parable of the Prodigal Son, that because of His love for us, our heavenly Father wants ALL of us to be joined in loving friendship, not only with Him but also with one another. As our elder brother, our Lord wants us to experience the same true and intimate oneness with our Heavenly Father that He does – as the firstborn. In verse 14 of the fourth chapter of John's first letter, he repeats what he told us in his gospel, that the Father sent His Son into the world so that whoever will confess that Jesus is the Son of God, then God will dwell in him. Then in verse 16 he says; *"We have come to know and believe in the love that God has for us. God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."* A few verses further on he says that, if we maintain that we love God yet indulge in jealousy, anger, revenge, or we show a selfish disposition and indifference towards our 'brother' – and in its widest sense that means all those with whom we come into contact – then we give the lie to our claim that we love Him.

Jesus, himself, was the kindest man that ever lived. He talked a great deal about the ordinary, every day practice of kindness. In fact to judge by what He said, He regarded kindness as the most important aspect of love and would rather see kindness in His followers, than any other trait of character.

In the fourth chapter of the letter to the Ephesians, verse 32 we're told that we should, *"Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another just as God has forgiven you in Christ."* Paul is saying that because God has shown Himself kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to us, it is only right and proper that we in turn should show the same feelings to our fellow man. After all, the one needing kindness from us has not failed us in the degree that we have fallen short in our loyalty to God. It cost God the death of His Son to forgive us but it costs us nothing to forgive our fellow man. Kindness is based on the loving heart of the giver and it's impossible to be truly kind unless one first of all truly loves: and it has been said that rivers of kindness flow from our Heavenly Father, the

fountain of love. It has also been said that kindness lifts the spirit, and that compassion opens the heart. When we think about it, nothing encourages us more than when someone, in a spirit of love, shows us an act of kindness or understanding. Like forgiveness, kindness costs us nothing, but our Lord places so much emphasis on it that He identifies Himself with those who need it. We can see this in His parable of the Sheep and the Goats, in Matthew 25. There He lists many different things that were done for the king and then says in verse 40 that *"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to Me."* After listing the same things that were NOT done for the King, He says, in verse 45 that, *"Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."*

This, taken in its broadest sense, rather than in the limited words of the story, means that Jesus is, in effect, saying that anything that we do for someone else we do for Him. On the other hand, when we fail to do something for someone who needs help, of any kind, we are failing our Lord. The implication seems to be that we can't have a proper relationship with Jesus, if at the same time we are indifferent to the needs and suffering of others around us. He also tells us that, however simple, or small, an act of kindness is, it won't go unnoticed or unrewarded by Him. Not, of course, that we show loving kindness for the reward we will receive; that is a contradiction in terms. True love is happily and generously giving any kind of help with no thought of getting anything in return. Its greatest form is doing a kindness to someone who will never find out who did it.

John in the third chapter of his first letter verses 17 and 18, says that if anyone who has some form of worldly goods does not use them to help when they see someone in need, then they do not have the love of God in their hearts. He goes on to say that it's time that we stopped talking about doing good deeds and instead, got on and did them. While John Wesley, in commenting on this passage, said that the very sight of want should knock at the door of our conscience and that if we ignore the want that we see, then we are not showing love towards our neighbour. James in the second chapter of his letter verses 15 and 16 asks us, *"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and if one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them those things which are needful to the body, what good is it?"*

These men are all telling us that fine words can never take the place of good deeds; and not all the Christian love in the world can take the place of a kindly action towards someone in need. And when that good deed is performed at the cost of some sort of self-denial or sacrifice we will be illustrating the principle that our Lord laid down in John 15.13 and which He demonstrated to the full, that, *"No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"*.

Perhaps, to make this principle of self sacrifice a little clearer we should remember that Jesus said that we should, *"Give to anyone who asks of you. "* At the time that He was speaking this meant giving alms to the poor and needy: and there are two points to consider here. First, if we apply His words to another of His sayings, that we should – as it is expressed today – 'go the second mile', then we shouldn't wait to be asked. Secondly, alms doesn't necessarily just mean giving money: it can also mean the doing of some kindly act for someone. To do a kindness for someone involves giving of our selves, of our time, which can often be more valuable than money.

In Matthew 10.37-42 we are told that Jesus said something that at a first glance seems to contradict all His other teaching because He tells us that, *"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* However, what we are really being told is we must show love both to our family and to others, but that this love must not take precedence over our love for, and our obedience to, Jesus. Then our Lord goes on to say; *"And he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life shall lose it. And he who loses his life for my sake shall find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives Him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a just one in the name of a just one will receive a just one's reward. And whoever shall give to one of these little ones a cup of cold water to drink, only in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you. He shall in no way lose his reward."*

This does not mean that doing works can save us because we can only be saved through the grace of God. What He is telling us, is that nothing we do, whether it's good or bad, escapes the notice of our heavenly Father. However, there are those who dispense what they call kindness very grudgingly, sometimes even with a lecture on how, if the one being helped had behaved in a different way, the help wouldn't have been necessary. And Luke tells us in chapter 6 verses 37 & 38 what our Lord said about this sort of behaviour, *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over, they shall give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you measure, it shall be measured to you again."*

We ought to be very careful when we form opinions about others because we want our heavenly Father to make every allowance for our own behaviour. If we are of a giving and a forgiving nature, or we, in Christian love, develop such a nature, we shall ourselves reap the benefit by our spiritual progress. What is more, the Holy Spirit working in us will encourage us as we try to become more fruitful. A tree is known by its fruit: and if we are to be ready for our Lord's

return we must be fruitful in every good word and work, and the word of Christ must be so grafted into our hearts that loving kindness becomes an automatic reaction.

RJH

DAUGHTER OF PHAROAH

She stood at the water's edge, looking curiously at the papyrus basket entangled amongst the water-plants. Her maids caught up with her and stood, a respectful distance off, awaiting her pleasure.

She looked round and made an imperious gesture. "Bring that to me!" One of the slave-girls plunged into the water and waded out. She returned, stumbling against the encumbering weed, bearing the basket safely in her arms. She climbed the bank and set her burden down on the grass.

"Open it" commanded her mistress.

A deft movement of the hands and the cover was stripped off, revealing a three-month-old baby, peacefully sleeping. The brilliant Egyptian sun shone straight into its face; it awoke, and set up a cry. The austere features softened suddenly, and the princess went down upon her knees beside the basket, careless of her garments brushing the dust. Gathering up the child, she stood up, holding it close. "Beautiful" she said "the most beautiful child I have ever seen. The gods have sent it to me. I shall keep it for my own."

