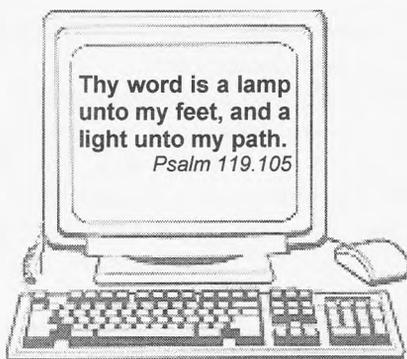
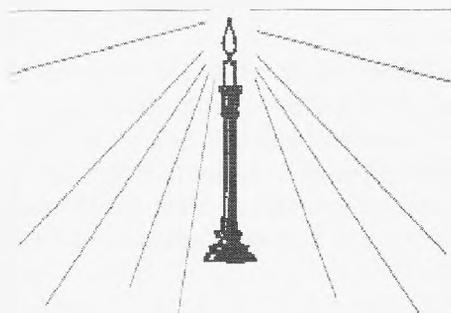
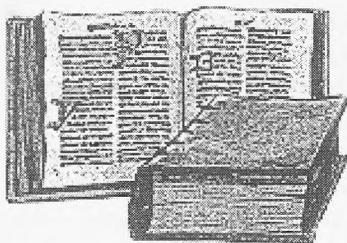
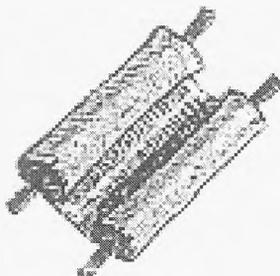


# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

## WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship – what does it mean? Our English word is translated from a little family of the Greek words, and the one most familiar to us is – *koinonia*. It is an idea common in Greek society in the first century relative to a partnership including marriage. Since the Christian Church began on the day of Pentecost a fellowship has existed among the followers of Jesus that has no parallel. This is made clear in the New Testament by Paul, Peter and John that this fellowship is unique because it is sharing in Christ which in turn joins us to the Father (Phil. 3.10; 1 John 1.3, 6, 7). The idyllic conditions in the Early Church have their first mention in Acts 2.42 and are described in Acts 4.32-37. That fellowship is shattered by allowing the human, worldly spirit to enter the Church.

William Barclay in "New Testament Words" writes "In the Christian life there is a *koinonia* which means 'a sharing of friendship' and an abiding in the company of others" (2 Cor. 6.14). It is very interesting to note that that friendship is based on common Christian knowledge (1 John 1.3). Only those who are friends with Christ can really be friends with each other.

W. E. Vine in 'The Expository Dictionary' defines "*koinonia* (a) communion, fellowship, sharing in common (from *koinos* common) is translated 'communion' in 1 Cor. 10.16; Philemon 6 RV 'fellowship' for AV communication, it is most frequently translated "fellowship"; (b) that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution Rom. 15.26; 2 Cor. 8.4." So fellowship, as a loving fellowship, is practical – seeing a brother or sister in need goes to their aid.

The basis of our fellowship is our relationship to our Father in Heaven and with His son Jesus Christ. It is the knowledge of Him, the way He does things and the way He treats people, that gives us a sound basis for our fellowship in the Church. We do not belong to a 'club' that has been formulated for doing certain things and which has a common body of academic knowledge. We are part of a

family that will involve a common life style and set of ethics. What we do and say will arise out of that family relationship and not be the goal of it. We do not belong to a 'society' which meets together to promote certain ideals or body of knowledge. We belong to a family and are bound by ties of love with the goal of doing our Father's will and working towards the restoration of everyone and everything in all Creation being restored to perfect union with Him.

We must never be responsible for saying and doing something that hinders the experience of fellowship with God or man or anything in all His creation. The oneness that exists between the Father and the Son must exist throughout Creation. As part of their family we must promote that oneness in everything we say and do.

It follows that the fellowship we have in Christ is the most important aspect of life in the Church. The extent to which we enter into that fellowship will be the extent of our progress in the Christian way. It is clear from the New Testament – from the life of Jesus and from Paul's message to Corinth, that division within the Church, rupture of relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ is painful to our Father, as quarrelling within a human family is painful to loving parents. Disassociating ourselves from brother and sisters in Christ is a very serious matter and must certainly cause us to ask the questions, is this the Lord's will – is this the really loving thing to do? Or is division just the result of my own sinful, impatient human nature?

*"God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1.9).* That fellowship is enshrined in the words of Jesus about our oneness with Him and with the Father, in John 14-17. That fellowship is the only way by which we are being changed into His likeness and by which we can become acceptable to Him. No amount of "service for the truth" and no amount of clear doctrinal understanding can achieve that likeness. That fellowship with Him is impaired if the relationship with our brethren in Christ is not kept sound and active.

Let us walk in fellowship with the Lord and His people.

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## **HIGH LEIGH 2009**

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, England

Monday, 17th – Sunday, 22nd August

**Theme – “The Will of God” (1 John 2.17)**

All ages are welcome.

A programme for teens and younger ones will be provided.

Contact: Accommodation Secretary: Joan Charcharos

Tel: 01442 381550

## THE PARABLE OF TWO DEBTORS

This Pharisee was a righteous man, one who held sin and every manifestation of sin in very correct abhorrence. One of his favourite texts was that spoken by the prophet Habakkuk(1.13) *"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil"*; in every affair of life he endeavoured to keep himself undefiled by contact with the sinful and the unclean. He believed in the coming of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. He was sure that when Messiah did appear He would look for those who had remained true to the Pharisaic traditions and could stand before him in the integrity of their own righteousness, model keepers of that Law which was at the first given to Moses. Such men, the Pharisee believed, would be welcomed into the Kingdom. The sinful and the unclean would be unceremoniously ejected, and after that, life would never again hold anything to besmirch or defile the purity of God's own people.

Now he had invited this new young prophet of Nazareth to dine with him. It was not necessarily that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Rather he had been much more impressed with his bearing and his words than had his brother Pharisees, and he wanted to know more. It looked very much as if this young enthusiast was in the tradition and spirit of the old Hebrew prophets and the Pharisee felt that he owed it to himself to explore the matter further. He probably prided himself a little that he was not prejudiced or bigoted or dyed-in-the-wool as were so many of his brother Pharisees. God had undoubtedly spoken in the past by his servants the prophets and history was witness to the fact that if Israel had taken a little more notice of those prophets the nation might not now have been reduced to its present straits. Moses had told their forefathers what would befall them if they forsook their covenant and his prediction had undeniably come to pass. This young man, without doubt, possessed a clear understanding of the sinful condition of Israel and He was not afraid to voice His opinions. It could very possibly turn out that here was the leader for whom all right-thinking men were looking and if so it would be a good thing to get better acquainted with Him right at the outset. So the Pharisee invited Him home to dinner.

He had brought in a few friends, Pharisees of the more liberal turn of mind like himself, and they were gathered round his table reclining in the customary manner, facing the table, leaning on the left elbow, with the feet outside forming a kind of outer ring. The meal proceeded, servants flitting to and fro attending to the needs of the guests, whilst round the table grave question was followed by equally grave answer. Simon the Pharisee rubbed his hands with satisfaction; things were going well. His guest was certainly coming up to expectations.

There was a slight disturbance at the farther end of the room where it opened out on to the central courtyard. Simon did not take any notice. In conformity with custom his courtyard was open to anyone who wished to linger there awhile, in the shade, and perchance catch a glimpse of the prophet or just satisfy

their curiosity by watching the feast. As befitted a Pharisee who took his profession seriously, there would be a certain amount of provision of plain food out there for whoever felt hungry, for hospitality to the traveller and kindness to the poor were incumbent upon Pharisees. But he pursed his lips somewhat as the slight form of a woman emerged from the group in the courtyard and came forward towards Jesus where He sat. It was not her sex which brought Simon's brows together in disapproval; it was his recognition of her identity, a woman known as a prostitute in the town. Had he consulted his own inclination, he would probably have ordered her away from the house, but to do so at this moment would have been a breach of etiquette to his guests and bring an element of dishonour upon his head. Frustrated and impotent, he watched as she knelt down behind the circle, right at the feet of the principal guest. This was altogether too much, it seemed that the woman had no sense of decency. Relying on the unwritten code that she knew Simon would not break, she was taking advantage of this opportunity to bring herself to Jesus' attention. He waited, tensely, for Jesus to notice her, His fine eyes to go hard and cold, His voice chill and severe, to condemn her and bid her remove her defiling presence from the house. The Prophet of God could so easily do what he himself could not do, and so he waited expectantly.

Jesus seemed slow to observe. He was still talking earnestly with the other guests. Simon, at the other side of the table, could give his attention only to the woman. Everything else was a blur; his eyes were fixed only on her, so near to Jesus' feet. Shamelessly, like all such women, she had removed her veil and allowed her long tresses to fall down around her shoulders. She was weeping, sobbing uncontrollably with overpowering grief, in the intensity of her emotion grasping convulsively at the Lord's ankles. Perceiving that her tears were falling upon His feet, she bent her head to the floor and used her flowing hair to dry them. From the recesses of her clothing she took a small phial of perfume, she opened it and poured its contents over them, filling the room with a fragrance it had perhaps never known before. The buzz of conversation had died down now; the assembled guests were all looking, with various expressions of disapproval or repugnance, at that crumpled figure on the floor. Only Jesus appeared to be unconcerned at her presence. He went on quietly talking, making no movement either to encourage or discourage her ministrations.

Looking at His serene face, Simon was attacked by a sudden doubt. "*This man*" he thought to himself, "*if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him; for she is a sinner*". He could have understood and approved Jesus receiving this kind of homage from a devout woman. If He were a prophet and if He had that extra-human knowledge which was the hall-mark of the prophets of God, why did He not shrink from that defiling touch, refuse the offering of that perfume which itself was probably

the reward of sin and command the woman to go? Had he made a mistake in his assessment and was Jesus not the man of God he had imagined him to be? Simon looked down at the woman, distastefully, then back to Jesus, to find those candid eyes fixed full on him. He waited, wondering.

The quiet voice broke the silence. *"Simon, I have somewhat to say to you"*. He felt instinctively that this was going to be a momentous word. On the one part he feared what was to come, on the other he felt there was something he had not yet grasped and he wanted to know what it was. There was something in Jesus' attitude that told him the situation was not so easily resolved as he would like to think. And he wanted to know; more than anything else he wanted to know what was the power behind Jesus. More humbly perhaps than he had ever spoken in his life before, he met Jesus' eyes and replied *"Master, say on"*.

The room was very quiet now. The guests had all ceased eating and talking and were giving close attention. Probably more than one of them had the same inward thought as Simon, and were each looking upon Jesus with varying degrees of cynicism or speculation according to their respective measures of sincerity. Even the woman had restrained her outward grief, and remained in her recumbent posture, listening intently to the calm voice.

*"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors"*. A story! the atmosphere became electric. No surer means of obtaining rapt and earnest attention. *"The one owed five hundred pence" (denarii) "and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"* Simon was not quite sure what connection this hypothetical case had with the situation before Him, but he was prepared to be honest. *"I suppose"* he said – the Greek word does not imply doubt or dubiousness, but the reaching of a conclusion based on the evidence presented, as though one would say *"I consider the answer is thus and so"* – *"I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most"*. The answer came, in tones of quiet approval, *"You have rightly judged"*.

Now for the first time Jesus turned Himself about and looked directly upon the woman behind him. Who can doubt that she lowered her head in shame before that countenance of sinless purity? The level voice went on. *"You see this woman?"* That was a hard one for Simon. He had been only too painfully aware of her presence ever since she entered his house and now Jesus was talking as if he could hardly have been expected to notice her. Yes, Simon did see this woman: he only wished he could truthfully say he did not. But the next words shattered him completely.

*"I entered into your house. You gave me no water for my feet; but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil you did not anoint; but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment"*.

A slow flush of embarrassment crept into Simon's face. His fellow-Pharisees were looking at him curiously. He realised, now, that he had under-estimated the man before him. Knowing Him as one of the labouring classes, born and bred among the peasantry of Galilee, it had just not occurred to Simon that the courtesies normally extended to guests in his own walk of life were just as much in place with respect to Jesus. It was customary for the host to provide water and servants for the cleansing of guests' feet upon entry to the house. As a mark of special honour the host might even perform the washing operation himself. Some reluctance to treat this Galilean peasant on the same level as his Pharisee friends must have caused Simon to omit this formality, doubtless excusing himself on the ground that the peasantry were not so scrupulous in such matters and might even be embarrassed at the service. Every guest normally received a kiss of welcome from the host but somehow Simon could not bring himself to this act of close fellowship; there was, of course, always the question of his own friends' reaction to his too ardent espousal of the young prophet. It was true that he had omitted to have a servant anoint the visitor's head with fragrant oil, but that was pure forgetfulness in the stress and hurry of the occasion. The unspoken excuses faded from his mind again as he became conscious of Jesus' gentle regard and realised that all those excuses counted for nothing. The plain fact was that this woman, sinner though she be, had performed all the duties which he had neglected to fulfil, and performed them with an infinitely greater ardour and sincerity than he could ever have displayed. He looked again at the woman and was bitterly ashamed. Jesus' voice was very gentle now.

*"Wherefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little".* So He said to her *"Your faith has saved you. Go in peace"*. And she got to her feet and went out of the house to a new life.

It says much for the sincerity of those Pharisees there gathered that they did not break out at once into impassioned protest. They did not even question Jesus' words outwardly. They asked themselves, each man in his own mind, *"Who is this who even forgives sins?"* There was something in all this that was new to them and they were prepared to reserve judgment. It would seem that Simon had collected some most unusual Pharisees there that day and it might well be that they all learned a most unexpected and unusual lesson.

What of the wider implication? There is much in this incident to throw light upon that other statement of Jesus *"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5.31). Simon the Pharisee is not the only one who, priding himself upon his own rectitude and cleanliness of life, has come to God in a smug and self-satisfied attitude of mind which is none the less frightening although it is characterised by perfect sincerity. We do not necessarily have to

demonstrate our repentance by floods of tears and an agony of self-reproach, as did the woman. A lot depends upon the individual temperament and intensity of feeling; some are less outwardly demonstrative than others. But we do all have to realise that of ourselves we have little wherewith to commend ourselves before God and we all come short of His holiness in a variety of ways. The woman's sin outraged and shocked the conventions and customs of the day and violated the written law; the Pharisees' self-righteousness outraged the holiness of God and violated His moral law, and in the sight of Jesus there was no difference between the two kinds of sin. They both needed repentance, conversion and forgiveness. The difference was that the woman realised her need of forgiveness, was repentant, and went out a child of the Kingdom. In the eyes of Jesus the whole of her sin was as though it had never been. The Pharisee had not yet realised his need, had not yet come as a suppliant to the feet of the Saviour, and therefore was yet in his sins. Not for him had the golden vista of the Kingdom gleamed through the partly opened gates.

Perhaps it did in after days. It is noteworthy that in all this story there is no word of reproach for Simon, only the implied reproof at his omissions. It may well be that he, and maybe some of his fellows at that meal that day, became followers of Jesus and eventually followed the "*woman a sinner*" into the light of the Kingdom. That there were some such, even among the bigoted Pharisees, who thus espoused the cause of Jesus, we know; perhaps this was the beginning of the way for some of them.

As in so many instances, this story illustrates the Divine principle "*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, wherefore turn from your evil ways, and live*". The passion for the punishment of the wicked that characterised all good Jews and still characterises far too many good Christians has no counterpart in the counsels of God. He is much more interested in the reclamation of the wicked than their condemnation, and if there is any capacity for repentance at all He is going to explore that capacity to the full before He permits condemnation to come. "*The Son of Man*" said Jesus "*is come to seek and to save that which was lost*". Both woman and Pharisee were lost; Jesus came to save both.

Neither Simon nor the woman appear in the Gospel story again. It is sometimes suggested that the woman was Mary of Magdala, the one who loved her Lord with so fervent a passion that her faith held when that of all others had well-nigh failed. She became the acknowledged leader of the little band of women during the dark days after the crucifixion when even the disciples had fled into hiding. But there is no proof; only the fact that the character and temperament of Mary of Magdala as revealed in the Gospels harmonises very well with this brief picture of this repentant woman.

The incident in the house of Mary sister of Lazarus at Bethany, recorded in Matt. 26, Mark 14 and John 12, is a totally different one and must not be confused with this story in Luke. This one was at the beginning of our Lord's ministry and took place in Galilee; the other one was just before His crucifixion and occurred near Jerusalem. The only similarities in the two stories are the use of a phial of perfume and the fact that the host's name was Simon, a very common name in Israel anyway. There is no foundation whatever for connecting the sister of Lazarus with the woman who came to Jesus on that memorable day, weighed down by the burden of her sin, and went out a free woman, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

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## STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

### *Part 9 1 John 2.20-29*

*"But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know."* (1 John 2.20 RSV)

Coming just after John's stern warnings against Antichrist this word is one of comfort and assurance. We have an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and that anointing is our safeguard and protection against all the assaults of the Adversary. Those who come under the anointing thereby come under the protection of God Himself. *"He that dwells in the shelter of the Most High who abides in the shadow of the Almighty"* (Psa. 91.1 RSV). There is no need to fear the power of Antichrist even in those periods of the Age when his oppressive persecutions bear most hardly upon the faithful Church. We have an anointing of the Holy Spirit, and that anointing is all-sufficient and all-powerful for our safety, if we but remain under it. That is a great truth, says John, which we all know, of which we all ought continually to be aware. It is a pity that the AV has rendered the phrase *"ye know all things"*, for that distorts the meaning of the entire text and makes it say that our possession of the Holy Spirit's anointing automatically gives us all knowledge. So many of the Lord's little ones, realising their own deficiencies in the matter of knowledge, have puzzled over this verse and wondered if, because they manifestly do not *"know all things"*, they have not really been anointed with the Holy Spirit. We do well to remember that Paul said quite plainly that he and those with him had knowledge only *"in part"* (1 Cor. 13.9-12) and would not be complete in knowledge until beyond the Veil. Paul surely was anointed of the Holy Spirit! We are told, too, that it is because of belief that we are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1.13). It is our faith and our consecration, not our knowledge, that ensures our anointing. The text is badly translated. Ancient authorities give it *"Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye all know"*, and modern translators put it the same way. What John is really saying is that his readers are all recipients of the Holy Spirit and

they all know that they are, and in that knowledge they can rest secure. *"I write to you not because you do not know the truth"* he says *"but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth"* (v 21). Let no one think that John has so little confidence in his disciples that he fears their defection from the truth through ignorance. He knows full well how firmly grounded they have been in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and how they are standing fast in the traditions in which they have been taught (2 Thess. 2.15). He has no fears for their present position; what he does fear is for their future, when he and those of his generation will have passed into death and the disintegrating influence of time made its inroads into the faith and hope of the still waiting believers. He knows that the power of Antichrist will wax stronger in the next generation and stronger still in the generation after that, and he is striving with all his might to impress the minds of his brethren with the necessity not only of receiving and knowing the Truth, but of holding to it tenaciously throughout life despite all the opposition and misrepresentation that will be brought to bear against it.

The Apostle's train of thought carries him now to a fierce denunciation. It is his deep concern for the purity of the faith and the clear understanding of Christian truth so necessary to spiritual life that makes him thus emphatic. *"Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son"* (v.22). This is a much more serious matter than may appear at first sight. It is serious for believers, much more so than for the world. For an unbelieving Jew to deny that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of prophecy can be understandable. It might even be excusable if the unbelieving one has his mind so saturated and dazzled by the glory of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies that he cannot possibly reconcile their hero with the Man of sorrows who died upon a cross. Such an attitude is admittedly a refusal or failure to believe in Christ for one's self, but it is not necessarily antichrist. The condemnation passed by John in this verse is against the man who in his denial is deliberately fighting against the cause of Christ. The setting of the denunciation seems almost to point to the apostasy of some within the Christian community rather than to those who are outside it. For professing Christians to deny that Jesus is the Christ means in effect that God, the Father, has not after all revealed Himself to man. It is only through the person and work of Jesus Christ that God has thus revealed and manifested Himself. *"No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared (manifested) him"* (John 1.18). When Philip desired this same manifestation Jesus had to explain to him *"He that has seen me has seen the Father, how do you say then, Show us the Father?"* (John 14.7-9). To the Jews, Jesus said *"He that sees me sees him that sent me"* (John 12.45). If Jesus is not the Messiah, then God has not spoken; and if God has not spoken, then our faith

is misplaced and in vain and we are of all men most miserable. John certainly triumphs above all such foreboding but he states quite positively that there can be no Christianity without Christ and moreover without the Christ he preached, the One who is a redeemer from sin and an advocate for the sinner, and Whose death was necessary before man could be released from the sentence of death passed upon the race and an opportunity granted to man to become reconciled to God. Any other gospel, says John, is the gospel of antichrist and the preacher is a liar.

We need to halt at this point and apply this to our own day. In our own time and generation, more so even than in the Apostle's day, there is this denial of Jesus Christ as a suffering Messiah Who must die for the sins of the people before coming in glory to lead them into eternal happiness. The existence of "original sin" is denied and the Bible philosophy of redemption belittled and dismissed as of no importance or consequence to the present generation. The effect of worldly wisdom infiltrating into theological education has been to introduce something which is quite definitely the modern counterpart of what John is condemning here. The person of Jesus of Nazareth is accepted; He is looked upon and worshipped, but the Messianic work and office of the One Who died upon the Cross is either ignored or else openly repudiated. It would be quite wrong and unjust to accuse the Christian clergy as a whole of this fault. Happily the pulpits still contain many faithful men of God; but that a considerable body of ecclesiastical opinion rejects Christ as Messiah while retaining Him as a distant object of veneration and worship is true.

*"Whosoever denies the Son hath not the Father; but he that acknowledges the Son hath the Father also"* (v.23). The second phrase, although appearing in italics in the A.V., rests on good textual authority and should be quoted. It is just one of the many statements which show how deeply and accurately the *"beloved disciple"* had grasped the truth regarding the relationship existing between Jesus Christ and the Father. The one cannot be accepted or rejected without accepting or rejecting the other. The one cannot be imagined as receiving or possessing anything without the other sharing in the same. Since His resurrection our Lord has been *"set down with my Father in his throne"* (Rev. 3.21). The Father has committed judicial power equivalent to His own, to the Son. *"The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son"* (John 5.22). In that mystic oneness which we try to define but can never hope, in this life, fully to comprehend, neither can hold anything back from other. *"I and my Father are one"* (John 10.30). We may try to define it, following more closely the Scriptural terms that are used, but we can never hope while in the flesh to understand it fully. All our lives, and all we have in life, is yielded up willingly both to Father and Son, and in their keeping we are safe.

*"Let that therefore abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If*

*that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father" (v.24).*

It might almost seem as if there is a somewhat wearisome repetition of thought in John's exhortation. This constant stressing of the need to abide in those things which we have heard from the beginning is a theme that has been worked out in later days. But it is the true abiding in Christ of which John speaks, and appropriately enough therefore, he comes in here with that reminder of a truth we already know full well. *"This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (v.25).*

It is at this point that we have one of the most charming expressions of confidence in his pupils by a teacher that is found anywhere in the Scriptures. After all this long catalogue of deceptions and snares and enticements that may beset the path of the Christian, and all the grave warnings against being overtaken by the wiles of the Adversary, John expresses his complete confidence in his disciples and tells them of the basis of that confidence. *"These things" he says "have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him" (vv.26-27).*

Some have taken this text as an excuse for claiming that they need receive no instruction or help in spiritual things from any man; that the Holy Spirit will teach them inwardly in a kind of mystic supernatural way. They need not and will not that any man shall teach them. It is a dangerous condition of mind to get into, or would be dangerous if our Lord took them seriously. Probably He does not. Probably there are many fanatics of various kinds who name the name of Christ and spend all their lives exploring and practising some fantastic philosophy or theory upon the basis of some such misinterpretation of a text, whom our Lord simply ignores. Christ's Kingdom will be time enough to deal with them. And it wants plainly to be said that this idea, that God will take an individual and give him special instruction apart from all his fellows and without their proffered help in the Christian way savours of spiritual pride and certainly betokens blindness as respects the Divine method of building up the Church in knowledge and faith. God has set the members in the body as it hath pleased Him and given to each member a place to fill and a duty to perform for the building of the entire body. Neither hand, nor foot, nor any other, abound in every spiritual gift and every necessary item of knowledge, and as an anointed company eventually attain the "full stature of a man in Christ" (Eph. 4. 13), so becoming fitted for His future purpose.

That which we "have no need that any man teach you" is quite evidently the truth that John had stated in the same breath. The anointing that we have

received abides in us. That is a self-evident truth. We have no need that any man teach us *that*. We have the witness of the Spirit within ourselves and no man can ever take that confidence away from us. That is John's faith, and ours.

So he comes to what is perhaps the end of one letter, now appearing as the first two chapters of this his First Epistle. The final verses appear to partake of the nature of a closing exhortation; it may well be that we have more than one letter in the First Epistle of John and that vv28-29 represent the closing injunction of the first of such letters. *"And now, little children, abide in him, that, when he may appear, ye may be comforted and not be ashamed before him at his coming, if you know that he is righteous, you know that every one that does righteousness is born of him."*

The abiding, then, is to be until He appears. The hope of the Second Coming burned very brightly in John's heart. He knew it was going to be a long time. That did not trouble him. He was concerned only that his flock should not be confounded or ashamed before the Lord at that great day. Here is a solemn thought for us. How necessary it is that we abide in Him, in His love and manifesting His spirit, that we be not of those who are *"ashamed before him at his presence"*. There were times when the twelve disciples quarrelled between themselves by the wayside, with Jesus perhaps, as they thought, just out of earshot; and He must many a time have gently reproved them for their lack of brotherly love and understanding, and made them feel ashamed of themselves. So it is with us. Whether we believe that our Lord is present or that the time of His arrival is imminent, we must realise that we do stand very closely before Him and that He is very near. We do well to watch every point of our life's conduct, and particularly our relationship with our brethren, lest we so fail to abide and we come short of His standards at the last. If with our fallible human judgment and imperfect reasoning we have made a mistake regarding our Lord's coming, He is not going to attach great importance to that, if we have continued earnestly waiting for His appearing. But if we have a wrong spirit and failed to abide in Him, and smitten our fellow-servants, then it is very different. How can we expect our Lord to accept us for His great work of the future? If we cannot show His spirit and His standards in our contacts with our brethren now, how can we expect to do it toward the world then? How can Jesus conscientiously, as it were, present us before the presence of the Father as one who has proved himself worthy of the Father's love? The exhortation comes to us with keen, penetrating force, *"abide in him, that, when he shall appear, ye may not be ashamed before him"*.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

## LOVE IS CENTRAL

To anyone who reads the first epistle of John, it will soon become apparent that love is a central fact and a crucial commandment. The noun and the verb, agape and agapao in the Greek, appear 37 times in this short letter, mostly in chapters 3 and 4.

The central fact is that God is love (4.8). Love comes from God. Every man who truly loves is God's son and knows Him (4.7 JBP). God sent His Son into the world out of His love for us – so can we do less than love Him. The new commandment that Jesus gave (John 13.34) was to love one another as Jesus has loved us. And *"If we love each other"* says John in his letter, *"God does actually live within us, and His love grows in us toward perfection."* (4.12 JBP) This is guaranteed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The love we share must not be theoretical but practical (3.18). God, who is also Light (1.5) knows our minds and reads our hearts. The extent of our loving should reflect the love of Jesus, who laid down His life in order to meet our great need. His orders are that we should put our trust in His name and love one another (3.23). This commandment is crucial.

We may feel lacking in love. But we should not feel guilty, because God who loves us, knows everything about us (3.20) including the reasons we fall short. What to the best of our ability we must and can do, is to trust Him and obey Him, in particular the commandment to love.

If we love we are born of God, we know God, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us (4.7, 12 AV). Is there any higher privilege for a Christian? The humblest and most ignorant believer who loves has this privilege. When thinking of other believers, we do well not to dwell on their accurate doctrines, or importance, or gifts, but whether we can perceive any evidence that they are growing in love. More to the point, am I?

GC

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Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut.  
Doesn't have a swelled head.  
Doesn't force itself on others.  
Doesn't revel when other grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always  
Always looks for the best  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.

(1 Cor. 13.4-7 The Message)

## A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

The letter to the Hebrews is book of contrasts between the 'old' and the 'new'. The writer commences by contrasting the ways in which God revealed Himself and His purpose – by prophets and by His Son. He then refers to salvation and worship, law and covenant, priest and sacrifice, to show how much better the new is than the old. The first arrangement foreshadowed the second so that we have a better priest who offers a better sacrifice; a better lawgiver and a better law. The new sacrifice really cleanses sin and enables us to worship in the presence of God wherever we are. The centre of this great and purposeful scheme is Jesus, Lord of glory and God's only Son, who has opened the way for all who will accept Him, to reach the centre of the Universe, to reach the presence of God Himself.

To accept that awe-inspiring invitation, children of Adam, sinful and weak, must first submit to God's way of doing things. He has provided a means of cleansing from sin and reconciliation to Himself through the work that Jesus did while on Earth. That work was the giving of Himself in total obedience to God's will. The satisfying of justice can hardly work in the same way as human law courts although various human expressions and illustrations give us a clue as to what Jesus has done. Those who would "climb to that immortal abode", into the eternal light, must first totally surrender their lives to God and confess total inability to put themselves right with Him. They must accept that the only way to be cleansed, purified and made holy in God's sight is to accept Jesus as the one who redeems and provides a way of escape from a sinful life. Yet every believer knows that even after they have surrendered to God to obey His law they continue to do, say and think the 'unloving' thing, repeatedly every day. But God's plan provides a way out of that also and it is found in 1 John 1.9 *"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

That forgiveness and cleansing is real. It is not an ethical fiction because He is faithful and just and He cannot do wrong. We may not understand the judicial mechanisms that bring that cleansing about but we can experience the freedom of conscience which God's forgiveness brings. In fact we can begin to understand what it means to re-educate our conscience so that it becomes sensitive to our failure to do what God wants us to do – His will. The old system with its high priest and animal sacrifices could not do that however much the sinner wanted to be free (Rom. 7).

The word 'conscience' is not easy to define. It is an expression that hardly occurs in the Bible until the time of Paul, and the letters of Peter and James. The Greek word for conscience '*sunideisis*' does not occur in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament used in the New Testament. There are ideas and expressions that appear to have some reference to what we know as 'conscience'.

One of the earliest of these is recorded in Gen. 42.21 when Joseph's brothers were accused of spying in Egypt. Reuben had realised at the time of the sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites how wrong it was and as they stood in the Egyptian palace he reminded them of their terrible crime.

Perhaps the life and work of David contain some of the most interesting expressions which relate to what we now call conscience. When he was a fugitive from the King, he was hiding in a cave when Saul entered the cave with some of his military men without knowing their 'quarry' was further in than they were. David had the opportunity while the king slept to cut off a piece of the royal garment and then with his men make a get away. When the king eventually came out of the cave his attention was drawn to David at a safe distance. The young man who Saul wanted to kill could have killed the king but would not put forth his hand to slay the Lord's anointed. As it was, David was "stricken to the heart" (NRSV) because he had damaged the clothing of the Lord's anointed.

In the next chapter with reference to David's altercation with Nabal, Abigail makes a valiant effort to pacify David. She referred to the future when David as God's appointed king would not want the memory of 'innocent blood' and said *"this shall be no grief unto thee nor offence of heart"* (1 Sam. 25.31). In the RSV that phrase is translated *"no cause for grief or pangs of conscience"*. In effect this confirms the translation in the previous chapter as '*conscience*' for '*heart*'. The use of words connected with human life and body is a study in itself and is not always clearly understood.

In the fulness of his life as king, David broke several commandments and behaved in a way toward Bathsheba and her husband Uriah that greatly displeased the Lord (2 Sam. 11). He stole his neighbour's wife and then tried to cover his sin with deception. Failing in this attempt he had Uriah placed in a position in battle that was tantamount to murder. The prophet Nathan visited David (2 Sam. 12), told the King a parable about a rich man who stole a poor man's solitary lamb in order to provide a meal for a visitor. David said that the man deserved to die and pronounced judgment that he should repay the poor man four-fold. Nathan then said to David "You are the man" and David was overcome with grief. His awakened conscience at last revealed what he had done. His feelings are expressed in Psalm 51 and its sentiments are so often applicable to us. David wanted God to search his heart and he realised that his crime was against God for he had broken four commandments and infringed the covenant. Offence against a fellow Israelite was an offence against God and it is a salutary lesson to us for we too are in covenant with God and our relationship to Him includes all those who are in Christ. We cannot choose our Christian brothers and sisters any more than the those in Israel could choose their fellow-Israelites. Any hurt or offence against those in Christ is an offence against God. We do well to echo the sentiments of Psalm 51 – often.

Later still in David's life, he decided to play the 'numbers game'. And we Christians sometimes in pride do that, about who and what we are. Why David felt he needed a census we are not told. Was it pride or a failure to trust God completely? Even Joab, unpleasant fellow that he could be, tried to dissuade David from numbering his people. The ultimate result was that God punished David in a way that caused suffering to many Israelite subjects and again we are told that "*David was stricken to the heart*" – another possible reference to conscience.

The wonderful prayers of Nehemiah (1.7), Ezra (9.6) and Daniel (9.3) reveal men of sensitive conscience. They were probably the most upright of men of their generation yet they each in turn expressed their sorrow for the sin of their people in which they felt involved. It is a further evidence of the solidarity of a covenanted people – when one sins they all sin – and there is a need for all to accept blame and responsibility for it.

There are one or two occasions in the Gospels when the idea of conscience appears to be surfacing. Two of these are at the time of the crucifixion. Peter, during the trial before the High Priests denied that he knew Jesus, as the latter had predicted. As the cock crew Jesus' words came to Peter and he realised that, in spite of his protests, he had denied his Master. He wept bitterly – were those tears the sign of a deeply troubled conscience? In after days Peter wrote in his first letter, "*... baptism which this prefigured now saves you – not as the removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*"

Judas discovered that he had been terribly wrong to betray an innocent man but his tragedy occurred because he did not know Jesus. Had he have done so he would have gone to him on the cross and begged for forgiveness. Instead he took his own life for in his blind conceit he could see no other course open to him – he will in the resurrection.

The Greek word for 'conscience' – '*sunideisis*' first occurs in the New Testament in Luke's record of Paul's defence before the Sanhedrin during his last recorded visit to Judea. (Acts 23.1) Paul insists that his conscience is clear and again before Felix at Caesarea he makes the same claim (Acts 24.16). Several times in writing to churches Paul claims to have a clear conscience and urges the brethren to be the same (2 Tim 1.3; 1 Tim. 1.19; 2 Cor. 4.2).

The 'matter of conscience' figures prominently when Paul is advising the churches at Corinth and Rome concerning the practice of using for food, meat that had been presented to idols as a sacrifice. Paul is aware that eating such food has no spiritual or physical dangers but he urges those who agree with him not to offend or tempt any who do believe it to be wrong to eat such meat.

In making this point concerning this meat sold in the common market but derived from pagan temples, Paul is drawing to us all, a principle concerning

unnecessarily offending a fellow Christian's conscience. Such a principle is operative in differences of understanding concerning 'keeping the Lord's day' – not unlike Paul's comments in Romans 14. The principle is that we don't cause others to 'stumble' by doing or saying something which others believe to be wrong. There is freedom in Christ but it is wrong to use that freedom to hurt another's conscience.

Throughout much of Scripture including the whole New Testament, God's people are exhorted – encouraged – commanded – to have good will toward the civil government under which they live. Paul makes this doubly clear in Romans 13.5 when he writes that we must be subject to the State not only to avoid God wrath and man's displeasure but for conscience sake. This should be part of our true spiritual moral behaviour and in the end its like all Biblical rules – it is the most logical way of life.

Writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 1.19) Paul urges the young elder of Ephesus to fight the good fight of faith and have a good conscience. In this way he asserts the value of conscience in our Christian life and warns of those who reject conscience. From a human point of view rejecting conscience is to ignore the value of one's upbringing and life's experience. It occurs through blundering through life without proper thought - much more it comes from selfish ambition to get ones own way at any cost. It must be entirely contrary to the Christian faith and the God who leads us from what is wrong to what is right.

So we may return to that text in Hebrews 10.22 where the writer insists *"let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."* Whatever the problem if our hearts are sincere then our consciences can be clear because of our trust in Jesus Christ.

But we may still be wondering what conscience is. It is not easy to define but it involves a consciousness of sin. In Romans, chapters 1 and 2, Paul discusses the position of the unbelieving Gentiles. They should know the difference between right and wrong because God has placed something of His law in their hearts and Paul reiterates this in Rom. 2.15 showing that :some Gentiles outside the Law Covenant keep the Law more perfectly than the Jews who had the Law.

From this we may infer that Paul teaches, as indeed do some philosophers in ethics, that conscience is innate – a gift from God with which we are born. It may also be a distinctively human trait which animal do not have because they are 'controlled' by instinct. But people's consciences can differ widely as, for example, in the matter of warfare and whether or not it is right to kill an enemy in time of war. A person's conscience is often regulated by the national and social background of the people among whom that person is brought up. Such a social unit shares common values and prohibitions. The influences of national habits, education, religious beliefs, and even environmental constraints can

affect the 'voice of conscience'.

Whatever the natural influences have been, when persons surrender their life to God, then whatever the human weakness and deficiencies, however far steeped in the degrading influences of an evil society, God's work of cleansing through Jesus Christ is totally effective. Sensitivity of conscience may be one of the first signs of the working of the Holy Spirit in the human mind. Many of God's children are slow to enjoy the presence of their Father in their lives and thereby fail to hear his voice in their consciousness. This is not an audible voice but it is more than studying His Word or listening to formal or informal conversations from godly people. This is a deep inner consciousness that God is there, within the heart indicating clearly His will. Our touchstone for every decision and choice is God's Word and He does not say anything to our hearts which cannot be supported by the Holy Scriptures.

We live in a very different social and political culture from any who lived in the first century and we need to come to terms with the very varied influences which affect our manner of life – our life style. The massive changes in technology and the media by which we are bombarded every day could, if allowed to do so, erode our sensitivity of conscience. The impact of science, the enormous increase in wealth, the social and actual mobility has completely changed during the twentieth century. What is all this doing to us? *"Whatever is not of faith is sin"* wrote Paul to the Roman Church. How much of what we do is *"not of faith"*? How does that affect the way we get our money – and how we spend it? How does that affect the way we use our leisure time and how we influence other people? What may be perfectly right and justifiable for the world may not be for one who has "presented their all to God as a living sacrifice?"

These considerations should not frighten us. Our Heavenly Father is only a prayer away. Jesus bade us to take no anxious thought and described His Father in terms of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. God just longs to talk over with us our concerns – our anxieties and our weakness. He can help us face each problem and He knows all the answers. But we need to take time in this supposedly busy world to be with Him. "Take time to be holy, the world rushes on" ran the old hymn ... "spend much time in secret with Jesus alone."

Our consciences should become more sensitive – more aware of what God wants us to be and to do. They should become more adjusted to his utterly pure and upright standard. But he does not expect them to do overtime in worry and uncertainty. God knows us and cares for us – and in the end we must leave all our concerns with Him.

The older order of life within the community of Israel and its covenant could not provide a way of worship to God because it was one of outward appearance and not a change of heart. Through Christ, no matter what we have done to displease Him, there is a way to back to God and so long as we allow conscience

to have a voice, we shall always be able to find that way. There is a door that is always – will always be open until we shut it by destroying our own conscience in persistent sin. But our sins have been paid for in full, there is nothing – nothing that Christ cannot cleanse. We have a conscience regulated by the Gospel which really remains cleansed so long as we turn to Him for forgiveness and that is our privilege until we reach the end of the road.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart today;*

*Try me O Lord and know my thoughts I pray:*

*See if there be some wicked way in me,*

*Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.*

Mission Praise 587

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## STRONG LOVE

We think of Jesus and we think of love. He is the Son sent into the world by the Father's love, and when He went about doing good in the world, countless people must have had a taste of that love.

He even loved His enemies. This did not necessarily mean that He spoke kindly to them. The money changers found themselves driven out of the temple court (John 1.15), the Pharisees had their inner thoughts compared to the unpleasant things inside a grave which is painted to look good on the outside (Matthew 23.27). And there were those whom He must have loved but did not trust (John 2.34).

Those He spoke to were challenged with unexpected thoughts. To the disciples, faced with a hungry crowd – *"Well you feed them!"* (Luke 9.13). To Nicodemus, in secret conclave by night – *"You can't even see God's kingdom unless you get born again"* (John 3.3). To a struggling cripple – *"Do you really want to be well?"* (John 5.6).

There are some of whom it is explicitly said that Jesus loved them, but He expected a lot from them. Like the well brought up young ruler – *"Sell your property and join my band of followers!"* (Mark 10.21). Mary and Martha were kept waiting for a miracle, so that God's glory might be more fully seen (John 11.4, 5). The disciples, whom He loved to the end, were made to sit down and wait for Him to wash their feet (John 13.1-2). John, standing near the Cross, was given responsibility for Jesus' much loved mother, who some might have thought Jesus had neglected for the past three years (John 19.26).

We need not think that being loved by Christ is only a matter of coming to Him when we are weary and overburdened (Matthew 11.28). He knows us as much as He loves us, and He challenges us in new ways to be His followers.

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## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

### *Part I The Widow's Cruse*

It was in the olden time, before any of the prophets of Israel had given utterance to their visions and written their books. It was before even Hosea and Joel, the first of the prophets, in the reign of King Uzziah, had spoken the word of the Lord and told Israel of the end that was soon to come. Hosea had just been born when Elisha died, an old man of nearly a hundred years, and Elisha was only a lad of about eighteen when he first heard of the Tishbite. Elisha did not dream then, as he followed the plough on his father's farm, how closely his own life was to be linked with that strange man. But that is a different story and the years have to be rolled quickly backward until they come to the days when Ahab ruled the people of Israel from his capital city of Jezreel in Samaria.

Nearly a century had passed since good King David had been laid to sleep with his fathers and since then the kingdom had been divided. King Jehoshaphat, of the line of David, ruled over the two tribes in Jerusalem and he was a good and wise king and under him the people were content. But as for Israel, the ten tribes, in Samaria, Galilee and Gilead, they were ruled by the son of a usurper, Ahab the son of Omri, a man who cared neither for the laws of God or the welfare of his people. And now King Ahab had taken as his chief wife a woman of the infidels, even Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, the King of the Phoenicians, ruler of the merchant cities Tyre and Sidon by the Great Sea. It meant nothing to Ahab that this woman, beautiful as she was, a beauty renowned throughout the ancient world, was a pagan and idolater, devoted to the worship of Baal the Sun-god and determined to draw the people of her new country away from their own faith and compel them to accept hers. He thought only of the material riches this alliance would bring him. Friendship with the father of Jezebel meant rich stores of luxuries hitherto unknown in Israel. The ships of the Phoenicians, traversing the seas from every part of the greater world outside Israel, would bring to Ahab ivory and marble, gold and silver and precious stones, rare woods for his buildings and curiously carved vessels and furniture for his palaces. Thus he could become the wealthiest king Israel had ever known and his capital city of Jezreel the most luxurious. So Ahab built a great Temple for Baal in Samaria and erected an altar therein, and made places on every hilltop where those rites and ceremonies so sternly condemned by the Law of Moses might be celebrated to the degradation and degeneration of the people. Therefore the chronicler in after days, writing of these things, said "*Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him*".