The others crowded round for a closer look as the babe lay cradled in her arms. For a few moments no one spoke.

The infant had quietened and lay peacefully gazing into the rapt face above. The princess looked at it more searchingly. A faint shadow crossed her features.

"This is one of the Hebrews' children" she said. There was another silence, broken at last by one of the maids.

"O lady, child of the sun. Your father the Pharaoh has commanded that all the Hebrews' children shall be cast into the river and drowned, and none may disobey his decree."

The girl stood erect, head held regally, eyes flashing defiance, the while she clutched the baby fiercely and protectively. "I am the daughter of Pharaoh, and I say the child shall live. He is mine, and I shall tell my father so." Then the proud stance crumpled suddenly and she looked beseechingly at her attendants. "But this child will need feeding" Her strong mouth puckered and her lips quivered.

The others looked around helplessly. One of them suddenly darted into the thicket of papyrus bulrushes lining the river's edge and came back with a trembling thirteen-year-old Hebrew girl who had been hiding there, talking rapidly to her as they approached. The girl made a low obeisance.

The princess motioned her to rise. "Tell me, where can I find a woman who will nurse this Hebrew child for me?"

Miriam answered, a little breathlessly. "Great lady. I can bring you one here and now, if so be that is your wish."

An imperious wave of the hand: "Go", and Miriam was running hard across the greensward to the Israelite village in the distance.

The minutes ticked by quietly. The hum of insects filled the hot air. A crocodile waddled out of the water to sun himself upon the riverbank, and sensing the presence of humans, waddled back again. The three slave-girls talked between themselves in low tones. The princess remained standing, looking down upon the child, eyes betraying the dawning of a determination which belied her youth and gave promise of a future tenacity of character which nothing would shake. When she lifted her head and saw Miriam returning with a mature-looking woman at her side, she came forward a little, noting with some approval the quiet dignity of this woman.

"Take this child away and nurse it for me for so long as it needs your care. Bring it to the palace each day that I may see it for a while and hold it in my arms. I will see that the officers of Pharaoh do not interfere with you. Protect it from all harm, and I will give you your wages."

Jochebed advanced and bowed low. She took the child into her own arms and turned away, rejoicing inwardly that she held her son again and that he had been saved from the river. With Miriam at her side she trudged back to the village, conscious of an inner realisation that God had preserved her son for some great purpose which as yet could not be discerned.

The princess watched them until they were out of sight. She turned to her attendants. "Come, let us return to the palace, that I may tell my father what I have done."

* * * * *

The story of Pharaoh's daughter, who rescued the child Moses from the river and brought him up as her own son, is one of the most well-known in the Bible. The Scriptures say nothing more about her, and until comparatively recent years it was not possible to say with certainty just who she was. Progress in historical research has now enabled her identity to be established.

Eighty years before the Exodus there was a Pharaoh in Egypt named Thutmose I. (The name used to be read Thothmes but Thutmose is the more modern usage.) This Pharaoh had one daughter, Hatshepsut, who grew up to become a vigorous and accomplished woman, and after her father's death ruled Egypt by the force of her own personality to such effect that she is acknowledged the most famous and greatest queen of Egyptian history. The events recorded in Exodus concerning the Oppression, the life of Moses, and the Exodus, fit so closely to the historical dates of this king and his successors as to

leave no doubt that Thutmose I was the pharaoh who ordered the slaying of the Hebrew children and Hatshepsut was the one who adopted Moses. His own inscriptions, still extant, tell how he did the same thing to the Nubians in the land south of Egypt, whom he had conquered, leaving none of their males alive.

Princess Hatshepsut was about twenty one years of age at the time. Born of a great military leader, descended from a line of military conquerors, she was herself resolute, strong-minded, determined and a born ruler. After her father's death in later years she arrogated to herself the position and privileges of Pharaoh and reigned as Pharaoh for thirty-five years, bringing Egypt to a state of almost unprecedented prosperity and peace. One might well wonder why such a woman should take it upon herself to adopt a child of the despised Hebrew slaves.

The answer might well lie in the realm of her domestic circumstances. It was customary at that time for the son of Pharaoh to marry one of his sisters, this was because the royal title descended through the female line. Hatshepsut had no brother, but there was a half-brother, born to Thutmose I by one of his concubines. The princess was married to him, probably at sixteen or less, as was the then practice. Her husband, however, was a weakling and effeminate, he died not many years later and it may well have been that Hatshepsut, after about five years of marriage, despaired of presenting her ailing husband with an heir who would be of royal blood, and finding this healthy-looking babe in the river, conceived the idea of passing him off as her own and eventually making him heir apparent to the throne. Josephus says she did in fact put this proposal to her father and he concurred, but Josephus was probably romancing, although he may have had access to sources of information denied us today. But one might well ask what other motive this highly born princess could have had in acting as she did. And if this be the true hypothesis – and it is difficult to construct another fitting the case so well – the temptation that presented itself to Moses as he grew up was a far more crucial one than is generally supposed. He could, upon the death of his reputed mother's husband, become Pharaoh of Egypt, with all the power and glory which that entailed. As the reputed son of Hatshepsut he would possess a royal title to the throne. He could then have removed the burdens of his fellow-countrymen and restored to them the favours they had enjoyed in the days of Joseph.

When Moses was eleven years of age the old Pharaoh, Thutmose I, died, and his son succeeded as Thutmose II. Hatshepsut had already acted as Regent for her father during his last few failing years, and now she took full control and assumed the title of Pharaoh herself, consigning her husband Thutmose II to a minor role. In another seven years he was dead, having in the meantime given his wife a daughter, Nefrura, and, like his father, had a son by one of his own concubines.

By this time Moses was approaching twenty years of age and was rapidly becoming "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and mighty in words and deeds" as Stephen said of him at his trial (Acts 7.22). If there is any basis of truth in Josephus' story that Moses achieved distinction by leading an army into Ethiopia and conquering that land this would be the time he did so; more likely though this is another of Josephus' romances, although it is a fact that such an expedition did take place.

Meanwhile a constitutional crisis had arisen. With the death of Hatshepsut's husband a new Pharaoh must succeed. He need not necessarily be descended through the royal female line himself provided he was married either to Hatshepsut or to her daughter Nefrura, both of whom held the right of succession. If the Queen had actually intended to put Moses forward as the rightful Pharaoh this would be the time, either by a nominal marriage to his reputed sister Nefrura, then only three years old, or to Hatshepsut herself – the pharaohs of this dynasty were not particular about relationships in marriage. In either case Hatshepsut intended to remain the real ruler, as in fact she did eventually.

At this juncture the priesthood came into the picture, rather hurriedly. They may not have been too sure about their sovereign's ideas and intentions regarding Moses. They may or may not have known that he was a Hebrew but they must have known that he was not the natural son of the queen and her husband or they would have had no option but to acquiesce in whatever action he took. There was a quiet plot hatched – and the next that the queen knew about it was that her stepson, born to her husband by his concubine, and now about eight years of age, had been publicly proclaimed Pharaoh Thutmose III.

There was not much Hatshepsut could do about it. She had been tricked into a position where she must marry her stepson and so legitimise his election, although he was so young. It made no practical difference; the queen still ruled and for the next twenty-odd years she carried Egypt to a high degree of prosperity, sending a fleet of trading ships on a noteworthy expedition to a far-distant land and receiving in consequence a vast assortment of tropical trees, plants, animals and native products such as Egypt had never seen before. She also engaged in an extensive building and beautifying of various temples the ruins of which still remain as testimony to her greatness.

During this period there are references to a powerful noble who acted as her adviser and was the architect of the temples she had built, named Senenmut. This man appears to have enjoyed her full confidence and acted as tutor to her daughter Nefrura. He is depicted as having been born of undistinguished parents and occupied a prominent position at court. It is tempting to identify this individual with Moses but present evidence is against it. The tomb of Senenmut is known and it was desecrated by Thutmose III after the death of Hatshepsut. It

was common for Egyptian notabilities to prepare tombs for themselves long before their death and there is no real evidence that Senenmut ever occupied it. He disappears from the records at a time corresponding to six years before Moses' flight into Midian. If it should one day turn out that Senenmut and Moses are one and the same, which is questionable, there are ten statues of Moses as an Egyptian noble in existence in the world's museums today.

About this time, Thutmose III, now a young man of twenty-three, asserted his rights as Pharaoh against the dominance of Hatshepsut, who was some thirty years his senior. From now on he took an active part in the government. At some time before this there must have occurred the crisis referred to in Heb. 11.24-26 *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of the anointed greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"*. It is impossible to say whether this decision on his part created a rift between himself and the queen which involved his banishment from the royal court, or whether he stayed on in perhaps a less honourable position. The denouement must have been embarrassing for the queen. The insulting remark of the aggressive Israelite in Exod. 2.14 *"Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?"* does not sound as if Moses enjoyed any very high status at that time.

After about six years' joint rule with Thutmose III, and just forty years from the birth of Moses, Hatshepsut disappears from history. It is not known whether she died or was murdered by Thutmose III, who was always jealous of her dominance. In his hatred he defaced all her monuments and inscriptions so that the recovery of her history has been more than usually difficult. It is significant though that the time of her death coincides with the flight of Moses to Midian. The Pharaoh who "sought to kill him" was Thutmose III, who would certainly have no liking for this pillar of the former regime. Thutmose in his turn died about eight years before Moses returned from Midian, which is in accord with Exod. 2.23.

There is no reason to believe that the lot of the Israelites was any better under Hatshepsut than it was under her father or her successor. The contemporary Egyptian historian Ineni says of her *"all Egypt laboured with bowed head for her"* and the implication of the narrative in the first two chapters of Exodus is that the hard labour of Israel endured throughout her reign. The incident of the taskmasters occurred just at the end of her reign although perhaps just after her death and when her successor was getting himself established as sole ruler. It might well be that Moses, probably brought up to believe that he was an Egyptian, and her son, found out the truth and broke with her in order to take the side of his oppressed brethren. Despite the rather romantic flavour of the story of Moses' adoption in Exodus, the cold fact is that Pharaoh's daughter was

a masterful and dominant character who ruled Egypt with wisdom and insight but with ruthless firmness for thirty five years and suffered no one to thwart her will. The God of Israel meant nothing to her; she was an ardent devotee of the gods of Egypt and clung tenaciously to the doctrine that she was born in direct descent from the gods and Divinely ordained to rule.

God said to her grandson, the Pharaoh of the Exodus "*in very deed for this purpose have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power, and that my name may be declared in all the earth*" (Exodus 9.16). In just the same way did the Lord raise up this Egyptian princess to afford his chosen instrument for Israel's deliverance that knowledge and skill which was to constitute so essential a part of his training for his destined task.

AOH

The strength of the vessel can only be demonstrated by the hurricane, and the power of the Gospel can be fully shown only when the Christian is subjected in some fiery trial. If God would make manifest the fact that "He gives songs in the night" He must first make it night.

William Taylor

Did our Lord say "If man would be my disciple let him serve me" or was it "If man would serve me let him follow me"?

Chloe's home was ever open to Paul. News from the Corinthian Christians was not good and he had to severely reprove them. He did not gossip privately but openly told the Church that 'Chloe's people' had informed him of their conduct. A follower of Jesus Christ should never become involved in behind the back criticisms.

Jesus said "*Do not be anxious about your life.*" Are we worried? Have we noticed the birds of the air or the flowers of the field; or are we too concerned about the next meal or the new coat? Cast all your care upon Him for He cares about you – take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

True prayer is the process by which we learn to know God and to realise what He wants to be to us. Thus we can take possession of the wondrous inheritance of riches and power that are ours in Christ Jesus and which He is waiting to help us work out in our experience.

"Worry is an insult to Jesus Christ. It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because my worry means that I do not think God can look after the practical details of my life."

Oswald Chambers

WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

"Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6.4 NRSV).

The characteristic 'therefore' with which Paul begins the answer to his own rhetorical question in v.3 means that we really must look back at the earlier context. Paul asks the Roman Christians if they are not aware that they have been baptized into Christ's death. But we must go back a little further to the question about sinning "*so that grace may abound*".

First, let us look at what the letter to the Church in Rome is all about. In the first two chapters Paul describes sin in the world and the terrible state that it is in. In chapters 3-5 Paul discusses how God has provided a remedy for sin. He explains the spiritual life in chapters 6-8. Paul then seems to diverge a little into how God makes choices – how he elected to take natural Israel as His own, and in a similar way to take Christ's Church. Chapters 12-14 are about practical ethical issues.