Now we who live in later days know that God is not mocked; whatever a man sows, that he also reaps. King Ahab was very soon to find this out. It was written in the Law of Moses that prosperity would be the portion of the nation whilst they remained faithful to God. But there would be adversity when they disobeyed His Word and violated His covenant. *"I will break the pride of your power"* God had said *"and I will make your heaven as steel and your earth as copper; and your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits"* (Lev. 26.19-20). Now was it not true that some in Israel had heard stories in their childhood of days long gone when Israel had broken the covenant and the dread prediction had been fulfilled? The rain had ceased to fall, the land had dried up. The heavens above shimmered like burnished steel in the glare of the tropical sun; the baked earth glowed with heat like copper in the smelting furnace. And the trees and crops withered away and the flocks and herds lay down and died. King Ahab, proud and arrogant with his new wife and his new possessions and his new god, failed to reflect that what had happened before could happen again, until that day when he looked superciliously from his throne upon the messenger standing before him.

A strange figure indeed, Elijah the Tishbite, and greatly out of keeping in that luxurious court. Bearded, unkempt, a towering, massive man of strength, clad in garments crudely fashioned from thick woolly goatskins, grasping a stout staff in his hand, he stood, his piercing, burning eyes holding the king as if by a spell. His voice, when he spoke, commanded attention and none who heard could resist the authority in its tones. This was Elijah from Tishbe in Gilead, a place so small and unimportant that no man since has been able to say where it was or find any remains of the houses and people who once lived there. Gilead beyond the Jordan, far from the metropolis of Israel and generally esteemed the home of a rude, uncultured people who made their living as brigands and bandits rather than by honest farming and stock raising. Stalwart sons of Nature were the people of Gilead, living close to the soil and the rivers, ranging over field and mountain, breathing God's fresh air by day and sleeping under the stars by night, men of a world the soft-spoken and effeminate courtiers of Ahab's palace never knew. Now the noblest son of Gilead stood in the midst of that decadent assembly, facing its apostate King and pagan Queen, and threw down his ringing challenge.

*"As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years. but according to my word."*

Then he was gone. No one saw whither he went. One swift movement as he turned, shouldered his way through the gaping bystanders, and was gone. Court decorum forbade the turning of heads to look after him; all eyes remained fixed upon the royal pair. There was that Queen Jezebel with a contemptuous smile

upon her face. She had seen these wandering prophets in her own land and knew that Baal rarely backed up what they had prophesied concerning his intentions. King Ahab sat by her side, somewhat annoyed and just a trifle apprehensive. He was beginning to remember that there had been famines in the land before and it was certainly true that for some weeks now the weather had been unusually hot and rain showers had been less frequent than normally to be expected for the time of year.

Elijah was away from the city now, striding along the road, for God had told him to hide by a little stream, the brook Cherith. There, among the reeds and rushes of the river bank, he built himself a hut, concealed from sight by the overhanging trees, and in that hut he dwelt for perhaps a year, watching the waters of the river shrink and vanish away leaving wide stretches of baked mud where once the waterfowl swam and paddled and flew. There he waited for the word of the Lord to come to him again. But God only said that He "*commanded the ravens to feed you there .... and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook*". Now some people find this hard to believe, that ravens could bring food to a man, and so they suggest that the word *oreb* which means a raven, a crow, a rook or a jackdaw, is a mistake for *areb* which means an Arab. But the Arab peoples of today were called by other names in the time of Elijah, and there were none such within many miles of the place where he was dwelling, so that this explanation is not very likely. It is much more probable that this little brook was one of the few left in the land where water still flowed. All the birds of the district came to it for water after scouring the countryside for food and in the providence of God carried some of that food to their watering place and left it for the prophet. "*Bread and flesh*" says the story, and bread in the Old Testament is a general term for any and every kind of non-meat food. So it could well have been fruit or nuts or green-stuff besides pieces of flesh of goats or sheep that the ravens brought, if indeed they were ravens. And before we reject the idea we have to remember that on one occasion it is said of Jesus that he told Peter to go down to the Lake of Galilee and he would find a fish swimming with a silver coin in its mouth which he could take and use to pay the tribute money. Before we reject that story also we must accept the fact that in modern times the same type of fish in the Lake behaves in the same way. It picks up and carries in its mouth bright objects such as coins and coloured pebbles, and for this reason it is still called Peter's fish. Now if the one story is thus shown to be possible so might the other when we remember that behind all this is the controlling power of God. But whether by ravens or by Arabs, Elijah was sustained in his quiet retreat while the pitiless sun blazed down by day and the hot, dry air blanketed the earth at night, the streams dried up and the wells ceased to give water. Then at last Elijah's little brook dried up also and he knew that soon God would speak to him again.

When God did speak it was to send him to the very land from which Queen Jezebel had come. He was to make his way to Zarephath, a seaport on the coast of the Great Sea only ten miles from Sidon where was the palace of King Ethbaal the father of Jezebel. Surely for Elijah this was putting his head into the lion's mouth with a vengeance, for by now King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were searching the country for the man who, as they thought, had inflicted this terrible drought and famine upon them. True, God said He had commanded a widow in Zarephath to sustain him, but how could a widow protect him from the soldiers of the King if his identity should become known. Nevertheless Elijah demurred not, but set out for Zarephath, a hundred miles journey in the blazing sun, through the valley of Megiddo. It was usually a vast expanse of smiling cornfields but now nothing but bare parched brown earth. He went past the lofty height of Mount Carmel where later on he was to destroy the priests and the worship of Baal, along the sea coast for fifty miles, until at last he came to the gate of Zarephath. But the drought and the famine were afflicting the land of the Phoenicians also. When Elijah found the widow it was only to see her gathering a few sticks from the ground that she might make a fire. With this she could prepare her last cake of bread with a sole handful of meal and a little oil in the bottom of the cruse that she and her son might eat thereof and lay them down and die.

Now to this widow and her son, Elijah came as saviour. His presence in her dwelling guaranteed their sustenance while the famine lasted. But that deliverance could only be hers upon a manifestation of faith. *"Make me a little cake first and bring it to me"* said Elijah *"and after make for yourself and for your son."* Yet there was only enough meal and oil for one cake! Herein lay the test of faith. *"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth."* This woman was a Gentile, a member of a Baal-worshipping nation. Why should she have faith in the God of Israel or in Elijah his servant? But she did, and from that moment Elijah became one of her household and remained with her perhaps two years or more, while the famine persisted. And in all that time, the meal in the vessel was constantly replenished and so was the oil in the cruse, so that they had no want. A miracle, yes, but no more so than the feeding of the five thousand from two loaves and five small fishes by Jesus, and if we believe the one we must also believe the other. A miracle indeed to a man but commonplace with God, whose power orders the constant transmutation of one substance into another that is always going on in Creation and was in operation here, perhaps speeded up, in a particular case for a particular purpose.

Before we leave this part of the story let it be noted that the term *"barrel of meal"* gives a false impression. The word there used means an earthenware jar

of the kind Eastern women used to carry on their heads and it was a handful of meal in the bottom of such a vessel that was all the widow had left.

But now trouble of another kind came to the little household for the widow's son fell sick and soon he died. Then the widow in her grief reproached Elijah with having come to her and saved her from the famine only to slay her son and that because of some sin in her past life the knowledge of which she had locked away in her own heart and perhaps had thought was quite unknown to others. And now she was finished with Elijah, for the words she used "*What have I to do with you, O man of God*" mean that from now their ways must diverge. But Elijah took the child to his own room and laid him there upon his own bed and prayed to God that he would restore the child to life. In the intensity of his supplication he laid down beside the child's body. The expression here "*he stretched himself upon the child three times*" means that he "measured his length", as, we would say, and that several times in succession, as he strode the length of his room communing with God. Then God heard the voice of Elijah and the breath of the child came into him again, and he revived. So Elijah brought the child to his mother and she said "*Now by this I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth*".

There is nothing more said about this widow and her son. One wonders why the incident happened at all unless it witnessed to the universal scope of the protecting power of God. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, said Jesus upon one occasion (Luke 4.36), but the prophet was not sent to any one of them but to a Gentile outside the bounds of the Promised Land altogether. This woman was a woman of faith, that is evident, even although her faith was strained by the untimely death of her son. The miracle of the never-failing meal and oil convinced her that this was no ordinary man and his God no ordinary God. But to what did it all lead? There was no witness given to the idolatrous people of Zarephath, of Sidon and of Tyre, of all that pagan land. Elijah remained hidden and unknown throughout the remainder of the famine, until three years had expired; he disappeared from Zarephath as silently as he had come, and the widow and her son saw him no more, neither are they mentioned again in the history.

Perhaps all this was for Elijah himself, a sign that God was with him and would sustain him in all that he was afterwards to be called to do. All three of these miraculous happenings were of one nature; they were preservative of life. In the midst of famine, whilst death stalked the land, Elijah had been furnished unfailingly with means of sustenance, as it were from heaven. At the end, he was shown that Divine power extended over even the issues of life and death, that the one who had been received into the land of the enemy could be brought back into the land of the living. Elijah must already have believed in God's power to do this thing, for that is revealed in his supplication at this time. But perhaps

now he learned the place of faith and prayer in all this and realised the necessity of these in his own life if God was to work through him. Certain it is that Elijah was forever afterwards a man of sterling faith and fervent prayer. At the time of Israel's greatest peril he stood like a rock for the laws of the God of Israel and became his instrument in the most spectacular mass return to God which Israel ever knew.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

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## PRECIOUS PARENTHOOD

Dear open face! dear tousled head!  
Dear sparkling eyes of blue!  
Dear dimpled cheeks of rosy red!  
How much I owe for you!

Dear chubby hands, which clap my face,  
And soft, dear arms which wind;  
How lovely is their fond embrace!  
So sweet to heart and mind.

Dear childish voice which speaks and sings,  
And sweetest music makes, –  
And mind which asks a thousand things,  
And answers, trusting, takes.

How good of God, such priceless joys  
With loving hand to give:  
These precious gems of girls and boys  
Who come with us to live!

Shall we not ask that He will make  
Us noble, wise, and true;  
That we may train them for His sake,  
And hold them for Him, too?

From 'Life's Every Day' J.Danson Smith (M'Call Barbour)  
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# THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

*A story of Paul*

Corinth was the most depraved and iniquitous city in Greece. The capital city of Achaia, the Roman province which embraced the southern half of Greece as Macedonia did the north, an important seaport and commercial centre, it contained within its bounds all those vices and abuses which a place of resort for seamen of all nations, a military base, and a centre of paganism, could be expected to contribute. Corinth of Paul's day was a relatively new city; the ancient Corinth of Greek classical history had been destroyed and its inhabitants put to the sword by the Romans in 146 B.C. Julius Caesar, only some ninety years before the Apostle's visit, had the city rebuilt and peopled by retired Roman soldiers. From this new beginning it prospered commercially and attracted trade from all nations. The Isthmian games, held in Corinth every fourth year, brought visitors from every part of Greece; the court of the Roman Governor of Achaia, established in the city, ensured the concentration here of all official business with all the coming and going which that entailed. As if the graft, bribery and corruption associated with all these institutions was not enough, the worst excesses of paganism were practised in the great Temple of Aphrodite, notorious throughout Greece, where three thousand priestesses pandered to all that was lowest in human nature. The depravity and immorality of Corinth had become the subject of a popular proverb and the name "Corinthian" was a synonym for drunkards and thieves and extortioners and worse. What the Cities of the Plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, were in the Old Testament, Corinth was in the New. Corinth must have appeared the most unlikely city to yield fruit to the Apostle's labours compared with Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea, where after intense efforts only a handful had believed to form small Christian communities. Then there was the immensely more moral and respectable Athens, where after a courteous and careful hearing only one or two had accepted the faith. In the riot of debauchery and violence and lust and degradation, Corinth would seem to offer no soil at all in which the seed of the Gospel could find lodgement and spring up and bring forth fruit.

Yet it was in Corinth that the Lord appeared in vision to Paul and bade him remain and continue his work in confidence *"for I have much people in this city."* (Acts 18.10). To the human observer the evidence was all to the contrary; no reasonable man would expect anything in the nature of a religious revival there. But the Divine viewpoint is different. *"Man seeth not as God seeth, for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart."* God looked upon the corruption that was Corinth and knew that out of that unpromising material He could fashion vessels fitted to honour. These men and women, drawn from the morass of iniquity and depravity would become upright,

clear thinking servants of righteousness, worthy citizens of the world that is to be. "Miracles of grace" someone has called them. Perhaps only Paul, working in the midst of that darkness and hopelessness, could rightly assess the wonder of that miracle.

It was after the disappointment of Athens that Paul, not waiting any longer for his fellow-labourers still on their journey from the north, made his way, alone, to Corinth. He probably went by sea. The distance by road between Athens and Corinth is only about forty miles, but sea travel, in those days as now, was cheaper, and the Apostle's finances were low. Four or five hours straight sailing in a merchant vessel on which he probably gained a free passage in return for assistance to the mariners *en route* would bring him to Cenchrea – later to yield converts to his preaching – the port of Corinth. A steady walk of eight miles would then bring him to the city itself. At first he encountered the outskirts, areas of wood huts, the homes of the poorer elements among the population. Then he came to the city proper, an imposing assemblage of noble buildings in stone and marble, adorned with statues and monuments and gleaming with gold and silver and polished bronze. He traversed its busy streets, thronged with merchants and soldiers, tourists and seamen, people of all nations. He stood and gazed upon its shops and trading establishments, its gambling dens and haunts of vice, the magnificent palace of the Roman governor, the Pro-Consul, and the brooding malignity of the great Temple of whose sinister reputation Paul cannot but have heard. Stout-hearted evangelist though he was, surely he must have wondered what possible opening there could be here for him, what possible work his Lord could have for him in this place.

Following his usual practice, Paul started by seeking out the local synagogue. Here at least he could be sure of finding men and women of his own race and his own religion. And here he met with an unexpected encouragement and commenced a personal friendship which was to have far-reaching consequences in later years. For the first time in his travels he met a couple who were already adherents of the Christian faith. Aquila was an Asiatic Jew, recently resident in Rome, married to a Roman wife, Priscilla. They had been affected by the decree of Claudius Caesar banishing all Jews from Rome. According to the Roman historian Suetonius this decree was issued in consequence of continued tumults and riots among the Jews in Rome instigated by one Chrestus. There is much debate among scholars as to whether this was the name of an otherwise unknown individual or, corrupted from Christus, is a reference to Jewish opposition to the introduction of Christianity in Rome, but no one really knows. But these circumstances, coupled with the fact that nothing is said about their conversion or baptism and the evident close association with them into which Paul entered at once makes it a reasonable conclusion that they were Christians already. It is fairly certain that the Christian faith arrived in

Rome – by what means or by whom is entirely unknown – within a few years of the crucifixion and by now there was a substantial Christian community in the capital of the Empire. From these two, therefore, Paul must have had his first information about the city to which his thoughts so often turned and where at last he was to suffer martyrdom.

Aquila and Priscilla were 'tentmakers' – weavers of goats' hair into sailcloth and tent cloth, a trade for the products of which there was always a good demand in the seaport towns of the Empire. This was Paul's own trade also. Every Pharisee had to learn some manual craft even although his chosen vocation as Rabbi or Doctor of the Law would normally mean that he would not have to work at it, and Paul as an erstwhile Pharisee had conformed to the rule by learning this particular trade. At times such as this, when he needed do something for his own support, this was the occupation he took up. It was logical therefore that he should join forces with his new-found friends and find accommodation in their home, labouring during the week, and on the Sabbath preaching Christ in the synagogue.

It was thus that Silas and Timothy caught up with him at last, having chased him almost the entire length, north to south, of Greece. Luke remained at Philippi still. Dissolute Corinth as yet had heard nothing of the message; probably no one outside the Jewish community so much as knew of Paul's existence. All his efforts at the moment were directed to the conversion of his fellow Jews. Comparison of Acts 18.4 with verses 5-6 appears to infer that at the first his message was received, if not with enthusiastic support, at least with a measure of acceptance, sufficient to give hope of good results. The advent of Silas and Timothy, however, together with an evident intensification of the practical implications of Christianity, evoked strong opposition even to the extent of blasphemy. Perhaps some of the permanent officials of the synagogue felt that this apparent continuing influx of Christian missionaries was carrying things too far and threatened to disturb the security of their own position. Paul realised that he was going to get no farther with these stubborn co-religionists of his; he had seen the same thing so many times before. *"Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean"* he exclaimed. *"From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles"*.

Justus, a Greek who professed Judaism and was a member of the synagogue, and who had now accepted the Apostle's message and become a Christian, offered the hospitality of his house, which was conveniently next door to the synagogue. Here the Apostle continued his preaching and here the Corinthian Church was born. One notable convert was Crispus, the presiding minister of the synagogue, who *"believed on the Lord with all his house"*. The duties of his office had included selecting readers and teachers for the synagogue services and examining discourses and pronouncements for their orthodoxy and

faithfulness to Scripture tradition. The secession of Crispus must have given the rest of the synagogue officials quite a jolt. "*And many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptised*". These were the Greek citizens now finding acceptance into the growing church. One wonders why Luke uses the particular term "Corinthians" instead of the general one "Greeks" as he does elsewhere in the narrative where other cities are concerned. Is it possible that he used the word in the light of its general meaning throughout Greece as a term of opprobrium, denoting the lowest and most degraded of men? Did he mean to indicate that many of the converts Paul gained at this time were in fact from the dregs of society, the most depraved and degraded of men and women, gathered from lives of every type of crime and immorality known in Corinth? It is possible! The writings of Paul to this very Corinthian church in later years show that the believers there had in fact been guilty of all these things and found it hard in some cases to resist relapses into their bad old ways. The terrible indictment of paganism which forms the early part of Paul's Epistle to the Romans was written when he was at Corinth on a later occasion, and what he knew of the city and its people and its practices must have formed the inspiration for that indictment. It is probably true to say that the motley crowd assembled in the house of Justus must have appeared to the Apostle about the most unpromising – and perhaps unlovely – collection of would-be Christians upon which he had ever set eyes. It might have been with very good reason that the Lord spoke to him at the time and told him that He "*had much people in this city*".

Despite this apparently unpropitious start, the work of the Apostle Paul at Corinth was the most gloriously successful of his entire missionary journey. Neither in Asia nor in Greece did he achieve such results at any other place. By the time he left Corinth eighteen months later there was a large and flourishing community which, for all its faults, and they were many and have become proverbial in later Christian thought and homily was for ever after very dear to Paul's own heart. The two Epistles to the Corinthians reflect so much of the frailties and weaknesses of human nature that the figures that move through their pages are real and personal to all of us. They are so like real men and women, even Christian men and women, beset by shortcomings and mistakes like all people, that we cannot but feel quick sympathy with them. Time and time again they fell into grievous error; time and time again their father in God admonished them, sternly and judicially, yet with love and tenderness. In so many ways the church at Corinth prefigured in miniature just what the church of Christ in the world was to be like in later days.

In the meantime the members of the synagogue next door were not idle. They were biding their time. That time came when the Roman Pro-Consul ('deputy' in Acts 18.12) retired and was replaced by a successor. Now is the time for an

attempt to get rid of Paul and his evangelising, the synagogue Jews must have thought, while the new man is feeling his way and will not want to risk upsetting established officials or institutions. So they laid their plans and somehow had Paul arrested and arraigned before the new governor. *"When Gallio was deputy" (became pro-consul) "of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying 'this fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law'".*

Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio was a refined, cultured, genial member of a distinguished Roman family, popular among his contemporaries at Rome and celebrated for his kindly disposition. His brother, the philosopher Seneca, wrote of him "No mortal man is so sweet to any person as he is to all mankind." He represented the best type of Roman administrator, just and impartial in upholding the law and not influenced by either the praise or the threats of those with whom he had to do. He certainly gave the complainants in this case short shrift. Without waiting to hear Paul's defence he brusquely quashed the proceedings. Had it been an accusation of crime against property or person, of flagrant immorality or an offence against the laws of the State *"reason would that I should bear with you"* he said. It does not seem that Gallio rated the sincerity of these Jews very highly. He was perhaps better briefed than they had imagined. *"But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law" (the law of Moses) "you look to it, for I will be no judge of such matters."* It is clear that Gallio saw through their subterfuge at once, and made it crystal clear at the outset that they were not going to use Roman jurisprudence to serve their own sectarian ends; not while he was Pro-Consul, anyway. *"And he drove them from the judgment seat."* The word indicates a forcible expulsion; it is evident that at his signal the Roman lictors (guards) hurried their exit by the indiscriminate use of their staves, and the discomfited schemers found themselves in the street with nothing achieved, and a few painful bruises to boot.

Popular feeling in Corinth was evidently with Paul. By way of sequel to these ineffective court proceedings a number of Greek citizens laid hold on Sosthenes, who had evidently succeeded Crispus as ruler of the synagogue. They carried him to a position in the street immediately in front of the court where Paul had been arraigned, and administered a sound beating in full view of the representatives of law and order. The proceeding was undoubtedly altogether illegal, and carried out at the place constituted somewhat of a slight upon the dignity of Roman rule, but *"Gallio cared for none of those things."* Despite his customary good nature and courtliness, it is apparent that on this occasion he was thoroughly disgusted with the machinations of Paul's enemies and decided that one salutary lesson at the outset might save him a lot of trouble in the future. It would only need a hint to the centurion to ensure that the lictors on guard would watch the administering of the beating impassively and abstain

from interference; without much doubt Sosthenes and his supporters would 'get the message' as it is said today, and be more careful in future. Certain it is that the Christian community in Corinth had no further trouble with their Jewish antagonists. Paul remained at Corinth for eighteen months, probably evangelising much of the district round about in addition to his work in the city. Before he left, a companion church existed at Cenchrea, eight miles away. The magnitude of the work achieved, compared with that at other centres, is indicated by the fact that the New Testament records the names of some seventeen notable converts originating from Corinth. At least five of them, Aquila, Priscilla, Erastus who held the important official office of City Treasurer, Gaius, and Phoebe the deaconess of Cenchrea, in after days travelled the world serving the interests of the developing faith. Paul sailed away at last, accompanied by his co-labourers Silas and Timothy, and his more recently acquired friends Aquila and Priscilla, doubtless feeling that this experience was the highlight of his journey. The most unpromising soil had yielded the richest harvest.

From Cenchrea the little party sailed to Ephesus on the Asiatic mainland, where Paul was well received and made a promise that he would return. It is evident that he felt the urge now to get back to his home church at Antioch; he had been away long enough. Leaving Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus, probably to foster the development of the work Paul had accomplished, the original trio took ship to Caesarea, the port for Jerusalem. They did not stay long, apparently long enough only to make some contact with the Jerusalem Christians, and then they were on the road again for Antioch.

So ended the second missionary journey. Paul and Silas had been away from home for some two years of which eighteen months had been spent at Corinth. It had been an eventful two years. They had met and enrolled Luke at Troas and left him to work at Philippi. They had taken the youthful Timothy from Lystra and brought him to Antioch; found Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth and left them to serve at Ephesus. Six other converts, made during this journey, were later to join the Apostle in his further works; Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Sopater of Berea, Phoebe of Cenchrea, Erastus and Tertius of Corinth, all figure later on in the history. The two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written during this sojourn in Corinth; they were the first of the present books of the New Testament to be written.

The stalwart form of the Apostle was probably a little bent; he must have shown some outward evidence of the appalling physical sufferings he had endured during that two years but his spirit was as unconquerable as ever. He was still and for all time God's man, commissioned to plant the Gospel in regions where it had never yet been preached and to lay the foundations of the worldwide Christian church. Both he and Silas were bound to be glad of a rest

and respite under the ministrations of their own brethren at Antioch. They rehearsed to the assembly the triumphs and achievements of this notable mission that had its real beginning when Paul in his dream at night saw that Greek stranger reaching out appealing hands across the sea and heard his urgent plea *"come over into Macedonia and help us."*

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## RELATIONSHIPS

*A study in Matthew 7*

Our Lord's 'Sermon on the Mount' comprises Matthew chapters 5-7. The Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon' (Matt. 5.3-12) are well known if not so well understood. As we proceed through the three chapters the content becomes less familiar. The 'sermon' has been called Jesus' 'manifesto' and there certainly is much valuable teaching in the whole of it. Chapter 7 is about relationships and how we react and respond to others and to our environment. There are relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, with our Heavenly Father and how we should speak to Him in prayer; with neighbours and doing as we would be done by, and finally with Jesus and being obedient to what He says.

Firstly, Jesus deals with the problem of 'judging others' – being critical and finding fault. Why do human beings criticise one another? Does it serve a useful purpose? Those who are critical of other people, probably like to think that they are helping the one criticised to overcome a weakness. But is the real motive prompting criticism a means of inflating the ego of the critic – an effort to contrast someone else's weaknesses with their own virtues. Jesus makes it clear that if we would have others think well of us we must think (and speak) well of them. The kind of judgement that we mete out to others will be the kind of judgment that we receive from God. The Christian faith is all about reciprocity – the give and take of life – the mutual exchange of privilege that leads to true friendship. We have no choice in this matter. We have no right to choose to whom we will extend the hands of good fellowship. God chooses our brothers and sisters in Christ. He also oversees those among whom we move every day – the ones who, believers or unbelievers, we must extend the love of God. The way we treat them, is the way in which we are asking God to treat us.

Jesus makes the point of judging very clear with a wonderful little parable about trying to get a speck out of someone's eye while we've got a plank of wood in our own. The large piece of timber tends to obstruct our vision so that we can't see clearly. As Roy Hession suggests, that plank is probably our own judgmental attitude. So long as we are in the critical frame of mind we cannot possibly see to help our 'brother' sort out his minor problem – perhaps a small deficiency or

weakness. As we look through the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus wanted to impress His disciples with the principle of never being critical of others.

There is a wealth of material in the Bible, either direct teaching or fascinating anecdotes that help us to see the lessons we must all learn, right from the incident in Egypt when Moses was asked "Who made you a ruler and judge over us", through Paul's letters, notably Romans 14 to the penetrating teaching of James 2. Judging others is wrong because we cannot see into the heart of another. It is also wrong as Paul pointed out in Romans 14 because we are judging another person's slave, something we have no right to do. Becoming a judge in Israel was a responsible and exacting task. Frequently, judges failed because they took bribes which perverted the course of justice. Too often the judges were more concerned with their remuneration or their reputation than they were to see that justice was done, and was seen to be done. Too often justice was not done because the judges were concerned with the outward appearance and what other people said. They had not the power of God who has appointed Jesus to judge the world, as Paul said on Mars Hill (Acts 17.31). Jesus can look into the heart as He demonstrated 'while here on Earth.

So Jesus tells that a strange but very pointed little parable. Jesus is a master of hyperbole – he draws an exaggerated picture to press home His point. To remove anything from another person's eye is a delicate operation, as a nurse would tell us who removes glass splinters from accident prone motorist's eyes. Fault finding can do much harm to Christian relationships.

There is a kind of 'judging by implication' and this is highlighted in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, praying in the Temple. Let us be gentle in what we say about others knowing that everything is done, said and thought in the light of eternity. Father hears and sees it all; not standing by with a notebook, for our character is the record of our thoughts, words and actions. Are they being shaped into His likeness? Do we cause Him to smile at our love for Him through His people or does He shed tears at being hurt when we fail to show that love?

This does not destroy our privilege of 'choice'. We can chose those whom we believe make good close friends, those who make good confidants and advisors, those from whom we may learn Christian teaching. There is a need for 'discernment'. Jesus makes this point with the reference to throwing precious stones to pigs. But that is very different from carping criticism which can destroy another's reputation.

*"Do not give to dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."* (Matt 7.6). As Dr Tasker suggests "A Jew... would not invite a pagan to share his religious feasts." Nor should we disseminate advanced spiritual truths to those who would despise

and ridicule and be antagonistic toward the 'pearl of great price'. Lack of common sense can be counter productive in the preaching of the Gospel.

There is a place for judgment. The Bible upholds the principle of those in authority judging the law breaker, (Rom. 13.1; 1 Tim. 2.2). There is a place for judges, examiners, referees and those in authority. There are times when Church leaders lovingly, must make judgment as Paul writes "*don't you know that you will judge angels*". But when we pass judgment, let us remember our own sin and strange idiosyncrasies.

In Matt. 7.7 Jesus gives some simple instructions about prayer. "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.*" Jesus draws the parallel between the Heavenly Father and our earthly parents. It looks easy enough but considerable debate as to Jesus' meaning has resulted over the centuries since. Jesus didn't intend this to be difficult; quite the reverse. He wanted His followers to discover how easy was the access to the Father He so loved. There are several rules about coming to God. We are approaching the great and mighty Creator of the Universe. That universe is vast beyond our imaginations. We cannot possibly comprehend the great Mind behind it all. It is not merely large in size but ingenious and complex; and its expression of sheer love. God is love. He wants His children to approach Him. He will draw near to us if we will make a move toward Him. He doesn't demand set formularies and stilted language. He wants us to pour out our hearts to Him. There need be no holding back. He can see into every corner of our lives. He wants us and there is no limit – providing we remember one or two things. Sin places a barrier between us and God and only the blood of Jesus can break down that barrier. If we have an outstanding problem between someone else and ourselves, that causes defect in us, that will be a barrier. When we want to bring a gift – when we want to worship – we must do our best to solve that problem before we pray. God knows that while we have bitterness and resentment in our hearts we are not fit to talk to Him, so He says, 'get it put right', it will not do to blame the other person and expect an apology from them. The onus is on us to be sorry – to admit our fault – better that way even if in the end we were not at fault. Contrition of heart – true contrition is absolutely essential before God – and real humility of heart is prepared to face the hurt party and make it clear that we are sorry. Then, and only then, are we ready to "ask anything in the name of Jesus" – for then are we most likely to ask according to His will – which is the second essential for prayer. Perhaps in the early days of our Christian walk we had little more than Bible study and sound Christian pastorate to discover God's will. Slowly we may have gone further afield than the leaders of the Church where we were converted and learned ways of assessing the advice and teaching of other communities. Maybe the teaching, stories, biographies of men and women of God from across the world have enabled us to know God's will. All along

God has made Himself known in the personal circumstances of the lives of His people – which we may have called providence. Hopefully, as we begin to grow spiritually we find that we are conscious of God working in our minds and is being discerned in our thinking, particularly in prayer. Heart to heart communion becomes a reality with the living God and His will becomes readily identifiable almost immediately we seek it. But sometimes a cloud crosses our pathway and we fail to understand what God is doing in our lives. This may be our Father deliberately letting us discover what it is like to be without Him but more likely we just need to recognise disobedience that is obstructing our communion with Him.

We need to be alert and well tuned to God and His purpose for us. It's of little value having an expert knowledge of the Plan of God for all creation if we ignore God's plan for our own individual life. So what may we pray for? Jesus said "Whatsoever" and He meant it. We may look back through the lives of great Bible characters – Abraham, Hannah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Mary, Paul and the Master Himself – they are all wonderfully inspiring with many lessons to teach. There are countless books of prayers and books about prayer; arrow prayers, panic prayers, does God help with bullying and exams, does God heal? Have we discovered the value, the absolutely vital need, of a Quiet Time, alone with the Lord and His Word. What might start with 7 minutes with God becomes 15, 30 and for some it runs to one or more hours. Here the stresses and strains are smoothed out. Here the sorrow and worries are given to Him and in Him alone we find the answer to our questions. For the honest enquiring mind there may be questions about the meaning of a Scripture – about the wonders of Creation and God's wonderful Universe – and our little planet – about the confusing issues in the world of mankind – about what we should do next.

There are times, perhaps many times when the Lord gently says "Let it be" – it isn't important – it's better not said – there are other things to do and say. Listening in prayer is as important as telling God about our problems. Mental attitudes in prayer are more important than physical positions.

As we look at verse 12 of this wonderful chapter we are reminded of Charles Kingsley's children's story 'The Water Babies' and the lesson that Tom had to learn 'Do as you would be done by'. This 'golden rule' had been approached by some of the great teachers in Israel but as Dr. Barclay points out, they had never quite made it. Our Lord seems to have given the first positive rule and not just 'don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you'. There is a very great difference – the difference between sins of omission and sins of commission. We don't live a good life by trying to avoid what is wrong, because it is wrong not to do good when its possible to do it. The priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan did nothing wrong apparently – except fail to help a fellowman who desperately needed their help. Love as you would be loved –

and it's the kind of love which Jesus expressed all His life – and which it was left to Paul to define in 1 Cor. 13. Love never fails – and we must never fail to express that love in word and action until we become the very embodiment of that Greek word 'agape', until it become the natural things to do and say ... and think. We must target with our love those who are unloved – and those we find hardest to love. That is only really possible when the Spirit of God takes hold of us and really shapes us into the likeness of Him who is love.

The remainder of the chapter needs a study of its own for it is about the 'Strait Gate' – false prophets – and above all our relationship with Jesus our Lord. May He open our ears and our eyes to know His will and our mouths to praise His name.

*(To be concluded)*

(William Barclay and Martin Lloyd Jones have much to offer in their books on the Sermon on the Mount.)

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**CART (Christian African Relief Trust)** issues excellent Quarterly Newsletters, put together by its volunteer helpers and always well worth reading. Follow the link marked 'News'.

From Uganda, Simon Opio writes, 'The tree project is ideal – especially for resettling the people in villages after 10 years of being displaced from their homes. It will be a very good source of income for families, once the project is established; in the long term, over 2000 families will benefit. Each nursery tree costs approx. 5p to 16p (100-500 Ugandan shillings) ... Church: members will be able to help set up the tree projects; we could initially plan for 200 families each planting 100 trees - i.e. 20,000 trees @ 16p = £3,200.' In Malawi, the main problem being addressed seems to be the erosion of existing forests by uncontrolled charcoal burning; the churches are doing their bit in improving this situation and encouraging new tree-planting. There's a footnote saying that 'CART can purchase saplings suitable for firewood for approximately £8 each', and on another page we read that CART had decided to make these tree-planting projects a part of its Harvest Appeal for 2008.

All the Trust's administrative costs are met by the CART Trustees, but the actual cost of shipment is very high, so monetary gifts are greatly appreciated, they may be sent to Br. Guildford Tompkins, whose address is 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks HD8 0LR. Thank you for your continuing support for this important work.

B & K K-S

## TWO FATHERS

There is an interesting comparison between two fathers mentioned in scripture, the Father of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 and the Father of Absalom in 2 Samuel (chapters 13 to 18).

Both these fathers had something to forgive their sons. The 'Prodigal Son' despised his family inheritance and the traditional way of life. Like many a young man, he wanted freedom, argued to get his way, and having obtained his rights' went off beyond the reach of criticism to follow a way of life that his father could hardly approve.

Absalom, among the macho company of King David's sons, murdered his half brother Amnon in revenge for a sexual attack upon his sister Tamar. He escaped to his mother's family home in the north. Then after three years David longed to have Absalom back, but when he returned he was not allowed into his father's presence at court for another two years. Absalom set himself to become popular with the people, and after four more years staged a coup against his father, who had to escape beyond the River Jordan. Soon David had gathered an army to protect his life against Absalom.

Both fathers, when the crunch came, forgave their sons. When the Prodigal Son returned, he received a loving welcome, forgiveness for desertion and folly, and a feast in his honour. David, when battle was joined between his army and Absalom's, gave his commanders instructions not to harm Absalom, whom he still loved. *"Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake."*

The two outcomes were radically different, but each led to noteworthy words from the respective fathers. Despite opposition from an older brother, the Prodigal's father explained, *"How could we help celebrating this happy day? Your brother was dead and has come back to life, was lost and is found."* Absalom, however, was killed by David's commanders, and David cried, *"O my son! Absalom, my son, Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son."*

One is apt to wonder to what extent the attitudes of these fathers contributed to the outcome. Both loved their sons very deeply. The Prodigal's father had the wisdom to let go the chains which tied him to family expectations, so that when he wished to return the way was open. King David on the other hand might in some ways be thought responsible for his son's conduct. David's personal life in the matter of Uriah's wife set a bad example. He tolerated behaviour among his sons which more personal attention from him might have checked. In forgiving Absalom's first crime, he only half forgave – kept him at a distance, and did not concern himself with his 'political' activities. In fact, did he really know his son? At the end, he could only grieve for him with pathetic longing.

Love, on its own, is not enough. Our love for others should be accompanied by personal knowledge and wise treatment. Even if these are lacking, love may

bridge the gap and remedy our shortcomings, yet we cannot rely on mere emotion. Our heavenly Father loves us wisely, with discipline, and knows us through and through. Can our love be like His?

GC

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## ASLEEP

It is worthy of note that the word used for 'sleeps' in the account of Jairus' daughter is one that in the New Testament is never used to indicate death; always to denote natural sleep; *katheuso*. A word which is used in the story of Lazarus "*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, I go to awake him out of sleep*" is *koimao* which is used often as a synonym for death besides its normal meaning of sleep. Thus Acts 13.36 "*David fell on sleep*" 1 Cor. 15.20 "*Christ ... the first fruits of them that sleep.*" 1 Cor. 15.51 "*We shall not all sleep*" 1 Thess. 4.14. "*Them that sleep in Jesus*" are all from *koimao*. It is this latter word that passed into Latin as *coemetorium*, from which we get our English word 'cemetery' - 'place of sleep'. It would appear that no conclusive evidence exists in the Gospels for the customary impression that Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. He himself said "*The maid is not dead, but sleeps*". It seems probable that she was in some kind of a trance or coma, and that our Lord awakened her from it. The friends and neighbours, convinced that the girl was dead "*laughed him to scorn*" when He said that she was not. They would probably not believe anything else but that He had in fact raised her from the dead. Hence Jesus cautioned them not to make the incident generally known, a caution they promptly rejected.

This view is supported by Aramaic words used by the Lord "*Talitha cumi*" is said to have been the usual greeting by which a mother roused her child in the morning and means "Little girl, I say to you, arise." It would seem that when referring to Lazarus our Lord used the word that commonly could mean death, and then "*said plainly to them, Lazarus is dead.*" In referring to the synagogue ruler's daughter, He equally definitely stated that the maid was not dead, only sleeping, and used the word that would normally denote that fact.

AOH

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"Frankly, I stand amazed at the unfathomable complexity of God's wisdom and God's knowledge. How could man ever understand his reasons for action or explain his methods of working? For

Who hath known the mind of the Lord?

Or who hath been his counsellor?

Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things.

To him be the glory for ever and ever, amen."

(Romans 11.33-36 Phillips)

## NOTICES

**DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984** Bible Fellowship Union use computer files to record names and addresses of all readers of the Bible Study Monthly. The information so stored is – the BFU reference number, readers 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 to BFU and are a UK taxpayer, 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 be done only 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 always the opinion of those serving with the BFU.

**The Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust** is a registered charity that owns and manages Gainsborough House – a Christian Retirement Home at Milborne Port. **Gainsborough House** is a large Victorian villa where existing buildings surrounding a courtyard were developed into self-contained flats. Several of the flats are immediately available as permanent accommodation or for holidays. The centre is under the care of a Housekeeper who resides on the premises and who prepares an excellent mid-day meal. There are two lounges, a library, a pleasant garden and laundry utilities. It is set in beautiful rural surroundings with the sea and many places of interest easily accessible.

**Tell a Friend** – if you have enjoyed reading the Bible Study Monthly may be others would also if they knew about it. Sample copies will gladly be sent to anywhere in the world providing we receive a name and an address clearly written.

## Gone From Us

Sister Lily Elmer (Coventry)

*“Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away”*

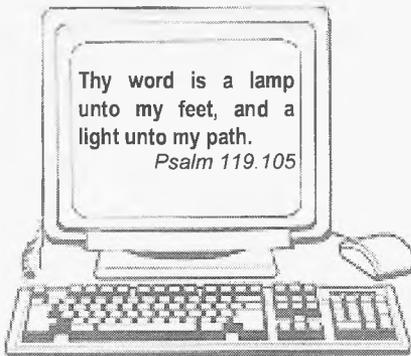
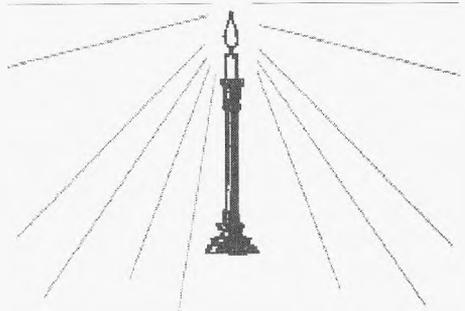
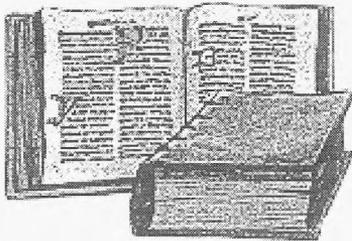
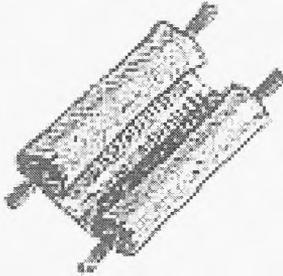
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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 86 No. 2

March/April 2009



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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.

## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

In every aspect and phase of our Christian life and our activity in the service of Jesus Christ there is nothing of greater moment than absolute sincerity and the ability to judge our own motives aright. Some of the greatest and noblest of men have ruined their life's work just because in the enthusiasm of success they have allowed their own motives to go more and more unquestioned until the influence of self-desire and the policy of expediency has usurped the place once held by selflessness and true sincerity. One whose early life is spent in unselfish service for others and whose native zeal is used to bring happiness and inspiration to his fellows, may in later life become a veritable barrier to progress, without at any time so much as suspecting that any inward change has taken place.

Particularly is this true in respect to our standing as believers in Christ Jesus. The very intensity of one's personal conviction of the teaching of Scripture inspires a zealous desire to "preach the Word, instant in season and out of season"; and to carry the flaming torch of Truth into every place where it has not as yet penetrated. And in the power of that zeal and confidence great things have ever been done. It is in later years, when the wonder of Truth, and the joys of its service, have become more familiar to us and begin to be regarded as the normal setting of life, that the temptation to adopt worldly methods for the furtherance of our work comes in. Fully justifying our attitude to ourselves, and fully desirous of doing our Master acceptable service, we become less tolerant to others, more arrogant in insistence upon our own way, and progressively we become blinded to that great secret enunciated by Jesus; *"I came... not to do mine own will. ..."*

Ah yes – here is a secret thing indeed. We who are as servants waiting for their Lord need to be very watchful, very, very prayerful, that when He cometh He shall find us ready in every respect – not only armed with the knowledge

which is fitting in those who "*know what their Lord doeth*" but also in that attitude of mind and heart which belongs to an "*Israelite indeed*". If it can be said of us, not only at the beginning but at the end of our Christian life, that there is in our hearts unselfishness, kindness, true brotherliness, we shall indeed be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light". The children of Israel came short because they put their trust in the Egyptians, who were "*men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit*" and we too, if we become blinded to that spiritual guidance which comes from God alone, will fail in the same manner. Clear-sighted sincerity and tolerant unselfishness will keep us ever true sons of Him who is worshipped only in spirit and in truth.

AOH

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At the time when the Bible Study Monthly was first published in 1924 it served the needs of a number of Christian communities. The following article described a viewpoint which might be as inclusive as possible amid varying concepts of truth. Time has moved on and the Bible Study Monthly also serves many individuals and groups among many churches although most of the original groups in UK no longer exist. Current readers may find it of interest, even important, not just as an historic document but as containing much that is relevant to Christian people today – as well as those when it was first written – over a hundred years ago.

### **“OUR FELLOWSHIP”**

Our fellowship sprang up spontaneously and gradually. It is composed of thinking Christian people of various ages who are studying the Bible reverently and profitably. There are no limitations as to membership, except such as could be properly applied to any true Christian, (1) Faith in God as the great Creator and Heavenly Father, (2) Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the world's Redeemer, (3) Faith in the Bible that it is the inspired message of God, respecting his will and purposes in connection with mankind, (4) A clean and honourable life.

We find this platform broad enough for all true Christians, regardless of denominational differences. We have no bondage, and anyone is as free to leave the local gatherings as to enter them. Indeed, following the example of the Early Church in this as well as in other matters, we avoid any special enrolment, or any special commitment as to faith and practice other than the broad principles already mentioned.

Each local gathering is independent, manages its own affairs, conducts its own meetings, and provides for its own expenses. The personnel of these gatherings come from all walks of life – labourers and physicians, pupils and teachers, housewives and the leisured.

There is reason why our position is blessed of God – the time mentioned in the Scriptures when the "wise" of God's people are to understand is here. The

Scriptures show, what men are now beginning to realise, that we are in the dawn of a new era. This is the time concerning which God promised that He would give special enlightenment respecting his Word and his Plan, and the mystery of God should be finished.

Our fellowship therefore, while not affiliated to any of the older denominations and sects, is sympathetic with all Christian people of every creed. We realise that the various denominations were organised, not for the purpose of dividing and distracting the Lord's flock, but each with an endeavour to find the light and truth. We urge Christians to ignore all sectarian fetters and fancies, and would point out that there is one true Church, and but one Head of that Church.

Our fellowship therefore endeavours to bring all Christian people into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, as his members. We recognise that the different denominations contain true people of God, and are glad to co-operate with them in any manner for the furtherance of the Lord's work in harmony with the Scriptures. We urge Christian people to stand for the Divine character, Plan and Word, even although this may mean opposition and persecution from those of sectarian spirit.

We labour therefore specially for Christian unity, on the Bible basis, in harmony with the words of the Apostle. *"By one Spirit we are all baptised into one Body"*. (1 Cor. 12.13).

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## DIANA OF THE EPHESIANS

### *A story of Paul*

The Apostle Paul was about fifty-one years of age when he set out upon his third missionary journey, destined to lead him seven years later to his first trial – and acquittal – before the Emperor Nero at Rome. He could not have stayed at his home base of Antioch more than a few months following his second missionary journey, as a result of which he had been able to plant Christianity firmly in Greece. Now, as he set out along the high road leading northward from the city, he could hardly have known that he would never see Antioch again. The flourishing church which had taken the lead in missionary endeavour for so many years watched their most famous ambassador disappearing into the distance, little realising that they would sit under his ministry no more; never again see him in the flesh. From now onwards, the first Gentile church, the place where the name 'Christian' was coined and first used, the community which above all others had grasped the vital truth that Christianity is essentially a missionary religion continued its course bereft of its greatest son. It had grown in spiritual strength and understanding of the faith beyond its fellow-church at Jerusalem in direct consequence of the realisation and the zeal with which it had instigated and supported missionary work, Antioch was a famous name in

Christian history for many centuries. The torch lit by Paul and Barnabas, Simeon and Lucius burned brightly for a long time, although at the last the false doctrines and the false brethren foreseen by the great Apostle gained the ascendancy and had their way. Little more than two centuries after those early Antiochean believers watched the figure of their beloved father in God disappear into the distance, another Paul, Paul of Samosata, lorded it as Bishop over the Church of Antioch. He lived in luxury and dissipation, introducing heresies of doctrine and conduct, and the bright light that had been the Church of Antioch burned low and went out.

How much of all this Paul's deep spiritual insight showed him must one day happen, no one knows. Perhaps in any case his active mind was already working on the details of another problem. He had planted Christianity in two notable centres, apart from the many towns in which he had left groups of believers, Antioch in Syria and Corinth in Greece. Now his eager steps were taking him in the direction of one more famous city of another great section of the ancient world, Ephesus in Asia. For the first few weeks he traversed the Asiatic hinterland in the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia, revisiting groups of disciples he had established during the course of his second missionary journey. But inevitably his steps were tending towards the cultural and commercial centre of Asia, where he had left Aquila and Priscilla at the time of his brief initial visit two years previously. Ephesus was the capital city of Roman Asia. Situated on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea and possessed of a fine natural harbour, it had become the terminus of several main roads and trade routes stretching far into the interior of Asia. From its quays, merchant vessels carried the produce of Asia to Greece, to Egypt and to Rome. It was in consequence a city of trading and of markets, and the Jews were very much in evidence. Side by side with Greek paganism there flourished the worship of the One God, and the city's greatest architectural treasure, the Temple of Diana, looked down from the eminence on which it was built to the synagogues of the Jews. The cosmopolitan nature of the population gave opportunity for every kind of superstition and fanatical practice. Of all the cities that figure in the travels of Paul this one was noteworthy for the extent to which sorcery, astrology and all forms of magical practices had obtained a hold. Like Corinth, it seemed a most unlikely place in which to expect any response to the preaching of the Gospel.

Nevertheless Ephesus shared with Corinth the distinction of being one of the most successful of Paul's missions. In later years the flourishing church established in this place by the Apostle was further blessed by the residence and ministry of the Apostle John, who ended his days here. It became the leading community of the informal federation known as the Seven Churches in Asia, and was to Roman Asia what Antioch was to Syria, a centre of ministry from which dedicated men journeyed in various directions ministering to the needs of

local town churches. Writing to the church at Corinth, at this time, the letter known to us as the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul said of his opportunities here *"a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries"* (1 Cor. 16.9). It must have been with high hopes that he renewed his friendship with Aquila and Priscilla, and began to look out for opportunities to preach.

His first effective contact was a unique one. He came across a small company of believers in John the Baptist. They apparently knew of no developments beyond John's brief and tragic mission. The later Advent of Jesus of Nazareth was something with which they were quite unfamiliar. It is probable that this little group owed its origin to one or two disciples of John the Baptist who fled Judea after Herod's summary execution of their Master. They settled in Ephesus, holding and teaching the message of their deceased leader, so that a quarter of a century later there were these dozen men modelling their lives around the baptism of repentance which John had preached. It is strange that Aquila and Priscilla had not already met them, but there were many Jews and a number of synagogues in Ephesus and it seems to have been the enquiring and penetrating instinct of Paul which found them wherever they were. Having encountered them, he quickly showed how the work of John found its sequel and fulfilment in that of Christ, and so these twelve men became the nucleus of the afterwards celebrated church of Ephesus.

As usual, Paul was at first well received in the synagogues; his preaching and exposition found willing hearers. Inevitably the dissentients began to make their voices heard and within three months the Apostle found his work being hindered by objectors. The pattern of things was very familiar to him; he had seen it so many times before, and without hesitation he withdrew himself and his converts from the fellowship of the synagogues and established them in the lecture room of one Tyrannus. The word "school" in Acts 19.9 is hardly accurate even although the Greek word here is the one which gives us our English word 'school'. The Greeks were very partial to discussions and debates on philosophical subjects and the building belonging to Tyrannus was obviously an establishment where such functions took place. Paul probably hired it for the regular meetings of his group as an ordinary commercial transaction; whether Tyrannus was Roman, Greek or Jew is not stated but the name is not a Jewish one and in the circumstances it is most probable that he was a Greek. At any rate, this arrangement lasted for two years. The Christian community thus formed became a centre for missionary work; *"all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks"* (Acts 19.10). Roman Asia was more or less the western part of modern Turkey, not the whole of the present continental mass known as Asia.

More Christians meant less pagans; less pagans meant a decreasing demand for certain miniature silver models of the inner Temple enshrining the great goddess Diana. One Demetrius, a silversmith, finding sales dropping off, began to look with somewhat jaundiced eye on the crowds attending the meetings in the school of Tyrannus. He probably had no particular reverence for Diana himself, but business was business, and he could see his craft being seriously affected by the results of this Jewish preacher's eloquence. The outcome of his annoyance was a trade meeting of the master craftsmen and their employees addressed by Demetrius in terms which left no doubt of his concern. Not only was their craft in danger of extinction, he claimed, but additionally- this must have been said unctuously – the worship of Diana was threatened and the Temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, would lose its reputation and with that the city itself sink into oblivion. This happy combination of business and religion has in all ages formed ample justification for launching a crusade, and the present occasion was no exception. The meeting broke up to a tumultuous accompaniment of the city battle-cry "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" and the indignant metalworkers poured out of the building looking for trouble.

In a city like Ephesus there was never any lack of street loafers and others spoiling for a fight, and it was not long before the whole place was "*filled with confusion*" (Acts 19.29). Somehow or other two of Paul's travel companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, both Greeks of Macedonia, came face to face with the mob and before they could grasp what had happened found themselves being rushed off to the 'theatre'. This was the huge open-air stadium which served as the venue for plays, sporting events and every other kind of public function. Next to the Temple of Diana, the Stadium at Ephesus was the city's chief glory. When excavated in modern times it was discovered that it could accommodate twenty-five thousand spectators. It is possible that Gaius and Aristarchus found that most of the twenty-five thousand were present on this particular occasion.

News of the occurrence came quickly to Paul and he was for going into the stadium to the aid of his co-workers but was persuaded against doing so by "*certain of the chiefs of Asia, which were his friends*" (Acts 19.31). These "chiefs of Asia" were the Asiarchs, Greek officials of the Games, whose duty brought them into Ephesus at times when notable athletic events were due. They had considerable experience of mob rule in the stadium, and evidently felt the matter could be handled better with the unwitting cause of the trouble absent from the scene. It is worthy of note in passing that these very important Greek officials had formed an esteem for Paul and did not appear to view his threat to their religion and city in the same light as Demetrius and the populace.

Meanwhile the scene at the stadium remained one of unmitigated confusion. "*Some therefore cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly was*

*confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together"* (Acts 19.32). In the general disorganisation, Gaius and Aristarchus seem to have disappeared, for they are mentioned no more. In their place there appears one Alexander, put forward by the Jews. These latter, of course, representing the orthodox synagogue, to make some kind of defence to the concourse.

It is not clear whether Alexander was a Christian or an orthodox Jew. The fact that Jews were present at the stadium appears to infer that some of the orthodox community had come along to see vengeance meted out upon the Christians. Their presence may have further inflamed the mob, who were not likely to make much distinction between Christian Jew and orthodox Jew. Perhaps Alexander was one of their number chosen to justify their own position. On the other hand he may have been a Christian who the Jews had picked up and brought into the stadium as their contribution to the proceedings. Years later, writing to Timothy, Paul refers to an "*Alexander the coppersmith*" who "*did me much evil*". This Alexander had once held, then made shipwreck of, the faith, and was apparently a resident in Ephesus during Timothy's time of service there. This may have been the same man: at the time of the riot; he may not yet have become a convert and being of the metal-working fraternity himself could well have been put forward as the best person available to appease Demetrius and his fellows. There was, however, to be no appeasement. From his attire it was plain that Alexander was a Jew. For the next two hours the concourse, "*with one voice*" kept up a continuous shout "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*". There does not appear to have been any question of physical violence; the impression gained is that the working population had decided to make this a kind of one-day holiday and having crowded into the stadium intended to stay there and enjoy themselves.

At last the town recorder (the English 'town-clerk' is a very exact equivalent of the Greek office here) managed to restore order. Two hours of continuous exercise of the vocal chords was probably enough for the mob anyway. The thunderous shouting died away and a blessed stillness reigned. Perhaps even Demetrius and his comrades were a little scared of the storm they had raised. They listened now, rather shamefacedly maybe, to the measured reproof of this worthy civic official, who seems to have handled the matter very expertly. In the first place, he reminded them, it was a well-accepted fact throughout the Greek world that Ephesus was the city of Diana and there was no dispute about it. Secondly, they had illegally apprehended two men who had transgressed no law and were entitled to the protection of the civic authorities. If Demetrius or anyone else had any kind of grievance against them there were the ordinary processes of law to which they had access; let them lay their accusation in the proper quarter and have the matter judicially determined, Thirdly, and most important, "*we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there*

*being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse".* That last remark must have brought Demetrius and his fellow business men up with a jerk. Ephesus was subject to Rome. Being the political capital of Roman Asia it was also the official residence of the Roman Governor, the "Pro-Consul" of Asia. Rome did not like disorderly conduct or the taking of the law by provincial citizens into their own hands. There might very well be an enquiry into this affair should the story reach the ears of the Governor and in that case the least the city could expect would be a heavy fine. When such a thing happened, since the authorities were not particularly concerned from which of the citizens the money came, and most of the working population had no money anyway, it was usually the business men and the traders who had to pay up. Possibly Demetrius, on reflection, felt that this thing had gone altogether too far. There was at any rate no further trouble. When the town-clerk *"had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly"*. The enthusiasts for Diana who had raged into the stadium like lions went out like lambs. It is likely that the streets of Ephesus were models of order and rectitude for the next few days.

But the incident terminated Paul's work at Ephesus. He evidently felt, in the light of this personal hostility to him, that the interests of the growing church would be better served by his absence rather than his presence. During his two years' residence in the city, the Church had become well organised; there were several responsible men well able to fulfil every duty of the Christian ministry and the Apostle felt that he could now resume his travels. He took his leave of them and set sail for Macedonia.

AOH

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Please note correction to the date of the conference – Sunday **23rd** August

## **HIGH LEIGH 2009**

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, England

Monday, 17th – Sunday, 23rd August

**Theme – "The Will of God" (1 John 2.17)**

All ages are welcome.

A programme for teens and younger ones will be provided.

Contact: Accommodation Secretary: Joan Charcharos

Tel: 01442 381550

"It made the tragedy all the more tragic that at the very table there was one who was a traitor. Jesus Christ has at every communion table those who betray Him, for if, in His house, we pledge ourselves to Him and then if, by our lives, we go out to deny Him, we too are traitors to His cause."

William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible – The Gospel of Luke

## WHY CHRIST HAD TO SUFFER

*"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory!"*  
(Luke 24.26)

That was an enthralling talk which Cleopas and his companion had with the stranger they had encountered on the way to Emmaus upon the day of the Resurrection. Enthralling, because it had brought into one focus all those apparently contradictory Old Testament prophecies of the Christ that they knew so well and understood so little. They had so often pondered them with hearts uplifted, as they read of the glory of the coming Messiah. Their minds puzzled as they laboured through the eloquent descriptions of the One who must suffer and die before the purpose of the Lord in the restoration of His people could be fulfilled. Suffering and glory; both were there, on the sacred pages, but in their impatient longing for the realisation of the golden days of Messianic power they turned away from the suffering and thought only of the glory.

But why had there to be suffering? Why could not Christ have come in all the plenitude of His Divine power and entered straight away upon His ordained work of reconciling whosoever will to God, through the successive stages of evangelism, repentance, and conversion? So would be brought to pass the ultimate reality so vividly pictured in the Book of Revelation, where the dwelling-place of God is with men, and there is no more death, no more sorrow and crying, because the former things are passed away and all things are become new. Someone will answer that before all these things can transpire, mankind must be redeemed from the death sentence which rests upon the entire race, inherited from Adam, and this is true. So Christ must first die, giving His humanity a Ransom for all, before He can breathe new life into the dead and set their feet upon that Highway of Holiness which can at the last lead them to the happy condition described in Revelation. But even so, the question must be asked, by us today as it was by those earnest souls of so many centuries ago, why did Christ have to suffer? Could He not have died naturally and quietly immediately after His baptism in the Jordan? He could have even gone literally into death in the very baptising waters themselves, and so given His life for the world at that moment, relinquishing a humanity He would never take again? Could that not entitle Him, risen from that death by the power of the Father, as He in fact was later on after the agony of the Crucifixion, to bring back from the dead the human race He had thus bought by the laying down of His life. Then restoration of all things could begin straightaway?

Had that been possible, surely that is the way the Divine plan in Jesus Christ would have gone. How can it be thought that God, who is Love, would deliver His beloved Son into the suffering and ignominy which did surround His earthly life and death if it was not necessary? The very fact that our Lord was called

upon to tread this pathway of suffering is full evidence that this was the only way. *"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things"* He said to those two wondering disciples *"and to enter his glory"*. There must be a definite relation and connection between the suffering and the glory. The one is an essential prerequisite to the other. It was not that God *would* not confer the glory without the prior suffering; it was that He *could* not. For some fundamental reason clear to the Father, and clear, too, to the Son, even though not at all clear to us, it had to be that Christ must first suffer, and after that enter into His glory. That is why the Apostle Peter in 1 Pet. 1.11 referred to the Holy Spirit in the prophets of olden time speaking of *"the suffering of Christ, and the glory that should follow"*.

The supreme purpose for which our Lord came to earth and took upon Himself our human nature was that He might achieve the salvation of men, their deliverance from the effects of sin and their restoration to the Divine likeness, that they might be fitted for the Divine purpose. But this great work is not to be accomplished by waving some kind of magic wand above men's heads, nor yet by reciting the laws of God to them and expecting them instantly to obey. Man at the first had the opportunity of attaining the Divine likeness by heeding the Divine commands, but he proved unable to attain the goal that way. And so sin entered, and with sin came suffering, and death, even upon those, says Paul *"who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression"*. So it is through suffering that man comes ultimately to his destiny in glory, just because there is no other way. And whether we think of this as a destiny attained by the learning of lessons taught by hard and bitter experience, or whether there is some deeper and hard to be understood principle in God's creation which decrees that perfection can only be attained through suffering, it is clear that this is the way through which man must pass. It is also the way through which our Lord passed. He was of God and with God in all the eternal ages before man was. He came to earth, having emptied Himself of that high heavenly estate and took upon Himself the bondman's form of human nature, still retaining His oneness with the Father the omnipotent. Yet we are told that while in the flesh He *"learned obedience through the things which he suffered"* (Heb. 5.8). That word "learned" means literally to learn by practice or experience. "Obedience" means to render submissive acceptance, the obedience of one who conforms to God's commands. The writer to the Hebrews in the next verse goes on to say that being thus *"made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* So something more than the act of dying on the cross was necessary; there was something imparted to our Lord in consequence of His suffering which was not there before, something which itself became the means by which men might eventually attain union with God. The captain of our salvation, says Heb. 2.10, is Himself made perfect through suffering. That word 'author' has the significance of that in which the cause of anything resides. The essence of the

power by which Jesus will turn the hearts of men to God in the coming age of His kingdom on earth, or now, in the case of those who do come to him, was instilled into Jesus by virtue of His sufferings. Until that was accomplished He was not ready or able to commence His great work of reconciling man to God. So the test must be understood as His being made perfect or complete for this particular work by His sufferings.

Perhaps a glimpse of the hidden principle that demanded this situation is afforded by the words of Heb. 2.18 *"In that he himself hath suffered, being tested, he is able to succour them that are tested"*. It is as though He says to those who so sadly need his ministrations that they might eventually attain eternal life, "I have walked this pathway of suffering and I have come through triumphantly. Now I can show you the way with sympathetic understanding and positive knowledge, for I have gone this way myself". Is it that Jesus can only save the fallen by positive and actual identification with them, in all their troubles and all their suffering, experiencing all the injustice and violence and hardship which is their lot and bearing it with them? A word from the Old Testament expressive of the relation of God to His people, Israel, expresses just the same principle. *"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them"* (Isa. 63.9). If the Father shared the sufferings of His wayward creatures, could the Son do less?

Now there must be related to the sufferings of Christ the grandest theme of the Scriptures, that there is life, eternal, everlasting, undying, life in Christ and only in Christ. "No other name is given, no other way is known" runs the old hymn, and that only echoes the words of Peter *"there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved"*. Life for the world comes in and through Christ, highly exalted and given a name which is above every name. But the suffering had to come first. Is it then that the seed of life has to be rooted in the soil of suffering? Is there some law of creation not yet understood by us which rules that life can only be born out of suffering? Is there, embedded deep in this mystery, the final answer to the problem of the Divine permission of evil? When Jesus spoke of the seed of corn cast into the ground and there dying, that it may afterwards spring forth into new life and bear much fruit, was it this of which He was thinking? When He talked about men eating His flesh as bread, consuming it utterly until it was no more, that it may be for the life of the world, was it this that held the foremost place in His thoughts? The youthful prophet Isaiah, receiving His first Divinely-bestowed commission to take God's word to Israel, was told of a leafless oak which had suffered all the vicissitudes of summer and winter, and now stood, a bare hulk destitute of apparent life. But those same adverse processes had created the living sap which in a new year would rise again into the tree and bring forth leaves and flowers and fruit. So is the holy seed to apostate Israel, said the Lord to Isaiah. So is the

new life inherent in the glorified Christ to the suffering and death which preceded His resurrection.

Before the creation of man there were untold ages during which the earth was being prepared for life. Through aeons of geological time the elements of which this planet is composed were passing through stupendous changes and mighty convulsions. Fire, frost and water were all playing their part, until all the strife and upheavals and turmoil culminated in the quiet serenity of Eden and man entered into the home prepared for him. So life came out of chaos. But until all that preliminary work, violent and savage as it was, had been accomplished there could be no life. Out of the suffering of the inanimate creation was born the life of animate man.

Joseph the son of Jacob, lord of all Egypt, could never have attained to his high office had he not first endured the school of physical suffering. Envied and hated by his brethren, sold as a slave into Egypt, unjustly condemned and left to languish in prison, he spent most of his early manhood in the abyss of suffering. But it was in that abyss and by means of that suffering that he developed those elements of character which enabled him to discharge with wisdom and judgment the duties of his later high position and all the responsibilities of all his regal glory. So he became the means of salvation to his father's family and their preserver and life-giver.

Moses was prepared for his historic mission in the school of mental suffering. Perhaps it is not easily realised what those long years in Midian meant to Moses. At forty years of age, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds, burning with zeal to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, he had all his high hopes dashed to the ground in an instant. *"He supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them"* said Stephen at his trial *"but they understood not."* And in the outcome Moses, for all his zeal and ability, found himself doomed to spend forty years in a camp of Midianites, keeping sheep. But it was that experience in Midian which prepared him for leadership in Egypt. The opportunities for calm, leisured reflection on the ways and the laws of God fitted him for the office of Lawgiver to Israel. The knowledge of the ways and byways of the trackless wilderness in which he pastured his flocks, enabled him to lead the people unerringly to their desired haven. Out of Moses' travail in Midian was born that which ultimately became the salvation of Israel.

Had Job never endured the darkness of his sufferings, and afterwards emerged into the light, purified and enriched by his experiences, he would never have been able to say to God, *"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you"*.

None of these men would have accomplished the great work they did accomplish had they not, like our Lord, been *"made perfect through suffering"*.

As with our Lord, they all must first suffer these things, and afterward enter their glory.

But not only is the suffering of Christ related to His resurrection life; it is also related to His resurrection power. He possessed power before He came to earth yet the Scriptures declare that in some mysterious manner He possessed greater power afterwards. The second Psalm, the Hundred and Tenth Psalm, almost the whole of Hebrews, and many other allusions, all attest this. Just before His ascension Jesus told His disciples, as though it was a thing only recently conferred upon Him, "*all power is given to me in heaven and in earth*" (Matt. 28.18).

At His ascension the Father set Him at His own right hand "*far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named ... and hath put all things under his feet*" (Eph. 1.21). What kind of exaltation is this, so far and away beyond His dignity and office before He came to earth? What was the cause of this exaltation? Whatever it was, it was and is intimately associated with experiences through which He passed whilst on earth and which Scripture specifically declares fitted Him for His mission of reconciling man to God. "*He is made*" says the writer of Hebrews "*after the power of an endless life ... wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them*" (Heb. 7.16, 25). Paul adds his testimony: "*For to this end Christ both died and rose, and revived*" – entered upon new life – "*that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living*" (Rom. 14.9). Why must He die to be mankind's Lord? Was He not, as the Word of God, the manifestation of God to men, the one by whom all that is made was made? Was He not man's Lord before, right back at the beginning? At the resurrection Christ must have become man's Lord in a new sense and He was empowered to deal with men in a new fashion which had not been possible before. "*Let all the house of Israel know assuredly*" said Peter on the Day of Pentecost "*that God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2.36). Must it therefore be concluded that out of the ruins of a broken body, and only out of the ruins of a broken body, must rise the all-powerful Lord of all mankind. Out of suffering, willingly and patiently endured conforming to the will of God, is born power which will eventually save all mankind.

Now if all these things be true of Christ the Head, what of the Church which is His Body? We are called to follow in His steps, to endure whatever of hardship and suffering may come our way as He endured, and afterwards to be associated with Him in the work of reconciling mankind to God. When toward the end of his life Peter penned his epistle to his converts he exhorted them to "*rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy*" (1 Pet. 4.13).

If the Church is partaker of Christ's sufferings then surely in the new life beyond the veil the Church will receive an endowment of power made possible by and born out of suffering. *"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment"* says Paul in 2 Cor. 4.17 *"works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."* The one is the direct cause and source of the other. Like their Lord, every member of the Church will have learned obedience by the things which they have suffered, and, again like Him, being made perfect, will have their part in conferring eternal salvation upon all who obey God.

AOH

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## WHEN THE SUN STOOD STILL

### *An examination of a wonderful happening (Joshua 10.6-14)*

The story of the sun and moon standing still at the command of Joshua provides the incentive for many excursions into astronomical science in order to demonstrate that the idea is by no means so fantastic as it sounds. Some enthusiasts, such as Prof. Totten in the nineteenth century, have produced elaborate calculations to show that such a super-naturally lengthened day must have happened once in human history. Records of ancient nations have been searched for stray allusions to so noteworthy an event; but in all this fervour of scientific research the fact that a careful examination of the passage in question fails to justify the popular impression has generally escaped notice.

It was shortly after the entry into the Promised Land that Joshua's army, battling to secure possession of their new home, marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon. It was an uphill journey of sixteen miles, involving a climb of several thousand feet into the mountains, to intercept and do battle with the Canaanites and Amorites. Upon their arrival, at probably about five in the morning, Joshua gave battle, and, tired as his men must have been after their all night forced march, defeated the enemy and pursued him for seven miles to Beth-horon (Josh. 10.10). They went over the crest of the mountain into the valley of Ajalon, which runs in a south westerly direction to the Mediterranean Sea. It was apparently at this point that Joshua, seeing that his prey was escaping him, uttered the cry that has been interpreted as an invocation to the powers of heaven to intervene on his behalf: *"Sun, stand still at Gibeon, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies... The sun stopped in mid-heaven, and did not hurry to set, to go down about a whole day."*

Whatever the real purpose of Joshua's appeal, the powers of heaven were already taking a hand in the battle in another manner. A violent hailstorm from the Mediterranean was sweeping up the valley of Ajalon, a not uncommon phenomenon in the valley, then or now, in its course overwhelming the fleeing Canaanites. Their rout was complete; many of them perished; *"they were more*

*that died with hailstones"* says the chronicler *"than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword"*. The Israelites, high up on the summit of Beth-horon, apparently escaped the hail but the Canaanite host was decimated. This was the decisive battle which laid the land of Canaan open to the invading Israelites.

From verses 10 and 11 it is clear that the Canaanites encountered this storm whilst they were between Beth-horon and Azekah, and therefore well down in the valley. Joshua must have been standing on the summit of Beth-horon, and from his exalted position perceived the storm approaching from the sea long before the Canaanites were aware of its onset. From where he stood, facing the south, his gaze could take in the heights of Gibeon on his left hand, and on his right the valley of Ajalon, crowded now with the retreating foe. The time would have been about eight a.m., for the seven mile pursuit between Gibeon and Beth-horon could hardly have occupied more than two or three hours. Gibeon lies E. by S.E. of Beth-horon, so that at this time the sun would appear to Joshua to be directly over the heights of Gibeon. Upon turning to his right and looking W. by S.W. through the valley of Ajalon, Joshua would see the crescent moon, in its last quarter, directly over the valley, faintly illumined by the rays of the sun. That this was the phase of the moon at the time is deduced from the fact that the Israelites crossed Jordan on the 10th of Nisan, and therefore ten days after the new moon. A study of the subsequent events with their date as recorded in the Book of Joshua shows that the battle took place about six weeks later. This is within a day or two of the 24th of Zif, the second month, so that the moon would be in the third quarter of the second lunation of the year. It is an interesting testimony to the historical accuracy of the Book of Joshua. Only at this one time in the month could the sun be over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Ajalon simultaneously from the point of view of an observer on the summit of Beth-horon.

It was not the "standing still" of the sun and moon, but the hailstorm, that achieved the victory for the Israelites. The confusion and disaster into which the Canaanite hosts were thrown by the pitiless rain of hailstones completed the havoc begun on Beth-horon by Joshua's warriors. What then was the purpose of Joshua's command to the sun and moon?

The words in question are not original to the Book of Joshua. They are quoted from the 'Book of Jashar' (see v.13). The account of the battle occupies vv.10 and 11, and the thread of the narrative is not taken up again until v.16. The intervening portion is a parenthesis, inserted by some later transcriber of the Book of Joshua, in order to place on record the words used by Israel's great leader on this occasion, words that apparently had been preserved only in this 'Book of Jashar'. After the quotation, which occupies v.12 and part of v.13, and the acknowledgment *"Is not this written in the Book of Jasher"* there follows a short observation (vv.14-15) by the same unknown transcriber by way of comment on the situation.

The Book of Jasher is referred to once elsewhere in the Scriptures, in 2 Sam. 1.18. Here is mentioned a song or poem called (the song of) "the Bow", dealing probably with the prowess of archers in battle; a song which David ordered should be taught the children of Judah. From this fact, and the fact that in the Joshua quotation the passage concerned is, in the Hebrew, not prose, but poetry, it has been concluded that the Book of Jasher was a poetic composition telling of the great events in Israel's history, and was in existence certainly in the time of David. We probably do well therefore to allow for poetic licence in the words in which Joshua's appeal is recorded – much as must be allowed when reading Jud. 5.20 *"The stars in their courses fought against Sisera"* and Ps. 18.9 *"He bowed the heavens and came down"*. Both expressions are taken from similar poetic compositions.

The passage in question then needs to be considered as a fragment of true history preserved in a fine piece of poetic language. *"Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."* The word here rendered 'stand still' is *"dom"* and means to be silent, quiet, still or dumb. Gesenius says that it is derived from the sound made by the shutting of the mouth and that its literal meaning is "to be dumb". Its significance is not that of standing still in the sense of cessation of motion, but of being still or silent in the sense of ceasing to perform a customary activity. Instances of its use are in Lam. 3.28; Jer. 8.14 (silence); Hab. 2.19 (dumb), 1 Kings 19.12 (still). The literal English of the Hebrew text is "Sun, on-Gibeon be-dumb, and moon, on-valley Ajalon".

The Israelites would be hard put to it to keep up with their fleeing foes. They had been on the move since the previous evening and it was essential that this victory be complete and that no appreciable number of Canaanites be allowed to escape. The sun's heat was rapidly increasing as the morning advanced, and Joshua must have feared above everything else its effects upon his weary troops. In this extremity he appealed to the Lord (v.12), but not for the cessation of the sun's progress, which would involve a corresponding increase in the duration of noonday heat. Rather it was for the silencing or cessation of the sun's activity so that the greater coolness of the day might invigorate his tiring forces.

God answered the prayer by sending the hailstorm described in the account. As the dark clouds swept the valley, first the crescent moon over Ajalon, and then the sun over Gibeon, were blotted out, and their rays *"ceased"* from the earth for the remainder of the day, *"until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies"*.

In v.13 *"The sun ... hasted not to go down about a whole day"*, there is no justification in the Hebrew text for the use of "down". The word is *"boa"*, a verb meaning to come in or to enter, but not to go down or descend. It is normally used for 'to enter' as into a chamber, and is so used in some parts of the Old Testament to describe the sun's setting, as if entering into his chamber. But in the

passage under examination it probably signifies that the sunlight failed to break through the clouds so as to enter upon the earth for the remainder of that day. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the word for "sun" used in this account is not "*chammah*", the sun itself, but "*shemesh*". the sun's radiance or rays, or as we would say, the sunlight. Similarly the word for "moon" used in the passage is "*yareach*", "the scent of the moon", i.e., moonlight, and not "*levonah*", the lunar satellite itself.

*"And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel" (v.1.14).* This is the comment of the unknown transcriber who felt bound thus to complete his quotation from the Book of Jashar. The reference is of course to the hailstorm, which, the account tells us, was definitely sent by the Lord to ensure the Israelite victory.

AOH

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### TOWER OF THE FLOCK

*"And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion." (Micah 4.8).*

This has always been considered a Messianic prophecy, speaking of the time when Christ shall take his power and reign, proving himself the true "*tower of the flock*", the true "*stronghold of the daughter of Zion*". The theme is associated with Chapter 5 "*Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah ... out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel...*" Bethlehem, in old time the royal city of David, is pictured as the place from which the Messiah comes forth to his people – as indeed in the days of his flesh He actually did.

The reference to the "*tower of the flock*" is to a tower having that name which stood near Bethlehem in ancient times. Mention is made of it in Gen. 35.21 in the story of Jacob. Immediately after Rachel's death and burial "*on the way to Bethlehem*" it is said "*and Israel journeyed and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.*" That name in Hebrew is *Migdol Edar*, "*the tower of the flock*". It was probably a tower from which the shepherd could look afar and watch the interests of his scattered flock. It must have stood all through the fourteen or fifteen centuries which elapsed between Jacob and Micah, a silent witness to the purpose of God that royalty, the leading of the flock, should one day come forth from Bethlehem. Who first built the tower and what was his purpose in so doing, we do not know. All we do know is that Jacob pitched his tent there, that it stood through the centuries, that Micah addressed it with poetic fervour and prophesied that the promised dominion would one day come to the true "*tower of the flock*", the Lord Jesus Christ.

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It is good to accept with open hand the gifts of God; it is better far with open heart to accept the Giver himself. No wealth of earth is so desirable as the gifts of God; the whole world itself is but refuse indeed in comparison with possessing God.

# STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

## *Part 10 1 John 3.1*

The third chapter of John's first epistle opens up a new subject. It has already been observed that the first two chapters are complete in themselves and may, for all that we know, have originally constituted a separate letter. The end of the second chapter concludes one line of argument quite definitely and the beginning of the third as clearly commences an entirely fresh line of thought. The theme of the first two chapters is constancy – to abiding in God, in Christ, in the light, in the Truth. The theme of the remaining three chapters of the epistle is love – God's love for us, our love for God, for Christ, for each other, for the Truth. John wants us to know that not only is Christian constancy, "abiding in Him", necessary, if we are to attain the *"prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus"*, but also the supreme quality of love, love in all its aspects and its powers. In the first two chapters he tells us that it is little use a man claiming to be walking in the light when there is darkness in his own heart and mind. Now he tells us that we sadly deceive ourselves in claiming to love God if we have not love for our brother. And the love that we have for our brethren must be of the same quality as the love that God has for us. That is a sobering thought. This is no mere feeling of good fellowship or tacit acceptance and toleration of our brethren without any deeper or more personal feeling. Those whom we recognise, as fellow members in the Body of Christ, must be of as great concern to us as we ourselves are to God.

But before coming to that heart-searching thought John seeks to establish the foundation of our fellowship together and shows that our whole acceptance before God is based upon love: not, at first, our love for Him, but His for us. *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"* (3.1). In that simple sentence of twenty words John preaches a most eloquent discourse enshrining the whole truth of our acceptance with God. It is of His love, a love greater than man has ever known or can ever conceive in relation to any other thing. Its outcome is that we, weak, puny things of earth, are become sons of God, offspring of the Most High, having the right of entry to His presence, as children have the privilege of access to their natural fathers. The words of John seem all too inadequate to express the feeling which he has at heart, when one compares the insignificance of mortals, inhabiting this grain of matter floating on its way through the vast recesses of space. Here is majesty and magnificence of the One Who is King of kings and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see. *"Behold what manner of love"* that has raised us to so lofty a position of honour and privilege in His sight, what love is this? We know that the love of God extends throughout all His creation. None of His erring creatures are debarred from

a share in the redeeming power of that love if they will. The most famous text in all the Bible tells us that God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only Son for its redemption. The text is so well-known, and so familiar, that we tend to lose sight of its significance. We think of the gift and to some extent fail to realise the depth of the love that inspired the gift. We reflect upon the love of Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save that which was lost and we measurably overlook the love of the Father which inspired that coming. Of course, both those manifestations of love are really one and the same love, for this is only one of the aspects in which "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10.30). And this oneness which subsists between the Father and the Son demands that we reject completely and for ever the old theological idea that Jesus waits to be merciful to the sinner whilst God demands only judgment upon the sinner. The old mediaeval paintings that depicted Christ protecting the fallen world from the vengeance of its angry God were little short of blasphemous; their creators can only escape that charge on the plea of ignorance. We in our day have no such excuse and we must realise that the entire plan of salvation is permeated through and through with the love of God, manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord. God is just; there can be no doubt about that. Jesus is just also, for He is one with God, but God is also the justifier of him who believes in Jesus, and Jesus Himself has said "*he that comes to me I will in no wise cast out*" (Jn. 6.37). These sublime words before us could never have been coined by John if he had believed, as many ill-instructed disciples in later days have believed, that Jesus' death on the Cross was a blood-sacrifice offered to God in order to appease His wrath with man. That view is occasionally met with even today and it is rank blasphemy. The wrath of God that is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness cannot be appeased by anything short of the elimination of the sin that has provoked the wrath, and that wrath is directed against the sin and not the sinner. Hence the saying that is familiar to some of us 'God hates the sin but loves the sinner'. Those eight words at any rate express sound doctrine and true theology. When God the Father loved the sinful race of men, Jesus loved them too and came to save them. When Jesus the Son suffered as He must suffer, in the course of that act of redemption, the Father suffered too. It could not possibly be otherwise and still be true that "*I and my Father are one*".

It is this love of God that is the guarantee of an opportunity for all men in the coming Age. He made men for life and not for death. Even although death must ever remain the penalty for wilful and irrecoverable sinners, it is going to be a hard thing for those same sinners to steel themselves against all the persuasive influences God will bring to bear upon them during the age to come. It is sometimes urged, as a reproach, that the gospel of the Kingdom is a gospel of a second chance. We do not need to apologise for the fact nor attempt to whittle

it down by arguing that under present conditions of sin, no man really has had a fair "first" chance. The Prodigal Son in the parable had a second chance and the story ended happily. There are many Biblical characters whose histories show that they had a second chance to recover from past failures and demonstrate their loyalty to God.. *"How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him"* asked Peter *"till seven times?"* How positively and forcefully came the answer of Jesus to him *"Nay; until seventy times seven"* (Matt.18.21-22). Jesus knew Himself to be fully in tune with the Father when He laid down that principle. Not until the deliberate sinner has rejected every incentive to righteousness the Heavenly Father can possibly put before him will Divine love return to itself and leave the sinner to the inevitable result of his wilful sin. Even that will be the final proof of love. The love withdraws this gift of life, that the recipient neither desires nor can use aright, granting him what is really a blessing to him, the only alternative to continued life in an environment which he resents and into which he will not fit. God's great love for man, then, is shown in four main aspects.

The first is His provision for man in creation. The earth and all it contains is so admirably fitted for the use and enjoyment and continued life of perfect humankind that we cannot but see here evidence of God's great love. Very soon after the beginning, we read of the first man to work and make articles in copper and iron. It was God who stored the copper and iron ore in the heart of the earth, vast ages before Eden, for man to find in due time and convert to his use. We obtain our light and heat and power in this modern age very largely from coal; it was God Who caused to grow those rich forests of the Carboniferous Era, long ago, that they might eventually provide the black mineral that is so essential to our needs today. Upon the earth, below the sea, in the sea, in the air, everywhere we look, we can see evidence of God's love for man in the preparations that He made for man's well-being before ever man was.

Secondly, God's love is shown in His forbearance with man's sin. It is idle to pretend that the "high and lofty one that inhabits eternity" looks down with indifference upon the wickedness and cruelty of man. Surely it is only His infinite Wisdom – and His great Love – that restrains Him from doing what the prophet Isaiah upon one occasion besought Him to do, rend the heavens and come down in swift judgment. True, from time to time He has intervened in judgment – Eden, the Flood, the Exodus; many are the instances of such judgments - but always they have been part of His calculated Plan and never has Divine judgment made an utter end. It has always left the way clear for a fresh start. That is a striking evidence of God's love for this sinful race.

Thirdly, God's love is shown in His plans for man's future. So very few know of these. We who hold this precious knowledge ought to esteem very highly the privilege that is ours. *"As truly as I live, says God, the whole earth shall be full of my glory."* *"The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the*

*effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." "And my people shall dwell in a quiet habitation." "The tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them."* All these and many more are promises yet to be fulfilled and promises that are sure of fulfilment. They are all evidences of God's love for man and His determination that mankind shall yet attain to the condition of perfection that He has all the time intended.

Fourthly, God's love is shown in His contentment with man in the Ages of glory that are to follow the ending of the Millennial Age. The very phraseology of Scripture breathes the spirit of expectancy and anticipation that God manifests as He looks forward to that glad day that sees the consummation of His Plan upon earth. *"And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord"* (Isa. 66.23). It is impossible not to sense the spirit of satisfaction with the completed work that pervades those words. *"There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor sighing, for the former things are passed away... he that sits on the Throne says, Behold, I make all things new"* (Rev. 21.4-5). Just as Jesus will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53.11) so will the Heavenly Father behold all that He has made. He will say once again, as He did in the day of Adam's creation, *"Behold, it is very good!"* In that eternal contentment with all that He has done with man and made of man in this earth we have a grand manifestation of so *"great manner of love"* bestowed by Him upon His earthly creation.

Then if this must be so with mankind upon earth, how great must be the love our Father cherishes for His spiritual family, the Church. The human race will spend eternity *before* the Throne, content in the radiance of His presence, but those who have been faithful to their covenant of consecration with Him now, will spend eternity in the Throne, members of the family of heaven, having always direct access to the God and Father of us all. As members of the "Bride" of Christ, of the glorious celestial company that will be associated with the Son in all that hereafter He will do, there is surely a very intense sense in which the love of God is their portion. Although we cannot admit for one moment that God has "favourites", in the sense in which the world understands and uses that term, yet as on earth there are family affections and loves that mean so much more than the affections of the wider circle. It is because of closer affinities and interests and sympathies. So it must be with the Most High, with those whose hearts are given exclusively and wholly to Him. In the experiences of an ordinary life, those with whom we have gone through the most trying or dangerous experiences, those with whom we have laboured the most intensely for the attainment of some cherished ideal, are the ones for whom we normally have love of a depth and character that we do not find in us to extend to others. It is a love that has found its root and its sustenance in those common

experiences and trials and strivings, and without them it could never have been. So with the love of God to His sons; without our coming to Him and the wholehearted consecration of ourselves to His service and our sincere endeavours to conform to His image, the image of His Son, He could never enter with us into this experience of Divine love of such degree. We who have believed in God and witnessed and sacrificed for Him when all has seemed to be against Him; have held to our faith, enduring "*as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11. 27); is it not to be expected that there should be some reflection of all those things in the love wherewith the Father loves us?