So in chapter 6 Paul begins to sort out the subject of 'living in Christ' but is disturbed by an idea that some Christians of that time actually held. It may seem impossible that anyone should think that 'grace would abound' by them deliberately sinning. Some in every age have lived as if they believed that, even if they didn't actually say so. In any case, why sin? Sin is illogical because sinfulness destroys itself and everything it contacts. Sin is disobedience to God and this has dogged the human race for most of its existence. It has caused the human race to live chaotic lives and to create chaos in the natural world until it has brought the environment to the verge of destruction.

'Grace' has had various definitions but Norman Snaith in his valuable little book 'The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament' regards 'grace' in the New Testament as the equivalent of the Hebrew word 'chesed'. This word is translated consistently in the RSV as 'steadfast love' which seems to be described very well in the beautiful hymn by Thomas Chisholm 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' – God's faithful covenant love.

But how can grace abound if sin is multiplied. Grace can only abound to the sinner who repents of sin, whose heart is contrite and who wants to avoid sin. Those who deliberately sin cannot expect God's compassion. Paul discusses a similar problem in Rom. 3.5-8 concerning justice and wrath.

Paul in verse 2 of this sixth chapter, shows the contrast. We have died to sin – or to put it another way as he does in Ephesians 2.5 "*God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*" Professor Barclay explains that when a proselyte (that is a Gentile who was being accepted into the Jewish

faith) was baptised at the beginning of his new life, he totally undressed, had his hair and nails trimmed and was accepted into the new faith as if resurrected from the dead. He genuinely started a new way of life. So it is with a Christian being baptised into Christ. He is leaving behind forever an old way of life, never to go back to it. Later in the letter to Ephesus (4.22) Paul writes *"You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* So we must ask what was that 'former way of life'?

In Galatians 5, before Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit, that which must grow in us, he lists the characteristics of the 'flesh' which is the old nature, our former way of life. These not only have no place in our active outward life, but they have no place in our thoughts and words. But that is not all.

"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (Rom. 14.23). Whatever does not in our thoughts, our words and our actions come from a complete trust in God, is sin. Bringing thoughts into subjection to God's will is a little harder and can only become a reality when we really do trust and are prepared before God and our brethren to acknowledge every deviation from that trust.

"We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." The clay jars are the human bodies that we have inherited from the sinful human race along with the controlling brain which so often, almost involuntarily, causes us to do, say and think the wrong thing. This is the proud and wilful self and before Christ can be demonstrated in our life style, our very self must die. It is death to our will, as it was death to Christ's will in the Garden of Gethsemane, but in us it is a proud and wilful 'I' that must be broken. We must become constantly aware of God's direction. The irritable, envious, resentful, critical and worried self must come to the foot of the Cross and in utter repentance leave its burden of sin there. Each time these characteristics of the human nature become even slightly apparent, we must return to the cross. This kind of repentance does not conflict with the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 6 verse 1 when he says *"not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith towards God."* The writer there is referring to our initial repentance as we come into Christ and find faith to be saved from our sins. We are in an 'earthen vessel' for the whole of our Christian walk and John writes *"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* 1 John 1.9). In theory this should decrease as we move toward the goal of our hope in Christ Jesus. In practice we become more sensitive to sin, and in the words of the hymn writer we find it 'a pain to feel it near', therefore we are more aware of what is wrong in our lives.

All this takes place in Christ and not only do we become sensitive to His correction, we also become more sensitive to His direction. When our frail humanity directs us the wrong way, or more likely makes us say something that would be better left unsaid, we are aware of His inner direction in our hearts. But this is only possible when we walk with Him in newness of life. The old nature has what Jesus called 'hardness of heart'. He challenged the Pharisees about this hardness of heart and later spoke to the disciples about it as they sailed across the lake (Mark 8.14-21). Hard hearts and deaf ears are insensitive to the Master's correction and the old nature, if not stopped will gradually dominate the new life in Him. Fruit is not grown by self discipline but by self being disciplined by Jesus and having His power within us.

As "*The branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine.*" (John 15.4) so the new nature only grows within us as we abide in Christ and listen to His voice. The Word of God is our touch stone. As we read it in our daily Quiet Time, we must meditate upon it in such a way that previous interpretations do not prevent us hearing what the Lord is saying to us now from Scripture. So as our old nature dies, we grow in grace and in that true knowledge of Him who died that we might live. If we would worship God in our time with Him each day we must be sure that we are totally reconciled to our brother or sister in Christ. Roy Hession in his so valued book *Calvary Road* suggests that the log in our eye that prevents us from seeing clearly the speck of dust in our brother or sister's eye is our own unloving reaction to the speck of dust.

Unwillingness to listen to Christ's correction and direction reminds us of the rich young synagogue ruler who came to Jesus aware of something lacking in His life and He asked the Lord what he could do to obtain eternal life. Jesus did not adversely comment about the young man's self assessment that he had kept the commandments, but He did clarify the issue of what really mattered. "Sell all you have and follow me" would mean that the young man could no longer try to buy salvation by being a good boy, in keeping the Law. He must unload the old way of life and find a new life in Christ. Following Jesus might mean exclusion from the synagogue, even suffering – perhaps death. Jesus was beginning to make it clear that it was 'a thorny path to the stars'.

Paul wrote that "*I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal. 2.20). He later wrote in the same letter "*far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.*" (Gal 6.14). Had Paul heard one of Jesus' sayings "*He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it and he who loses his life for my sake will find it*" (Matt. 10.38)? Much of the interpretation of these verses depends on what we mean by being crucified. There have been very great

differences of physical suffering that Christ's various followers have endured. Reference to the two sons of Zebedee is sufficient evidence of that fact. James was slain by the sword on Herod's orders, relatively early in life, perhaps not long after Stephen's murder. His brother John lived into old age – around the 100 years mark. Both had stood with Peter on the 'Holy Mount' when the Lord was transfigured – both had said that they could share the Lord's baptism and drink His 'cup'. Every true follower of Jesus who has surrendered his or her life to God and genuinely sought to know and do His will, has shared in the crucifixion and gloried in the cross.