This "what manner of love" that the Father has bestowed upon us therefore has two aspects. It is first of all of His great and abiding love for mankind that the opportunity of becoming the sons of God is offered to us. It is in His love for all mankind that He has provided that some may become sons of God now, that they may be the means of reconciling to God all who will, in the age to come, and so complete the great purpose which was inspired by and is the embodiment of God's love. It is of that love that provision was made in Jesus that "*whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (Jn. 3.16), In consequence we whose hearts are turned towards God may come to Him now in confidence, "*having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (Heb. 10.19) and so come into this hallowed condition of sonship. Having thus entered, we shall experience, as the years pass by, more and more of that other aspect of God's love that is strengthened and deepened by our conduct before Him and our devotion to Him. When the Apostle speaks of our being presented before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy he is using no empty phrase; there will be joy, exceeding joy, on both sides. "*The Father himself loves you*" said Jesus, and the Father Who so loves, will most surely manifest "exceeding joy" when those who have loved Him supremely are at length conducted into His presence.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

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"The First Beatitude means: O the bliss of the man who has realised his own utter helplessness and has put his whole trust in God, for thus alone, he can render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven".

William Barclay  
The Daily Study Bible – The Gospel of Matthew

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"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him."

(Romans 12.1 Phillips)

## THE GADARENE SWINE

*Luke 8.26-39*

The story of the Gadarene swine who were possessed by a legion of demons and in consequence drowned in the lake is an interesting sidelight upon the general Scriptural presentation regarding the 'fallen angels'. The incident itself is well attested, having been recorded by all three synoptic writers in Matthew 8.28-36, Mark 5.1-20 and Luke 8.20-34. The three narratives agree in all main points except that Matthew declares there were two demoniacs involved and the others tell of only one. The probable explanation is that two men were in fact concerned but one became the centrepiece of the incident and the demons spoke only through this one. This short note will not touch upon the general subject of demon obsession, which would require much more space for anything like adequate treatment. It will merely be remarked that according to the New Testament it was a very real thing, and trained observers in this present century have come across cases in their own experience where it has been a very real thing also. It is not suggested therefore, that the unfortunate victims in this incident were simply cases of epilepsy or psychological unbalance. Their brains were in sober fact under the control of malevolent spirit creatures, angelic beings living in a state of active rebellion against God and only deterred from their evil course by such restraints as God placed and enforced upon them. The wider view of this matter is well known to students of the Old Testament. There has been at some remote past time a rebellion against God and righteousness by certain of the angelic creation, which rebellion was dramatically arrested by the Most High at the time of the Noachic Deluge. The story in Genesis 6, coupled with various New Testament allusions affords a sufficiently detailed picture of what happened. The angels concerned, already in a state of rebellion, "*kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation*" to use Jude's words, and after materialising into physical bodies lived a lawless life as men upon earth. The Flood came and thereafter they were deprived of the power thus to materialise again, but at the same time were excluded from the spiritual world which is the place of the Divine throne (see Jude 6, 1 Pet. 3.19-20 and 2 Pet. 2.4). The history of witchcraft and spiritism through the ages since, has been largely the history of these rebellious spirits endeavouring to break through the restraints that have bound them, and continue their evil ways.

Hence, these two men, like so many before and since, having at some time or other, willingly given themselves over to the influence of the evil spirits, found their brains so controlled by them that they no longer had any will-power or volition of their own. Outwardly they manifested all the characteristics of incurable and violent insanity; but the insanity was not the result of a physically diseased brain. It was due to the operation of many supernatural intelligences – a 'legion' we are told in the accounts – all working simultaneously on the one human organism.

This was the state of the crazed wretch who met Jesus as He walked up from the shore of the lake. The local inhabitants would be keeping their distance; the madman had been habitually manacled but such was his demoniac strength that he continually broke free from his fetters and did quite a lot of damage before he could be overpowered and restrained again. He appears at this time to have been free and the impression given is that he rushed upon Jesus immediately the latter had stepped ashore from the boat. Perhaps there was in the madman's dark mind some glimmering realisation that here was the means of deliverance from his fearful plight if only he could get near to the Man of Nazareth. But to speak of his own volition was evidently beyond his power. When his lips did move, the words were controlled by the evil influences that possessed his mind and they were words not of pleading but of resentment. *"What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Are you come here to torment us before the time?"* Now that is a most important statement in Christian theology *"before the time"*. What means this frank avowal, first of Jesus' Divinity and Messiahship at a time when His own friends and followers had not as yet realised the fact, and second of the fact that a future judgment awaited them but that the time had not yet come? 'Torment' in all three narratives is *"basanizo"*, which means trial and testing and judgment as well as the execution of the consequent sentence. These evil angels, speaking through this crazed man's lips, admitted their knowledge that the Man before whom they stood was indeed the Son of God and tacitly admitted His authority over them. They admitted their realisation that judgment and sentence upon their evil course had yet to be passed but asserted that the time was not yet. In short, they accused Jesus of coming upon them for judgment before the time that had been pre-set in the Divine purposes. All of that implies that we are dealing here with definite superhuman intelligences who, despite their admitted evil, did possess some detailed knowledge of the Divine Plan. The Apostle Paul had some such knowledge when, twenty years or so later, he told some of his disciples that, if faithful, they were destined to *"judge angels"* (1 Cor. 6.3). He was thinking of the 'time' to which these referred in their question to Jesus, the Millennial "Day of Judgment" when not only evil amongst mankind but evil amongst the angelic creation is to be rooted out and all wilful evildoers, human or angelic, finally destroyed.

A significant expression in this narrative takes us back to very early times in human history. Two out of three accounts represent the evil spirits as using the expression *"the Most High God"* in referring to the Deity. *"Jesus thou Son of the Most High God."* It is significant because so far as men are concerned, this particular name for God dropped out of use several centuries before Christ. It seems to have been the earliest appellation by which men knew God, in its Hebrew form of *"el elyon"*, being succeeded then by *El Shaddai*, "the Almighty", and later by the incommunicable name quite incorrectly

transliterated into English by 'Jehovah' but meaning 'the Eternal'. These fallen angels, addressing Jesus, used the term that was current in the days that were before their restraining, the days before the Flood. It is significant that the angel who appeared to Mary at the Annunciation (Luke 1.32-35) and those who sang to the shepherds (Luke 1. 76) used the same expression (Greek *hupsistos*, equal to the Hebrew *el elyon*).

So the demons, perceiving that Jesus intended to bring their domination of this unhappy man to an end, "*besought him*" according to Mark "*that He would not send them away out of the country*", but according to Luke "*that He would not command them to go out into the deep*". Be it noted there was no attempt at defiance or resistance. They recognised the authority of Jesus and would obey, but they endeavoured to get the best terms they could. In Mark, "country" is "*choras*", meaning one's own proper place or where one should rightfully be, hence, one's own country. In Luke, "deep" is "*abussos*", from which is derived the English word 'abyss', the same as the "bottomless pit" of Rev. 20.1, into which the Devil is cast for the whole period of the Millennium. Neither Mark nor Luke were present at the time; all their information must have come from one or other of those disciples who were there. It may well be that both expressions were used; the accounts are quite likely to be abbreviated and Mark may have had his information from one, and Luke from another, of the witnesses.

By the "abyss" the demons may well have meant the same thing as Peter refers to in 2 Pet. 2.4, "*God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to 'tartarus', and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment*". Tartarus in Greek mythology was the prison of the Titans, who rebelled against the gods and were overthrown and imprisoned forever in a place "as far below Hades as earth is below heaven" – an apt description of the "bottomless pit" or "abyss". It would almost seem from these and other allusions in Scripture, that these "fallen angels" are constantly seeking to evade their restraints and sometimes partially succeeding. In this case it would appear as if Jesus acceded to their request not so to use his power to return them to "*Tartarus*" or the abyss, but definitely to command them no longer to obsess the man. So the "legion" of spirits "*came out*", and in the absence of any prohibition by Jesus – with His permission – they took possession of the nearest living creatures in view, a herd of swine which happened to be feeding in the vicinity.

Whether this is a unique case of demon obsession of brute beasts and just what such a thing involves we have no means of knowing, it can only be assumed that, as with the men, so with the beasts, the effect on the brain was similar to that of madness. The herd exhibited all the signs of sudden terror and panic and in a mad gallop they raced across the greensward, over a little cliff, and into the water, where they quickly drowned. Mark, with all his usual passion for descriptive detail, tells us there were about two thousand of them.

The question has often been asked; is such a proceeding in keeping with the known character of Jesus? Was it thus necessary to encompass the death of two thousand dumb creatures? In another place Jesus had said not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without the Father's knowledge. We may not intrude into the Saviour's motives for acting as He did, but we can assemble a few related facts.

How did the swine come to be there? The use of swine's flesh was forbidden to the Jews and even though the religious observance of many had become perfunctory their inherited antipathy to swine's flesh remained. The explanation is that the district around the sea of Galilee was largely cosmopolitan; five sizeable towns contained a considerable Greek and Roman population and there was a good demand for pork. Here in Gadara, certain not over scrupulous Jews were making a good living rearing pigs for market. The quick death by drowning of this particular herd only anticipated a much more painful death that would have been their fate a little later on. Viewed against that background, Jesus' act was one of mercy.

But the people of the district thought otherwise. They came to Jesus and they besought Him to depart. They evidently feared He would do the same thing to more of their herds and they were more concerned over the preservation of their vested interests than the casting out of demons from the obsessed. It is an ironic comment on the hard heartedness of mankind that whereas at first they all went in fear of the madman who infested their cities they now went in fear of the One who had delivered them from that scourge. In their eyes the remedy was worse than the disease. The casting out of demons was one thing, and a very acceptable thing it was, and all honour to the stranger who had landed on their shores to do this thing. But when it came to touching their financial interests and causing them to lose trade and money the whole attitude changed. That was too heavy a price to pay, and so *"the whole multitude ... besought him to depart from them"*.

That part of the story is a parable indeed. There are plenty in this world today who would gladly be delivered from the bondage and oppression of sin, but when they learn what the obligation will be, they turn away. True it is that the saving power of God is free to all, but then that is not the whole of the story. God does not just forgive sin so that man can make a clean start and sin again. God created man in the first place to have definite obligations toward Him and to assume definite responsibilities in and towards God's universe. No man will ever attain everlasting life without willingly taking upon himself those obligations and so fitting into the pattern of life which God has devised for him. So, after deliverance, there is a price to be paid, and even although the service of God is perfect freedom, it is still service and man must enter and remain in it.

The man who had been healed realised that. The story closes with the one-time demoniac, clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. He at any rate, having come in contact with the power of God which is unto

salvation, was not going to lose touch with it again. Luke tells us (8.38) that this man also besought Jesus. But it was not that he *"besought him to depart from them"*. He *"besought him that He might be with him"*. He wanted to give his life, for what it was worth, to Jesus. He wanted to be a disciple.

Jesus accepted him. It is true that the text says *"but Jesus sent him away, saying, return to your own house. and show how great things God hath done for you"*. That does not mean that Jesus rejected his proffered service. He accepted it, and sent the man straight away to be a missionary to his own people. Obviously his preaching would be much more effective in a circle where his past history was known than in a strange environment where he was just another convert to Jesus of Nazareth.

There the story ends, as so many of these stories do end, on a missionary note. The man who is first sighted coming forth out of the dead world of the tombs, exceeding fierce so that none could approach him, naked and demented, is last seen going forth into the world of living men, childlike and peaceable, clothed, in his right mind, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of peace. Jesus has done that same thing for so many in every generation. *"Come unto me, you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"*. There is a price to pay, but *"take my yoke upon you and learn of me ... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest to your souls"*.

AOH

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Don't expect a miracle to happen straight away  
When in your extremity you found time to pray,  
Have faith and go on praying, go on working too  
Problems worry everyone on earth, not only you.

Kathleen Partridge

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O Lord of life, give life to me.  
A living channel let me be –  
Not stagnant as the Dead Salt Sea  
But open, overflowing, free  
And filled with life, like Galilee.

Margot King-Smith

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Children with wonder minds can often see  
Much more in life than those who coldly  
Calculate within the range of finite ken  
To fit things of God into the words of men.

Vera Robins

## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

### *Part 2 The Lord – He is God (1 Kings 18)*

The days and the weeks and the months had passed and still there was famine and drought in the land. The historian who wrote down the story of those days did not say how long the famine lasted but James the Lord's brother somehow came to find out, and he said that Elijah *"prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months"* (Jas. 5.17) so that Elijah must have stayed with that widow woman at Zarephath and shared with her and her son the ever-continuing meal from the jar and the oil from the cruse for at least two years. And meanwhile because of their sin the people in Israel suffered from hunger and thirst and watched their cattle die and their crops wither. Like the men of Isaiah's day a century or so later it could be said of them *"They will pass through the land greatly distressed and they shall be hungry, when they are hungry they shall be enraged and will curse their king and their gods. They will turn their faces upward or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish and they will be thrust into thick darkness"* (Isa. 8.21-22 NRSV). The famine is pictured in the narrative, coming as a punishment from God for apostasy. It is probable that much of its severity was due to the inordinate ambition of King Ahab and the self-indulgence of his subjects in spending too great a proportion of their time and energy in the pursuit of commercial gain and selfish pleasure. It was so apparently easy and desirable in this time of close alliance with the merchant people of Tyre. The penalty of that pursuit of riches and ease had to be neglect of their lands and their pastures, their crops and their flocks. They had failed to maintain the water-courses and aqueducts which alone could preserve their water supplies under that fierce Palestinian sun. They had been ruthless in despoiling the forests to provide timber for their ornate city buildings, only to find, too late, that when the forests go, the rain goes also and the land quickly turns to desert. Have not later peoples done the same thing and incurred the same consequences? And are not men even now despoiling this fair earth, heedless of the inevitable retribution which must come upon them and which a few far-sighted men can perceive, while the masses go ever more feverishly after the worship of Baal which they have set up?

In the days of Ahab, the Lord did not intend to let the situation get out of hand. So, one day when Elijah was sitting outside the little house in Zarephath, the familiar inner voice came to him, saying, *"Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth"* (1 Kings 18.1). So the prophet collected his few belongings, bade good-bye to the widow and her son, doubtless leaving her with the heartening news that the famine would soon be ended and life become normal again. So he set out to retrace the hundred miles that lay between him and Ahab's palace at Jezreel.

Now in the meantime the people in Israel were reduced to desperate straits. This wicked King Ahab was more concerned at the prospect of losing his prize horses and mules, the mainstays of his military power and the adornment of his pageants, than for the welfare of his people, the preservation of the flocks and herds, the wheat and the barley. So he called his chief steward Obadiah to his side to join with him in an expedition through all the land, searching all places where water might yet linger, to find *"grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts"*. He cared not that his subjects were slaying their sheep and cattle in desperation for food, leaving nothing or next to nothing wherewith the land might recover when the rain should return. Though the nation perish, he must cling to the empty grandeur of his personal glory and his military might, and in this he was not so very different from many a ruler and statesman in the world today.

So they set out, Ahab with his attendants in one direction and Obadiah with his attendants in the other. Ahab was an unbeliever and an apostate, but Obadiah was devoted to the Lord God of Israel. Without doubt he mourned greatly in spirit as he traversed the countryside and perceived how the Lord's curse had blasted field and forest, flock and herd, and knew how well-merited had been the calamity. And as he went, and as he mourned, he came suddenly face to face with a terrifying apparition, a fierce giant of a man, shaggy of beard and wild of appearance, clad in goatskins and grasping a stout staff. Obadiah fell on his face in the dust before him for he knew who this strange man must be and he feared for some new calamity to fall upon suffering Israel. So in submissive tones he asked *"Is that you, my lord Elijah?"* Swift and uncompromising came the incisive reply *"It is I. Go tell your lord, that, Elijah is here."*

But this command put Obadiah in great fear, for although he was a sincere and devoted believer in the Lord God of Israel he was not the stuff of which martyrs are made. If he carried such a message to Ahab, and then whilst he was gone Elijah took himself off again, Ahab would vent his chagrin upon Obadiah. For, said he tremblingly, *"there is no nation or kingdom to which my lord has not sent to seek you ... As soon as I have gone from you the spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where; so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he shall kill me..."*. Then to make the best case he could for himself he protested to the grim-faced man before him *"I your servant have revered the LORD from my youth. Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred of the prophets in a cave and provided with bread and water... and now you say, Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here; he will surely kill me"*. The future looked very dark to this 'doubting Thomas' son of Israel. Caught between the unpredictable king and the redoubtable Elijah, he felt that circumstances were altogether too much for him and probably wished heartily that he had taken the other road so that Ahab himself had been the one to make this unfortunate encounter.

But Elijah, for all his forbidding exterior, was a kindly man at heart, and he reassured the fearful steward. In the most solemn and binding words known to Israel he gave his pledge. *"As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today"*. So Obadiah went to find Ahab, and Ahab came with haste, and there was Elijah, standing in the middle of the highway where Obadiah had left him.

Ahab was inwardly greatly quaking, for by now he had realised the truth of Elijah's prediction of more than three years ago. But he was a proud man and he professed an air of arrogance that he did not really feel. He thought he would take the offensive and try to put the blame upon Elijah, and so he advanced towards the silent prophet with a supercilious air. *"Is it you ... troubler of Israel?"* came his insulting question. Sharp as a sword-thrust, loaded with condemnation, came the reply. *"I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and followed the Baals."* That quickly wiped the cynical sneer off the king's face. More meekly now, King Ahab listened to the prophet's instructions; he was to gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, and all the prophets and priests of the false god Baal, and attend himself, and Elijah would meet them there. The king, even although he was the king, and normally took instructions from no man, felt he could do naught else but obey, and he turned and went back the way he had come, and all his attendants with him, to do as the prophet of the Lord had commanded.

So the people came, and the prophets and priests of Baal, and King Ahab with all his court, and they climbed mount Carmel, which is not much of a mountain really and can be climbed to the top in less than an hour, and there was Elijah, waiting. He looked upon them and they gathered around in a wide circle ready for whatever the man of God was going to do. Although in Elijah's command to King Ahab he had told him to gather all Israel to mount Carmel it is hardly likely that he intended all the millions throughout the land to leave all their pursuits and come. Much more probable it is that there were representatives present from every tribe and every part of the country. When all were present and all was ready there was made a great silence, and it was then that Elijah spoke,

*"How long will you go limping with two different opinions"* he demanded of them. *"If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."* And there was none that made answer, or opened the mouth, for some of the people were afraid of Elijah and many indifferent as to which god they should worship, and some believed secretly in the God of Israel but served Baal outwardly because of the king's command. Not many were there who really believed in the reality of Baal, and so for a variety of reasons the people were ashamed in the presence of this champion for the true God. They looked at one another and away from the piercing gaze of the prophet and shuffled their feet and held their peace.

When Elijah had waited, yet no man spoke, and the prophets of Baal looked on, and moved not, he made his proposal. Let the prophets of Baal, said he, prepare an altar and a sacrifice, and he would do the same and call upon the Lord to accept it. *"And the God that answers by fire"* said he *"let him be God"*. Then the people found their voices and in unison they responded *"It is well spoken"*.

So the prophets of Baal built an altar, a little pile of rough stones large enough to bear the wood of the fire and dismembered carcase of the bullock which was to be the sacrifice, and they set to work with a will, for Baal was the sun-god and here the sun was shining upon them from an azure sky and the morning heat was already beginning to be felt. So by about nine o'clock in the morning they were ready and that wicked King Ahab looked on from his place in the front as the leaders of the prophets approached the altar. And Elijah stood still, watching.

*"O Baal, answer us"* they cried *"You who are the lord of the heavens and flood the earth with light, send your fire upon this offering and show that you are God. O Baal, hear us; hear us and answer"*. But there was no voice, and no answer, and no fire. The sun pursued its accustomed way in the skies and climbed steadily towards the meridian but no sign came from heaven and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still. So the minutes passed and all the prophets of Baal took up the cry *"O Baal, hear us"*; and the hours passed, and they worked themselves into a frenzy and leaped about and around the altar, and cut themselves with knives until the blood flowed. And still there was no sign from heaven, and the sun climbed still towards the meridian, and the prophets of Baal cried and implored, and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still.

And now it was noon, and the sun was at its zenith, blazing down from a cloudless sky upon a parched and baked earth. The people, waiting still for the sign; that wicked king, beginning to look a trifle apprehensive; those prophets, flagging in their efforts through sheer physical fatigue, still crying faintly *"O Baal, hear us"*. And Elijah, who had stood immovable these three hours past, now striding across the grass towards the now well-nigh frantic prophets. *"Cry louder"* rose his stentorian voice in tones of bitter scorn *"for he is a god; perhaps he is meditating some important thing and has not heard you. Cry louder"* and in rage and anger they redoubled their efforts. But there was no voice. *"Cry louder"* came the mocking tones again *"he is a god; perhaps he is pursuing the chase and in the excitement of the hunt your cries have not reached his ears. Cry louder"* and again their entreaties went up into the silent skies. But there was no sign. *"Cry louder"* urged their tormentor. *"He is a god; perhaps he is on a journey from home and too far away to hear you. Cry louder"* and in their frenzy they foamed at the mouth and fell motionless upon the ground. But there was none that regarded. *"Cry louder"* came the culminating insult, *"He is a god, but perhaps he is fast asleep and will have to be awakened"*. And the sun went on its way in the heavens, declining to its setting, and it was three o'clock in the

afternoon and the offering lay on the altar, lifeless and still. And when the prophets of Baal saw the symbol of their god sinking into the western skies and knew it would soon be shedding its dying rays over the land they ceased their supplications, and there was a great quiet.

That wicked King Ahab looked on with sombre eyes as the prophet of the Lord came forward and beckoned to the watching crowd. "*Come near unto me*" he commanded and all the people gathered around him in a wide circle. The altar of Baal with its useless sacrifice lay behind them, forgotten. Now the prophet was gathering stones, twelve large stones, carrying them one by one to the centre of the circle where he began to build the altar of the Lord. "*Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel*" rose the stentorian voice, calling to the heavens "*let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that you are the Lord God, and that you have turned their heart back again...*"

A blinding, vivid flash ... the lightning drove down from the clear sky, a dazzling sword-thrust to the altar, a consuming fire that burned the offering and the wood in a moment and vapourised the water in the trench into a white mist of steam. The vapour cleared away, and the people saw the stones of the altar lying shattered and scattered, the remains of the offering, cinders on the ground. And when they saw that, those people fell on their faces in fear and in awe, and they shouted "*The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God*".

Then the prophets of Baal sought to escape, for they knew that their cause was lost. The people, in the swift revulsion of feeling that had been induced by the spectacle they had seen, pursued after those prophets. Led by Elijah, the people took them down the mountain to the River Kishon which flowed hard by Carmel on its way to the sea, and there they slew all the prophets of Baal the false god and joined themselves anew to the covenant of the Lord. And that day was the greatest day Israel had known since the day in which Moses the Lawgiver had led them out of Egypt to find the Promised Land.

But Elijah was back on the top of Carmel, wrestling with God in prayer that the rain might now come and the famine end, and his servant on the crest of the headland looked westward across the Great Sea. Thus he presently saw arising out of the sea a cloud no bigger than a man's hand and that was a signal to Elijah that his prayer had been answered and that the rain was coming. So the prophet told Ahab to get himself back to Jezreel before the rain overtook him, and the people to disperse to their homes in faith that God would turn his face towards them again. Soon "*the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain*", and Elijah, that stalwart man of God, girded up his loins and ran in that rain, ran before Ahab's chariot to the gates of Jezreel.

*(To be continued)* AOH

## THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12.13-34

The man broke in abruptly, breaking the thread of Jesus' conversation with His disciples. He had a personal matter which to him was more important than all that Jesus had been saying. "Master" he urged *"speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me"*. The total irrelevance of his request to the subject on which Jesus was dwelling shows that in this case at least the Master's teaching was falling on completely deaf ears. The man was not interested in what Jesus had to say to him; only in what He would do for him.

A very noticeable factor in our Lord's ministry is the unceremonious manner in which He dismissed those claims on His attention that came from unworthy sources. Although He never missed an opportunity of doing good when such action was in accord with the object and tenor of His mission He would not use His power or authority on unworthy objects. In this case He saw through the man and refused his request without hesitation. He said "Man", (what scorn and contempt lie in the use of that epithet) *"who made me a judge and a divider over you?"* And without another word to him He turned to His disciples and began to talk about the evils of covetousness. *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of goods which he possesses"*.

It is evident that the original suppliant was a covetous man; he had become involved in argument with his brother over the disposal of their inheritance and was hoping to introduce the authority of Jesus to favour his side of the argument. That was his only interest in Jesus; he called him "Master" but he was not particularly interested in becoming a pupil, less still a follower who would give up the interests of this world and follow Jesus wherever He might lead. He was a covetous man and he meant to get all he could while life lasted and if the moral leadership of Jesus could be invoked to his advantage in this argument with his brother, he was going to invoke it.

The remark about covetousness was only the prelude to some more positive teaching. Straight away Jesus plunged into His parable. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, so plentifully in fact that he was faced with the problem of the disposal of his gains. There were of course a number of alternatives. Having taken enough to provide himself with a comfortable living he could devote the remainder to the relief of the poor. There were plenty such in Israel and the need was always there. Or he could make a generous donation to the Temple treasury for the work of God. There would be no lack of worthy outlets for his surplus. But no; he intended to keep all that he possessed for his own selfish enjoyment. He decided to pull down his granaries and storehouses and build bigger ones, and there store all that his land brought forth. Having done so, he would say to his soul, *"Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years, relax, eat, drink, be merry"*. The rich man was too covetous to part with

anything that he had or to do good with it. He would hang on to it and look forward to a life of ease and indulgence.

But man proposes and God disposes. This man does not seem to have considered God in his calculations at all, but now God spoke to him. *"You fool"* – an epithet meaning one lacking reasoning power, unintelligent; perhaps our colloquial use of the word 'idiot' is the best equivalent – *"this very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"* To that, of course, there was no answer. The one circumstance in life over which the man had no control was come upon him, and in the face of that fact all his planning and expectation was come to nought. There is an expression in use in this our expressive day "You can't take it with you" and that is the thought which came at last to this man who had laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God.

Let that last point be well considered. This man's fault lay not in the acquiring of wealth or of goods. To the extent that he diligently cultivated his lands and cared for his flocks and herds he did well, for the earth has God given to the sons of men as a stewardship, to be wisely administered and made to bear increase. Slothfulness and idleness are never extolled in the Scriptures – rather the reverse. The unprofitable servant is reprov'd but the one who increased the money entrusted to him is commended. Up to the point where the man had increased his productivity tenfold he did well; the fault lay in the disposal of his gains. He failed to recognise his wealth as a stewardship from God. *"All things come of you, and of your own have we given you"* sang the Psalmist but this man had forgotten that. The needs of his daily life were supplied, and well supplied; now came the question of an acknowledgment to God and some return made to God. There was nothing of that in the man's mind. He failed to admit that all he had gained came in the first place from that which God gave and that some return was appropriate. More than that, he also failed to realise that the purpose of man's existence is not merely to absorb food and drink and pleasure and thus enjoy the blessing of life without bearing any responsibility toward others or fulfilling some useful purpose in creation exterior to himself. *"No man lives to himself"* wrote Paul. Each and every man is designed by God to live for a purpose, both now and in eternity, to fulfil some useful function in the fabric of His entire creation. This man intended to live a life of idleness, and idleness has no place in the Divine purpose. *"Bless the Lord, you mighty ones that do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word. Bless the Lord all you his hosts, his ministers that do his will"* (Psa. 103.20-21) is a conception of the celestial world and its abounding activity for which we are indebted to the Psalmist. This same energy and zeal is used for the administration and orderly conduct of the material creation, must animate men if they are to be adjudged worthy of what, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, is called the inheritance prepared for them

from the foundation of the world. The keynote of creation is work – without fatigue, without sweat of brow, divorced from the unpleasant associations normally attached to the term, but work nevertheless. These activities are necessary for the proper maintenance of the order of existence in which men have their being, and this man did not want to work any more. He had made his pile and he wanted to sit back and enjoy it.

So the rich man passed through the gates of death empty-handed, with nothing to show for all his years of labour. He could have laid up in store rich provision with God for the eternal future, stores of sterling character and understanding of the principles of righteousness and Divine government, that he might fill a useful place in the eternal world. He might have had stores of sympathy and compassion and experience of human folly and weakness, gained from the wise and beneficent administration in this life of the wealth he had acquired. These are qualifications which would fit him for use in God's future work of reconciliation and reclamation of men in the day of Messiah's Kingdom. But he had none of these. He came to God without anything to show for what God had done for him, a unit of creation that had yet to find his proper place in God's scheme of things.

Jesus drove the lesson home. *"Therefore"* He insisted, *"take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, nor for the body, what you shall wear."* Jesus did not mean that we are to give no consideration whatever to our bodily needs nor plan for the future. That would be the very negation of all His practical teaching. The Greek word employed here and in many similar passages is not one that refers to taking thought in the sense of considering or reasoning, but one which means literally to be anxious for, or to have care or concern. Most modern translations render "take no anxious thought" or "be not anxious" and this is precisely what Jesus meant. We who are Christians must realise that God has the oversight of all our interests and will overrule circumstances for our good; He can provide against the unforeseen events of life and we may give ourselves without distraction to His service in the security of that knowledge. That does not mean that we should live a hand to mouth existence without using any part of our present gains to make necessary provision for the future. Christian stewardship demands that we order our lives within the limits of our ability, that we can expect to go on serving the Lord to the end. Neither does it mean that we should announce our intention of "living by faith" – which may be an excuse for sponging on the generosity of other Christians to avoid working at a regular occupation or undertaking any of the normal responsibilities of citizenship. It does mean that we should put the service of God and the interests of His work foremost in our lives, making all other things subsidiary and using all that comes to us in this world as aids to this supreme object.

Jesus' reference to the ravens and the lilies is liable to be misunderstood. The ravens, He said, neither sow nor reap, but God feeds them. Lilies neither toil nor spin but are arrayed more magnificently than Solomon in all his glory. His words need careful reading. God has designed creation so that the ravens can obtain their food and live their lives in a perfectly natural fashion, instinctively going to the place where food is to be gathered and finding it there. He has so ordered Nature that the lilies, as they grow, can absorb light and air and moisture, and the elements of the earth, to build the wonderful structure that is a flower. These things happen because the ravens and the flowers fit quite naturally into the place God designed for them, and so fulfil their function in creation. So it is with us. We can rest in the knowledge that there is a place for us in God's purposes and that nothing save our own unbelief or obstinacy or wilfulness can prevent our occupying that place. We can be as the ravens and the lilies, fulfilling our designed place in creation in complete orderliness and serenity, giving glory to God by the very fact of our being. Just as the ravens must go to find their food, just as the lilies must lift up their faces to the sun and push their roots deeper into the earth, so must we be diligent in sowing and reaping, toiling and spinning, to fulfil our own particular destiny before God. It will be, always, in the serene knowledge that He is overseeing all and we are doing His will. There need be no anxious thought then; we are units in His scheme and He is controlling all things, cognisant of every life that waits upon Him.

*"Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?"* asked Jesus. He called this *"that thing which is least"* but the addition of eighteen inches to one's height would seem to be a pretty big thing. In point of fact the AV translators misunderstood this expression altogether. *"Helikian"* means extent of years, not extent of inches, and is rendered *"age"* in other translations. Which of them could lengthen his life by the shortest possible span? That was Jesus' question. No man can extend his life by worrying about it. No man can avoid entering at last into the portals of death. In the final analysis we have to trust God because we have no power of our own. He gave us life, all the things which are necessary to continue life, and He alone knows the ultimate purpose of life. The things of the present are transient and must sooner or later pass away. The life that is in us is capable of eternal continuance, sustained always by God, who is all-powerful. We have to discover His purpose, and place ourselves in line to be fitted into that purpose. Everything else will fall into place. *"Seek first the Kingdom of God"* was the conclusion of the lesson *"and all these things will be added unto you."*

AOH

## RELATIONSHIPS

### *A study in Matthew 7.13-29*

The previous verses dealt with unloving judgment of our brothers and sisters in Christ and with our relationship to God. Judgment may be good if not injuring another's reputation. We may use our judgment in selecting for a particular job. Sound judgment is required in our choice of close friends and in the use of time. These things demand that we seek God's will to reach a decision through the Holy Spirit. Now we examine briefly relationships believers and unbelievers, to false believers to our Lord Himself.

Verses 13-14 discuss the 'Narrow Gate' or door that opens up to us the Narrow Way. The AV uses the word 'strait' that translates from the Greek word *'thlibo'*. Vine refers this word to a narrow gorge, hemmed in by rocks. Elsewhere it has been translated affliction or persecution, as pressure coming from without. It can even describe the pressure of the crowd as Mark 3.9 speaks of Jesus being in danger of the 'crush'. So where does the pressure come from in the gate and the way? It may come from the world but that is under God's control.

Not everyone recognises the need for a Christian to take a specific course that is very different from the world's way. It is not everyone who has an opportunity to discover the Narrow Gate. In any event most men and women would rather take the easier way in life. They do not want, nor can they see the purpose in, the discipline that Christ demands from a disciple. The Narrow Way is for those who follow Jesus in total self-surrender. It is for those who are prepared to give up what comes naturally. They will take the trouble to discover what God wants them to do and then do it. Jesus warned His disciples as He approached the Cross that they too must be prepared to deny self and take a similar course to Himself. But God's will does not always imply physical suffering. Various followers of Jesus may have quite different experiences. This was clear from what Jesus said to Peter when they met in Galilee after the Resurrection. Peter asked Jesus "What shall this man do?" Jesus, in effect, told Peter to mind his own business. There was an interesting contrast between the two brothers James and John. James was one of the earliest martyrs but John lived to the end of the century. Many followers of Jesus have suffered at the hands of all kinds of people including some who claimed to be doing God's will when they tortured and killed fellow Christians. Others lived long active unhindered lives, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. The common factor among all who enter the 'Strait Gate' and travel the Narrow Way is that they follow the way that God, in His wisdom, marks out for them. He chooses the experiences and provides the needed grace to do what He wants. Even so, there are relatively few that give up all that they naturally would want to do in order to walk with Him. God reveals Himself and His purpose sufficiently for each one who passes that way. Knowledge is not the key to the Narrow Gate.

Verses 15-20. There are some who appear to be on the Narrow Way that leads to life but who are there by false pretences. They claim to be 'prophets', God's servants. It is important that God's children should recognise and avoid them. Such allow themselves to be deluded into becoming servants of Satan and enemies of God and His people. It is for those who follow Jesus to be guided by God's Spirit and clearly recognise those who are not mellowing in their Christian growth and do not produce the fruit of righteousness. Such are not real branches of the Vine. They are not living in Christ and cannot bear the fruit of the Spirit. It has always been so among God's people if we look through their history in the Old Testament. Hypocrisy and arrogance mark their character growth and selfishness is the fruit of their lives.

In verses 21-23 we come to our relationship to the Lord in doing His work and in obedience to Him. Firstly, we need to discover what He wants us to do. The Sermon on the Mount makes it clear that we are to do good works when it exhorts us to "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify God.*" (Matt. 5.14-16). It is so easy to get excited when our own plans appear to work out right and we apparently accomplish much for Him. We get excited too in the Scriptures and discover a teaching that had never been seen clearly before. But what has that teaching done for our Christian life? Has it brought us nearer to the Lord and made us become more like Him? Do our brethren, friends and neighbours see a difference in our behaviour as a result of the 'new revelation'? If so, we have gained mightily and can give thanks to our Father in Heaven.

We may do many wonderful things in Christ's name but doing what God wants us to do is really the key to becoming like Him in thought, word and action. It is possible to 'enjoy' our privileges in Christ but not come to know the Lord, as He tells us in this chapter (v 23). In fact those that accomplish so much yet are not doing God's will, are classified as 'evil doers'. Jesus told His listeners in the first century that those who heard His Word and did not obey it were like a man who built his house upon a poor foundation. The foundations are the part of the house that we don't normally see and may not be aware of them. But this is not a story of two foundations, but a story of two builders. Matthew tells us that the wise man placed his foundation upon rock and the foolish man built his on sand. However Luke records for us that the unreliable building had no foundation at all. (Luke 6.46-49). Travellers tell us that this scenario actually occurred in the Jordan flood plain. In Summer the river would dry up to leave a broad expanse of shore upon which a stranger to the place who was unfamiliar with the River Jordan, might actually build a hut on the soft ground, ignorant that the area would be flooded in winter. The fabric of the house is like the fabric of religion – a good outward show perhaps but of no serious consequence in the storms of life. Paul said something about the building process in the Christian

life when he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3.10) "... *Like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid which is Christ Jesus.*"

Outward religion is a shell concealing what is not good inside. It is so important that we are not just hearers of the Word but doers. Young and old, we are building day by day and we build well if we not only hear or read what Jesus says but take His instructions to heart, making sure that they become an integral part of our lives. Our human nature is so used to having its own way, and we are so ready to tear off and do something without proper reference to the Lord. Over the years and the centuries, many times God's people have 'learned half the story'; they have seized upon some isolated text or found some 'undiscovered truth' and acted impulsively to accomplish a great work. Doing God's will demands long hours in prayer and meditation so that the Lord can work upon our consciousness and convict us of what He wants us to understand. As we contrast scripture with scripture, and as we compare what the Word is actually saying in context, the real light dawns and we are aware that other Spirit-filled believers have come to the same conclusion about God's will.

Jesus, and His servants who wrote for the Early Church, had in the nature of their task to enunciate principles and give examples appropriate for the time and place to which they were writing and speaking. That fact does not provide us with an excuse to go off and 'do our own thing'. It does, however make us look carefully at what was said and written so that we understand the great principles of the Holy Word and make sure that they are really behind all that we say and do. Long years of deep spiritual thinking with the Lord in prayer, should make it possible for mature brethren to come to right conclusions. They may not at first totally agree with each other but they will discover enough of the Christian Path to proceed cautiously until the Lord makes His purpose clearer. Such can also be the experience of those who unavoidably travel a more lonely experience. The key is 'waiting on the Lord', praising Him for the way He has led us till now and trusting Him whatever the outward circumstance may appear to be. But we must lift up our hearts in praise, in appreciation for what He continues to do, counting our blessings as the days and years pass swiftly by, assured that He does know our plight and is really only waiting to be gracious – full of His grace – His faithful love.

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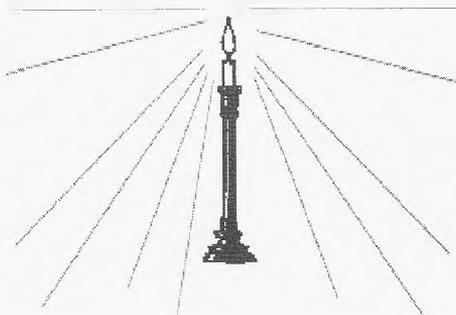
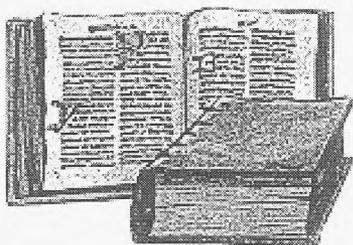
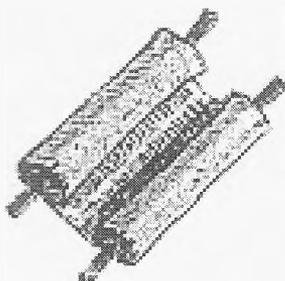
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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

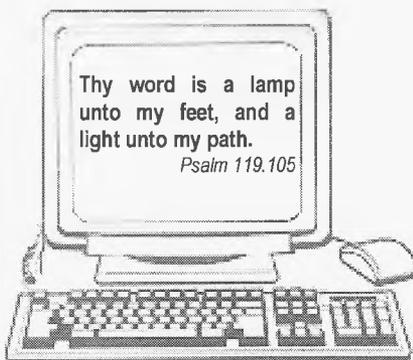
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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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)

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven."* (Prov. 23. 4-5 RSV)

Timely advice to-day, when fortunes are won and lost by unexpected financial crises. A noticeable factor in contemporary society is the intensive and oft-times frantic endeavour to make money and still more money.

Whether it be the manual worker, demanding higher and ever higher wages in proportion to the success of earlier demands, or the business executive working the stock markets, or the housewife filling in her football pools coupon, the dominant motive is the acquiring of wealth. And who can blame them when every aspect of modern industry takes measures under the pretext of "efficiency" and "stream-lining" to increase its profits, and every national government devises ways and means to extract progressively heavier taxes from its citizens? The acquirement of wealth has become the major pre-occupation and few are wise enough to know when to desist.

The Wise Man knew better. He knew how transitory a thing is worldly wealth, even apart from the fact that "you cannot take it with you". And this is the important thing. The life we know is but the beginning of life, a caterpillar stage, as it were. Beyond the traditional three score years and ten lies an infinity of expanding life and increasing achievement, and nothing of this world's wealth is of any value in that world, or those worlds, and the life we shall then experience. Good it is for one to acquire wealth in this world if it is used to do good, further, this will enrich character, so that one is better fitted for entry into the next stage of life, but that involves knowing "when to desist". No good at all, said Jesus, to lay up treasure if one is not rich toward God. To be of any use in the next world, treasure must be laid up in heaven.

AOH (1989)

## PAUL: EN ROUTE TO JERUSALEM

### *Philippi*

The tall, scholarly looking man looked up from his writing as a shadow darkened his doorway. His momentary expression of incredulity gave place to manifest pleasure; he rose from his chair and went forward to grasp the hand of his visitor. The last thing Luke the physician expected was to see his close friend, Paul, walking into his house here at Philippi. It is easy to visualise the unfeigned delight with which he drew the newcomer to a seat, called for a meal to be prepared. He then began to enquire into the progress of Paul's work at Ephesus and the reason for his unexpected appearance so far from the scene of his labours.

Something like six years had elapsed since last these two men met. Upon the establishment of the church at Philippi during the course of Paul's second missionary journey Luke had remained there to nurture the infant community while Paul went on to Berea, Athens, Corinth and eventually home to Antioch. They had probably kept in touch; casual travellers would have carried letters and news, but such opportunities were few and far between so that in great measure Luke had been left to his own resources in the discharge of his obligations. How well he had succeeded was evidenced by the healthy state of the Philippian church. The two old comrades-in-arms must have sat up late that night satisfying each other's excited queries, the one asking after affairs in Philippi and the other seeking information about the many places Paul had visited since they parted six years earlier.

After the riot in the Ephesus stadium which precipitated the end of Paul's work there, and his rather hurried departure from the city, he took the road to Troas, the seaport for ships going to Greece, with the evident intention of visiting the churches he had established there during his second missionary journey. It was at Troas, six years earlier, that he saw in a dream the man of Macedonia calling him to come over and help them; those churches in Greece were the fruits of that call. He was in Troas again, doubtless in fellowship with the believers, waiting there for the return of Titus, who a little while previously had been despatched to Corinth bearing the letter known to us as the First Epistle to the Corinthians. From Paul's words in 2 Cor.2.12-13 it seems that Paul was getting worried about the failure of Titus to meet him in Troas as expected. The Epistle had been sent to correct certain abuses which had crept into the Corinthian church and it is only natural to surmise that the period of waiting, loaded with uncertainty, following his recent harrowing experience at Ephesus, had thrown the usually confident Apostle into a mood of deep depression. It seems that at last he could stand the inactivity no longer, and deciding that Titus was not coming to meet him at all, he took ship for Macedonia and made his way to Philippi where he could be certain of finding his old friend, Luke.

It was here that Titus did join him eventually. The news was partly good and partly bad. The brethren at Corinth had taken his letter of reproof and admonition (the First Epistle) in the right spirit and had taken steps to correct the abuses in their assembly. On the other hand, there had been other visitors to Corinth casting doubt upon the validity of Paul's apostleship and upon his personal integrity, and a section in the church had accepted these accusations as true and were repudiating his mission and his message. The upshot of this was the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which was written probably at Philippi and sent to Corinth by the hand of the ever willing Titus. Paul himself determined to delay his own visit to Corinth for a while longer to give his letter an opportunity of having its full effect upon the Corinthian brethren.

As if the shortcomings of Corinth were not enough, the Apostle now encountered trouble from another quarter. News came to the effect that the churches in Galatia were being influenced by teachers who claimed that Christians must be subject to the Laws of Moses. This "Judaising" tendency was a constant problem in the early Christian communities and several generations passed before it was finally settled. Fully alive to the situation, Paul lost no time in preparing and sending to his Galatian converts a complete refutation of this doctrine, this "yoke of bondage", as he described it; thus did the Epistle to the Galatians come into being.

In addition to these literary activities, written in the house of Luke at Philippi, the Apostle found time for a brief tour through Macedonia, revisiting Thessalonica and Berea, and pushing farther westward than he had done before, into the district of Illyricum on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. On the other side of that sea lay Italy, and in Italy was Rome. Whilst he was still in Ephesus he had determined within himself that after this tour through Greece, and one more visit to Jerusalem, he must go to Rome (Acts 19. 21). As he gazed across the heaving waters of the Adriatic he pictured beyond the distant mountains that proud city which had become the capital and centre of the Empire. He told himself that he must certainly visit the Christian community which already existed there and proclaim the truths of the Gospel with no uncertain voice in the city of Caesar itself. With these thoughts in mind he finally made his way to Corinth.

### *Corinth*

Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. Three momentous months they proved to be, for during this time the Epistle to the Romans was written. First of all he had to undo the work of the false apostles who had been busy in Corinth, and set things in order in the church. Secondly there was the question of the money gift for the brethren at Jerusalem. Throughout Greece the Christian communities had been working on this proposal; news had come their way of

the desperate straits of poverty to which the Jerusalem church had been reduced, partly because of famine and partly the disturbed political state of the country. Judea was already entering into that era of active rebellion against Rome which came to a head ten years later when the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and expelled the Jews from the land. Paul had made himself responsible for seeing that the gift was safely taken to its intended recipients. Already he had travelling with him as joint custodians, Jason and Aristarchus of Thessalonica, Sosipater of Berea, Gaius of Derbe, together with Timothy, Trophimus and Tychicus, all of Ephesus, and his close friends Luke and Titus. It had been a lonely journey up to this point, but now he was with a goodly company of stalwart warriors of the Lord and his heart must have rejoiced. It was in that exultation of spirit and relative freedom from stress that the Apostle Paul sat down to write what is universally acclaimed the greatest of his written works, the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul was no stranger to the Roman fellowship. Although he had not as yet visited Rome many of the Christians living there were personally known to him. Aquila and Priscilla, whom he first met at Corinth and afterwards worked with at Ephesus, were now back in the capital. The decree of Claudius expelling all Jews from Rome was never rigorously applied by the authorities, and by now, fourteen years after its promulgation, had become a dead letter. So Aquila and Priscilla had gone back. Epænetus, the first convert in Greece, and Andronicus and Junia who worked with Paul at Ephesus, were also in Rome. So were a number of others whom the Apostle had met or with whom he had laboured at various times and at the end of the Epistle he makes special mention of them all. There he reveals his intention, not mentioned in any other record of his work, of one day journeying not only to Rome but onward into Spain, the western extremity, as Judea and the adjacent lands were the eastern extremity, of the Roman empire. So the epistle was finished, and Phoebe, the deaconess of Cenchrea, who had been converted when Paul first came to Corinth, was entrusted with the task of making the long journey to Rome to convey it into the hands of the Christians in the great city. There must have been considerable excitement among the brethren there when the letter arrived, and at the prospect of a visit from the famous Apostle. There was as yet no persecution of Christians in Rome. The Emperor Nero had been on the throne for four years but had not yet developed those characteristics which bore such terrible fruit a few years later. The church in Rome included Romans as well as Jews, highly born as well as slaves, and all were able to follow their faith without let or hindrance. So the Apostle was able to discourse to them without necessity or thought for exhorting to steadfastness under persecution as the writers frequently do in some other New Testament books. This three months at Corinth was a quiet interlude in the Apostle's stormy life, an interlude that he used to good purpose in writing the most celebrated of all his epistles.

### *Journey to Jerusalem*

The interlude was all too short; three months was as long as the orthodox Jews of Corinth could stand before making plans to do him a mischief. It had apparently become known that he intended to take ship direct to Syria, en route to Jerusalem with the money gift that had been collected, and the Jews plotted to waylay him as he set sail. Taking evasive action by a change of route, Paul and his party travelled overland into Macedonia instead, doubtless calling at Philippi on the way, and sailed across the sea to Troas on the Asiatic coast, from which port he had come to Greece. To all intents and purposes this concluded the third missionary journey. From now onward he was making his way to Jerusalem to hand over the gift.

### *Troas*

The brethren at Troas were not going to let him go easily. The Apostle spent a week in the city and while he was there the incident of Eutychus occurred. The believers had come together on the first day of the week to break bread; Paul was present with them and was to preach. The story is of value as showing that at this early date, only twenty five years after the Crucifixion, the adoption of the first day of the week as the day of gathering for worship, instead of the seventh, the Jewish Sabbath, had become established. It was to be another three centuries before the Emperor Constantine legalised Sunday as the weekly day of rest and worship throughout the Empire. The reference to breaking of bread is often taken as indicating a celebration of the Last Supper, or "Holy Communion", but this is open to question. There is no indication in the New Testament as to how frequently the early Church obeyed our Lord's injunction "*this do, as oft as ye do it, in remembrance of me*". It is perhaps more likely that this occasion at Troas was the weekly "*agape*" or love feast, mentioned several times in the Book of Acts. The simple communal meal which was held at frequent intervals in the life of each local Church to express in symbol and practice their joint fellowship in Christ. At any rate, the centre of attention was the Apostle Paul; he continued his preaching until midnight and apparently was showing no sign of finishing even then. His hearers were not tired of listening and gave him their undivided and rapt attention; all, that is, save one young man, Eutychus.

Eutychus was sleepy. The weakness of flesh had overcome the eagerness of the spirit. He might well have been a slave who had performed an arduous day's work before coming to the meeting. It was being held on the third floor of the building and Eutychus had seated himself in one of the window embrasures which were just plain openings admitting light and air—perhaps in the hope that the cool night breeze would keep him awake. But "*Paul was long preaching*" and "*there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together*". Despite his best endeavours, Eutychus began to nod. The voice of the

speaker went on and on, impinging dully on his consciousness, but all the time Nature was demanding, and receiving, the blessed relief of sleep. The account is so realistic that one might think that Luke, who was there and recorded it, was himself looking apprehensively toward Eutychus at the time but was not near enough to prevent the mishap. The lad was at first *"fallen into a deep sleep"* but as the sermon went on *"he sunk down with sleep and fell from the third loft, and was taken up dead"*. One can picture the cry of alarm which suddenly interrupted the meeting and the rush of some downstairs to the inert body lying in the courtyard, and then perhaps the anxious faces as Luke, the physician, knelt by the unfortunate lad to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

There is a certain amount of doubt as to whether Eutychus was actually dead or merely rendered unconscious by the fall. It is a doubt which is due to the remark attributed to Paul himself, who came down, embraced the still form, and said *"Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him"*. Later on *"they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted"*. Against this hypothesis there must be considered several factors. In the first place, a fall of this nature, even if it did not result in death must have involved serious physical injuries - at the least broken bones. Secondly, with Luke present it is most unlikely that Paul would take it upon himself to give what amounts to a medical opinion. By common consent the examination of Eutychus would have been left to Luke, and he says that he was "taken up dead". A layman might have been mistaken but not so likely a professional medical man. It seems more probable that we have here one of the very few examples of Divine intervention following the end of Jesus' life on earth and that Eutychus was literally dead and was restored to life. The action of Paul in "embracing" the body is reminiscent of Elijah and of Elisha in Old Testament days; both those prophets raised from the dead, one the widow's son, the other the Shunammite's child, in a similar fashion. The New Testament gives a detailed account of the restoration of Tabitha to life by Peter shortly after death had taken place, so that Paul here might well have done what his brother Apostle had done a few years previously. Such an exercise of miraculous power would, of course, include the healing of such physical injuries as might have been sustained; thus Eutychus could be brought back into the meeting shortly afterward as implied by the account.

Paul continued his discourse until break of day, so that the gathering must have been in session for almost twenty-four hours. That accounts for what appears to be a second breaking of bread in Chapter 20.11 in the small hours of the second day of the week. They probably needed it. This was most likely a more substantial meal during which the Apostle talked in a more informal fashion; that seems to be the implication of verse 11. Then he took his leave of the brethren at Troas and set out on the last lap of his journey to Jerusalem.

## *Miletus*

The ship on which the little party of evangelists had secured a passage was evidently one of the small trading vessels that coasted along the shore. It called at each port in turn, remaining a while to discharge and take on cargo, and if night was imminent waiting until next morning before resuming the voyage. A few days sailing brought them to Miletus, which was the port for Ephesus, distant from the city about forty miles. The vessel was evidently scheduled to stay here for several days, long enough for Paul to summon the elders of the church to meet him at Miletus for a brief conference before the ship departed. It was a memorable meeting. The Apostle reminded them of the ministry and teaching he had so freely given them over the space of three years and exhorted them to prove true to their calling and their obligations as elders in the church. He warned them that 'grievous wolves' would enter among them and wreak havoc with the 'flock', men speaking perverse things and drawing away disciples after them. *"I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God"* he said, striking sadness into their hearts by telling them *"I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more"*. It is apparent that at this time Paul did not expect ever to return to Ephesus; he felt that the unrelenting enmity of his Jewish opponents was bringing him steadily nearer to the day that he would fall victim to their machinations. He had just told these very elders *"And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me"*. At this moment Paul had no clear view of the future and probably no plans. He only knew that he must go to Jerusalem; after that all was in the hands of his Lord.

So at length, after changing ships at Patara in Lycia, and again at Tyre in Phoenicia, Paul and his companions arrived at Caesarea, the nearest seaport to Jerusalem. There they entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, to spend a few days in quietude and rest before going up to meet the Jerusalem church.

There was to be no more quietude and rest for the Apostle after this. Within a few days he was to be Paul the prisoner, and more than four years were to pass before he was again to know freedom.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

### **HIGH LEIGH 2009**

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, England

Monday, 17th – Sunday, 23rd August

**Theme – “The Will of God” (1 John 2.17)**

All ages are welcome.

A programme for teens and younger ones will be provided.

Contact: Accommodation Secretary: Joan Charcharos Tel: 01442 381550

## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

### 3. *The still small voice*

The story of Elijah running away to Mount Sinai because he was afraid of the vengeance of Queen Jezebel has to be looked at and viewed from a rational standpoint. It is certainly true that Elijah had led Israel in the matter of the slaying of the prophets of Baal and that was a great day in the history of Israel and everyone rejoiced except the haughty Queen Jezebel. When her husband, that wicked king Ahab, told her about it the 'fat was really in the fire'. So she commanded a messenger to seek out Elijah and give him a message: "*so let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by tomorrow about this time*". And the unfortunate messenger must have set out upon his mission with a quaking heart, for was not this Elijah an unpredictable man and who knows what fate might befall the daring emissary who came to him with such a threat. That expression "*so let the gods do also to me*" was a kind of oath in which Queen Jezebel called down upon herself the fate with which she threatened Elijah if by any means she should fail to effect her purpose. And it did turn out that way later on, for Elijah did escape, and the pagan queen did meet a violent death many years afterwards. But that is a different story.

So many commentators and students have concluded that Elijah ran away to Mount Sinai because he feared for his life. Surely that is a completely unwarrantable conclusion for it ignores two important factors. The first is that if this wicked Queen really did intend to have Elijah killed she would know better than to warn him in advance. The second is that the man who had already flatly defied the miserable King Ahab and this scheming Queen Jezebel to their faces, and would do it again in after times, was not going to be deterred by threats of that nature. The Queen must have known that; and, there was something else. She had seen the powers exercised by Elijah, powers given to him by the God he served, powers which she knew full well had never been manifested by the god she worshipped, Baal, the sun-god. It is plain that it was Queen Jezebel who was frightened at the powers possessed by Elijah, so that her purpose was to induce him by her threat to leave the country and not to trouble her again. Thus what she really did was to give him twenty-four hours notice to quit the land of Israel and not come back.

Yet the Scripture says that when he heard the message, "*he arose, and went for his life*" — "*and came to Beer-sheba*", which was in Judah and outside that wicked king Ahab's jurisdiction. But was it not that his life was utterly and altogether devoted to his prophetic calling and he must take all reasonable care to preserve it lest the Lord should have further need of him? He set out knowing that by so doing he would be there and ready when the Lord should commission him again, and he would come back to Israel for such a commission. He did

eventually come back, and that wicked king Ahab and this idolatrous Queen Jezebel were again to hear the whiplash of his tongue delivering the Lord's message of condemnation to them.

So now he had left Jezreel behind and was striding along the road that led southward over the central mountains of Samaria, out of the dominions of Ahab. He made his way towards the friendly kingdom of Judah where good King Jehoshaphat ruled his people in the worship and service of the God of Israel. It was forty miles to the frontier, over a gruelling mountain road that was little better than a track, skirting Ahab's principal city of Samaria as he went, Samaria with its idols and its Baal-worship. He passed through village after village bearing the name of the hated god, Baal-Hazor and Baal-Famar and the rest, and the detested idol sanctuary of Bethel. He viewed on his left the ruined town of Shiloh from a distance as he passed, the town where the priests of Aaron had once tended the Tabernacle made by Moses in the wilderness of Sinai in the days before Baal-worship had come to afflict his people. On his right he looked upon the heights of Beth-Horon, and far below, the valley of Ajalon, where in the days of Israel conquering the land Joshua the courageous had led the hosts of Israel against the Amorites. The Lord had sent a driving hailstorm into the faces of the fleeing enemy and enabled Israel to win a resounding victory. And that reminded him of the storm cloud which had come up from that same direction when he was on the top of Mount Carmel and he wondered a little if his victory then was going to be as decisive and lasting as had been that of his illustrious predecessor. So he came to a little village called Adasa and knew he was in the territory of King Jehoshaphat and it was the second day and the sun was declining to its setting and he laid him down and slept.

See now this unpredictable man, for it is morning and he is striding out along the southward road. Will he not relax and take his ease, free from the malice of the vengeful Queen Jezebel? He will not take rest. He strides forward as a man with a purpose. Fifty more miles he must go, over the tops of the Judaean mountains to Beer-Sheba, the southernmost town of Judah on the southern frontier of Jehoshaphat's dominions. So on the second or third day he was there, speaking to no man and staying for none. Then he was gone again, into the trackless wilderness which lay beyond Beer-Sheba, that wilderness from which Israel had come at the beginning. It was the wilderness in which lay the sacred mountain of the Lord, hallowed by the making of the Covenant which made Israel the Lord's own people. Mount Sinai. Thus then, after another day's journeying into the mountains, he lay down and committed himself to God. *"It is enough"*, he said *"now, O Lord, take me away, for I am not better than my fathers"*.

Was this despondent man really he who a few days earlier had called fire down from heaven to demonstrate the reality of God? And had the zeal which inspired

him to lead the people in the slaying of four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal so soon evaporated? Could it possibly be that the fearlessness with which he had faced and challenged this wicked King Ahab and that pagan Queen Jezebel in their own court, surrounded by their own courtiers, should so quickly have vanished? So many have taken it that way, reading the story as it has been set down. But how uncharacteristic of the man, and how unlikely. Might not his apparent despair have been not for himself, but for his nation, for Israel? True, the representatives of the people gathered there on Mount Carmel had shouted with awe and conviction "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God", but how many of their fellows would believe them when they got back home to their tribal villages? How many of the nation would sincerely and zealously abandon Baal worship and turn to the living God? Judging by the recorded condition of national affairs during the rest of the reign of Ahab and his successor, Ahaziah, not many. He had not really achieved deliverance for Israel, any more than the men of God who had gone before him. He had done no better than his fathers. And now, he was the Lord's man, now and for ever, and if it was the Lord's will to take him out of the way and raise up a better man, he was quite content that it should be so. He, like Moses of old, was willing to go to his rest in the mountains, no man knowing of his sepulchre or of his end, and some other man finish his work.

But the Lord had other plans. See now an angel approaching over the rocky desert. A moment ago he was not there; now he is, clad in the attire of a Bedouin nomad. He sets down a loaf of bread and a vessel of water. A moment ago those were not there either. He touches the sleeping man. "*Arise and eat*". Elijah opens his eyes, sits up, and sees the bread and water. He looks round over the wide plain. There is no one there. He recalls the provision God had made for him at the brook Cherith in the days of the famine; the three years spent with the widow woman of Zarephath; and he knows that God is about to make his next revelation to him and give him his next commission.

So then in the peace and confidence of that conviction, he slept again, quietly, peacefully, until in his sleep he felt again that soft touch, and heard again that quiet voice, "*Arise, and eat, for thy journey is a great one*". At that he opened his eyes and realised where he must go. His feet must take him even to Mount Sinai, the mountain of the Covenant, where God had spoken to Israel through Moses. Was God now going to speak to Elijah? He hesitated not one whit but set out to traverse the two hundred and fifty miles that separated him from his goal.

Forty days, it took him. Forty long days under the scorching sun, traversing tortuous ravines, finding food where he could and sleeping wherever he might find shelter from the ice-cold nights. He had not gone this way before and he must have sought directions from the occasional nomadic tribesmen he would

have encountered from time to time. They would know, for Sinai had from ancient times been a sacred mountain revered by all the inhabitants of that desolate land. So at length he came within sight of the mountain, and found himself a little cave in its sides, and therein he entered, and rested, and waited for the voice of the Lord.

*"What doest thou here, Elijah?"* So strange a question. Surely the Lord must have known why he had come. Was He oblivious to the apostate state of Israel, unmindful of the continued power of the pagan queen Jezebel, of the idol temples and sanctuaries defiling the land which He had declared his own. Had God not seen into his own heart and perceived his despondency and concern? He must put the Lord right at once. *"I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, only I, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away"*. So hopeless a plaint, he must have thought as he spoke, and yet, and yet, what else could he say and what else could he do? He spoke, and waited.

*"Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord"*. He obeyed, and waited again. Now what is this? A murmur in the distance, a sound, undulating softly and becoming steadily louder; a noise, as of a strong wind blowing; suddenly a raging gale which shook the mountain crags and tumbled loose rocks down the precipices. Elijah quickly withdrew back into the protection of his cave and stood .... now the wind has died down and passed away and all is quiet but there is no word from the Lord. Surely then the Lord was not in the wind.

A rumbling below the ground and a shaking. The mountain quivered and chasms opened as the earthquake struck. The jutting peaks were riven and rock masses fell down the mountain side to the valley far below .... Now the shaking has ceased and the rumbling has died away and all is quiet but there is no word from the Lord. How plain it is that the Lord was not in the earthquake.

A vivid, dazzling lightning flash; in a moment the sky was alive with fire, driving down to earth to the accompaniment of crashing thunder. A tropical thunderstorm of a severity never experienced in temperate climates, one which illumined the sky together with a tremendous noise ... The lightning ceased to flash and the thunder sank to a low rumble and died altogether and all was quiet and there was no word from the Lord. And nothing there was to show that the Lord was in the fire.

And then ... *"a still, small voice"*. The Hebrew is literally *"a sound of soft stillness"*. Only Elijah heard it; perhaps only Elijah could hear it. And no man knows what it said to him, for he never told anyone. But whatever it was, and whatever it said, the consequence was that Elijah covered his face with his mantle and went out to the entrance of the cave, for he knew, now, that he was going to meet God. And he stood and listened, *"What doest thou here, Elijah?"*

He repeated his complaint - perhaps not despairingly as on the former occasion, but more dispassionately, as a concise statement of the impelling force which had brought him to Sinai. He had done all he could in Israel; he had earned the enmity of its pagan rulers; there seemed no one of consequence who remained true to the Lord, and he had no direct lead on what he was to do next. So he had come to Sinai to put himself in the Lord's hands and accept his decision.

*"Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholeh shall you anoint to be prophet in your place.....and I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal".* (And let the studious take note that the Lord did not say "I have left" as in the AV. The Hebrew is in the future tense and He was telling Elijah that all was not lost; there would yet be some who remained loyal).

Hazael was captain of the Syrian army; Jehu was captain of Ahab's army; Elijah was yet to be involved again in the politics of his nation and concerned in the eventual overthrow of Ahab. He was to seek out and anoint his own successor to his prophetic office. There was work for him to do. That wicked king Ahab had not yet seen the last of him. So Elijah went back.

*(To be continued)*

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## THE HEART OF THE REVELATION

The Book of Revelation has long been the subject of controversy among students of the Bible. A book of symbols, it is variously interpreted, a fertile field for disputes between exponents of interpretations labelled "praeterist", "futurist" or "historical". Some, mystified by the strange events which John records, have given up the task of understanding them. Others have applied themselves diligently to discovering some event in history, however insignificant, which will correspond to each detail of the narrative. It is not an easy book, but it is an intriguing one. A Bible class that embarks upon its study will toil through it long and painfully. The leader of such a study may feel he needs a complete knowledge not only of Old Testament prophecy but also of two thousand years of secular and church history; and together with this, a sense of proportion and an appreciation of spiritual values.

Yet, the fact remains that the book is intended as a revelation. One scholar puts it, *"The writer obviously expects that his meaning, so far from being obscured by the strange figures of speech and symbols which he employs, will be thereby illustrated, enforced, and brought home to the mind with greater than ordinary power."* It would be hard to believe that this revelation, given by Jesus Christ, was intended only for scholars.

The book is a prophecy of things which, when it was written, were yet future. Those who first read it must have been as perplexed as those today who come to it lacking a knowledge of history - if indeed it be that many of the prophecies of the book have been fulfilled. To the first readers the book must have seemed a vast drama, with heaven and earth for a stage, in which move the kings of the earth, the angels of heaven, the powers of darkness and the messengers of light. As the apostle John unfolds his vision they recognise themselves, persecuted and oppressed, as the souls under the altar as the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. They are spectators of the great drama of history, played before the King of Kings, in which the hero, the slain Lamb, becomes the Victor. As the dark symbols follow one another they rejoice to find that God is to be vindicated in his dealings with men: and the voices which speak to them in strains as of poetry tell plainly the foundation truths of the Gospel.

The modern reader, poring over various translations notices passages which Weymouth, Moffatt and the RSV have rendered in verse. It is interesting to look at them. Often it is the four and twenty elders of the throne scene whose words the translators put in verse. These elders speak to praise God. Their continual song, night and day, is to ascribe to God glory and honour and power. Why? Because He is the Creator of all things, and because it is by His will that the universe has come into existence. We may well echo these praises, for it is God the ever living One who through the ages has fashioned the world in which we live according to laws which only now are scientists beginning to understand. As Paul said upon Mars Hill, it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. It is fitting that the Gospel should commence with the fact that our God is Creator of heaven and earth; and right that we in our praises should give thanks on this account.

In chapter five the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song. The ages have rolled on. The world has long been established, and now the race of beings that inhabits it has been redeemed by Jesus. But what is to follow? The prayers of Christians come before the God of heaven.

The elders rejoice, for that same Jesus is found worthy to open the book of the future, to control the destinies of this world. He has ransomed men from every tribe and nation, a body who will reign over the earth as priests. Thus a second great fact emerges: that the Gospel Age is a time in which Christ's ransom sacrifice is applied to a company, for whom God has a special work.

If we are among those who thus have been redeemed, we can join with their song -

*"Worthy the Lamb that died, they cry, To be exalted thus!*

*Worthy the Lamb! our hearts reply, For He was slain/or us"*

It is not till chapter seven that we find the elders once more burst forth in praise. The sight that inspires them is a numberless host of men, justified and

victorious, from every nation. Their great tribulation is past: they are to suffer no more, but under God's protection are to serve him. Irrespective of any question what "class" this multitude represents, is it not a comfort to know that the future is to hold life, with the privilege of his service and protection, to any one who is under *"the robe of Christ's righteousness"*.

The theme of the elders is more awesome in chapter eleven. If the mercy of God is to be praised, so also is His judgment. It has been the lot of Christians in the Gospel Age to live in a time of darkness, when the light of the Gospel has only partly illumined the world. There is light enough to see by for those whose eyes are open to the message of salvation; but for the rest of mankind the world is dim, full of half truths, with any course of action a choice between two evils. Men dimly perceive what is good, but lack the courage to endure that measure of suffering which right action entails. While there are men upon earth to take selfish advantage, Christian meekness will bear this reward of suffering. So the nations are not meek but angry: and God's wrath comes upon them. Wrath upon the spirit of self, wrath upon those who destroy, wrath upon all those things which work, not creatively in the spirit of the Creator, but to disrupt, antagonise and embitter. Just as the dentist drills away the rotten part of a tooth in order to preserve the good remainder, so all that is antagonistic to the very life of God's kingdom must be removed. Christ's rule will be one of mercy and equity; but what He sees fit eventually to destroy must indeed be worthy of destruction. God's judgment is a cause for rejoicing, for we long to see vindicated that spirit of love which now shows so little in outward results. We long for God to reveal himself in power and righteousness, to show his majesty, to embrace mankind in his love, to make it once and for all evident that the scorned and rejected gospel of Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Truth. As the twenty-four elders say, when they fall down and worship God, *"We give thanks to thee, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign"*.

If we are conquerors, we too may sing *"Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, For thy judgments have been revealed."*

The chapters which follow are full of the judgments of God. False religion, the lust for worldly power, infatuation with the good things of this life, hypocrisy under the garb of godliness, all these things come under sentence together with the Dragon - the Adversary - that inspires them. All is summed up in Babylon, that city into which is drawn all the wealth and pride of life. In it there is gaiety, finery, all those external things that delight the senses but without godliness are a delusion. Babylon is the epitome of the kingdoms of this world: its inhabitants live for self; they have a worldly allegiance. Their conduct stands

condemned, for it results in the bloodshed of innocent men, of men made holy by their relationship with God.

It is small wonder that Babylon's fall is heralded in the language of poetry. It is small wonder that the adjuration is "Come out of her, my people". We must beware of the spirit of Babylon, whatever our surroundings and with whoever we meet. Only by a personal guard over our lips and our ways, by a perpetual watchfulness in prayer, shall we ensure that we are free of the trammels of the world. Let us beware lest our conduct betray our heavenly city or dishonour our heavenly King. It is so easy to peddle between two masters.

After the judgment of Babylon goes up the cry of the hosts in heaven, "*Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just*". The earth is rid of an evil thing, and by contrast we see the Bride of the Lamb, made ready to be joined to her Lord. From the vision of the faithless we turn to the faithful: our Lord comes into his own, and his chosen ones with him. Babylon is doomed: the new Jerusalem rises in its stead.

As the book draws to a close, there comes a voice from the throne itself:

*"God's dwelling place is among men  
And He will dwell among them  
And they shall be his people.  
He will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death shall be no more;  
Nor sorrow, nor wail of woe, nor pain;  
For the first things have passed away."*

This is the consummation of God's purpose, a new order which follows the time of tempest and judgment. The waters of life flow there, and the nations, purged of sin, bring their glories to God's feet. The broad picture is clear. God's purpose looks beyond the suffering of the present hour, and God's ultimate design removes pain and death from human kind. The heart thrills as his designs are made manifest. Just as Christians of the First Century longed for their final accomplishment, so do we. If, after nineteen hundred years of history, we can identify our position in time among the symbols of the book, well and good. But even if our minds are not capable of grasping the details, we may rejoice in the one great hope, join with the four and twenty elders around the throne as they cry,

*"Worthy art thou, O Lord God!  
Worthy is the Lamb!"*

GC

# STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

## Part 11

*"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3.1 NRSV)*

The greatest honour that can be conferred upon any mortal being is that of being called a Son of God. We know that all life is of God, that He holds in His hands the breath of every living thing and that at the first He was the great First Cause of all that lives. In that sense all intelligent creatures are His children and He is the Universal Father. But that is not the sense in which the term is used in the Bible. A Son of God in the Biblical sense must fulfil one essential condition; he must be in harmony with God, not in a condition of alienation because of sin.

Before we take to ourselves this honour which the New Testament tells us is ours by right, if we be Christ's, we do well to note the previous occasions in Scripture history where the title has been used. Our earliest reference is that in Job 38.7, where it is said that at the foundation of the earth the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. The Creator Himself is speaking; no human eye was witness of the events, for this was long before man's creation. The expression is obviously a poetic one, for if this was before the appearance of man upon the earth those who are thus described as rejoicing together and shouting for joy must obviously have been citizens of the spiritual world. They are those righteous celestial creatures who had been brought into being by God before He proceeded to the creation of the material universe. Whether the term 'morning stars' is a poetic name for the two who figure so largely in later history, our Lord before His coming to earth, and Lucifer the Adversary before his fall, may be decided by each student for himself according to the extent to which the suggestion appeals. Both these are described as "morning stars" in other and later Scriptures. That is not relevant to our present study. That the "*sons of God*" who "*shout for joy*" must have been the angels of heaven is perfectly obvious and this is right in line with our present enquiry. At that remote time in the ages which preceded this world there were angels, fully righteous and in harmony with God, known as "Sons of God".

The next instance is at the time of man's creation. Adam awakened to life perfect and in harmony with his Creator and there was no trace or shadow of sin or imperfection in him. He was upright, pure and innocent, fresh from the hand of his Maker. In that condition he was a son of God. Luke testified as much (3.38) in his record of the genealogy of Jesus. The line of descent, father to son through the centuries, commenced, not with Adam, where it might have been expected to commence since he was the first man, but with God, who gave life to Adam. Since all of God's work is perfect and He has never created a being in whom sin is inherent, it follows that Adam, the son of God, was perfect in his sonship. It was only after his transgression and his fall that he lost the proud title.

Next we have the antediluvian angels who *"kept not their first estate"*. Genesis 6 tells of these sons of God and of their fall into sin. They were sons until that grievous disaster but are never referred to as sons again.

From the days of the Flood it is a long stride to the days of Jesus, and in all those long intervening ages there is no mention of sons of God upon earth. Not one of Adam's race had proved worthy. All, as says the Apostle Paul, had alike become unprofitable. There was none to do righteousness, no, not one. Jesus was the first since Adam to lay rightful claim to the title. Peter's bold declaration settles that for all time; *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"*. The accusation laid against Him was that He claimed to be, or at the least allowed Himself to be called, the Son of God. And the claim was true. The One in whom was no sin, the One holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, was indeed able to take to Himself the title which of all titles proclaimed His sinlessness and His full and complete harmony with God.

And now the same honour is ours! We, who by nature are by no means sinless and righteous as He was, are nevertheless brought into a condition of justification before God that enables Him to call us His sons. We have come into the family of God and are called by His Name. There are so many Scriptures to assure us that this is no empty phrase; we are accepted by Him as though we had indeed attained to actual righteousness and perfection of being. What manner of love is this that has led the God of all, to call us His children?

It is because of our faith in the first place. *"To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the sons of God"* (John 1.12). That is the first essential, our acceptance of Christ. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Being led by the Spirit of God (Rom.8.14). Paul likens this to an adoption; we who were by nature children of the fallen Adam have been adopted into the family of God. The adoption is a real one, and we are indeed and in truth the sons of God. The Holy Spirit is a witness to that. The Holy Spirit assures us, bearing witness to our own spirit inwardly, that we are the children of God, receiving and enjoying all the rights and privileges pertaining to that exalted position (Rom. 8.16,17). We are therefore heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, sharing with Him not only His life of suffering but also His life of glory, *"glorified together"*.

*"Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not,"* The servant is not greater than his lord, and seeing that the world ignored and turned away from Jesus when He was upon earth we should not regard it strange if it does the same to His followers. That is not the only meaning in John's words though, and perhaps not the most important meaning. "Therefore" is a critical word in this sequence of thought. It is because we have become sons of God that the world knows us not. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. This sonship

into which we have entered is a very real thing to us and we have the Spirit's witness as to its genuineness; but is it so real to the world? How can they understand? Even Nicodemus, an educated man and a ruler among the Jews, found it impossible to comprehend what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of being born from above, and men in the world today are in just the same position as was Nicodemus. They just cannot understand. And the further that the world drifts towards materialism and away from God the more difficult it is going to be for them to receive any conception of that inner life which we live by the power of the Spirit and which to us is the hall-mark of our sonship.

There is much in this chapter to remind us of John's first words in his Gospel. We must not think that the "other worldliness" which the men of this world find impossible to understand is something, that is, as it were against nature. "*He was in the world*" says John, "*and the world, was made by Him; and the world knew Him not*" (John 1.10). He was of the spirit realm and this world is of the material realm, yet He was in this world and this world was made by Him. Spiritual and earthly are all of one and if men are unable to appreciate the reality of spiritual things it is not because it is unnatural for them to do so but because they have lost the link that binds the two worlds together. Whilst it will always be true that the purely natural, material man will never understand or be able to visualise accurately the things of the spirit, he will when restored to the Divine image realise and know that there is a spiritual order of things, transcendently high above the natural. He will believe and accept the fact. It will no longer be true then that "*the world knows us not*" just as it will not be true that they then will know Him not. Mankind upon earth will themselves have become sons of God by then; Rev. 21.7 is our guarantee of that. "*He that overcomes*" on the earthly plane of being, during the Millennial Age "*shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son*". Those Millennial overcomers, sons of God, will realise at last, that the ones who, in former times, they "knew not", have inherited the greatest and noblest of all destinies, that of eternal association with Christ in the heavenly realm. In the gladness of that knowledge they will brush all their former ignorance away and regain that link with the unseen world which Adam had before his fall and which all men will have after the restoration. As in heaven, so on earth, "*when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away*".

(To be continued)

AOH

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Look back and praise him,  
Look up and trust him,  
Look around and serve him,  
Look onward and expect him.

## ONE WITH CHRIST, ONE WITH EACH OTHER

*"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me "* (Jn. 17.20,21 NRSV)

This is a remarkable prayer that makes quite astonishing statements. That the children of Adam, "born in sin and shaped in iniquity", can become 'one' with the mighty Creator of the Universe is astounding. There is a sense in which all God's creation must become one with Him. But what Jesus is requesting is much more, for Jesus is praying for those who are specially united to Him - His close followers - who have shared His life and experiences in the world. There lies the key to the unity with the Father - the sharing of the experiences which God has designed to teach His only Son, Jesus, obedience by what He suffered. This unique experience for men and women of the human race is part of God's great design for all mankind and forms the first stage in His reconciliation of all creation to Himself through Christ (Col.1.19,20). The final phase of this personal reconciliation is technically 'sanctification' which is the process in which sinful children of men are made holy, and this takes place during the rest of their lives here on Earth.

Holiness is not just an absence of sin as the Pharisees seemed to think. Holiness is a positive quality - it is doing the right thing - doing what our Father would do in our position, and in fact we are His representatives - His 'ambassadors', representing Him to the world. We are His ministers, appealing to those around us 'to be reconciled to God' (2 Cor.5:20). So, eventually we shall be so like Him that we shall be ready to become like Him in every respect.

As the 'children of God' move in the world, the oneness with Christ, as branches in the vine, makes a difference to the way they live. They are now motivated by Christ's love. It is much more than knowing the ethics of the Gospel. God's Holy Spirit provides the spiritual energy to enable His people to do what they know to be right; but oft time they find they fail. This was Israel's problem - they knew God's Law but they had not the motivation to accomplish it. They allowed their knowledge of what God wanted of them to stand still. They never really progressed further than the Sinai Desert. God was present with them - He literally made His presence known in the cloud and the fire and later by wonders on Sinai and the provision of food and footwear. But when they began to mix with the adjacent tribes and nations, Israel was unable to resist the influence of the Devil and his people. So they worshipped and lived like 'Canaanites'. We face the same problem. We live in the world and in every sphere of life the union with Christ must make a difference. It is a life of separation - yet it is a life that is totally involved in things people are doing, but

we must not do them in the same way that world does them. In earning one's living and in domestic, social, civil activities, being in Christ must make a difference. Everything is done in a way that represents Him and therefore will be done superlatively. A Christian husband is one that is the best possible husband who does far more for his wife and children than is 'normal'. He is therefore a model father who loves His children to the extent that He is to them what God is to us. A Christian employee or employer does his or her job as Christ would do it in their place. The principle is readily applied to neighbourliness by a parable of Jesus, and to civil duty in rendering to 'Caesar what is Caesar's'.

Within the Church the link with Christ has its greatest impact for Christians are to be one - an ideal unity that has never been known or equalled anywhere else. That was the model community that Jesus prayed for. But after the Apostles fell asleep, it was not often experienced during the next two thousand years.

The objective is to grow into the likeness of Christ. It is his own image that He needs to see. The strange wrinkles in our knowledge and understanding of God's purpose can be ironed out in seconds of eternity but becoming like Christ takes a lifetime. It is so important that our intellectual understanding of the Scriptures does not cast a veil across the image and example of our Master. It is that reflection of Him that draws others to Him. It is not by superb oratory nor by clever argument that we shall draw men and women to Christ, and frequently those skills repulse people especially younger folk. If we are truly 'in Christ', linked to Him by a spiritual life-line, we shall know what He wants us to do, and will do it joyfully. So, a Christian, a follower of Christ, is a doer of the Word rather than just a listener, though we must listen in prayer often. A Christian is a man or woman of prayer rather than someone running around desperate to do something. Yet like Christ, the followers of Jesus have plenty to do - their lives are not empty and certainly not boring. But as the physical activity inevitably becomes less, the link with Christ becomes stronger and the life becomes spiritually richer.

Jesus wonderful prayer has been answered. Throughout the Age, He has drawn men and women to Himself and God's Spirit has been changing them. At last, they have been made ready for that final change that will liberate them from this body of sin and death (including the brain) that has so often caused them to stumble and held them back. But no need to fear, the Master Craftsman knows His task and we shall be ready. Let us then be workers together with God, co-operating with Him till He has completed this phase of His design in us.

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It is far easier to place a child's arm round the cross of Christ than a man's.

*Walter Sargeant - Herald of Christ's Kingdom*

## 'DO YOU LOVE ME?'

*"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? (John 21.15 NRSV)*

Do you love me? These were the words of Jesus to Peter when they met after the resurrection. Three times Jesus asked this question and it has become traditional for preachers and writers to link the 'three times' with Peter's triple denial of knowing Jesus during his Jewish Trial.

But there is scriptural evidence that Jesus had already seen Peter. In the wonderful resurrection chapter, Paul records, *"that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...."* (1 Cor.15) and in any event, Jesus is hardly likely to have shown up Peter in front of his peers. Peter must have cried when he spoke to his Master for the first time following the resurrection and Jesus was unlikely to have demanded public confession of Peter's sin. What was important to Jesus was to reinstate Peter as a leader among His people, and that He did in the words *"feed my lambs" - "tend my sheep" - "feed my sheep"*. Many years later we have echoes of Christ's designation of Peter's pastoral role when that Apostle referred to being "examples to the flock" and "the Chief Shepherd appearing". Those questions by Galilee were to make Peter think carefully about his loyalty to Jesus and to make us think about our loyalty to Him too.

Jesus gave the disciples a 'new commandment' that they love one another as He had loved them (John 13.34). That makes it harder when the comparison is with Jesus who was without sin. But the standard is there - an example in perfection of love. That love is demonstrated by the way we behave as brothers and sisters in Christ. Such love cannot walk away from brethren just because we may intellectually differ from them. Love cannot be expressed in separation (except perhaps in prayer and sending gifts). It is vital to our readiness to meet the Lord, that we express that love to all who love Him; to everyone, so far as it is humanly possible, in God's intimate family.

Yet the love that Jesus was talking about and is recorded in John 13,34, is not the love described by the Greek word *'storge'* - the love between those of closely related members in a human family. It is not even the love that is expressed by close friends - described by the Greek word *'phileo'* which is the affectionate bond between those who have the kind of relationship enjoyed by David and Jonathan.

It is this word *'phileo'* which Jesus uses in John 21 when he asked Peter for a third time *"Do you love me Peter"* and Peter's answer as expressed in J.B.Phillips' translation is *"Lord you know I'm your friend"*. In the first two questions Jesus had said *"Peter do you love [agape] me?"* Peter in reply had used the more human love and said *"Lord you know that I love [phileo] you"* In those first two questions, Jesus did not query Peter's affectionate friendship love. He is questioning Peter's deep spiritual love (agape). But in the third time of asking

Jesus comes into line with Peter's own expression and says "*Are you really my friend, Peter?*" Jesus appears to be saying to Peter that unless he has a love like His own, he can never feed and tend His sheep and lambs. He is saying to Peter that these are not a flock to be bullied by arrogant stewards who really don't know what love is all about. There was going to be an old sheep that would face the shepherd out and be ready to do a bit of head butting. There are young inexperienced lambs that have found their way into to the next field and become lost. Those problems and a hundred others are not solved by bullying. There is only one way and that is the way of love - agape love. It is a love that sees a neighbour in desperate need by the roadside and stops to relieve the suffering and make provision for recovery. It is a love that gives of its dearest and best in order to bring about salvation. It is a love that forgives and really forgets, not once, not seven times, but goes on forgiving till it has forgotten how many times it has forgiven. It is a love which if by reason of its own humanity it hurts another, it makes reparation as quickly as possible. It is a love that will die that others might live. It is so easy to talk and write about that love, but living in that love - well, that is a different matter.

The Greek word that describes love between husband and wife does not appear in the Scriptures - it is *'eros'* 'Nevertheless, when husbands and wives are called upon to love each other - it is the *'agape'* love. Even when they do not feel like expressing the fond love as a married couple, they must still have *'agape'* love. It is the absence of this love in family life that opens the way for dissension, division and ultimately separation. It is so in the Church. All kinds of sectarian excuses have been made for division within the Church but it is the absence of love that causes the situation to arise that Paul described in the 'unity' chapter - 1 Cor.1. It is the unwillingness to 'bend' the arrogant determination that 'I am right'. That situation comes about because not enough time is being spent with the Lord alone - because there is a lack of awareness in the life of a living Saviour directing the life. And every time we express a hurtful word or action we are saying 'Lord I don't love you'.