For some it may have meant that they were but door keepers in the house of the Lord in a community of God's people in the land of their birth. For others it has meant forsaking homeland and family and trekking across half the world in order to do God's work. Some have faced great hardship and danger, and endured great physical suffering as did the martyrs from the fourth to the seventeenth century, and on into the twenty-first century. Others have lived more peaceful lives untroubled by violence. To follow Christ we need a have a resolute determination to do God's will whatever the cost and be ready to take whatever God sends to us.

Paul writes to the Philippians that our Lord set the pattern by emptying Himself, becoming a slave and humbling Himself in obedience to death. In the same letter Paul regarded his Jewish heritage as rubbish compared to knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord. He so much wanted to share in fellowship with the Master's sufferings and thus be made conformable to His death, so that he could know the power of Christ's resurrection in his life now.

Jews gloried in formal religion and outward piety but that could not save them from their sins nor free them from slavery to sin. Like humanism today it may be a satisfactory intellectual exercise but it can't cope with sin. The world today thinks it knows so much – that it can achieve so much – but its conceit stimulates sin. The church in Galatia boasted of keeping the Mosaic Law and Corinth boasted of its wisdom and gifts but all was not well with the ethics of either situation.

Paul's description in Romans 7 tells of the conflict in his own life, either before conversion on the Damascus road or even afterwards. His intellectual ability and his religious zeal could do nothing against the habits and 'instincts' of his old nature. That must die and be replaced by a living faith in Christ.

Where do our affections lie? Paul in Colossians 3 tells us that if we are risen with Christ then we must set our affections on things 'above'. Obviously he is contrasting the things of Earth and with Christ in Heaven but it's interesting to note that the word 'above' comes from a Greek word associated with the diaphragm – that huge muscle which separates heart and lungs from the digestive arrangements in the body. It is as if Paul was telling the church at

Colossae to make sure the seat of the affections is in the right place and not upon a mundane instinct like food. He also uses the homely illustration of removing a garment, *"you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator"* (Col. 3.9, 10 NRSV).

So we come to those words in the text *"Raised from the dead by the glory of the Father so we too might walk in newness of life."* Perhaps we are helped to understand what the 'glory of God' is by Paul's words to the Corinthians, *"seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree to another glory of the Lord are being change into his likeness from one degree of glory to another."* (2 Cor. 3.18) These texts contain a humiliating thought – we are being changed into the Father's glorious image now. And this is being done because our eyes are fixed on Jesus. His words and actions shown to us in the Gospels reveal what the Father is like and what we must become. It is so easy to become addicted to the habits of this world especially with modern technology and all in its wonderful electronic inventions. Fast cars, TV games, computer pastimes are remarkable for wasting God's time. Even Christian service and interesting Bible interpretations can distract from the main issues – being with Him and like Him. Is there anything in our lives which is separating us from Christ – preventing us from becoming more than over-comers? This is but a moment compared with eternity.

Moment by moment I'm kept in His love
Moment by moment I've life from above
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine
Moment by moment O Lord I am thine.

DN

Commitment to Christ is when we have given Him everything – laid at His feet all that we have and are – our time and strength – our skills and experience – our voice, our eyes, and our ears – our hands and feet. We place them on His altar with no strings attached.

All evidence points to the earliest civilisations worshipping one God who had the highest moral values – a faith of ethical monotheism that through many centuries deteriorated into the immoralities of paganism.

"O Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr

GODLY WISDOM

"He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" (1 Cor. 1.30, 31)

The city of Corinth lay on the isthmus in Achaia and was a flourishing commercial sea port, through which came all kinds of people from the Mediterranean area. In those days there was an enormous trade between Africa and Europe. Corinth prided itself on its wealth and wisdom. It was also infamous for its immorality and it was a 'sink of iniquity', like a drain for the Roman world. Twice in its history it had been rased to the ground because of its corruption and each time it had risen again from the ashes. Wealth is a snare and love of it, said Jesus, is the root of all evil. Corinth was in an area of the world that regarded itself as leaders of wisdom and thinking. But this was human wisdom which was little more than an acquisition of knowledge much of which was inquisitive speculation which solves none of the real problems of life and is not unknown in this day and generation. It was also allied to much pagan religion and its associated immorality.

The ethical standards of the city appear to have infiltrated into the young church and it was causing many problems for these relatively new converts to the Christian faith. Information had reached Paul by several channels and among his informers were 'Chloe's people' who are mentioned more than once in this connection. The first major problem concerned the sectarian divisions that had arisen in the Church. It was inevitable that this was having an effect on the other causes for concern, such as sexual immorality and mixed up ideas about Christian doctrine and the gifts of the spirit. Wealthy and influential believers were ignoring the needs of their less wealthy brethren.

Paul began his letter with warm greetings to the brethren of Corinth and he congratulated them upon their spiritual growth, expressing appreciation of their kindness and goodwill. Sadly, their boasting had marred the early progress of this Christian community and Paul had to explain to them the folly of their pride. Their wisdom was not of God but of the world. Spiritual gifts, however much they appeared to demonstrate the Church's spirituality, were being misused so that growth in grace and knowledge of God had been stunted. The morality of the church had become worse than many unbelieving Gentiles.

Worst of all, they were not living 'in Christ' which was the only way to achieve their goal of love.

In spite of all their troubles, or perhaps because of them, the two letters of Paul to the church at Corinth contain some of the most beautiful teaching in the New Testament. The treatise on the 'Resurrection' in 1 Cor 15; the description of the greatest gift – the love of Jesus – enshrined in the Greek word 'agape' in

1 Cor 13; and in the second letter the opening up of the New Covenant in chapters 3-6 were all to have a tremendous affect on the Christian church.

The first chapter of Paul's first letter has much to set the record straight concerning wisdom; so what is wisdom? The Greek word '*sophia*' means insight into the true nature of things. An ability to see the inside of things '*Phronesis*' is the ability to discern modes of action with a view to their results. *Sophia* is theoretical while *phronesis* is practical (according to Vine). Wisdom has been defined as knowledge plus understanding. We may know how to grow fruit and vegetables but we also need to know something of nutrition and cooking. One who has insight makes more than superficial observation of the outside of something. We may know how to write and draw our own descriptions of the brain of a water vole after carefully looking at many pictures, diagrams and models and even examining an actual brain of the species, but know nothing of how that brain causes the animal's legs to move. Yet that is how many approach the things of God. They know thousands of Biblical facts and have made some remarkable assumptions and interpretations, but know nothing of living with the Lord and becoming like Him. That was the problem at Corinth or they would not have been so insensitive to the needs and feelings of those they should have been nurturing in the faith. But man cannot know God nor gain salvation unless faith becomes a personal relationship.

Wisdom is a characteristic of God and is plainly revealed in His physical Creation. We benefit from it every moment, waking or sleeping. "*Lord how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*" (Psalm 104. 24). "*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.*" (Prov. 3.19) It is the opposite of evil and foolishness.

Old Testament examples of wisdom				
Job	Joseph	Bezaleel	Solomon	Daniel
Job 42.1-6	Gen. 41.39, 40	Ex. 31.1-5	1 Kings 3.3-9	Dan. 9.22

God had revealed to Joseph as a teenager things yet to come. That was one of the reasons that his brothers sold him to the Midianites. As he trudged along the road to Egypt, roped to animals and perhaps other slaves, he had time to ponder the wisdom of telling everything to the family. But in Potiphar's household and in the most important prison in Egypt he demonstrated wisdom and integrity, which seems so lacking in his family and in Potiphar. The head of one of the two greatest empires of his day designated him the ruler of his kingdom, as there could be none so wise as the young Hebrew.

A study of the book of Job shows Elihu's extraordinary insight into God's wise ways which was lacking in the worldly wisdom of the older men who blamed either God or their fellow men for their folly. Solomon asked God for wisdom and was mightily used as a result. His proverbs are most interesting but when it came to his growth in character he indulged in the folly of wealth and power, in the indiscretions of foolish marriages and the dreadful evils of idolatry and violence - all aspects of the wisdom of this world.

In wonderful contrast, Daniel in his exile, became the wise minister of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius, providing others with insights into their future. But it was the strength of his character that resisted the charms of foolish Belshazzar and the hostility of Persian noblemen, that really made him the beloved of God.

So what is wisdom? In the making of the tabernacle and its equipment the wisdom of God resided in the skills of the craftsmen (Ex. 28.3; 31.3,6). Knowledge and expertise resided in those who had a special work to do for God. What is needed is not only ability to do things but wisdom to use those gifts and skills for the glory of God and the benefit of fellow men.

Wisdom, in the end, must be doing things as God directs. The Greeks sought wisdom and they had many great thinkers but that did not lead them to God, as Paul's visit to Athens demonstrated. Despising the 'barbarians', for all their highbrow thinking, they had no ability to save. They regarded Christ's crucifixion as folly just as the people of God, who had His Law, stumbled at the cross.

It was not the wealthy nor the influential, nor the wise of this world, who found God but those who were insignificant by worldly standards. Great men are humble, not placing themselves above others. Standing in awe of God is easier to understand when we are close to some great piece of God's handiwork. It was not always easy to understand the wisdom of God in Old Testament times but the prophet Isaiah revealed that Messiah would be endowed with it. *"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;"* (Isa. 11.2-4). These words hardly sound like the counsel of the great ones of the earth, but of Him of whom the temple guard said *"never man spoke like this man"*. The wisest in Israel thought how remarkable his questions were in the Temple when he was twelve years old. His first allegiance was to his Heavenly Father - not as Joseph's son nor a 'Son of the Law' as he might have been called at the age of twelve and a half. He sought His Father's will and that became the absorbing passion of His life. It was when He went to the synagogue at Nazareth early in His ministry and read Isaiah 61 that people began to take notice of the wisdom of this special young man.

When Jesus called disciples to Him, few were the wise of the Jewish world. Nicodemus found Him hard to understand. Joseph of Arimathea preferred to keep in the shadows until Jesus had died. Teachers and leaders among God's people understood Him no better than their forefathers had understood the prophets. Now the message had gone to the Gentiles and judging from Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1 the same failure to understand the ways of God was still the human problem. The early believers in Corinth wanted to boast in their wisdom. Perhaps their standing among the citizens of that Greek city and certainly their prestige within the Church meant more to them than their standing with God. They had failed to realise that humility – real humility – was more important to God than their acquisition of knowledge, their spiritual gifts and being in the 'right set' within the Church. Has the lesson been learned yet? It is easy to focus attention on other Christians, be it today or yesterday. It is much harder to turn the spotlight of God's Word upon ourselves. Is our treatment of Christ's followers better than the wise of this world treated the Master – with contradiction and crucifixion? Have we totally left behind the spirit of men that used the rack and stake?

As Paul comes to the end of his discussion about wisdom he mentions the wisdom of God in the Christian doctrines of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We were reckoned righteous through the sacrifice of Jesus. We are being sanctified through the Holy Spirit. We shall finally reach our deliverance as we are beckoned into the eternal presence of God. These three stages are only accomplished by our standing "in Christ Jesus" for in Him is the source of life. Jeremiah knew the only source of wisdom and what it did to those who found it. He is the prophet whom Paul quotes "*Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord, I act in steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight says the Lord.*" (Jer. 9.23, 24) and knowing the Lord is enlarged by this man of God, speaking to the son or grandson of good king Josiah about his forbear "*He judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well. Is not this to know me? Says the Lord.*" (Jer. 22.16).

Human intelligence has found it hard to understand the ways of God because of the blinding effect of God's adversary but our Father will not allow it to be so for ever, "*For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful upon all.*" And God has provided a way out of that prison of disobedience now – for Christ unlocked the door on Calvary and in Him we may have life now (John 5.25, 26, 28). "*O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?*" (Rom. 11.32-34).

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 3 1 John 2.1-2

"An advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (v 1). The word that is here translated 'advocate' is the same one that is rendered comforter in John 14 and 15. Jesus foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit to the help of His disciples in the words *"The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name..."*

The Greek word '*parakletos*', means, literally, one called or sent to stand beside a man in his time of need. It was the word used to describe the pleader or 'defending counsel' in the Greek courts of law and its application here is very obvious. When the Lord was about to leave His disciples He promised them that He would not leave them helpless; He would send a *parakletos*, one to stand alongside and be their ever-present help in time of need. We all bear witness to the fulfilment of that promise. We all testify to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, guiding, guarding, illuminating, instructing, and at the end making us spiritually fitted for the inheritance of the saints in light. That is the office of the Holy Spirit during this Age and this work of the Spirit has been accomplished in full degree. The word 'comforter' in the A.V. does not adequately express the meaning of the term. The Holy Spirit is a guardian, a defender, an instructor, a counsellor, a source of power and a vital force that makes the weak strong and the timorous courageous. Even the more modern version of 'helper' does not express all the meaning; in fact no one English word can possibly define the many-sided work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Perhaps we do well to think of all the terms which express the full manifestation of this wonderful power by which we live and by which we will, one day, gain the victory.