When we have mastered this quality of character, we can more easily go on to express this wonderful love to the antagonistic world.. If we haven't turned our back on our brother, we are more likely to turn the other cheek to the persecutor in the world.

This love really did not have much expression until Jesus came into the world. The Greek word *'agapao'* was unknown in the ancient world but we find that those who were close to God began to develop it. Perhaps it is best seen in Moses' forgiveness of and intercession for Miriam; in the way in which Hosea treats Gomer and in some of the thoughts given by Jeremiah amid his persecution - and by the alien who got him out of the pit.

It was the great Christian Apostle to the Gentile, Paul, who first really described it in his wonderful chapter of 1 Cor.13. More than one dear soul in the faith has said that all believers should read that chapter every day. The standard is high, beyond any of the great religious philosophies of the world. It is a standard only obtainable through the power of God's Holy Spirit. The question Jesus still asks us is - "Do you love me." So we keep his commandments. The new commandment that He gave to the 'twelve' was that they should love one another.

This love of which Paul writes in 1 Cor.13, and which Jesus spoke to Peter about by the Sea of Galilee after His resurrection, the love which is translated from the Greek word '*agape*' is the same love which was demonstrated by Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Over and above any love for family, and close friendship, translated from the Greek words "*storge*" and '*phileo*' this stronger, richer love which Jesus brought into the world, described and demonstrated in His own life is a love which must exist in the marriage partnership. This is the love which really holds a couple together and which makes possible the high standard of love and enriches the bonds of love between husband and wife. So Paul would bring to our attention in Ephesians 5.

This love which cannot see another human being suffer mentally or physically without itself feeling the pain, this love which must go the extra mile with the enemy and must pray for those who persecuted it, this love which is the most important requirement in the Christian character, does not develop all at once, not does it come about by intellectual strategies. This love is the fruit of being 'in the vine' of a spiritual union with Jesus. It is a love which comes through prayer, and develops in the Father's discipline.

Yet this is God's workmanship and nothing is too hard for the Lord. Let us give ourselves over to his master craftsman's skill assured that He is able to develop this love in our hearts and lives if we will but truly yield our all to Him.

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A small thing is a great thing if God is in it. His power creates the tiny flower bud, the opening leaf, the blade of grass. He forms the grain of sand, tiny globule of water, the glittering crystal of the snowflake. And it is these small things that make up the mighty oceans with their sand-girt shores, that clothe the vast forests, the rolling fields and the snow laden landscape. God uses all His works. The weakest thing has a service of its own. The dew-drop, the little bird upon the tree, the flower of the field, the flitting butterfly, the busy bee. All creatures serve Him, small and great, and He can use us though we be the weakest of them all.

Forest Gate Monthly

## PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN

*Matthew 21.33-44*

It was within a few days of his crucifixion that Jesus spoke this parable. There is not much doubt that He intended it to be prophetic - prophetic of his own death and prophetic of the Divine condemnation soon to fall upon those responsible for His death. But behind that there was a deeper purpose. Not many days hence a good many would be saying, sadly, to themselves what in fact two disciples did say aloud to the supposed stranger on the road to Emmaus *"We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel"*. Jesus meant to leave, in this parable, an explanation of the event soon to be consummated. This would take the discouraged believers back to their own Scriptures, the books of the prophets, and to their own national history. It would reveal to them that all this had been known and foreseen beforehand; that no other outcome was possible; that so far from being an irretrievable disaster, this crushing anticlimax to all their hopes was in fact the only manner in which those hopes would ever be fulfilled. So Jesus gave them the parable of the wicked husbandmen.

A familiar picture, this. A vineyard, leased by its owner to a group of men who would render him an agreed proportion of the fruits by way of rent. This was a common practice in Israel and usually worked very satisfactorily. In this instance the results were not so satisfactory. When the owner's servants came to collect the expected harvest they met with a hostile reception, were beaten, stoned and killed. The owner might have been justifiably incensed but it seems he was a man of long patience, not easily moved to anger. He sent more servants, giving the husbandmen another chance. Those servants were treated in similar manner to the first. So he sent his son saying, so the story goes, *"they will reverence my son"*. But when the son appeared at the entrance to the vineyard and announced his mission, the husbandmen conspired together and killed him, so that they could seize the vineyard for themselves.

So far the little company around Jesus had listened with close attention, as every Eastern crowd will do when a story is being told. Swiftly Jesus threw out the question among them *"When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?"* Some of them at least must have had a glimmering of what lay behind this everyday story, but even so, common honesty demanded the obvious and only reply. *"He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."* In so saying they condemned themselves out of their own mouths and gave opportunity for one of the most scathing denunciations ever to fall from the Master's lips.

Rightly to understand the force of that denunciation it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the story and look at it through Jewish eyes - and eyes of the Jews of the First Advent at that. Then national feeling was at its zenith and national pride had not been crushed by centuries of Gentile oppression. *"There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen."* As the simple yet vivid description fell from the lips of Jesus the minds of his hearers must inevitably have gone back to God's words to their fathers through the prophet Isaiah (5.1-7) *"My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein .... He looked that it brought forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes .... for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant, and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry."* Right at the beginning of the story Jesus' listeners realised that He was talking about them. They knew full well that their nation was symbolised by a vine or a vineyard in prophetic lore, and they must have listened with an added intensity to discern what the story was to unfold of good or ill for Israel.

Now the time of the vintage was come. The vineyard had been well planted with good vines, it was furnished with a winepress; there should be a good return for the owner. He had made rich provision for his tenants and could reasonably expect his due. He met instead with disloyalty, ingratitude and rebellion. That is how it was with Israel, not only in the days of Jesus but almost all through their history. They were brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of God and constituted a nation at Sinai under the terms of a Covenant. This made them not only the chosen people of God but also custodians of a destiny which was to make them a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. They nevertheless miserably failed to live up to their calling.

When God sent his servants the prophets to recall them to a sense of their duty and their destiny, they ignored and persecuted and slew them. *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"* demanded Stephen of the Sanhedrin before which he was on trial for his own life *"and they have slain them which showed before, of the coming of the Just One"* (Acts 7. 52). *"The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear"* declared Jeremiah (Jer.25.4). *"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tried, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"*. So runs the damning indictment of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb.11.37-38). Surely the wicked husbandmen did indeed beat, and stone, and kill the servants sent to them to collect the fruits of the vineyard.

But, said the householder, they will reverence my son - my *beloved* son, Luke's account of this parable has it (Luke 20. 13). So the Son of God came to earth. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life. He came to his own- but his own received him not. (John 1.11). They looked upon Him and they said *"This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours"*. There is a terrible truth underlying those words. The Messiah had come to claim His right, the kingship of the nation, to lead them into the light and life of the Kingdom of Heaven. The entrenched forces of priestly and aristocratic power were determined to preserve the traditional framework of Rabbinical theology which held the nation in bondage. Like the citizens in another parable they said *"We will not have this man to reign over us"*, and so they resolved on the most desperate act of their desperate course - they resolved to get Him out of the way by putting Him to death. None of the prophets of old, not even Moses whom they professed to obey had ever come back from the dead to denounce their apostasy. No reason existed to think that this one, even though the most prophets, would survive where Moses had failed. *"Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."* So it came about then, in Peter's biting words, *"him you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"*.

Now comes judgment. In Matthew's account Jesus makes his listeners pass judgment upon themselves. *"He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons"* (Matt. 21.41). There could not be any doubt as to the outcome, either in the story or in the application. The fearful words of Moses in Leviticus 26 detailing their fate if they apostatised from their covenant with God, is enough for that. No man of Israel was ignorant of the prediction, but most men of Israel trusted that by payment of formal lip service to the name of Moses they could escape the threatened retribution. But now they are brought face to face with reality. There was to be no escape. Sin merited judgment, and judgment must inevitably come. When they realised that, some must have cried out, as Luke says they did, "God forbid".

Jesus was talking still, talking with an earnest vehemence that compelled attention. *"Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?"* They knew that quotation well enough. So often had they heard Psalm 118 sung and chanted in the Temple service and their teachers expounding it as a song of rejected Israel's eventual triumph over the Gentiles. This was a new slant on an old theme. They were the builders and the stone was one that they had rejected. Uneasily, they remembered the burning words of Isaiah, denouncing the arrogant men who ruled Jerusalem in certainty that the refuge of lies and falsehood they had erected would always protect

them. God had laid in Zion a tried and choice corner stone on which he who believed could rely (Isa.28.15-16). They thought of Zechariah's vision of the unfaithful shepherds who were to be cut off and replaced by governors of Judah ruling in Jerusalem in the strength of the Lord their God (Zech. 11.12), and they shivered and once again they muttered "*God forbid*".

The compelling voice went on, and now it was inexorable in its cadences of judgment. "*Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" That nation is the Church of Christ, called out from among all nations to be a people for God's purpose. There can be no doubt whatever that there was an opportunity extended to Israel at the First Advent which, had it been accepted, would have changed the whole course of human history. Whether God, in his incomprehensible omnipotence, foreknew that they would reject and had planned accordingly, is quite beside the point. The opportunity was theirs, but they rejected the Prince of Life and desired a murderer to be granted to them, and the opportunity passed them by for ever. Within a very few weeks the faithful few who did accept Christ were being given their commission to be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but to the uttermost parts of the earth. That work of witness has progressed ever since and resulted in the development of a nation which has brought and is bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Paul puts all this into theological language in Romans 11 when he likens Israel to the unfruitful olive branches which "*because of unbelief*" were "*broken off*" and Gentile Christians, being wild olive branches, grafted on in their place. But he goes on to show that the original branches, "*if they abide not still in unbelief*" shall be grafted in again, "*and so all Israel shall be saved*". That can only mean that in a then far future day, after God's work with the Christian Church is complete, He will turn again to the once apostate people of Israel and find them in chastened and repentant mood and so receive them again, that they might, at the last, find their place in the administration of the Divine purpose. "*For,*" says Paul in Romans 11 "*the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*". That then far future day can only be the day of the Second Advent, when the eyes of Israel are opened, and they look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as for an only son (Zech. 12. 10). So we are presented, at the last, with the picture of the glorified Church of this Age, "changed" to be with Christ, resplendent in the heavens. Also purified Israel, waiting before God, and both being agents in God's hand for the extension of the knowledge of His glory over the earth just as the waters cover the sea. James saw this vividly when at the memorable conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 he declared that God was first visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name - the Christian Church. After that He would rebuild the dwelling place of Jacob - Israel - and re-establish it; all this in order that the residue of men - all mankind

as yet not reconciled to God, might seek after the Lord. Here is world conversion in very truth, to be done after, and not before, the salvation of the Church has been achieved and the purified nation of Israel has been made ready.

But the priests and Pharisees listening to Jesus knew nothing of all this. They heard only the solemn words of doom, "*Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder*", and they were coldly furious. Arrogant in their fancied security and determined to maintain their privileged position, they sought means to lay hold on Him, plotting to get rid of Him and the annoyance and inconvenience of His words. They scorned His warnings and predictions, little knowing that within forty years more their own folly would have brought the armed might of Rome against them, sweeping away their city and their polity, and driving them captive among all nations until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. The words of the parable came terribly true. "*He shall miserably destroy those wicked men, and shall let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*"

AOH

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Do you know what it is just to bow before God in silent and adoring homage, to hear from him rather than ask petitions of him? I sometimes experience what may be thought the unusual in that a quarter of an hour spent in kneeling before God without making any request, just recognising the fact that God is, and that I am before him, will bring a fulness of blessing and joy into the soul that no words can tell - *BSM 1989*;

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O strive to say at eventide, when sinks the golden day,  
The Father's, hand has guided me and led me all the way;  
In all I've said and done I've sought His Will to manifest  
Now shadows lower and evening falls. Thy Will, my Lord, is best.

O strive to say when sinks the day, though sad or bright it be,  
I've felt His love. His grace, His power, His help this day in me  
And though He chasten, I shall feel as down an offler day,  
I closer to His footstool kneel, nearer the perfect day. - *BSM 1940*

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Lord Justice Birkett speaking to the boys at a public school in 1951 uttered this tribute to the Bible. "*Here is a mystery -which seems past finding out - how it comes that certain simple -words placed in a certain order can yet move the human heart, beyond all expression, as they do.*

*Open the Authorised Version of the Bible almost anywhere you like and you will find exactly -what I mean."*

# ORIGINAL SIN

## *A Doctrinal Essay*

### **The Problem**

There has been concern about the man-made problems of the world for many centuries, and especially today. Why don't things improve? One explanation is the doctrine of original sin. For believers in the Creator, One who has long term intentions for the world, there is a need to understand what is happening. If we think of the world as God's world, is it the way it is because this is the way He has made us? Or should we think in terms of "adverse spiritual agencies" - Satan? Or does it come down to mankind's own responsibility - but can we help ourselves? If we are made in God's image and likeness, why can't we keep on the straight and narrow?

These questions are bound up in the concept of 'original sin'. A nineteenth century dictionary defines it as - 'Original sin: the first sin committed by Adam as related to or manifested in its consequences to his posterity of the human race' A twentieth century theologian looks at it as an inherited tendency - 'the passing on through heredity of the bias toward sin.... A bent toward sinfulness'.

Understandably, the 'doctrine of original sin' is not acceptable in some schools of thought today, although fashions in human thinking tend to change. Human behaviour is explained in scientific terms, not as a defective relationship with God. The word 'sin' as a general term may not even be found in a compact modern dictionary, which only has 'sins' which are infringements of a religious code of moral behaviour. 'Sin' is not thought of as a fundamental explanation of self-destructive behaviour. People are 'immoral' or 'anti-social'. Such behaviour is said to be due to mental and or psychological problems or disorders, social maladjustment or biological defect; it is 'in the genes'; but it is not due to sin. Social readjustment and rehabilitation is said to put it right. In any event, the wise of this world believe that they can rely upon the process of evolution to take humanity into a state sometime referred to as homo-moralis. But how does this square with the facts as we see them all around today when the media declares loudly that every form of barbarism and savagery, of drug-taking and self-destruction is on the increase. What is the rational explanation for this continued deterioration of behaviour?

### **The explanation**

Our explanation starts with belief in God the Creator. This is not unscientific, for science can be a pointer toward the Creator. While thinkers continue their speculative and hypothetical explanations, real scientific investigation is frequently ignored. There are some in the forefront of such research who recognise

that the very first DNA must have been extremely complex and no one has ever been able to explain the second law of thermodynamics in terms of a beginning by blind chance. Every nook and cranny - every minute detail of the physical universe as we so far have explored it, shout the word Creation at us.

### Sin

Men of ancient times had no doubt as to the reality of sin. Here is a plea, recorded on a tablet still in existence, of a man who lived more than four thousand years ago, obsessed with the consciousness of his sinful state and beseeching God to free him from its bondage. (Be it noted, too, that the God he besought was not one of the gods of paganism. In his day only the God of Heaven, the Most High, was known and worshipped. Researches over the past century have confirmed what some scholars had asserted for a century previously, that paganism was an invention of men's minds; primitive man knew and worshipped the one God.)

"O my God, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins. I transgress and know it not. I sin and know it not. I wander on wrong paths, and I know it not. I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I am silent, and in tears, and none takes me by the hand. I cry out, and there is none that hears me. I am exhausted, and oppressed, and none releases me. My God, who knowest the unknown, be merciful. Lord, thou wilt not repulse thy servant. In the midst of the stormy waters, come to my assistance, take me by the hand. I commit sins—turn them into blessedness. I commit transgressions—let the wind sweep them away. My blasphemies are very many—rend them like a garment. God, who knowest I knew not, my sins are seven times seven—forgive my sins".

Long before Moses; long before Abraham; that man poured out his heart to God. He knew there was such a thing as sin.

In the Bible view the problems and troubles of this world, crime, disease and death itself are the consequence of sin. Sin is a reality and the Bible not only presents its cause but its cure. Its cause originated in Satan's rebellion against his Maker, in which he then went on to infect the human race and invited and encouraged their disobedience to the rules that God had laid down for the well being of Adam and his descendants. The record in Genesis 3, whether intended to be taken absolutely literally or not, enshrines that one great principle, obedience to the known will of God. Sin entered the world by one man and subsequently passed to all.

However one understands the story of the Garden of Eden it enshrines the reality of what sin means. Man was created by God; that is an essential prerequisite. He was not the product of blind chance or natural forces, of evolution from a fortuitous combination of chemical elements. And man was created perfect, sinless, able to live an eternal life by reason of the sustaining Divine life

infused into his organism. Then man sinned, and the source of life from above was interrupted - cut off. The man who ceases to remain in living communion with God who alone is the Author and continual provider of life cuts himself off from life and eventually he dies; there is no alternative. So Adam died. And because the whole of his posterity were conceived and born while he was in that dying state they too have not that Divine sustaining life in them and they too die in their turn. The Bible is positive about this. "In Adam all die... By man came death" (I Cor. 15) "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5.12)

### **The nature of the primal sin**

What then was the intrinsic nature of that primal sin which brought such consequences upon the emergent human race? Granted that the Eden story is factually correct, in that one human pair was created at the first to become parents of the entire human race. What was the act that brought upon them the sentence of death, a sentence that was to involve the whole of their descendants, as yet unborn? The story depicts it as the picking and eating of the fruit of a forbidden tree - but was it really as simple as all that? Not a very sinful act by ordinary standards; neither immoral nor degrading. It is sometimes suggested that the prohibition was a test of obedience and the sin was that of disobedience. Against this it could be argued that the Lord has always been reasonable in his ways and demands and the death sentence for so apparently trivial an act does not match up with his character as revealed in the Bible. Perhaps this aspect of the story needs a little closer examination. Says the narrative "*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat*" (Gen.3.6).

There is a very similar position arising in later times alluded to by the Lord, speaking to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel (16. 49). "*This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness .... therefore I took them away as I saw good*". Good for food - fulness of bread, pleasant to the eyes - abundance of idleness. To make one wise - pride. The Sodomites enjoyed the munificence of Nature in their fertile domain, somewhat analogous to the Garden of Eden, but they sinned against the Lord to a degree that has made the very name a byword to this day. And the Apostle has a word which enshrines a faint echo of the Eden story. "*The desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*" (I John 2.16).

The story of the forbidden fruit enshrines the perpetration of an act, or series of acts, which involve the use of God-given powers and the resources of man's environment for purposes pleasing to the flesh but inimical to the orderly

conduct of life and to the detriment of spiritual communion with God. So was the sin, not merely disobedience in a minor matter, but disloyalty in a major matter?

### **Consequence**

Disloyalty—rebellion—faithlessness; that was the original sin which separated man from God and interrupted the flow of continuing life from God. In consequence man could only carry on with what could be described as his reserve of vitality and when that was exhausted he died. All he could pass on to his descendants was a subnormal life that can only survive a limited term of years and then end in death. So all men die because of original sin.

But the idea that God is in any way going to hold humanity guilty for all eternity is unimaginable in human terms. That a loving God should punish for all eternity anyone who has disobeyed Him for a short three score years and ten is so illogical, and worse, is so unscriptural as to hardly be worthy of further argument. In Roman 11 Paul explains how God "locked the human race up" in its stupid sin so that all mankind can hardly help themselves in their disobedience His rules.

### **Salvation**

But that is not completely true because Paul explains how that even now it is possible in Christ to be reconciled to God and so be liberated from the 'curse' of sin. That having been accomplished, God is able to transform those who surrender to Him. In the remaining years of their lives He is able to change them into His likeness, thus restoring the original intention that man should be in the image of his Maker.

### **Paul's words in Romans**

Those whose eyes have been opened to the causes and cures of sin and who wish to please God, should seek His help in overcoming what is plainly condemned in Scripture - for it is all 'original sin'. Paul, apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, explores the doctrine of original sin in his letter to the Roman church. Right through from the first chapter he is treating of sin. But he does not leave his readers saddened by the terrible state of humanity, and goes on to show in the following chapters how sin can and will be remedied. It is hard to understand why after having read through Romans to the end of chapter 11, any one can resist the invitation given in chapter 12 to surrender one's whole life to God. It is equally hard to understand how anyone who reads and accepts Romans 11 as the word of God can possibly resist the viewpoint that He intends to reconcile the whole of the human race to Himself, if they are willing to co-operate with Him. This can only be accomplished when Jesus raises all who are in their graves, to life.

### A real chance for all

And for those who have not enjoyed this wonderful experience of knowing and doing God's will, he provides them after their resurrection with what is in fact not a second chance as some incorrectly suggest, but with a first opportunity to enjoy real life in Him. Many who have done such evil things in the world that sometime it is thought that they are beyond redemption have no more had a 'first chance' to please God than the tiny baby who dies a few days or month old in a refugee camp. Sin is real - it grips the personality, it warps and twists the life, until the image of the Divine Maker is all but obliterated. But none is beyond deliverance - God in his almighty love can and will offer all mankind the opportunity of a life obedient to Him which Adam threw away in Eden. Jesus died for Adam and his race and they all will be restored to start again where Adam did the first time.

There will be a time when sin shall be no more. The results of sin will vanish. *"There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away"* (Rev. 21.4).

The Father in heaven has provided a remedy. It is true that *"in Adam all die"* but equally and gloriously true that *"in Christ shall all be made alive"*. He will call all men back from the grave so that under the administration of our Lord's Kingdom they will learn the principles of righteousness. It will be such a contrast to their experience of this world of sin and death that they will of full free-will and understanding accept Christ as Saviour and so become "children of the living God". In the final chapter of the Bible the Tree of Life reappears, its fruit for the life of the nations; but of the other tree there is no more to be found.

*Symposium*

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O BROTHER man ! Fold to thy heart thy brother,  
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there ;  
To worship rightly is to love each other,  
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

For he whom Jesus loved hath truly spoken ;  
The holier worship which He deigns to bless  
Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,  
And feeds the widow and the fatherless!

Follow with reverent steps the great example  
Of Him whose holy work was doing good ;  
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,  
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude.

*John Greenleaf Whittier. 1807-92.*

## A comparison

The world through television have recently witnessed the inauguration of a new President of the United States. He is charismatic figure, quite young, with a gift for words. The 'new broom', with new ideas, he speaks with authority, perhaps with the power to get things done, challenging people to take control of their lives. Not a member of the old establishment, he has drawn great crowds to see him, a figure of hope for his nation.

The Jewish people in AD27 viewed Jesus in much the same way. He was young (about 30, Luke 3.23) and had such a way of attracting support when he so wished, that the established leaders were in despair - they complained the whole world had gone after him (John 12:19). His way with words was phenomenal - never man spoke like this man (John 7:46). His teaching was new and authoritative (Matthew 5:21-2) challenging his hearers. His record of getting things done in healing and meeting human need made people cast him for a political role (John 6:15). He did indeed speak of a kingdom (Mark 1:15) and roused the hopes of his nation (Luke 24:21). Not a member of the religious establishment, he had his own way of doing things (Matthew 7:28-9). Great crowds came from a distance to see and hear him (Mark 3:7-8). Some began to see him as the national icon, the Messiah (John 4:29).

The excitement we feel at a new and powerful figure has not changed in two thousand years. What success Barack Obama will have we do not know, but we wish him well. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had great popular success, but His mission was different - not just to serve his people, which indeed is what the best politicians also do - but to give His life in redeeming the world.

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I urge then first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

*1 Timothy 2.1-2*

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

*Matthew 20.28*

## The Minor Prophets - a Quiz

Can our readers name the twelve 'minor prophets', in correct order, and without checking in their Bibles?

How long is it since we read these last books of the Old Testament?

Here is a small quiz which may encourage us to look at them again and remember their spiritual value. Twelve phrases are given. The test is to state from which of the minor prophets each one is taken.

1. Go at once to Nineveh
2. The prophet Elijah... will turn the hearts of parents toward their children
3. Your king comes to you... riding on a donkey
4. When Israel was a child, I loved him
5. An oracle concerning Nineveh
6. The remnant of Israel... no one shall make them afraid
7. Once again in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth
8. An army of locusts... and young men who see visions
9. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom
10. The day of the Lord is darkness, not light
11. They shall beat their swords into plowshares
12. No fruit... no food... no herd... yet I will rejoice in the Lord

The answers with references are on the opposite page.

## The Prophetic Word

In these prophecies we are left with an overwhelming conviction that God is God, right is right and wrong is wrong; and that in itself is an iron tonic to us moderns. For most of us today are afraid of denouncing evil for fear of being called intolerant; we are not allowed to be morally indignant for "psychology says" that what is making us angry is an identical fault in ourselves! We are not allowed to have any definite values of right and wrong, for all things, we are told, are purely relative - though relative to what is not made clear. In these days we can scarcely spare a thought for the victim of vicious assault for all our sympathy is needed for the brutal and callous aggressor. We are frightened of sharing our faith with a fellow human being for fear of interfering with the sanctity of his private beliefs; we are even scared of living out the principles of the Gospel lest we are labelled contemptuously as "do-gooders".

But here in this world of nearly three thousand years ago human beings are far less self-conscious. They can be noble, wise, brave and good, but they can also be cruel, stupid, greedy, fickle or just plain wicked. We are back in a world of real people, potentially sons and daughters of the Most High, but making tragically wrong choices and treating each other abominably. But the prophets assume always that men have consciences and that they have the power to choose their path. If they are beyond the reach of messages of sweetness and light, then violent, indeed terrifying, threats and warnings must be used to crack their dreadful complacency.

*JBPhillips (from translator's preface to **Four Prophets** 1963)*

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9.Obadiah1 10.Amos5.20 11.Micah4.3 12.Habakkuk3.17,18  
S.Nahum11 6.Zephaniah3.13 7.Haggai2.6 8.Joel2.5,28  
1.Jonah1.2 2.Malachi4.5-6 3.Zechariah9.9 4.Hosea11

**Quiz Answers**

## YOUR FAITH

I came to your door and I met your faith. I had met faith at various times, but not your faith. Faith indeed had much to do with my experience with life. When I had come to the borderland where the country of knowledge ends, Faith had taken my hand and led me forward and shown me things that were strange and of wondrous interest. But your faith had an individuality of its own, and impressed me with directness and with power. Perhaps that was because I was weary. I do not know. I only know that I was glad to rest awhile and to bask in the sunshine of your faith.

The way had been toilsome and long. There had been the mountains to cross, and there had been avalanches and great storms. There had been the forest, where wild beasts roamed at large and where to lose one's way was easy enough. At times my strength seemed unequal to such a journey, but I had undertaken it, and my mind was a citadel where resolution had intrenched itself and where it was not likely to yield to conditions of difficulty and opposition from without.

The sun was declining in the west and a golden shaft of light fell upon your door as I stood there before you for the first time and met your faith. There was music as of many birds singing, and then your faith enveloped me as with a mantle of peace.

Conspicuous elements of your faith were kindness, tranquility and strength. You received me as I was and took for granted that my intentions were the best. As I looked upon your faith, it translated life into beauty. It cheered me with the hope of higher and better things to come. It sat upon you with outstretched wings as a thing meant to soar. I still think of your faith as I met it that day.

And your faith has not lost anything with the passing of years. When illness entered into my dwelling, the memory of you and your faith was there as a soothing balm. And then—wondrous to relate—your faith became my faith and this with no loss to you. I mean that my faith took on the hue and colour and power of your faith, which seemed greater than mine had been heretofore. When pain assailed my tabernacle of flesh, Faith stood beside me. His locks were all gold, and his eyes were bright with the shining of joy. When he smiled upon me, the darkness passed away, and I knew there were ministering angels at hand, and I was enabled to look beyond the present things to those realms where love and peace abide forever.

Oh, I am glad—glad because of victories gained along the trail that runs through the years. Glad because of stars and flowers and the songs of birds. Glad because of white-robed peaks that spear the sky and whisper of eternal realities that shall not fade with the fading of earth. Glad because that once when I was weary, and my heart was heavy after a toilsome way, and when the vanities of

life looked down upon me with sombre eyes, after the mountain had been crossed, I came to your door and I met your faith, and it led me to heights where today I can look up and see the smile of God.

*I sat me down in earth's benighted vale,  
And had no courage and no strength to rise;  
Sad, to the passing breeze I told my tale,  
And bowed my head and drained my seeping eyes.  
But Faith came by, and took me by the hand;  
And now the valleys rise, the mountains fall;  
Welcome the stormy sea, the dangerous land!  
With faith to aid me, I can conquer all.*

*Walter Sargeant, from the "Herald of Christ's Kingdom".*

---

O Lord of life, and love, and power,  
How joyful life might be  
If in Thy service every hour  
We lived and moved with Thee;  
If youth in all its bloom and might  
By Thee were sanctified,  
And manhood found its chief delight  
In working at Thy side!

'Tis ne'er too late, while life shall last,  
A new life to begin;  
'Tis ne'er too late to leave the past  
And break with self and sin;  
And we this day, both old and young,  
Would earnestly aspire  
For hearts to nobler purpose strung,  
And purified desire.

Nor for ourselves alone we plead,  
But for all faithful souls  
Who serve Thy cause by word or deed,  
Whose names Thy book enrols;  
O speed Thy work, victorious King,  
And give Thy workers might,  
That through the world Thy truth may ring,  
And all men see Thy light.

*Ella Sophia Armitage 1841-1931*

## NOTICES

**The Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust** is a registered charity that owns and manages a Christian Retirement Home at Milbome Port known as Gainsborough House. It is a large Victorian villa where existing buildings surrounding a courtyard were developed into self-contained flats. Several of the flats are immediately available as permanent accommodation or for week-ends and short stays. The centre is under the care of a Housekeeper who resides on the premises and who prepares an excellent mid-day meal. There are two lounges, a library, a pleasant garden and laundry utilities. It is set in beautiful rural surroundings with the sea and many places of interest easily accessible.

*Housekeeper: Mrs Corrinne Vaughan Tel 01963 250 684*

**Christian African Relief Trust (CART)** This wonderful Christian charity has for the past 25 years been sending clothing, food, household items, educational supplies, computer equipment, and a great many other things to Africa and more recently to Asia. The Charity is remarkable because it relies upon voluntary labour to handle, restore and repair the vast variety of goods. Its trustees pay all their own expenses so that every penny donated to the Charity goes to its relief work. The 15,000 items in 22 huge containers in 2008 were sent to centres known to CART as genuine.

The work includes the provision of clean drinking water in many places and helping to establish schools. We are deeply grateful to our dear Brother Guildford Tompkins and all the many Christian brothers and sisters who have accomplished this work that has been so blessed by the Lord. May that blessing continue so long as there is a need to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, support the sick and visit the prisoners.

*Contact address: Mr G. Tompkins 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD8 0LR*

**In publishing the Bible Study Monthly** and other literature we try to reach all ages, often using modern translations. We keep articles to moderate length with varied presentation and retain original viewpoints when reprinted material is updated. We publish what is believed to have a wide interest; but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of those responsible for editing.

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## Gone From Us

Brother W.T. Jones (VA USA)

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

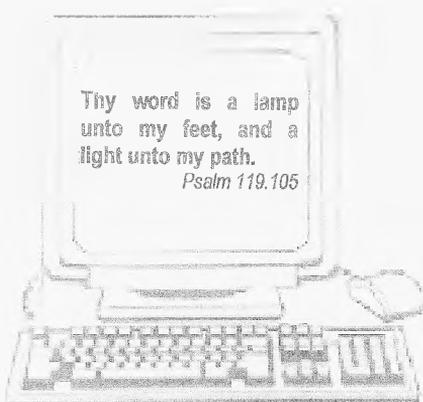
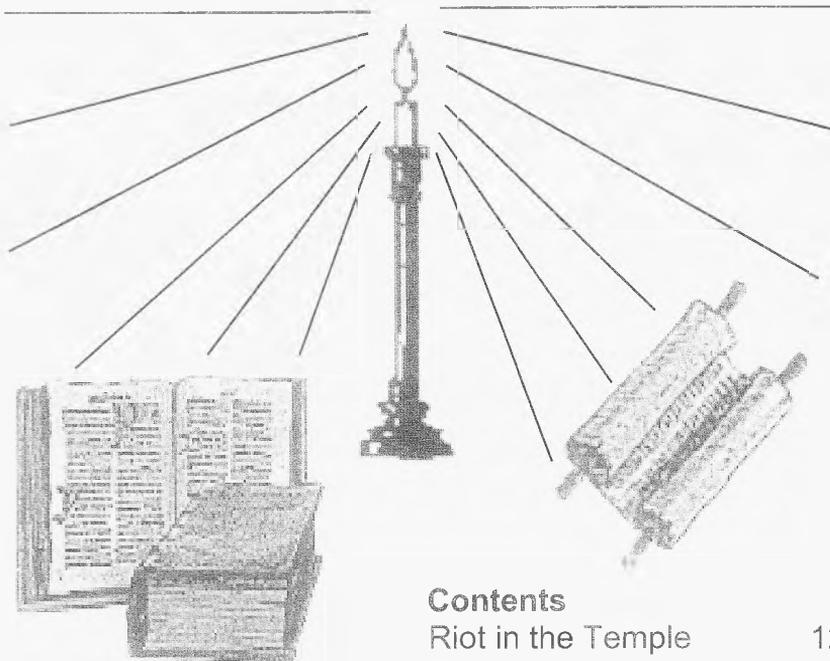
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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

### SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

*"And with you in all the work will be every volunteer who has skill for any kind of service..... Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?"* (1 Chron.28.21 & 29.5 NRSV).

The great Temple of Solomon was classified by the ancients as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was made possible and built by voluntary service, by men imbued with an ideal. King David knew that the dream of his life would not be achieved by himself. In these words, he told his son the Crown Prince Solomon that there would be an army of voluntary workers at his disposal. He then turned to his counsellors and elder statesmen, he appealed through them to all Israel to give of themselves and their property to help forward this great work.

Our materialistic age looks with some scorn upon people who render voluntary service. The whole idea is out of date. If Solomon's Temple was to be built to-day there would be half-a-dozen big "property development" concerns scrambling for the contract, and no matter which one got it the price would be pretty high. Solomon's Temple was a marvellously ambitious structure. It has been calculated that with the gold and silver, copper and iron, rare woods and hewn stone used in its construction it must have cost the Israelitish king the equivalent of a hundred and fifty million pounds (over two hundred and fifty million dollars) of today's money for material alone. And the labour at to-day's trade union rates would have set him back another hundred millions. Then there would have to be the contractors'

profits and the architect's fees and compensation for all sorts of people whose real or imagined rights could be shown by their legal representatives to have been infringed by the project, and of course those same legal men's expenses and some associated court costs. Solomon in later life did most regrettably inflict some heavy taxation on his people but had the Temple been built by modern methods he would probably have had to extract some four hundred millions from those same long-suffering subjects on the Temple project alone before the contractors would hand over the key. King David knew a better way. "Every *willing* skilful man . . . for any kind of service . . . willing to consecrate his service this day *unto the Lord*". That was how the most magnificent place of worship the world has ever known—with the possible exception of Herod's Temple, later erected on the same site—was built.

Even among many Christian communities the ideal of voluntary service for the Lord is not exemplified as it should be. How many churches and chapels there are surrounded by a tangled mass of grass, weeds and overgrown shrubs which by the efforts of a dedicated band of amateur gardeners from the congregation could be turned into little oases of beauty in what are only too often drab and unprepossessing surroundings! How many ministers and pastors could intensify their powers for good tenfold with the aid of a small group of helpers devoted to taking the more mundane tasks of ministry off their shoulders! If the local place of worship is an earthly outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven—and it should be—then surely even physically it should reflect some of that beauty which is an attribute of the Kingdom of Heaven. "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*" was the Apostle's admonition. Many of our readers are members of groups where some of these ideals are put into practice—there is room for much extension of this among many Christian bodies. The outside world might even take notice at last and wonder if, after all, there might not be something in the idea of doing something for nothing. The pulpit is not the only platform from which sermons are preached.

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Go, labour on, spend, and be spent,  
Thy joy to do the Father's will;  
It is the way the Master went;  
Should not the servant tread it still?

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#### GONE FROM US

Sister Marjorie Hudson (*Milborne Port*)  
"*Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away*"

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## RIOT IN THE TEMPLE

### *Continuing the story of Paul*

#### **Seen to be orthodox**

There was a long silence in the room after James had finished speaking. The faces of his colleagues, elders of the Jerusalem church, revealed their satisfaction with the manner in which he had put their proposal. Paul and his companions, men of Asia and of Greece, sat with grave countenances. They had not expected this fundamental difference of outlook between Jew and Gentile to be introduced so soon after their coming together. The question was of observing or not observing the Mosaic law, but it had been introduced and now they had to face it and come to a decision.

The Asiatic and Greek churches had been collecting a money gift for the benefit of the hard-hit believers in Jerusalem for a number of years past. Now Paul was in the city, together with eight representatives of those churches, formally to hand over the money. As an evidence of Christian love and good fellowship this gesture ranks high. There had been very little contact between the Gentile assemblies and the Church at Jerusalem. The spirit that inspired the gift reveals an intense awareness, on the part of the Gentile believers, of the essential unity of all believers in Christ, transcending differences of race or nation, of culture or of doctrine. These Judean disciples were in dire need and the newly formed Gentile communities in the first flush of their Christian experience were doing what they could to relieve that need. The importance they attached to their gesture is high-lighted by the fact that in addition to Paul's personal co-workers, Luke and Timothy, six others had made the long journey with him to Judea to testify to the Jerusalem disciples by their presence how real was the concern of the Gentile churches for the distressful condition of their fellow-believers in Jerusalem.

It is rather puzzling that the account of the meeting in Acts 21 says not one word about the actual presentation of the gift. The stern ascetic James, a natural half-brother of Jesus, was the acknowledged leader of the Church, and all the elders, it is said, were present. It is hard to resist the idea that the travellers were somewhat disappointed in their reception. All that Luke saw fit to record was that Paul gave a detailed account of the work he and his fellow-labourers had carried out in Asia and Greece and the results they had achieved in terms of conversions and assemblies established. The response from their hosts seems almost perfunctory: "*and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord*", and they immediately plunged into discussion of a totally different and purely local interest, the manner in which suspicion of Paul's orthodoxy in matters relating to the Mosaic Law might be allayed whilst he

was in their midst. It seems almost as if that subject was of infinitely greater moment to them at that time than the gift and the loving spirit that had prompted so many believers in so many churches to make sacrifices for the well-being of these brethren whom they had never seen. It might well be that Luke, himself a Greek, had little patience with these pettifogging arguments about the detail and ceremonial of the Mosaic Covenant. Now he felt too sick at heart to record anything more about the gift which he and his brethren had carried with such pride as emissaries of their home churches.

All faces now were turned to Paul, for his was to be the decision. The proposal put forward by James was clear enough. The Jerusalem Christians still observed the Mosaic Law, including the rite of circumcision, the distinction between clean and unclean foods, and the observance of the great feasts. To what extent they realised that the coming and the death of Christ, and the new message which He taught, had abrogated all these things, is not now known, but they did certainly continue to observe all the outward ceremonial. Paul they knew as the man who proclaimed in no uncertain voice that "*Christ is the end of the Law to everyone that believes*". Nothing of all the ceremony and restrictions associated with the Mosaic Covenant was of any validity or value to the Christian. They also knew that he refused to draw any distinction between Jew and Gentile, saying that God Himself had broken down the wall of partition between them, that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian or Scythian, but that all were one in Christ. Their own Christianity was not yet mature enough to prevent them resenting these sentiments with all their native Jewish pride and insularity. Matters were not helped by the accession of a great number of priests and Pharisees to the Church – according to James at this time there were "*many thousands which believe*". The Greek word *myriados*, literally means tens of thousands, and was used colloquially to indicate a multitude that was well-nigh uncountable. It is probably true that the Christian Church in Jerusalem was in real danger of becoming merely a sect of Judaism, and it was only the catastrophic ending of the entire Jewish polity a few years later that destroyed its Judaistic leanings and transformed it into a true Christian community.

In the light of this position James made his suggestion. He wanted Paul to indicate his personal orthodoxy in things Mosaic by participating in a Temple ceremony. Four of the local Christians had taken the Nazarite vow – to abstain from strong drink and allow their hair to grow uncut – and the time of their ceremonial release was at hand. This involved an elaborate seven day ritual at the Temple, where alone this release could be effected, and the priesthood had seen to it that the procedure cost money. It was the

custom for wealthy Jews, as an act of piety, to pay these costs on behalf of men too poor to meet them and this involved association in the relevant ceremonies. If, suggested James, Paul would thus associate himself with these four men and spend the necessary week in the Temple, all concerned would see that he was still a loyal son of Israel conforming at least to the outward trappings of the Law of Moses.

James' purpose was to allay criticism of Paul's reputed views regarding the Law, and there was nothing in the course suggested to which Paul could logically take exception. The Nazarite vow was a formal means of declaring in public the intensity of personal dedication or consecration to the service of God. As a ceremonial it had been regulated by definite provisions in the Law of Moses but there is reason to think that the practice existed long before the Law. The term "Nazarite" itself comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'to be separated' (it has no connection with the town Nazareth or the term Nazarene applied to the early Christians). A man desiring to express in symbol, for the edification of his fellows, the fact of his dedication to God, took the Nazarite vow. This involved abstaining from strong drink in symbol of keeping the mental faculties clear and vital for Divine worship, and allowing the hair to grow long – the ancient idea was that physical strength resided in the hair – to picture the preservation of the physical powers for Divine service. The vow was for a period at the end of which the hair was cut and offered to God by the priest with an appropriate ritual. The full law on the matter appears in Numbers 6. Several instances of its application are found in the Old Testament, Hannah's child and Samson being noteworthy examples. The ceremony was equally appropriate to Christian and Jew; Paul himself took the vow on one occasion (Acts 18.18) so that he was violating no principle of conduct in assenting to the proposal. The only question was whether his presence in the Temple for an entire week at the time of the feast – for this was Pentecost and the city was full of pilgrims from all parts of the world – would spark off trouble with some of his inveterate enemies. Perhaps he reassured himself with the thought that only a few years earlier, at the end of his second missionary journey, he had undergone the same seven days ceremonial in the Temple on his own account when he himself had taken the vow, and no untoward circumstance occurred. At any rate, he assented.

### **In the Temple, trouble**

This time the outcome was different. Five or six of the days had passed. The priests were conducting the ancient ceremonial in their usual perfunctory unhurried fashion, offering the unleavened bread, and the meat offering, and the drink offering, and the peace offering. Paul and his four companions

were standing in their allotted places, carrying out their part of the ritual in harmony with the movements of the priests. At a respectful distance around them clustered a crowd of spectators, curious pilgrims whose own sacrifices had been presented and who now were going round gazing with wide-open eyes at every new spectacle this wonderful Temple could furnish. The offerings passed from hand to hand; the droning voices of the priests went on.....

There came a sudden interruption. *"Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and this place; and further brought Greeks into the temple and hath polluted this holy place"* . The stentorian voice roared over the quiet court. A group of men – provincial Jews, Asiatics by their dress, had rudely broken into the circle of priests and laid violent hands on Paul, shouting to the crowd as they did so. In an instant all was confusion. The mere mention of Greeks in the sacred precincts was enough to rouse the entire concourse to raging fury. Paul was surrounded by an angry mob and hustled out of the 'Court of the Women' where the ceremony was taking place, down the fifteen steps of the Gate Beautiful into the Court of the Strangers where there was more space and less sanctity. As they did so the priests hurriedly closed the ponderous gates to avoid risk of bloodshed in the sacred court. What happened in the Court of the Strangers was not so important and not so much their concern.