Now the use of the same word "*parakletos*" in its application to our Lord, Jesus Christ the righteous, has a rather more restricted meaning. John is here telling of one aspect only of the Christian life, albeit a most important aspect. He is telling us of the Christian who has stumbled or turned from the way and has committed sin, and he says that such an one has a "*parakletos*", an Advocate, with the Father, Who is the Supreme Judge.

Now here the term is used obviously in the strict legal sense that it bore in everyday life in John's time. If any man sins, he has a 'defending counsel' in Jesus, one to stand alongside and plead his cause. The basis of the defence is that the offender has already been justified by faith in Christ and has now sincerely repented and seeks to claim again that justification by a renewal of faith. The Advocate does not take up the case of one who is unrepentant. This whole passage concerns only the Church, the believers in Christ Jesus.

Justification and consecration of the believer has placed him in a position where the Father accepts his sincerity of heart and his purity of purpose and

intention instead of demanding perfection of conduct, He does not hold against him that error and sin which is attributable to the weakness of the flesh. The Advocate urges the principle enunciated by Paul in Romans 7, that sin dwelling in the flesh, leads the believer to do those things that of his own will and desire he would not do, and precludes his doing fully the good that he would do. This is evidence of the believers' desire and intention to do good and his capability of doing good when, at the end, the hindrance of the weakened human flesh has been removed. The Father has already said that He has no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but would that he turn from his wickedness and live. Thus He assents to the rightness of the Advocate's presentation of the matter, and counts the sin that has been committed as those that had already been blotted from the record at the time of justification. So the Advocate stands beside every member of His Church, claiming each as one for whom He died and who has accepted that death for himself and in the power of that acceptance has become one of Christ's own.

The Apostle proceeds in his exposition of this great truth by going on to say "*and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*" (v 2). John is not particularly talking about the world in this chapter. He is in fact not talking about the world at all. However, lest any should think from his main theme that Jesus is the propitiation only for those who are His now, the members of His Church, John hastens to add that He is in fact such for the sins of the entire race of mankind. The death of Jesus is equally applicable to all, whether or not they come to God during this Age; all will receive its benefits, either now, or in the future Age.

This word 'propitiation' is capable of misunderstanding. The modern meaning of the word is to conciliate an offended or angry person by means of offerings or bribes, to placate. That has arisen from the use of the Greek word (*hilasmos*) in the early centuries to denote the giving of offerings and sacrifices to pagan gods in order to "propitiate" them, to turn away their anger, to cause them to look with favour upon their devotees. From this the idea has grown up quite naturally that Christ was a propitiation for our sins in that He gave Himself as a blood-sacrifice to an angry God who thereby appeased His wrath and turned to look with favour and graciousness upon the former objects of His displeasure. Now that may be all right with pagan gods but it is certainly quite out of accord with the known character of our God. Mediaeval theology made much of this idea in its conception of the doctrine of the Atonement, and much of it has survived into our own day. But the appeasement of Divine wrath by the offering of a blood-sacrifice has nothing in common either with justice or morality, and the Divine Plan is solidly founded on both. It was a farseeing man of God who declared, long before these times of John, "*thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are*

a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51.16-17). So that particular meaning of propitiation for which we are indebted to the pagan worship of Rome and Greece is one that we must definitely reject, hallowed though it is by long age.

The Lord Jesus gave His humanity as a 'corresponding price' wherewith to redeem man out of the bondage of sin and death, and make fallen man His own, that He might enjoy the legal as well as the moral right to raise all men from the dead, teach them of His ways and present them at the last before the Father's holiness, perfect and sinless. Paul's picture in 1 Tim. 2.5-6 is taken from the Roman custom of manumission, the system by which slaves could be freed. The ransom money for the slave was paid into the temple treasury and from thence to the owner of the slave, who in this manner, by means of a kind of legal fiction, sold the slave to the god. The slave thus regained his freedom by becoming the property of the god. So, says Paul, "*Christ died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living*". The price He paid in the giving of His human life was the price whereby Adam, and all his posterity, condemned in him, are redeemed from the power of sin and become the subjects of Christ.

A much more accurate understanding is ours if we keep to Bible usage and compare the equivalent meaning of the word in the Old Testament. The act of 'making reconciliation' upon the Brasen Altar (Lev. 8.15) or of sprinkling the blood of the sin-offering 'to reconcile' in the Most Holy (Lev. 6.30) or to "make an atonement for sin" (Lev. 16.6) is denoted by the Hebrew word *kaphar*. Now *kaphar* means, primarily 'to cover' and its derivative words are used in the sense of covering over the Ark of Noah with pitch (Gen. 6.14) or of obliterating the writing on written documents. From this comes the thought of atonement being a covering of the sin so that it is no longer seen or recognised by God. The place in the Most Holy where the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice was called the *kaphoroth* or 'place of covering' for this reason (translated 'mercy seat' in Exodus and Leviticus in the Authorised Version). When the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, came to this word "*kaphar*" they used the Greek *hilasmos* and its allied words as its equivalent and so convey the same meaning. This is why the "*kaphoroth*" or "mercy seat" of Exodus is called the "*hilasterion*" or 'propitiatory' in Hebrew 9.5. The real thought behind the word propitiation as used in the New Testament is that of a *covering for sin* and a *means of reconciliation with God* and not that of a bribe intended to allay Divine wrath. This makes John's words clearer and connects the two verses together. If any man sin, we have an Advocate, one to stand beside us to help us before the Father – and that Advocate is the One who both covers that sin and is the means the reconciliation of the sinner with God.

(To be continued) AOH

GOD'S POEM

An inspiring thought is observed in the AV translation of Ephesians 2.10 "*For we are his workmanship*". *Workmanship* translates the Greek word "*poiema*". It is from this word that the word 'poem' is derived. It occurs but twice in the New Testament, the other occasion in Rom. 1.20 is translated "things that are made". "*Poiema*" is from the basic root "*Poieo*" occurs many times, and is translated no less than 353 times by the word "do". A variety of other words is also used to translate it, but all contain the same idea as the word "do". According to its general usage, "*poiema*" does not necessarily mean "poem", but the fact that the Greek word has been transferred into our language by the word 'poem' and that the English word is definite and precise in its meaning invests its Greek equivalent with an inspiring thought. Truly the Church is God's workmanship, and as such it must be a sublime and beautiful work. Even to think of God's handiwork as the creation of a Temple, it must be of beautiful workmanship. But there is something exquisitely beautiful in the thought that the Church is 'God's Poem' - God's noblest thought couched in its loveliest form.

Among men who use words as the bricks-and-mortar of their creative work the poet uses them with the greatest charm. He is like the man who, taking clay, makes it into exquisite china. Like common earthenware, it is made of baked clay, but the moulding is more chaste and delicate, and the finished product more pleasing to the eye. Every word the poet weaves into his creation is at the disposal of every pen but not all brains are invested with poetic power. It is not the mere knowledge of words, nor the ability to choose appropriate words, that makes the poet. Each word must be the right one, it must be in the right place; word must balance word; line must balance line; stanza must balance stanza; and the whole thing must flow in rhythmic cadence smooth as a limpid stream. The thought that is being expressed must be distributed evenly throughout, and leave its impression clear and complete until the last word is reached. There is a difference between the technique of the good essayist and the poet. Each in his own way makes the right choice of words to express what he has to say, but it may be that more people would respond to a noble thought expressed in beautiful verse than in elegant prose. It is not unusual for the impressionable individual to find his soul pulsating more rapidly to the rhythm of a graceful and well-proportioned poem than to the cadence of a well-written essay. The rhythm of the poem grips and impels the senses along, somewhat like the marching tap of the drum or the strong accent of the dance.

When the poem has been born of the deep experience of a child of God, it becomes a living thing. It may reveal a Jordan consecration, a Gethsemane-agony, or a Pentecostal-visitation come to life. It may tell of a secret revitalizing contact between the Spirit of the living God with the fervent soul that fused

together the glowing words. It is a creation of something more than a string of words or of lovely sounds – something more the rhythm or rhyme of cadence or metre. Behind it is a Divine thought – a living expression of the Spirit of God brought down into this realm of time and sense. Pause for a moment to think of some of the lovely gems of thought which have been forged into living things to enrich the hearts of men. Think of blind George Matheson's '*O Love that will not let me go*', of dying C. F. Lyte's '*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide*', of Augustus Toplady's '*Rock of Ages, cleft for me*' of Miss Havergal's "*Take my life and let it be*", and a hundred other kindred expressions of praise and prayer and worship, every one gushing forth as living waters springing up from the deep places of the soul! Here is something deeper and more compelling than words. To recite all these words one by one from the pages of a dictionary would leave no such soul-stirring influence behind. They are all there for any scribe to pick out and assemble as he will. But it requires more than picking and assembling to make them live. Every poem that leaves its mark upon men must be written first on the page of experience of every child of God, as he seeks for, and finds, fellowship with the Holiest of all, before it can be wrought into shape for the printer's page. It must be the outcome of agony and suspense, or throb of pleasure and delight in the secret chambers of 'the inner man', before it can take ordered expression for another's benefit. It must have grown out of a deep spiritual hunger and tell how that hunger was fully satisfied by supplies of grace, before it can feed another hungry soul. There is always a price to pay before the poet's words can live as vehicles of grace for supplying another life's necessities.

It is a sublime privilege for gifted singers to become the instruments of Providence. The basic principles of Divine care and Christian experience as stated in God's Word are adapted and reset to satisfy the modern Christian pilgrim's need to serve the ends of Providence. They throw new light on the Way, and distil new Wine into the Cup for the believer's benefit; all this in the most choice and helpful words that humankind possesses. It is a great honour to be used to express the living thoughts of the Living God to living people. Although the poet sings the sweetest song in the most charming words, there is more behind the words than there is within. The realities are greater far than the phrase which sets them forth, for the contact of the believer with his Father in the sphere of the "higher life" are things that must be "felt, not told" as the Scots say, things that enter not into the natural heart of man. The natural mind may read and sing the poet's words without entering this sanctum of holy experience, or realising that another world – a higher world – lies beyond the ranges of the poet's song, that only the anointed eye can see and only the spiritual mind can understand. Today, it is impossible for the natural mind to comprehend the mysteries of the Spirit of God. In a better day, God intends that man shall understand enough to win and chain his heart to the Throne of God. To that end,

God is writing the story of His love and travail in the experiences of the Christian Church. He is composing a great Poem, every word of which is the right word, a chosen word; every word of which is in its right place; every word of which will tell of the deep passion of His Soul. Every word of this Divine Poem is a living soul, bought out of sin and death at a great price, chosen by the Creator, then balanced and adjusted soul with soul, to rhyme and harmonize with the Divine Poet's thought, so that the whole shall be perfect in cadence, spirit rhythm and metre.

Every child of God is placed "*in the body*" today as it has pleased God to so do but this is only the temporary draft of the poem. The human poet may have need to change or revise his first choice of words, or vary their place in the line or stanza before he is satisfied. The Divine Poet will set them at last in the Body in the position where they will best manifest His thought and purpose. They will together constitute the greatest living manifestation of the Spirit of their Creator, a revelation for all time of the sacrificing love of God during the dark ages while sin reigned supreme, and a gracious Creator worked and waited for the return to righteousness of His erring human children. This patient, long-suffering Spirit of the Eternal God will be written deep into the very constitution of His Elect. It will tell to the countless myriads of this world the deep sense of loss experienced in the heart of God, and of the great things He was constrained and prepared to do to win back the sinner from his evil way. Every soul, therefore, in that exalted people – that is, every word in His finished Poem, must express with very truth, all that the Divine Poet has ever felt towards His fallen children and toward the destructive and abhorrent principle of sin. Every word must ring true to the intent of the Divine Heart, and say to the wide circles of both heaven and earth, exactly what the deeply-yearning Love of God would have it say.

TH

Some of us think of ourselves as members of the "conquering bands with banners waving, pressing on o'er hill and plain," without remembering that there can be no conquest without conflict.

The story of Divine grace is the record of one who has been disposed to "give", and "give", and "give" again, because it please him to dispense of his fullness to helpless needy men.

Partiality and unfair discrimination for whatsoever reason is illogical and it is sin.

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