Somebody else, however, was concerned. At the north-west corner of the Temple area stood the Tower of Antonia, headquarters of the Roman garrison, specially built so as to overlook the Temple because so many riots had their beginning within its courts. The Romans had built a flight of steps that led down from the castle directly into the Temple outer court to facilitate the rapid descent of troops when necessary. The Romans had found by experience that it was frequently necessary. Now the centurion on duty looked down upon the melee below and saw the street ruffians hurrying in to take part in whatever was afoot. Without more ado he sent an urgent report to his commander that another riot had started in the Temple and *"all Jerusalem was in an uproar"*. That long-suffering tribune, Claudius Lysias, dropped what he was doing, doubtless with a muttered imprecation upon these turbulent Jews who would never let him rest in peace, called up a detachment of soldiers and centurions, and dashed down the stairs into the Court. At the well-known sound of clashing Roman weapons the tumult momentarily lessened; there was probably a bit of a stampede to get out of the Gate and into the street. Citizens of Jerusalem knew what it meant when Roman soldiers sailed in

to stop a fight. Even the Asiatic Jews who had started it all and were in process of beating Paul to death desisted when they saw the stalwart mail-clad soldiers forcing their way with scant ceremony through the crowd to get to them. In a moment, with typical Roman efficiency, the central figure was picked up from the ground and shackled to two soldiers. The remainder pushed the crowd back a little and then Lysias demanded to know what the trouble was all about. Immediately a babble of voices broke out mingled with abuse and threats aimed at Paul, standing silent in the midst of the soldiers. With a gesture of contempt the commander turned from the crowd. At a curt word of command, Paul's custodians began to march him toward the stairs. Seeing themselves being baulked of their prey, the crowd broke through the barriers and surrounded the little party, yelling like wild beasts. Quickly the soldiers formed a tight ring to push back the mob while several of them hoisted Paul up bodily and carried him up the stairs, their comrades holding back the crowd meanwhile. Once at the top, the emergency was over for no Jew would dare to follow on to the garrison ramparts.

It seems from the record in Acts that Lysias had formed the impression that his prisoner was a certain Egyptian false Messiah. Only a few months previously he had led four thousand deluded followers up the Mount of Olives under a promise that the walls of Jerusalem would fall before them and the Roman power be destroyed. Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, had acted promptly and quelled the insurrection, slaying many and taking other prisoners to be sent into slavery. The false Messiah himself had escaped and was never heard of again. Lysias seemed rather astonished to find that he had on his hands instead, an apparently respectable, educated Asiatic Jew. Perhaps rather reluctantly, he assented to Paul's request that he be allowed to address the multitude from the top of the stairs.

Standing there in full view of the people, Paul raised his hand in token of silence. The shouting died away; with a swift reversal of feeling the mob that a moment ago had been crying out for his blood was now curious to hear what he had to say. *"And when there was made a great silence he spoke to them."* Paul spoke in Aramaic, the native language of the people. That one fact alone must have contributed to the attention they gave him. Greek was the official language of the Romans, of the highly placed, the rich and influential. Aramaic was the tongue of the common people, the tongue of their ancestors. And many of them would be maliciously conscious that most of the Roman soldiers listening would not understand a word of what was being said, so they gave Paul their close attention.

It was a masterly discourse. *"Men, brethren and fathers"* was his introductory mode of address, conciliatory and giving due deference to the men of authority amongst them. He told them of his credentials as a Jew, his

education under Rabbi Gamaliel, the famous Pharisee whose name was even then, in his own generation, famous throughout Israel. He described how as a zealous Pharisee himself he had *"persecuted this way unto the death"* and told of his conversion on the Damascus road when his eyes beheld the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. He related the details of his commission to preach that same Jesus and how he obeyed. To all this his hearers gave respectful attention, for nothing he had said transgressed Jewish national or religious feeling. But then he came to the historic occasion when in this very Temple he had seen a vision of Jesus saying to him *"Depart; for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles"*. At mention of the hated name and Paul's bold assertion that God intended His salvation to be offered to the Gentiles, the entire assembly erupted in uncontrollable anger. *"Away with such a fellow from the earth"* they cried, *"for it is not fit that he should live"*. They tore their clothes, threw dust into the air, and probably made an involuntary dash to the stairs as if to drag Paul down into their midst again.

Lysias had had enough. He probably did not understand Aramaic and had become increasingly impatient as he stood by listening to Paul's oration. Now he intended to get to the root of the matter. He told his soldiers to take Paul inside for interrogation and to preface the examination with a severe scourging, which was the accepted way of getting the truth out of an unwilling prisoner. Paul had been in this position before and knew his rights. He quietly reminded the centurion of the illegality of scourging a Roman citizen. The centurion was startled; it was unusual but not unknown for Jews to hold the privilege of Roman citizenship and he knew the severity with which any breach of the law in this respect was treated. He suspended the proceedings for the time being and went straight to his commander.

Lysias came down in what was probably a state of near panic to verify the fact personally. He seemed doubtful at first. He himself, he said, had obtained his citizenship at considerable monetary expense. He was probably a Greek or an Asiatic who had spent his life as a professional soldier and acquired citizenship as a reward for some contribution made to State interests or even, not impossibility, by bribery. *"But I,"* said Paul, *"was free born"* – born a citizen. That meant that his father or grandfather must have held Roman citizenship before him.

Lysias could doubt no longer; the penalty for falsely claiming to be a Roman citizen was death, and he was convinced. He was also very worried, for in merely binding Paul preparatory to the scourging he had laid himself open to severe punishment should his prisoner make an

official complaint to the governor Felix at Caesarea. It is very probable that Paul spent that night, not as a prisoner, but as the guest of Claudius Lysias in the latter's private apartments. The next morning the members of the Sanhedrin – who had not been involved in the riot of the previous day anyway – received a peremptory summons to arrange a session at which Paul, under Roman surveillance, should appear and have the matters in dispute settled once and for all.

So, at last, the wheel had turned full circle. Some twenty-five years previously Paul himself, as a member of that same Sanhedrin, had seen Stephen arraigned and condemned to death for blasphemy. He himself had given his vote for the death sentence. Now he, in his own turn, was to stand before the same judicial body to defend his advocacy of the identical principles for which Stephen had given his life.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

## EVENING REST

When the day seems long and weary,  
When the day is o'er at last,  
Then the stars which shine so clearly  
Sweetly speak of rest at last.

Jesus whispers, oh! so gently,  
Deep within our inmost breast,  
Of His love, so true and tender,  
Which will guide us to our rest.

Safe in His sure care and keeping,  
'Till that blessed morning shall break,  
When with joy we'll soon be reaping  
Even for His own name's sake.

One with our Divine Redeemer,  
We will sing the song of love,  
Which will sound in Heaven for ever,  
When we reign with Him above.

AES – (1940)

## THE MASTER'S JOY

The Lord Jesus rejoiced in God. All nature spoke to Him of His Father. This wondrous world of which we, even today, know so little, was to Him not alien soil, but a mansion in the Father's house, and the Father Himself was at the back of all Nature's bounty and beauty. Jesus rejoiced in the Scriptures; they spoke to Him of His Father and revealed the character of One with Whom He was in constant communion. As a boy He eagerly awaited His reaching the age of twelve when He could get to Jerusalem and be in His Father's House. What a keen desire there must have been in the heart of the boy Jesus to enter those Temple precincts where He could ask those "*sitting in Moses' seat*", some of the many questions that crowded in upon His sinless yet undeveloped mind!

God's Word, throughout His whole life on earth, was the joy and rejoicing of the Master's heart. By that Word He repelled the Tempter at the commencement of His ministry and by it He caused the hearts of the disciples to burn within them immediately after His resurrection, at its close. To the Lord Jesus, God was unimaginably good: in the joy of His knowledge of God's love He sketched for us the picture of the prodigal son and the love of an earthly father, saying in effect, "if you then, being evil, are like that, how much more is God!" He experienced constantly the joy of boundless hope in a God so wonderfully and unimaginably good. Satan was the god of this world and evil was rampant. Those who would do God's will must endure persecution. He was confronted by the thought of a cruel death but the Master's gaze was habitually directed beyond these things. He lived in constant view of those conditions that will prevail when God's will is done upon earth as now it is done in heaven.

The Lord Jesus continued in communion with the Father, not merely One to be enjoyed, but also One to be served, and this opportunity of loving devotion was in itself to Jesus another constant source of delight. The will of God was placed centrally in the Master's life, and to carry it out was His meat and drink. His natural love for His own home, for His mother, and for His family circle, was intense, and yet before all these He placed those who did the will of God. "*Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" (Matt. 12. 50). From this delight in doing the service of God there arose another source of joy, that of a constant sense of the Divine approval on His life. "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" was the testimony given from heaven to John the Baptist on the banks of the River Jordan, a testimony that

was repeated to the three disciples upon the Mount of Transfiguration and attested by numerous evidences of the Father's favour during our Lord's earthly ministry. Those declarations were made that "*men might know . . . Jesus Christ*" whom God had sent, for Jesus Himself needed no such outward assurances. Within Himself, all the time, like sweetest music in His soul, vibrated the thought "*I do always those things that please Him*".

Perhaps greatest of all, our Master had the supreme joy associated with supreme self-sacrifice. Despised and rejected, scorned and spat upon, scourged and crucified, that wonderful love in the heart of Jesus inspired Him to exult with a deep and holy joy that in this way, through the valley of suffering and humiliation, He could bring the prodigal world back to God. All the evil that was inflicted upon the Master, all the mental and physical suffering which He bore so patiently, all the evidences of hardness of heart and lack of faith in those near to Him, only made him realise the more how vital was their need of Him. In prophetic vision he saw "*of the travail of his soul and was satisfied*".

How true is the Scripture which declares that "*For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high*". It was because our Master so consistently found joy in all that His life held that He was able to say "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled*"; and the Apostle adds as a triumphant commentary and exhortation "*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice*".

The joy of the Lord is our strength.

TH

## THE PEOPLE'S ANTHEM

Justice for the poor! This is a theme for the twenty-first century. At a time when while the greed of wealthy bankers is execrated the wretchedness in the third world is only partly relieved; when the rich live in increasing luxury yet many across the world are reduced to conditions of virtually slave labour; when there is traffic in vice; oppression of whole races; and violence resulting from despair, there is an overwhelming need for social justice and a despair for how it may be achieved.

The theme is not new. Old Testament prophets more than two thousand seven hundred years ago had the same complaint. Even among their own people, God's own people, there was greed and oppression. Isaiah

foresaw it resulting in the ruin of the nation. *“The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: it is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts.”* (Isaiah 3.14,15). The perquisites of the rich would be taken away from them as their enemies took them away, captives. *“In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets and the scarfs; ... the perfume boxes... signet rings... festal robes, mantles, the cloaks and the handbags... the garments of gauze.... the veils... Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope.... instead of well-set hair, baldness.... instead of beauty, shame. Your men shall fall by the sword and your warriors in battle.”* (3.18-25).

And while Isaiah spoke judgment in the city, Amos in the agricultural economy had a similar complaint. *“They sell the righteous for silver... the needy for a pair of sandals... they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth...”* prostitution, drunkenness, oppression (Amos 2.6-8) *“Because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.”* (5.11) *“You that trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land... practise deceit with false balances...selling the sweepings of the wheat”* (8.4-6). All this, said Amos, would result in national ruin and desolation. In our time, could the prophets of climate change say more?

It might be argued that Our Lord had a different perspective. Speaking to the rich, He warned them how foolish it is to rely on riches (parable of the rich fool). He said that the poor were blessed, but the rich already had their reward (Luke 6.24). But to such as the Rich Young Ruler or the tax-farmer Zaccheus He gave a personal opportunity to repent. Yet for all this, we find a little later that James in his epistle declaims: *“Come now, you rich men, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted; and their rust shall be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.”* (James 5.1-6)

It is in the context of such human behaviour which has persisted through the centuries, that we find a poet in early-Victorian Britain writing his 'people's anthem'.

Ebenezer Elliott lived near Sheffield. He was the son of an iron founder who in his chapel preached vehemently. Ebenezer became a self-taught poet, in the age of Southey and Byron. He loved the natural world. As a business man in the iron trade he failed, twice. His greatest concern was the Corn Laws, which over a period of thirty years created wealth for landowners by keeping grain prices high, and in so doing increased the misery of the poor. In his old age he wrote a parody of the national anthem. It was not 'God save the Queen' (who stood for the establishment and the rule of the wealthy) but 'God save the people' - the needy, the disregarded.

*When wilt Thou save the people?  
O God of mercy, when?  
Not kings alone, but nations!  
Not thrones and crowns, but men!  
Flowers of Thy heart, O God, are they;  
Let them not pass, like weeds, away -  
Their heritage a sunless day,  
God save the people!*

*Shall crime bring crime for ever,  
Strength aiding still the strong?  
Is it Thy will, O Father,  
That man shall toil for wrong?  
"No," say Thy mountains; "No," Thy skies;  
Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,  
And songs ascend instead of sighs.  
God save the people!*

*When wilt Thou save the people?  
O God of mercy, when?  
The people, Lord, the people,  
Not thrones and crowns, but men;  
God save the people; Thine they are,  
Thy children, as Thine angels fair;  
From vice, oppression, and despair,  
God save the people!*

All men, we know, are like grass, and eventually perish like grass (Isaiah 40.6), but Elliott's plea was that the common people should not be treated like weeds. His vision was the same as the Old Testament prophets, that God would 'do something' - "*give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light.*" (James Montgomery was writing these words at about the same time in his hymn 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed'.) Each man would live under his own vine and his own fig tree - not toil in dark factories or mines. He looked for the time when death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away (Revelation 21.4).

There were some Christians after Elliott's death who would not accept 'The People's Anthem' as a hymn (even though Booth wrote a fine tune for it). They said it blamed God. 'When will you save the people?' implied that God ought to be getting on with it! Elliott in fact believed that salvation for the people would come through giving them the vote - democracy.

It is true that this anthem raises up questions of why and for how long does God permit evil? Should people - with His help - make efforts to improve the state of the world? We expect it, don't we, of our statesmen. Or wait for Him to act? Or do we act as we are able, as for example CART does, to give the poor, if not justice, at least help? When, and in what manner, will God's kingdom come? What makes it possible for His will to be done on earth as in heaven? If we find it difficult to provide perfect answers to these questions, we can only pray for the Lord Jesus to settle all questions as He will in His good time.

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*For each new venture, give us heart,  
For each new step, give us courage,  
For each new problem, give us wisdom,  
For all things new, give us the word that is old, yet ever new.*

## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

### 4. Naboth's Vineyard

King Ahab was beginning to feel very pleased with himself. He had just won a decisive battle against the Syrians and concluded a peace treaty with their king Ben-hadad. It was a treaty that the Syrians had no hesitation in breaking a few years later with much less satisfactory results for the wicked Ahab. There had been no more famines, and his kingdom was relatively prosperous. Best of all, he had seen nothing of his old adversary Elijah for a long time. He was beginning to hope that he could settle down again with his pagan wife, that vicious Queen Jezebel, without any more uncomfortable reminders that there was a God of Israel who could not be defied with impunity. For one of the distinguishing marks of the hardened unbeliever is his fixed conviction that, even if God is really there, he can with good luck succeed in flouting him without incurring serious consequences, at least for the time being. So he conveniently put the memory of the three years' famine and the demonstration of the true God on the top of the Mount Carmel at the back of his mind and hoped that wherever Elijah was, he would stay there and not come back.

In which pleasant frame of mind the wicked King Ahab took a short walk to view a property belonging to a neighbour of his. Adjacent to the gardens of his palace in Jezreel there was a vineyard, belonging to one of his subjects, Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab wanted that vineyard for himself. It was not that he contemplated going into the vinery business; he was already doing very well living on the labours of his subjects, in addition to a very profitable commercial liaison with his father-in-law, King Ethbaal of the Phoenician merchant nation on the sea coast. He did, however, covet that vineyard so that he could destroy the vines and create an extension to his palace herb gardens. He knew that the Law of God given by Moses forbade the disposal or acquiring of family property and that it must remain inviolate through successive generations to prevent the emergence of rich and poor classes in Israel. After all, he must have reasoned, if he ever did think about the matter, which is in the highest degree unlikely, Moses had been dead a long time and no one gave much heed to those old principles in this modern age. Anyway he wanted the land and what was a king for if he could not have his own way with his subjects. So he went down to see Naboth the Jezreelite.

Now right here he encountered a problem. Naboth turned out to be a man of God, devout and perhaps a bit rigid in his loyalty to the laws of Moses, who

replied, "*The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance.*" It is true that the king had offered to buy it at a fair price, or to give him another vineyard in exchange. Whether he intended to fulfil that bargain once he got possession of the object of his desires is another matter. Rulers of peoples have notoriously short memories. But, attractive bargain or not, Naboth was not selling. And the reason for his not selling was his loyalty to the God of Israel. He had received the vineyard as a family inheritance from his own father and he must pass it on to his own son or sons should he have any. The sequel to the story implies that he had no sons at this time; perhaps he was not yet even married. At any rate, he would not sell.

Now the Authorised Version tells us that in consequence Ahab went home to his palace "*heavy and displeased*" and as is so often the case the Authorised Version translators failed to express the true meaning. What is really said is that Ahab went home to his palace sulky and morose, and that gives a much truer picture of his attitude. He had been accustomed for a long time to have his own way. His courtiers and servants fawned upon him and said yes to everything he said or wanted, and now that he had come up against someone who said no he was like a little child and he sulked. Not that Naboth cared one jot about that; he just got on with his vine-dressing.

But someone did take notice. The haughty Queen Jezebel came in and found Ahab stretched upon his bed, refusing to eat and generally manifesting a very anti-social attitude. Being his wife and not usually finding him like this she naturally wanted to know what was the matter. So he told her about the vineyard and Naboth's refusal to sell.

It is clear that Queen Jezebel was by far the most strong-minded of the two. Ahab would have got over his fit of the sulks in time and thought of something else he wanted and forgotten all about Naboth and his vineyard. But his wife was a different proposition. Who was this Naboth who dared to flout the wishes of the king? And he was a man of God into the bargain! She had already had enough trouble with Elijah, another man of God, and hoped now that she had induced him to leave the country. No one had seen him for a long time, and now here was another of the same pestilent breed talking about the laws of God as superior to the wishes of royalty. Something was going to be done about this and she was the one who was going to do it.

The iniquitous Queen Jezebel looked down disdainfully at her husband lying crying on the bed. "*Do you govern the kingdom of Israel?*" she queried scornfully. "*Rise up, eat bread and be merry. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.*" And in her evil heart she already knew

what she was going to do. So Ahab got up from his bed, and dressed himself properly, and went down to his throne room where his courtiers and attendants were sitting about with nothing much to do because their master had shut himself up and would see no one. He began again to attend to affairs of state and perhaps cherish a hope that his wife would succeed where he had failed. Knowing her nature he probably thought within himself that if so he would not enquire too closely into the means whereby she achieved so desirable a solution to the problem. Queen Jezebel was in her own apartments, busily writing letters to the elders and nobles of the royal city of Jezreel, and those elders and nobles must have been greatly dismayed and perturbed when they read the letters, for this is what she told them they must do.

*“Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the assembly. Seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring a charge against him, saying ‘You have cursed God and the king’. Then take him out, and stone him to death.”*

Now no one knows whether these elders and nobles were sincere worshippers of God and loyal so far as they were able to the Mosaic Covenant. Or whether they were worshippers of Baal and so apostates from the true faith, or men who retained faith in the God of Israel in their hearts but outwardly served Baal because it was the thing to do with the pagan Queen Jezebel ruling the land. Some of them may have been Naboth's friends and he himself may well have been greatly esteemed in the city. But all this was of no account against the Queen's commandment. So, even though some of them mourned, and almost certainly some of them did, they could do naught else but obey. Any disregard of her instructions would only lead to her vengeance and their own consequent death. To save their own lives, Naboth must die.

The people of the city were called together, and Naboth arrested and brought before his judges, withal protesting his innocence, and two worthless men bribed for the purpose stood up and testified that in their hearing he had blasphemed against God and cursed the king. These were heinous offences against the Mosaic Law and punishable by death by stoning. In that same law, the testimony of two witnesses, agreeing on all points, was necessary to obtain a conviction. It was but a little step to accept that testimony without the accused being allowed to proffer a defence and so Naboth was condemned and immediately taken out of the city and stoned to death. His body was left where it had fallen to be devoured by the scavenging dogs of the city. Although this episode stands alone in the histories of those days, there must have been many such cases of flagrant injustice and cruelty during the time that Jezebel was queen over Israel.

It is possible wicked king Ahab was not altogether easy in his mind as he went down to take possession of his newly-acquired vineyard. It was not that he was particularly concerned about the unjust death of Naboth; such things were always going on in Israel and he could not be expected to concern himself unduly about one individual case. But he could be, and perhaps was, concerned that the possession he had expected to be bought for money had been acquired at the price of blood. After all, it was not really his fault that Naboth had been unjustly accused and was dead. It was his wife who had concocted the plot and made all the arrangements without telling him. He could not really be held responsible for that. Now here was the vineyard without an owner and it was next door to his own property. It might as well be his as anybody's and anyway he was the king and in all the circumstances he had as much right to it, or even more, as anybody. In which self-justifying frame of mind he walked through the gateway into the vineyard and stopped short in his tracks. Standing facing him, and blocking further entry, was that giant of a man, goatskin clad, massive hands grasping a stout staff, burning eyes looking into his own with a fierce intensity he could not evade. The last man on earth he wanted to see, especially at this juncture. He closed his eyes momentarily and opened them again, just to make sure. But Elijah was still there, making no movement, saying no word.... just those eyes.

Desperately Ahab tried to remind himself that he was the king. He must brazen this out. If it was to be a battle of wits he must come out on top. Something of the old arrogance came back. He would have the first word. *"Have you found me, O my enemy?"* Swift as an arrow came the reply; those burning eyes never leaving the king's own eyes. *"I have found you"* There was a pause and then the voice of judgment. *"Thus says the Lord "Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, I will bring disaster on you. I will consume you and will cut off from Ahab, every male, bond or free in Israel and will make your house like the house of Jeroboam... because you have provoked me to anger and caused Israel to sin. Also, concerning Jezebel the Lord said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds shall eat."*

Now see this wicked king Ahab. His face is pale and his knees shaking. Idolater that he is, he is yet of Israelite stock, and something within him from his ancestors tells him that the word is true and will surely be fulfilled. He waits, tense and silent.

Then Elijah was gone. Ahab did not see his movement nor where he

went, but the way into the vineyard was open. Did Ahab the fearful go in to enjoy his new possession? He did not. He went home, silent and thoughtful, and presently he divested himself of his royal robes and put on sackcloth, and fasted, and thought more seriously than he had ever done since the day he took that evil woman Jezebel to be his wife. And the consequence of his thoughts and his fasting and his sackcloth was that he came a little nearer to repentance for his misdeeds and prostrated himself before the Lord. Just how sincere was that repentance only the Lord knew. Nevertheless He did not fail to respond immediately as He always does when there is the slightest indication of the sinner turning from the error of his way. So the Lord sent another word to Elijah to say that because of Ahab's seeming change of heart He would defer the destruction of his dynasty and his descendants until after his death. He was to be spared the anguish of that event. But notice here that the manner of his own death and that of his wife was not included in this concession. Perhaps the Lord in his wisdom knew that the repentance was not going to last. In fact it did not last, for less than three years later he went to war with Syria in the strength of and reliance upon Baal. When Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord reproved him and foretold his death he refused to believe and consigned Micaiah to prison. In the ensuing battle he was mortally wounded and died in his chariot, with his blood running out of his wounds. And when, later on, men washed the chariot the scavenging dogs licked up his blood and so the word of Elijah was fulfilled. But that strange man was nowhere to be found. Only the Lord knew where he was. And Israel had not yet seen the last of him. Another unbelieving King of Israel was to feel the whiplash of his tongue and realise to his cost that the God of Elijah, He is God.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

## QUIZ - BIBLE JOURNEYS

The Scriptures are full of accounts of journeys.

Here are the starting points and the destinations of several notable journeys. Who made them?

As well as the mental exercise of finding the answers, it may also be worthwhile to spend a little time meditating on what might have been the thoughts of the travellers, and how God dealt with them along the way.

1. Caesarea to Rome
2. Samaria to the Gaza road
3. Bethlehem to Egypt
4. Jerusalem to Mahanaim
5. Plains of Moab to Mount Nebo
6. Haran to Shechem
7. Kiriath Jearim to the House of Obed-Edom
8. Beersheba to Mount Horeb
9. Moab to Bethlehem
10. Cenchrea (Corinth) to Rome

Answers are on page 148.

## STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

### Part 12 1 John 3.2

*"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3.2).*

If in this present time we are already possessing the high honour of Divine sonship; if we are already sons of God, then what can be the superlative honour that awaits us beyond the Vail? Some such question as that seems to be in John's mind. **Now** are we the sons of God – then – imagination refuses to picture that which is to be ours **then**. That is truly so. *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit" (1 Cor.2.9).* There is a spiritual understanding which assures us of the reality of those things that are within the Vail, and a witness of the Spirit assuring us that we shall indeed inherit those things if we abide faithful. Even so we do not and cannot visualise in our minds the nature and appearance of those who are its citizens. The spiritual understanding of future things is ours, but not the ability to picture them or see them as we shall see them when we have experienced our "change". *"It doth not yet appear" what we shall be, but we do know that the life beyond is one of superlative happiness and glory. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col.3. 4).*

There is a *"present inheritance"* of the New Creation as well as a future inheritance. The rewards of consecration are not all deferred until

death, just as the obligations of consecration affect this present life no less than the future one. The old theological idea that the whole aim and purpose of this life is to get through it as quickly and easily as possible in order to inherit the life to come at the earliest practicable moment has no support in Scripture. God has work for all His servants to do before they depart this life, and a great many purposes to be worked out in and through and by those who are devoted to Him. Therefore the Apostle exhorts "*Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*" (Rom.12.2). There is a work of transformation to be carried out within us as we pursue the consecrated life, a work that is going to show fruitage, visible fruitage, and produce works, real works, even in this day, and in so doing will both reveal and accomplish God's purpose. And that work of transformation is only possible because we have become, in John's own words here, sons of God. The great Husbandman is able to accomplish His work only because the subjects of His skill have become plants in His garden, ready to be planted and watered and pruned and trained as His Wisdom shall direct. It is only possible because those who are being led to glory have already become citizens of that country toward which they journey and have already turned away in their hearts from the world in which they were first born. The power of the Kingdom of God has already invaded the world of men. There are isolated outposts of the new Kingdom in the heart of the enemy's country. Therefore, those who have been "*translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son*" can look upon themselves as defending one or another of those isolated outposts and as being "in the Kingdom" even though surrounded by all the visible trappings and powers of the kingdoms of this world.

That is why Jesus said that except a man be born again, or born from above, he could not see the Kingdom of God. Entrance into that Kingdom is not secured by a simple passage through the gates of death, out of this life and into the next. True, there must be that "*change*" in order that this mortal may put on immortality (1 Cor. 15), but unless the would-be entrant has already, while yet he lives in this world, experienced the new birth, he will never join the saints in light. We do not become sons of God at death; we are sons of God **now**. We have been from the time of our consecration of life to God, from the time that we were buried with Christ by baptism into His death, and rose to walk with Him in newness of life. Our being "*born again*" is not at the time of our entrance into the celestial realm, when our "*earthly house of this tabernacle*" has been dissolved (2 Cor. 5.1), but at the time we become dead to earthly things and alive to heavenly things. It may be true – and it is true – that we "*know not what we shall be*", but it is also and

undeniably true that we are now, at this present time, sons of God, and that high honour no man can take from us.

Having thus firmly established ourselves in our present inheritance, the privileged standing of the sons of God now, today, we can with confidence and joyful hope look forward to the greater glories yet to be revealed. *"It doth not yet appear what we shall be"* says John *"but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (3.2). This word translated *"appear"* – ‘*phaineroo*’ – means the making manifest or evident or visible something that has hitherto been obscure or unknown or hidden.

John reminds us here of the promises that connect our glorification and entry into the Father's presence with the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Without that Coming there can be no *"presentation before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy"*. Jesus told His disciples *"If I go away, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"*. There can be no whittling down or minimising the importance of those words. Many Christians today doubt or deny that Christ will come again. Has the Christian hope any value unless it incorporates a firm and steadfast belief in His Second Coming? Without that Second Coming the Plan of God ceases to have any significance and the prospect for the future of humanity is bleak and hopeless. He comes to save the world, and without His coming there will never be any salvation. John stirs up the minds of his readers and brings fresh inspiration to us as once again we are reminded of the indissoluble bond that links the fruition of our own personal hopes for the future with the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from heaven.

This is one of the most definite and clearly spoken promises of the future state of the Church that the New Testament contains. It defines the ‘shape of things to come’ in terms as comprehensible as can be attained when talking about the spiritual world. We can understand in what way we are sons of God now, in the flesh; we know that the glory that lies beyond the Vail is greater by far than the glory that we have now; but we cannot visualise it. The only man who ever glimpsed the lineaments of scenes in the sphere that lies beyond human sense was Paul, and he found it impossible to express in man-made language what he had seen and heard. John strongly emphasises just how infinitely to be preferred is that condition of life beyond the Vail to this which we now know and appreciate, glorious though this *"life in Christ"* may be to us at this time. So he says we shall be like Him; we shall see Him as He is. Nothing more; but then surely nothing more is needed. *"I shall be satisfied"* sang the Psalmist *"when I awake, with thy likeness"* (Psa. 17. 15). That is the goal and hope of every true follower of the Lord Jesus. To be made like Him, to

know Him as He knows us, to live in the sunshine of His presence forever. The words of old take on a new ring when we think like this. *"In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore"*. We know that our exaltation to that place of privilege is going to mean incessant and continuous work for God in the conversion and reconciliation of His erring children upon earth. It is true that we shall rest, but from labours which involve weariness and fatigue and suffering. Our works will continue, works that will still involve sowing, and watering, and tending, and pruning, before the desired harvest can be reaped. As we look now toward the bright prospect, we are thinking, as was John, of the moment of union, of the gathering together of all the saints into one great General Assembly, the Church of the First Born, whose names are written in heaven. Like Paul, we realise that although now we are seeing as through a glass, darkly, it will then be face to face. Though we know only in part, then we shall know even as we are known (1 Cor.13.12). That knowledge and hope gives us strength and confidence.

John's phrase fixes two most important matters together in time. The point to which he looks is "His appearing" and it is **then** that we shall be "like Him" – beyond the Vail. This appearing is the revelation of Christ, with His Church, to the world. It is the grand pivotal point around which all the aspects and phases of the Second Advent are arranged. We have our differences of thought on the earlier phases of our Lord's Coming, as to whether he has already come and is invisibly present, or has not yet come and will shortly be revealed in some way not as yet understood. Such differences are inevitable so long as Christ's disciples exercise their God-given right of private judgment; but there is no room for difference of thought on this central theme of our common expectation. There is to be a day, yet future – obviously still future – when the Church complete, gathered from death and from life, not one missing, shall *"shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matt. 13. 43). They will be manifested to all mankind in association with the Lord Jesus, manifest in similar fashion, as the world's deliverers. The Lord and His Church will be manifested together. That is the commencement of the Millennial reign, the fulfilment of the vision seen by John on Patmos when he *"saw thrones, and they (that) sat on them . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"* (Rev. 20.4). When John tells us that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, he is talking about that event and that day. So our great hope is centred upon the point of time at which our Master Jesus is revealed to the world. Whatever our own agreements and disagreements, we must, if we would not be found wanting at the last, keep our eyes and hopes fixed together upon that one supreme moment. *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the*

great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2. 13).

"And every man that hath this hope in him" John concludes "purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (v.3). Sacred, clean, chaste, undefiled – the word means all these things. The sincere reception of such a hope must surely inspire its possessor with an earnest desire to fulfil all the Master's commandments in order that the realisation of the hope may be made sure. Says the writer to the Hebrews "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12.1). Our hope is the great inspiration that enables us to count all things but loss and dross if so be that we win Christ and be found in Him. Recognising that fact, Peter declares that it is even by these promises and the consequent hope to which they give rise that we become partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet.1.4). "Exceeding great and precious promises" Peter calls them. How exceeding great and precious they must be if they can be made to lead to so glorious a destiny. And there is no doubt about it. "If ye do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

Well, there are the promises. It is for us to believe them, and take hold of them, and claim them for ourselves, and make use of them, and allow them to work out their beneficent effect in our hearts and lives. Our Father has done all that He can do; the remainder rests with us. Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself. So shall we be His disciples!

AOH

## A COLLECTION OF TEXTS

I have before me a collection of 23 verses of scripture. They were chosen not according to a scheme of study but by one arbitrary criterion. So they do not refer to the uses of a particular Greek word, or pursue a topical theme, or follow a line of references, or research a line of teaching. They were collected together as a kind of experiment, which could lead to a random mixture of thoughts. However, arranging them in order may have interesting results. Let us see.

The first is not very promising. "*Ruin and misery are in their paths.*" This is Paul in Romans, quoting from Isaiah 59.7, to show that all mankind, his own people not excluded, are 'under sin'. We can easily think of parts of

the world today which back up this claim.

The second is not much better. This is Jude, describing professing believers who take part in the wickedness of the world around them: *"These are grumblers and malcontents; they indulge their own lusts; they are bombastic in speech, flattering people to their own advantage."*

James, in the third, is thinking of the good life, and how wise it is to be gentle. But he is also aware of the alternative: *"For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind."* It is not only the love of money but raw human emotions which lead to all kinds of evil.

The fourth comes from Revelation, and is no reassurance to us. To be acceptable to God it is not sufficient to damp down wrong thoughts, He requires us to be positive. *"So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."* A graphic picture of rejection, based on the nauseating water of the hot mineral springs near Laodicea.

It is unsafe to rely only on being part of the group we belong to, whether it is a church or a holy nation. Moses led a 'holy' people, God's people, and consider what happened to them. Because of their faithlessness, their failure to trust, to obey, a complete generation failed to reach the promised land. As Hebrews expounds the situation, they were all in the same state: *"Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?"*

The Jewish people, in general, remained blind. They were given God's law, and heard it read, but there was a veil over their minds, states Paul (2 Corinthians). Individually, there was the possibility of turning to God. *"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."* God respects reverence and faith, it is not pointless to believe. Malachi states *"Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name."*

The seventh text, in Galatians, traces the promise made to Abraham so long ago, which underlay the experience of his descendants. Many of them expected their nation to be used by God, but the blessing of the nations in fact comes through one person: *"Now the promises were made to Abraham and*

to his offspring; it does not say 'and to offsprings' as of many; but it says 'And to your offspring', that is, to one person, who is Christ."

Texts eight to twelve are a group which speak of the Christ. John the Baptist is recorded by Luke: "John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptise you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'" In Matthew, Jesus the Christ is revealed: "And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him." What was happening? John explains "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

As Jesus sets about his mission, He chooses the twelve to assist him. Mark: "So he appointed the twelve: Simon ((to whom he gave the name Peter)...." And the power of Jesus is evident through those who believe, beyond Calvary, beyond Easter Day, beyond His departure into heaven... In Acts we find, "And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all." So spoke Peter when the man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple had been healed.

The power and purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ shines in the life of the early church, and is evident in the epistles. As Paul told the Christians at Corinth, they themselves were the place where God dwells by His Spirit. "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" And as the Spirit dwells in them, so does Christ's word, resulting in a life overflowing with joy, wisdom and gratitude (Colossians): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God." It is an inner strengthening, Paul told the saints at Ephesus, with all God's glory and power. "I pray that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit." Not that this can be taken for granted: "Only let us hold fast to what we have attained" (Philippians).

There will be opposition, says Peter in his first letter, and this requires a gentle approach from those who are facing it: "Yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear so that when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame."

Above all, says John, we must love, with sacrificial love, like Christ's love. *"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."* And along with the struggle and the sacrifice, comes peace from God. What more could we hope for (2 Thessalonians)? *"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in all ways. The Lord be with all of you."*

Besides this essential quality of inner life, there is need for teaching, study and training to supplement it. One should not neglect the importance of Scripture, Paul told Timothy: *"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness."* Peter appreciated that effort is required to understand what is being said to us in scripture and to apply it aright, including Paul's letters *"speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures."*

To help in the process of remembering and teaching others, we find in scripture sayings such as that which Paul quoted to Timothy, which encapsulates salient truths about our Lord.

*"Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great. He was revealed in flesh - vindicated in spirit - seen by angels - proclaimed among Gentiles - believed in throughout the world - taken up in glory."*

These 23 texts, which when placed together tell us so much, came to my attention when I noticed that some of the best known among them shared the same chapter and verse reference. Were there any others having this reference which were equally significant? Each one of the above texts is in fact to be found in the third chapter of the book concerned. Also at the sixteenth verse. What a glorious coincidence!

GC

## Quiz Answers

1. Acts 27 Paul and his companions
2. Acts 8.5,26 Philip
3. Matthew 2.13-15 Joseph, Mary and Jesus
4. 2 Samuel 15.14, 17.27 King David and his loyal friends
5. Deuteronomy 34.1 Moses
6. Genesis 12.1-6 Abraham and his company
7. 1 Chronicles 13.6-13 The Ark of God with King David
8. 1 Kings 19.3-8 Elijah
9. Ruth 1.6,19 Naomi and Ruth
10. Romans 16.1-2 Phoebe

## THE CROSSING OF JORDAN

*"Within three days you shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess it." (Josh. 1.11.)*

The great day had dawned and Israel stood at the banks of Jordan gazing at the Promised Land half-a-mile away. For full forty years had the promise stood. The fathers who had set out from Egypt to inherit this land were dead, their remains buried in the wilderness, but these their children had lived to see the fulfilment of the promise. This very day they were to pass over and enter upon their inheritance.

The crossing of Jordan is usually bracketed together with the passage of the Red Sea. They are two very similar miracles. But there is a fundamental spiritual difference. The passage of the Red Sea was a going into the wilderness; that of Jordan was a coming out of the wilderness. The one was a prelude to a time of humiliation and suffering, the other to a time of conquest and triumph. The one has been used to picture the Christian's deliverance from the bondage of sin and his entrance upon the Christian life, a life of humiliation and suffering whilst in the flesh. The other pictures his final victory and entrance into the heavenly kingdom, into the light and joy of the presence of God, the full attainment of the promised spiritual inheritance. The passing into the glory of the Divine is often spoken of as a crossing of Jordan; never as a crossing of the Red Sea.

For three days they had waited, watching the turbulent waters rushing past, for it was early summer and the snows of Hermon were melting. *"Jordan overflows all its banks all the time of harvest"* (Josh.3.15). The stream, normally only about a hundred feet wide and easily fordable, was a raging torrent half-a-mile from bank to bank and quite impossible of passage even by boats, if they had any, and they had not. The Canaanites on the other side were feeling tolerably secure, at least for the next few weeks until the waters would begin to subside.

Obedient to the command of Joshua, the priests were carrying the Ark of the Covenant, swathed in its blue coverings so that it should not be exposed to the gaze of the people. They were at a respectful distance, two thousand cubits, a little over half-a-mile, and the leaders of the people followed. How they were to cross the river no man knew, but, confident in Joshua and in their God, the priests went steadily forward and down to the water's edge. With perhaps only a moment's natural hesitation, they stepped boldly into the water. As they did so the wet mud appeared under their soles. They stepped forward again, slowly, into the stream, and

again the water had hardly washed their ankles before it receded and the mud appeared.

So they went on, more confidently now, and the water's edge retreated from before them as fast as they stepped into it. The hosts of Israel, higher up on the slope that led down to the river, could see what was happening, and a shout of exultation arose on the still air, a shout that aroused the attention of the Canaanite guards on the other side of the river, and caused them to disappear in haste to warn their superiors of the strange phenomenon that was occurring down there in the bed of Jordan.

The priests were still advancing, very slowly. Always the waters were shrinking and the priests advancing. The watching hosts on the hillside, limited still to their two thousand cubits distance from the Ark, therefore not as yet able to approach even the river's bank, cried and shouted to each other in awe and wonder at this great thing the Lord was doing in their sight.

The stream was down in the deepest part of its channel, gliding along more quietly and only thirty yards or so wide. The wide terraces so lately covered by the rushing waters were baking and steaming in the tropical sun, the soft mud hardening as it dried, ready for the tramping of the thousands of feet that would shortly be crossing its wide expanse. And the priests still advanced, slowly, forward.

There was but a brook now in the midst of Jordan. Farther up the valley, as the watchers on the hillside looked into the distance, the river bed was completely dry. There was no more water to come down. The last of the flow would soon have passed them on its way into the Dead Sea. The gateway into Canaan stood open before them.

The priests had stopped, and turned aside a little, standing in a group, with the Ark in their midst clearly visible as they held it hoisted up upon their shoulders. As they stood thus, there was a moving and a jostling of men. As though animated by one impulse the whole host surged forward, down the slopes to the edge of the bare hard mud, swarming on to the level terraces, dropping by successive steps to the place where the priests were standing. As they did so they spread out so until the whole valley as far as eye could see, in either direction, was filled with the thousands of Israel, walking, running, climbing, to the accompaniment of shouts and cries of triumph and joy. They were up the terraces on the Canaanite side, and assembling in the wide meadows, beyond which could be seen the walls of the garrison town of Jericho. It was not until the last few stragglers had brought up the rear and made their way up the slope to the Canaan side that the priests reformed their little party, and with the Ark still in their midst, moved up in turn, out of Jordan, into the Promised Land. From behind them, as they did so, came the water. The channel was filling, water was

coming down again from the higher reaches and as the people looked the river began to flow in strength. It lapped behind the feet of those slow moving priests until by the time they had gained the topmost level with their burden, the swirling flood stretched once more from bank to bank. Moab and Canaan were separated again and no man might come nor go. But the host of Israel was in Canaan. It was a miracle; of that there can be no doubt. Whatever the natural means by which the flow of the river was interrupted, it was by Divine intervention that it occurred just at the moment when Israel needed such an occurrence to make possible their entrance into the Holy Land.

The account in Joshua 3.15-16 reads *"So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah the Dead Sea were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho"*.

The waters *"stood, and rose up upon an heap"*. Where was this heaping of the waters? The "city of Adam" is the modern El Damieh, twenty miles up stream from Jericho, and Zaretan is Zarthan, opposite El Damieh, on the eastern bank of the river. At this point the Jordan traverses the narrowest part of its valley; it flows between clay banks ranging from forty to one hundred and fifty feet high. The clay is soft and landslides into the river occasionally occur. A heavy landslide can dam the river completely and interrupt its flow until the weight of the mounting waters is sufficient to wash away the obstruction and permit the river to resume its normal course.

Such a thing has happened three times at least in recorded history. On the 8th December, 1267, the west bank at El Damieh collapsed and dammed the river so that no water flowed down the channel for sixteen hours. This record rests on the authority of an Arab historian, Nowairi. It meant that the bed of Jordan from El Damieh to the Dead Sea was dry for all that time and anyone could cross on foot. In the year 1906 the same thing happened in consequence of an earthquake. Again in 1927, according to Prof. Garstang, the celebrated earthquake which shook all Israel, and cracked the Mount of Olives, caused the west bank at El Damieh to collapse. On this occasion the flow of water was interrupted for no less than twenty-one hours, and a number of people did actually cross and re-cross the river bed on foot.

It is known nowadays that the fall of the walls of Jericho, a few days after the Israelites crossed Jordan, was caused by an earthquake, occurring

at the critical moment. It might well be, as suggested by Garstang, that there was a tolerably long period of earthquake activity at this time and that such an earth tremor, occurring at the right moment, threw down the cliffs and dammed the river, just as in 1927. There is at any rate a remarkably exact correspondence between the story in Joshua and these more modern instances and there seems no reasonable doubt that the crossing of Jordan was due to this precise cause.

"Coincidence" says someone. "If this has happened at other times in history then it was just pure luck that it happened when the Israelites were ready to cross. Perhaps, even, Joshua had received secret information by swift runner of what had already happened twenty miles upstream and knew that within an hour or two the river would be running dry".

Perhaps - if it were not that the Scripture provides its own refutation of the suggestion. Joshua knew precisely what was going to happen at El Damieh several hours at least before it happened!

At some time during the previous day, when Israel was already gathered on the banks of Jordan in anticipation of the crossing, Joshua had said to them "*Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you*" (Jos.3,5). He, and they, already knew that by some means or other they were to cross Jordan. Joshua now knew that it was to be the very next day; whether at that time he also knew the means by which the crossing was to be effected does not appear. But that night, early in the morning hours, the Lord spoke to Joshua (v 7) "*This day,*" He said "*will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel .... and thou shalt command the priests . ...*". This was the day of the crossing; it is probable that the word of the Lord came to Joshua during the silent watches of the night, for it is most unlikely that the day itself with all its excitement would give any time to Joshua for quiet communion with God. And there was a full programme of events to be fitted into twelve short hours. First, there was Joshua's charge and instructions to the children of Israel. Then there was the selection of twelve men from amongst their number to be responsible for bringing out of the river's bed twelve great stones to be a memorial of the crossing. It was whilst giving these instructions that Joshua revealed his knowledge of how the miracle was to be effected. "*The waters of Jordan*" he said "*shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon an heap*" (v.13). This speech must have been delivered not later than 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, for it would take the people several hours before they could be ready for the crossing. There must time allowed for two millions of people to cross before sundown. By eleven o'clock the people would begin to move from their tents and by midday the priests be venturing into the edge of the rushing flood. It would be at this time therefore that the

first effects of the collapse that had occurred upstream became visible at Jericho in the retreat of the water's edge. Now if this effect became observable at Jericho at midday, the disaster at El Damieh must have occurred not more than four hours before. The high velocity of the water in the Jordan would drain the channel between the two places within that time. It must be concluded then that the collapse occurred not earlier than eight o'clock and yet Joshua knew precisely what was going to happen when he rose that morning, and probably earlier, during the small hours.

It may be expected that God revealed this coming event to him by means of a dream, as has been done so often in Scriptural story. Joshua saw the high, overhanging cliffs, the rushing river sluicing its way between them. In that incomprehensible manner associated with dreams he knew that he was looking at Jordan, although the place itself he had never seen before. As he looked the ponderous masses moved and slid across the foaming channel. As the waters behind began to pile themselves up behind the barrier, and those in front quickly drained away and left the river-bed bare, he knew that he was seeing what the Lord was about to do and awoke, ready for his great task. Thus it was, perhaps, that he was able to give Israel so accurate and graphic a description of the marvel that was to happen in a few more hours' time.

The rest of the day's programme fits into this picture very well. By one o'clock the crossing was in full swing. It need not be assumed that the people waited to negotiate the river channel in one long procession – two million would take a long time to cross in that way. More probably Israel was encamped along a wide 'front' – perhaps five miles or even more along the course of the river – and when the word was given, they began to cross in a body. In such fashion the entire host, with all their flocks and herds, tents and baggage, could be inside the Promised Land in three hours. By four o'clock the transfer could have been accomplished and the priests begin to make their own way up out of the river-bed. Thus the water began to flow again, following their retreating footsteps as they came slowly up the terraces. By six o'clock – sunset – the river was in full flood once more.

The crossing of Jordan was a miracle. The agency used was a natural one; the powers of Nature were enlisted in the service of God. But God knew beforehand what He was going to do and when He was going to do it. He gave Joshua due notice several hours before the event, and when the hour had struck for the barriers to be thrown down and Israel enter His Promised Land, *"the sea saw it, and fled; Jordan was driven back .... at the presence of the Lord"*.

AOH

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

From the beginning of time God planned a Kingdom in which mankind would be the subjects. He revealed that purpose to men and women but slowly. The first intimation of that Kingdom was to Abraham when God promised that through the patriarch's descendants every family upon the Earth would be blessed. Until then little seems to have been known of the meaning of the prophecy given to Mother Eve and recorded in Genesis 3.14,15, concerning the future of the human race.

From the birth of Isaac, one small but very significant section of mankind had a goal and purpose. It was at the departure of Abraham's grandson Jacob, when he blessed his sons (Genesis 49.8-10), that they were told something of a future king. Just how wide the rule of one of Judah's descendants would be could not be made known then and indeed the whole revelation of God's kingdom must await the development of the people of Israel.

Four hundred years later, the descendants of Israel had become a nation, led by Moses, aspiring to have their own land and leadership. But Moses like so many of God's servants, was primarily a prophet, and in deep humiliation he made no attempt to usurp the sovereignty of God. He gave just one small glimpse of Israel's desire for a king and what God would do about it in his final great addresses to the nation. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 17.14,15 (RSV) "*You may indeed set up a king over you, him whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you, you may not put a foreigner over you.*" Those who came after Moses as leaders of that great people, at first followed his example to a greater or lesser extent and none aspired to kingship.

The decades passed and ran into centuries, with the people of Israel gaining power and tradition. God had given them a system of worship and an efficient economy, yet they continually slid into the imitation of their pagan neighbours. Children of Abraham and God's people they might be yet they were also children of Adam and frequently gravitated to his disobedient and rebellious level. Somehow imitation of the worship and commerce of their neighbours gratified their human cravings with disastrous results. Worshipping idols and craving this world's wealth soon lowered their moral standards. Just as they wanted gods that they could see, so they wanted a king to whom they could pay homage. Human beings are blind to the illogical consequences of their actions and observation of the nations and the world in the twenty-first century should be sufficient to convince God's

people of the truth of that fact.

But God has always allowed His people individually and collectively to experiment with their own ideas, disastrous though that appeared at the time. Out of the experience, He was able to teach them of His loving purpose. So it was with Israel when they asked Samuel for a king. They were given Saul who demonstrated the truth of what God had told them about an earthly king. But He chose David who was something of the type of king He eventually intended to give them. To David was given the promise and the covenant concerning the coming Messiah – and because the promised One would be a son of David, so would come the sceptre, mentioned by Jacob, to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. But first that Messiah would prove His utter worthiness to be God's permanent king over mankind, by obedient suffering and dying. So the human race would truly become His own people bought with the price of His own blood.

Through the prophets who came after David, God eventually revealed His intention of true royalty. Not until the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC did God begin to unfold the mystery of the Kingdom through men like Isaiah *"See a King will reign in righteousness and princes will rule with justice."* (Isa.32.1 NRSV), but Isa.43.15 makes it clear that Israel's Creator is still king. From Micah came that oft quoted prophecy *"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days."* (Mic.5.2 NRSV). Daniel made reference to the everlasting nature of that Kingdom when he delivered the meaning of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar (2.44). There is a further reference to that fact from the mouth of Darius after God had preserved Daniel in the lions' den (6.26).

The teaching about the Messianic Kingdom was sufficiently developed by the first century that John the Baptist could warn the people of Israel that they must repent for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. This was a reference to the work of Jesus just a few months later. Jesus' teaching described how those involved in setting up that Kingdom would be selected and prepared for their work as "kings and priests". This is referred to by Peter in his first letter (2.9-10) in which he quoted from Moses' record of God's words in Exodus 19.2. Jesus' parables recorded in Matthew 13 and the other synoptic gospels clearly referred to the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. Jesus spoke of those who are close to the Kingdom, of those who will never enter it (Matt.18.3) and those to whom the kingdom belongs (Matt.19.14). He also said that God's ancient people would have the kingdom taken from them and given to more worthy recipients (Matt. 21.43). Old Testament references to God's kingdom can be applied with

caution to the followers of Jesus in the same way that the Covenant parables of the vineyard, the sheepfold and the bride and groom can be applied.

So far, the kingdom described in the Gospels is about 'the Church of Jesus Christ'. How does that leave Israel and the rest of mankind, whom Jesus said He would call from the grave (John 5.28,29)? When the disciples met the resurrected Lord (Acts 1.9) they asked Him if He was about to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus told them clearly that times and seasons are not their business. Their job was, and still is, to continue the Kingdom work that He had begun. He did not say that the kingdom of Israel would not come and James in his oration through the Holy Spirit to the Jerusalem church recorded in Acts 15.16,17 spoke of David's tent being restored and the rest of mankind seeking the Lord. Glimpses of the restored Israel given in the final chapter(s) of some of the prophets' writings are yet to become a reality, not just for the descendants of Abraham but, as God promised the old Patriarch, blessing all the families of the Earth.

*"I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at the first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin against me. And this city shall be a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I shall do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity that I shall provide for it."* (Jer.33.7-9 NRSV)

*"I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar, his roots shall spread out, his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden, they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon."* (Hosea 14.4-7 NRSV).

So we could go on with Joel 3.18 *"The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water"* and Amos 9.14 *"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them."* Zephaniah 3.14,20 *"Sing aloud O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel! At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you together; yea I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your eyes says the Lord."*

These are clearly references to the natural people of Israel and in discussing them in Romans 11, Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, quoted Isa.59.27 *"and so all Israel will be saved, as it is written 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'"* *"and this will be*

*my covenant with them when I take away their sins."* And in the final word of triumph in verse 32, Paul writes *"For God consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all."*

The wonderful spiritual qualities of the Son of God, Messiah of Israel and those who have followed Him, are best fitted to win the hearts of mankind and enable them to be cleansed and transformed.

The prophets described not only the people of the kingdom but also the paradise in which they will live. The selfishness and greed and blindness will have been healed and mankind's arch enemy, Satan, will have been restrained and will no longer create temptation. This will give Earth's ecology an opportunity to rehabilitate itself. How much it will need 'miraculous' intervention at least to begin with, is beyond our imagination. Left to itself, even now, Earth's environment readily recovers from human damage. The changes that must come are outside our experience or understanding. The whole pattern of animal life now depends on growth, reproduction and feeding – many are structured to be carnivores. How will the lion and the lamb lie down together? – and how can there be no more death? He who made the universe will be much more than equal to solving these problems and almost certainly, part of His plan for humanity includes its total restoration and that of the home which He first provided for them.

What is really important is the transformation of the human 'heart'. With sin cleansed and motivation being love rather than selfishness and hatred, human society and its administration will find that the selfless desire to live peaceably with neighbours is far more fulfilling. Then will come to pass the words of Hab.2.14 *"the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"*.

DN

## **THE TEST OF ENDURANCE**

### **An exhortation**

*"One who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off."*  
(1 Kings 20. 11).

The test of endurance is one of the severest tests of faithfulness to which the Church of Christ is subjected. It is the test which gauges the strength of every other virtue and grace, and no soldier of the cross will be crowned with the laurels of victory who has not stood this test. The

Christian life is a warfare, and the above words of a king of Israel to a boastful enemy are applicable, not only to every new recruit in the Lord's army, but to all who have not yet finished the good fight of faith.

The first gush of enthusiasm in the Lord's service, much as we may and do appreciate it, may be but the hasty production of the shallow soil of a heart which receives the truth with gladness but, having no root in itself, endures but for a time, and when affliction and persecution arise, immediately is offended. (Mark 4. 16-17). Such characters cannot stand the fiery tests of this "evil day", whereof it is written—"*The fire (of that day) shall try every man's work of what sort it is*" (1 Cor. 3. 13).

Therefore, says the Apostle Peter, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" (1 Pet. 4. 12). All must be so tried; and blessed is he that shall endure unto the end. The sure Word of prophecy points to severe conflicts and great trials in the closing scenes of the Church's history. Elijah finished his earthly career and went up by a whirlwind and a chariot of fire—strong symbols of storms and great afflictions. John the Baptist was cast into prison and beheaded. And we are forewarned of the great necessity of the whole armour of God, if we would stand in this "evil day".

It therefore behoves every one who aspires to the prize of our high calling to brace himself for the conflicts and trials of faith and patience that may suddenly be sprung upon him. In the battle of this day the effort of the Enemy is to surprise and suddenly attack and overwhelm the Lord's people; and the only preparation that can be made for such emergencies is constant vigilance and prayer and the putting on of the whole armour of God—the Truth and the spirit of Truth.

"*In your patience possess ye your souls.*" No other grace will be more needed than this in the fiery ordeals of this "evil day"; for without patience no man can endure to the end. All along the Christian's pathway, ever and anon, he comes to a new crisis; perhaps these are often seemingly of trivial importance, yet he realises that they may be turning points in his Christian course. Who has not experienced them? There comes a temptation to weariness in well-doing, together with the suggestion of an easier way; or there springs up a little root of pride or ambition, with suggestions of ways and means for feeding and gratifying it. Then there comes, bye and bye, the decisive moment when you *must* choose this course or that; and lo, you have reached a crisis!

Which way will you turn! Most likely in the direction to which the sentiments you have cultivated have been tending. If it be the wrong way, most likely you will be unable to discern it clearly; for your long cultivated sentiments will sway your judgment. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto*

*a man, but at the end thereof is the way of death.*" (Prov. 14. 12). How necessary, therefore, is prayer, that in every crisis we may pass the test successfully! Nor can we safely delay to watch and pray until the crisis is upon us; but such should be our constant attitude.

The life of a soldier, ever on the alert and on duty, is by no means an easy life; nor do the Scriptures warrant any such expectation. On the contrary, they say "*Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*"; "*Fight the good fight of faith*". The opposition is daily becoming more and more intense, Satan realises that his time is short, and he is determined by any and every means to exert his power against the consummation of the Lord's plan for the exaltation of the Church.

Consequently, we have many and severe storms of opposition; and there are doubtless more to follow. Those who, with overcoming faith, outride them all—who patiently endure, who cultivate the spirit of Christ with its fruits and graces, and who valiantly fight the good fight of faith, rather than withdraw from the field—such will be the "overcomers" to whom the laurels of victory will be given when the crowning day has come.

## **Come let us give thanks —**

For the discipline of sorrow,  
For the angel in distress,  
For the unseen hands that draw us  
Into greater blessedness;  
For the lips that close in silence,  
For the strong hands clasped in prayer,  
For the strength of heart that suffers,  
But sinks not in despair;  
For the penitence and patience  
That are meek beneath the rod,  
And our hope's glad resurrection,  
We give Thee thanks, O God.

For the many men and women  
Who turn aside from song,  
To mourn and weep in silence  
Because of war and wrong;  
Who can hate none for whom Christ died,  
Whichever name they bear,  
But must for foes as well as friends,  
Fill all their days with prayer;  
For the hearts to peace surrendered,

And full of love's accord,  
Though the fight be fiercely raging,  
We give Thee thanks, O Lord!

For the hope that right shall triumph,  
For the lifting of the race;  
For the victories of justice,  
For the coming day of grace,  
For the lessons taught by failure,  
Learnt in humbleness and pain;  
For the call to lofty duties  
That will come to us again;  
For the hope that those who trust Thee  
Shall not be put to shame;  
For the faith that bears us onward  
O God! we praise Thy name.

MF

## NOTICES

### **Christian African Relief Trust**

The Spring Newsletter from this wonderful charity marks its 25<sup>th</sup> 'birthday' and provides some very impressive reading. It began in a very small way with just one or two sending parcels of food and clothing to Africa. When disaster struck the coastlands of India, the people there were included in the work of CART. Parcels rapidly grew to 20 and 40 foot containers, and the storage space went from a farmer's barn to a large warehouse and eventually a charity shop. God's hand was seen in every step of the way. The Newsletter not only lists the kind of things that CART has sent over the years but the things it still needs like 'mice and computer leads'. It not only contains congratulations from its British supporters but congratulations and prayer from those who have been so blessed by CART's work. The charity spends thousands of pounds on transit to Africa and much of this is raised in its bright and enterprising shop. Trustees pay all their own expenses and the collecting, sorting, repairing and packing are done by teams of caring voluntary helpers. Such a Charity is worthy of our prayers and support. *Tel: 01484 461800*

### **Gainsborough House, Milborne Port, Dorset.**

This Christian Residential Retirement Home on the border of Somerset and Dorset continues to operate on a wonderfully slender staff and budget, although it has a number of vacant flats for permanent residents. Many friends have used it for temporary accommodation, short holidays and week-end breaks (overnight stops) and find it remarkably modest in its terms and very comfortable in its facilities. It has a fine chapel, a very well stocked library and is easily accessible to many places of interest. Such a project is also worthy of our prayers and support. *Tel: 01963 250684*

### **High Leigh Conference, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire**

Monday 17th August—Sunday 23rd August

Theme: The Will of God. All ages welcome. *Tel: 01442 381550*

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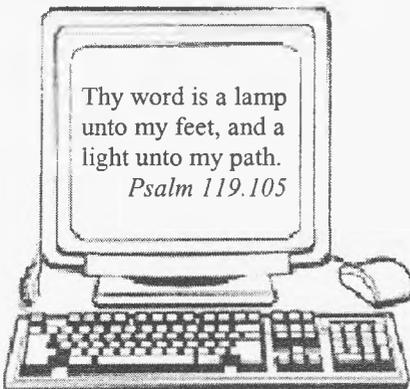
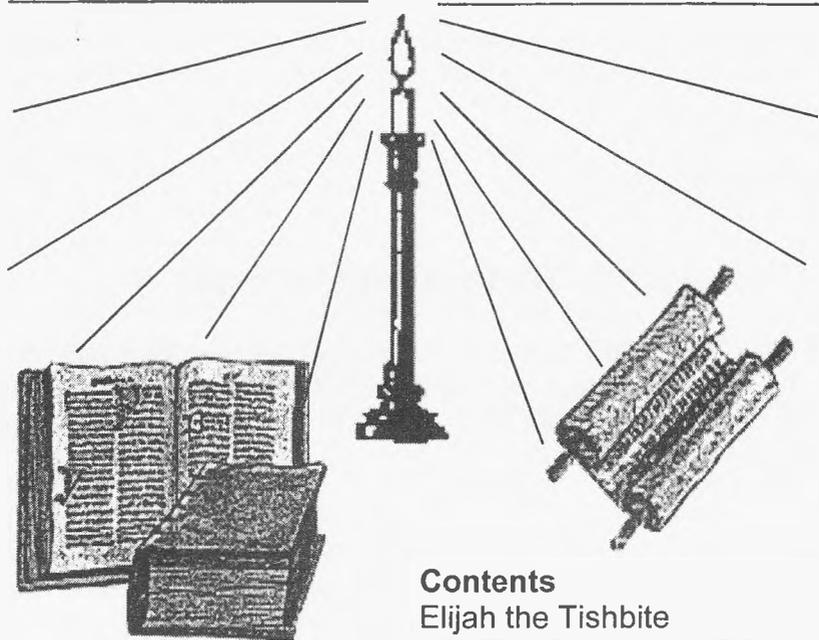
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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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.

## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"Is not God high in the heavens? ...Therefore you say 'What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see'"* (Job 22.12-14 NRSV). It would seem that even three thousand years ago, when there was no doubt or dispute as to the reality of the existence of God or the gods, some men believed they could escape from the moral obligation of loyalty to Him. God is too far away to see what we are doing, they said to one another. The clouds of the sky shroud us from His sight and we can go our own ways and plan our own lives without any thought of duty or responsibility to Him or even any appreciation of what He has done for us. Two thousand years before that time the ancient Sumerians taught that man had been created for the service of the gods and in every department of daily life they acknowledged the lordship of the gods and rendered them their due. The wise ones of Job's day were already a long way past such notions.

If God was there at all He was not unduly interested in the affairs of mortal men. The very obvious fact that evil deeds and evil lives went unpunished and that injustice was unheeded and the unrighteous, as often as not, profited exceedingly from their unrighteousness, proved that there was nothing to be gained by living an upright life and exercising a benevolent citizenship. God neither sees nor cares and we are free to add to the injustice and suffering in the world in whatever way we will. *"They said to God 'Leave us alone' and 'What can the Almighty do to us?'"* (Job 22.17)

The modern world does not even stop to ask what the Almighty can do to

us; the very existence of the Almighty is tacitly, if not avowedly denied. Man was not created. Perhaps he is the consequence of a fortuitous amalgamation of chemical substances acted upon by ultra-violet rays and lightning flashes, but he could have come about by any one of a half-dozen ways which are the subject of similar learned theories. Hence man is responsible to no one but himself. Hence we live by the law of the jungle. The end product of evolution appears to be annihilation.

Some among the wise men of this world are beginning to realise that. Some of the lords of creation will begin to hope there is a Lord of Creation to whom they can assign their self claimed role as arbiters of human destiny. Those old time philosophers of Job's day did say of those who demanded what could the Almighty do to them, that there was a world before theirs that the Almighty had brought to an end because of its wickedness. They also said that they themselves would one day come to the point where the fire would "consume their own excellency". Many years later, Peter, writing of the inevitable end of this continuing disregard of, and disbelief in, God, described the close of the present world-age in the same terms. "*The heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire and the earth and everything that is done on it will be burned up*" (2 Peter 3.10) It is after that catastrophe that all men everywhere, despite their past unbelief, will realise that God has been there all the time, not unmindful of man, always in full control. He created man for the purpose of living in abiding union with Himself in what Peter then goes on to describe as a "*new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.*" (v.13 NRSV). AOH

### **Little Points in a Big Programme**

1. A little more love for everybody
2. A closer cleaving to God's Word as my guide.
3. A little wider open purse in helping to support God's cause.
4. A little softer heart towards sufferers around me.
5. A little more readiness to see the viewpoint of others.
6. A little more freedom from the poison of prejudice and ignorance.
7. A little better remembering of the Lord's Day (every day!) as a day of spiritual privileges.
8. A little more time spent on prayer and meditation in the Scriptures.
9. A little more obedience to the Lord and his Word.
10. A little sweeter heart towards those who antagonise me.

## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

### Part 5 The Captains of Fifty

#### 1 Kings 22 and 2 Kings 1

For something like six years the mysterious man was nowhere to be found. He had denounced King Ahab over the affair of Naboth's vineyard and predicted his violent end, and too, that of the evil Queen Jezebel. Then he had vanished, just as he had done on previous occasions, and nobody knew where he was. For three years there was peace between Israel and Syria and King Ahab probably flattered himself that the danger was past and he could relax at ease with his ill-gotten gains. But the judgments of God cannot be thwarted and at the end of the three years he persuaded good king Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in an offensive against the Syrians to recover the district of Ramoth-gilead that he had lost to them many years before. This was his undoing, for in the battle he lost his life and the prediction of Elijah that the pariah dogs of the city would one day lick his blood in the place where the innocent Naboth was stoned to death, came true. So the wicked Ahab came to his foretold end and his eldest son Ahaziah reigned in his stead. Now Ahaziah was as godless as had been his father and his mother, with the evil Queen Jezebel by his side to abet him in his wickedness. Neither did he learn by the fate of his father that the God of Israel cannot be defied with impunity. He must have known of the affair of Naboth's vineyard but he would have been a lad of ten years of age or less at the time of the three years' famine and the demonstration of the true God on Mount Carmel. So he probably either never gave that story thought or if he did, dismissed it as a fable. So the chronicler says he walked in the way of his father and mother and like them made Israel to sin.

Now the judgments of God come in different ways and sometimes unexpected. This godless Ahaziah had been king for less than two years when he fell out of an upstairs window of his palace in Samaria, and was picked up badly injured. Did he in this extremity remember that the Lord God of Israel would heal those who placed their faith in him and were loyal to his Covenant? If he did, he placed no faith in the promise. He sent messengers instead to the Philistine town of Ekron in the south, seventy miles away, to enquire and supplicate at the shrine of Ekron's pagan god Baal-zebub for recovery. Whether the messengers believed in their hearts that Baal-zebub would do anything about it or even whether he could, they set out because it was the king's command.

And as they went, they came face to face with a terrifying apparition, a giant of a man, goatskin clad, muscular hands grasping a stout staff, pene-

trating eyes that burned into their very souls. As they stood they realised they were facing the man who had been such a plague to their former king, Ahab. This was the man no one had seen for six years past and no one knew whether he was alive or dead. Now here he was and very much alive. They stood and feared, and waited. *"Go, turn again to the king that sent you, and say to him, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to enquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus says the Lord, you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die'"* (2 Kings 1.16).

Then he was gone, adroitly, so swiftly that the eye could scarcely follow, that awesome figure had moved off the highway into the bushes and trees which lined its sides, and they saw him no more. The road to the south lay open before them, but see now those scared and somewhat thoughtful men. They had received the answer they sought, but not from the source they expected. Some of them began to remember how the past predictions of this same Elijah had come true, and the more they thought about the matter the less they liked it until with one accord they turned themselves and retracted their steps to tell the king what had happened.

Now see this godless king as he listens. Imagine his brows contracting as he regards his messengers. *"What manner of man was he which came up to meet you?"* he demands. They tell him. A look of incredulity, and then of realisation, passes over his face. *"It is Elijah the Tishbite!"* Those few words, set out in cold print in the story, cannot convey the tone in which that godless Ahaziah spoke. Was it of fear? Was it of scorn? Was it of enmity? It might have been any one of these. And his inner thoughts at that moment may hold the key to the rest of the story. At any rate, he sent a detachment of fifty men with their captain to command Elijah to appear before him. *"He went up to Elijah who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, O man of God, the king says come down. But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty"*. And fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. Now that was a very strange and incomprehensible thing for Elijah to do, and quite out of keeping with his character, and it will take some explaining. It is especially so since when that godless king heard what had happened he quite casually sent another fifty men and they suffered the same fate and then he sent fifty more, and the third time Elijah did come down.

Now it is not reasonable to think that God would destroy a hundred men wantonly and casually when they were only doing their duty to their king. There is something in this story which does not appear in the recorded narrative and that something has to be found by looking for clues. And

there are two clues. One is that this godless king, knowing as he must have done of the power of Elijah and the terror he inspired in his father Ahab, would be most unlikely to summon him into his own presence only to hear the words of judgment he would surely pronounce. He may have, and did, tell his men to bring Elijah to him but there could be something in the story which implied that he did not expect to see him. The other is that cryptic word the angel of the Lord said to Elijah respecting the third captain, who pleaded for his life. *"Go down with him; be not afraid of him"*. Why should Elijah be less afraid of this one than of his predecessors?

Was this godless Ahaziah repeating what his mother Jezebel had done when she sent messengers to Elijah threatening his life after the scene on Mount Carmel many years before? Is it possible that Ahaziah indicated to the captains that if Elijah did consent to come and if he should most inexplicably meet with a fatal accident whilst in their care so that the king would never see him face to face, then the king would not blame them in any way but just regard the whole thing as a regrettable accident. And if it was the case that these captains and warriors were themselves Baal worshippers as was their king, they too might have no objection to such a removal of a disturbing prophet from their midst! After all, why send fifty men when one single messenger would have been sufficient? If the third captain was sent with the same hint but happened to be an adherent of the God of Israel and determined that he would have no part in such a scheme but would deliver Elijah safe and sound to the king and leave him to sort things out in his own way, then there could be an explanation of why Elijah was told he had nothing to fear from the third captain where by implication he did have something to fear from the others.

Now if this was indeed the position, then these unfortunate men only suffered the same fate as the four hundred priests of Baal at the time of the Mount Carmel incident, and for the same reason, their adoption of Baal worship with all its degrading practices. After all, when one comes to think of it, what is the difference between their fate and that of those in our own day and age who adopt the same practices and die of a foul disease in consequence? Why blame the Lord for a fate one willingly brings upon oneself? Whether that fate be by the agency of a lightning flash – which is the meaning of the "fire from heaven" in the story – or by the ravages of disease, does not make any essential difference, except that the lightning flash is quicker and to that extent more merciful.

So Elijah went down with the third captain knowing that he would certainly be conducted in safety and stand before the godless king Ahaziah. The king must have cringed when he saw him come in, for he knew what he was going to say. *"Thus says the Lord: Forasmuch as you have sent*

*messengers to enquire of Baal-zebul the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? Therefore you shall not come down off that bed to which you have gone up, but shall surely die".*

Then he was gone, and no man stayed his going. And, says the chronicler, so the king *"died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken"*.

Just one more declaration of judgment upon the guilty, and Elijah's work was done. And this time it was not a king of Israel, but one of Judah, the nation that on the whole did remain more faithful to God than their kinsmen of the Ten Tribes.

Some thirteen years have passed, and good king Jehoshaphat has gone to his fathers. His son Jehoram reigns over Judah, and he does not follow the ways of his father. He *"walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab, for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife; and he wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord"*. So the people of Judah, following the example of their king and queen, became as the nation of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel. And the Lord declared that the penalty of the violated Covenant must come.

So, one day, King Jehoram received a letter. It was from Elijah the prophet, hidden away somewhere in the northern mountains of Israel. *"Thus says the Lord"* it said, *"Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah. but have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.... behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite your people .... and you shall have great sickness by disease ... "* And the plagues came, and the disease, for the Philistines and the Arabians and the Ethiopians invaded his land, and took away all the treasures of the palace, and his wives, and all his sons save one, *"and after all this the Lord smote him with an incurable disease"*. *"And it came to pass, that in process of time, after two years ... he died of sore diseases . . . and he departed without being desired"*.

For some thirty years, Elijah the Tishbite had been the scourge of kings, reproving them for their faithlessness and declaring judgment soon to come. Now the time was near at hand when he was to rest from his labours, and sleep with his fathers..... but his works continue.

*(To be concluded)*

AOH

*If the peace of God keeps your heart and mind, then the state of your heart will be calm and tranquil and you will find rest unto your soul. The circumstances of life cannot ruffle this peace for it is founded upon God. H W Fry*

## GOD USED THEM

Based on a talk given at the Crick Homegathering, October 2008

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 11 refers to many people who were used by God. There were, for example, Moses' parents who hid him for three months after he was born - or Moses himself - or the prostitute Rahab, who welcomed the spies. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets all get honorable mention. There were also those who *"through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released.... the world was not worthy of them.... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect"* Hebrews 11.23-40

In this article we explore some others who God used. For example, there is someone who led the singing of God's praises at a critical time in Israel's history; there are stories about prophets... a distinguished Judge... a member of the Royal Family, and a foreign immigrant. There's also a story about a very ordinary sort of person, just like you or me. There is a remarkably effective evangelist in the list, too. These were all women, and God used them all !

Do you remember who were Shiphrah and Puah? (Exodus 1) *The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.* God used those faithful and ingenious Jewish midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and God can use you, too !

The account of the birth of Moses mentions the rôle of his older sister Miriam, and there is also another story about Miriam, whom the Bible describes as 'the prophetess' : (Exodus 15) *When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the*

*sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."*

Now, I have this clear mental picture of Miriam, with her tambourine. In my mind's eye, I see her as a beautiful young maiden, leading a group of other beautiful young maidens, all wearing long flowing gowns and all equipped with tambourines, in a song of triumph and a stately dance – I'm afraid the pictures in those old Children's Bibles have a lot to answer for ! But let's just think this through for a moment. What do we actually know about Miriam?

When the baby Moses was concealed among the reeds on the bank of the Nile, (Exodus 2) *his sister, (Miriam) stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. Then Miriam asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"* There is a Jewish tradition that Miriam was twelve when Moses was born, and according to Exodus 7.7 (NIV) *"Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh"*. This implies that when she led the singing and dancing, Miriam would have been about 92 !! Well, whatever age you are, it's not too late to be dancing around, singing and praising God and encouraging the rest of us ! God can still use 90-year-olds, and he often does

Miriam was evidently the leader and teacher of a whole group of women – women probably quite a lot younger than herself . Paul has much to say about older men (and I don't just mean 'elders') – older men and older women, and their important rôle in the Church. Here's an example : (Titus 2} *"You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no-one will malign the word of God."* So, the older women should teach, encourage and give a good example to the

younger women. That's really good advice, since we men don't really understand women at all !

The prophet Micah describes Miriam as 'a leader' – a leader appointed by God. A co-leader, in fact, along with her younger siblings Aaron and Moses: (Micah 6) *"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. A word of caution, though: in God's economy, older siblings don't necessarily take precedence over their younger siblings. Indeed, in scripture, more often than not, it was the youngest son whom God would choose for some special rôle – it all depends how He distributes his gifts.*

In Numbers ch.12, we read that Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, and that, as a result, Miriam was struck down temporarily with leprosy. Miriam and Aaron certainly got it wrong on that occasion; but, hopefully, old age does bring with it a certain measure of wisdom and maturity! We must be extra careful, though, that, as we get older, we don't get critical or crotchety.

God used Miriam the prophetess to sing His praises and to speak out for him, and he can use you and me in those ways, too !

Let's turn to the New Testament now, and take a look at another elderly prophetess – Anna. She arrived on the scene in the Jerusalem Temple just as old Simeon was giving his wonderful blessing to the infant Jesus ('Nunc dimittis') :

*(Luke 2) There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

I said that Anna 'arrived on the scene in the Temple', but the truth is, as Luke makes abundantly clear, 'she never left the temple, but worshipped there night and day, fasting and praying.' I imagine that – like that later widow, with her 'mite' – no-one was really giving a passing thought to this elderly widow; she was always around in the Temple area, and perhaps it's almost as if she'd become 'invisible'. But when God's moment came, Anna emerged from the shadows, and God gave her an important prophetic word to speak for him.

If Miriam was a worship-leader and a teacher of the younger women, then Anna's special ministry was private prayer and total devotion to God – total availability, in fact. God used Anna to speak for Him, and He can use

you and me to speak for Him, too – whatever age we are !

Back in the Old Testament, consider another prophetess – Huldah – who lived and prophesied in the time of King Josiah. Young Josiah was painfully aware just how far Judah had departed from God's word; he gave orders that the Temple should be cleansed, and that the worship of God should be reformed ('re-formed') and renewed: (2 Chron. 34). *"While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses. Hilkiyah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law." Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.*

*When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders: "Go and enquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD'S anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."*

*Hilkiyah went to speak to the prophetess Huldah. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. She said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people – all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.'*

*Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Now I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.' "* So they took her answer back to the king.

Now, in fact, two important prophets – Jeremiah and Zephaniah – were both living in Jerusalem at that time, but, interestingly, the king's advisers prayerfully felt led to consult the respected prophetess Huldah in this matter, sensing that she would have the ear of God.

Huldah's resulting message probably wasn't what the Jews wanted to hear, but it was exactly what God told her to say, including a word of merciful approval for the young and repentant King Josiah. Sometimes, we too may have to speak out, in certain circumstances, but we must always be sure that what we say reflects God's view, as expressed through the Bible, and not our own views. God used Huldah the prophetess to speak out for Him, and He can use you and me in that way, too.

*To be continued*

B K-S

## THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

*Luke 16. 1-12*

*"There was a certain man,"* said Jesus one day, *"which had a steward."* By no means an unusual statement to make; all rich men had stewards, servants who had been with the family for many years and could be trusted with the duties of the position. The office dated back to very early times, for Abraham himself had a steward, "Eliezer of Damascus" (Genesis 15.2), and to that steward was entrusted the task of going five hundred miles into Aram-Naharaim to seek a suitable bride for Isaac, the son of Abraham. The responsibilities of the steward were heavy. He administered the whole of his master's estate, saw to his business matters, controlled the routine of the house, supervised the other servants and had charge of the children until they came of age. This latter fact is referred to by Paul in Galatians 4.1-2, *"The heir as long as he is a child... is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father."* The word 'governors' is the one used elsewhere in the New Testament for "stewards" – *oikonomos*.

But this particular steward, continued Jesus, was dishonest. He neglected his lord's interests and wasted his resources, so that at last he was required to make up his accounts and relinquish his position. And the unjust steward was afraid for the future. He had made no friends to whom he could turn in his hour of adversity. He had lived a life of ease and self-indulgence and forgotten how to labour that he might sustain himself. He had been proud and haughty and now was appalled at the thought of living as a dependent upon the charity of others. "What shall I do?" he asked himself despairingly. "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." And in searching for a way out of his plight the baseness of his nature came to the top and he saw a way of making himself friends at the eleventh hour, friends who by reason of the obligation under which he would place them might at least give him food and shelter. In order to understand the story aright we must examine its background.

The setting is an agricultural one. The 'debtors' who owed oil and wheat were evidently tenants of the lord's land and, as was the custom, paid their rent in kind – an agreed amount of the produce of the land. The previous expression of the steward, "I cannot dig," indicates the same thing; apparently the only manual work which was open to him in the particular community was agricultural. The scene of the story is in the country and not in the city. It would have been the steward's duty to assess equitable rents to the tenant farmers who leased the land, and the "hundred measures of oil" and "hundred measures of wheat" probably represented the yearly amount due. In English measure these equalled approximately 750 gallons of olive oil and one thousand bushels of wheat. It is sometimes suggested that the steward was executing a good stroke of business for his lord in that he secured payment of some apparently hopeless debts by offering a liberal discount for immediate settlement. It was nothing of the kind! The steward, knowing he was shortly to leave his lord's service, was deliberately reducing the tenants' rents and altering the legal documents, the "leases", which stipulated the annual amount to be paid. The word rendered 'bill' in *"take your bill, and write fifty"* and again in verse 7, refers to such legal contracts which were usual in Jesus' day, as in our own. There is no doubt that the steward had the legal right to adjust the rents when his lord's interests demanded it; but in this instance his action was dictated by his own interests and to his lord's hurt. It may have been legally permissible, but was morally unjustifiable. So he hoped to place these tenants under an obligation to him. He evidently did not intend to work for his living if he could find someone to give him hospitality in return for services rendered.

*"And the lord"* (the steward's master) *"commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely"* – shrewdly, according to Weymouth and the Twentieth Century versions – *"for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."* The master was broadminded enough and sufficient of a 'business man' himself, to admit that the unjust steward had shown himself quite capable of sharp business deals when his own interests were involved. There is no indication that the notice of dismissal was rescinded. He was a rogue, albeit a clever rogue and he had to go; but the master did at least commend him for his shrewdness as he went.

Jesus did not commend the man. To think that He did so is completely to misunderstand the parable, and waste a lot of time and ingenuity attempting to demonstrate that the steward was doing a legitimate and right thing. Jesus called him 'the *unjust* steward', and Jesus, by his silence as much as by his sequel to the parable, pronounced his own condemnation upon this and all similar actions which are so often justified by the glib saying

‘business is business’.

The story was ended. Turning now upon his disciples with a swift transition of thought, He said, perhaps with a vehemence greater than was his wont, *"And yet I say to you, make friends for yourselves out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it fails, those friends may receive you into everlasting habitations"*. The verse has been paraphrased a little in order to bring out its meaning. Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, the language of Galilee – at any rate, "mammon" is an Aramaic word – and the account was written by Luke in Greek. This verse has suffered a little in the process and is not altogether easy to follow in the Authorised Version. The conjunction "and" (*kai* in Greek) often has the meaning of ‘and yet’ or ‘and so’ when rhetorical emphasis is involved, as in this case, and ‘of’ is *ek*, ‘out of’. ‘Mammon’ is a word indicating worldly wealth or riches of any kind, and the expression *"when ye fail"* is more correctly rendered *"when it (i.e. the mammon of unrighteousness) fails"*.

The disciples, then, were to do, not what the steward *had* done, but what he had not done. He had the *"mammon of unrighteousness"*, worldly riches, power, and opportunity, entrusted to him, but he had not used it to make for himself true friends who could be relied upon to stand by him in the day of adversity. He had used it for his own selfish ends instead. Then when the day that it failed him came, he was compelled to resort to very questionable tactics to ensure his future comfort, with no real guarantee even then that his end would be achieved. Now that, said Jesus in effect, may be all very well for the world. They order their daily lives in that way and they fully expect to do such things or have such things done to them and they call it "business". In their own day and generation they are shrewder than the children of light; but it is a shrewdness that will avail them nothing in the day when this world, and the fashion of it, passes away. But *I say to you*, you whose lives are given over to a higher and a holier purpose, use the possessions, influence or worldly opportunities you may have in such a way as to win for yourselves friends in the heavens. So, when worldly mammon fails, as fail it must at last, you will be welcomed with joy into an everlasting home.

Whilst the disciples were thinking that out, Jesus drove home the principle which his story was intended to illustrate. *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much"* (v.10). The extent of our faithfulness to the exceeding great privileges and responsibilities which God intends His consecrated children to hold and administer in the coming Age when the saints "reign with Christ" is measured by the degree of their faithfulness toward God now. That is, in the administration of such worldly "mammon" as we may be possessed of now. If we have not placed it all on the altar and henceforth

used it in the interests of God and his Kingdom, then we are not likely to be any more faithful when the day for "*greater works*" has dawned. "*If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*" How could we expect God to do so in such case?

"*It is required of stewards*", says Paul in 1 Cor. 4.2, "*that a man be found faithful*". He was thinking of the stewards of his own day – perhaps even of this very parable, which must have been quite well known to him. We, the disciples of Jesus, are all stewards, and it is required of us all that we make good use of our stewardship while we have the opportunity, and not wait until the end of the day of grace before we commence thinking about it. The Parable of the Talents tells us that, as also does the story of the rich young ruler who wanted to gain eternal life but not in a way that was going to cost him anything. That story is repeated so often in these latter days. It is so easy to spend a few years in the first flush of enthusiasm for "the Faith", learning the doctrines and becoming familiar with the Holy Scriptures. We become accustomed to the routine of regular worship and even perhaps the discharge of duties falling to elders in the church. Then, having attained that stage, begin to devote increasing attention to a 'career' – as if any earthly career matters to the child of God – or to success in business – as if any earthly business counts for aught in the sight of the Great King. Perhaps it is attention to any of the other hundred and one earthly interests that the Devil is always so industriously placing in the pathway of consecrated believers. Jesus, knowing all this, told His disciples "*the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts (desires) of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful*" (Mark 4.19). How true are those words, exemplified in the lives of Christians who for a time did "*run well*" but failed at the last.

To-day, more than ever, we need to take this parable to heart. There has been so much disappointment and disillusionment. So many things expected have not come to pass. As with Peter and the other disciples after the Crucifixion, there is a tendency to go back to the fishing-nets and make the best of the world as it now is. So we hope, as we do so, that we can fit into our place in the Kingdom when at length it does come.

And of course – we cannot. Unless we have been constantly and tirelessly faithful in all respects to the unseen things whilst they remain unseen, we shall not see them when at length they become revealed to the watching ones, and faith is swallowed up in sight. If we do not make heavenly friends *now* by our use of the earthly mammon, we shall not be of those who, when *it* fails, will be received with joy into the everlasting habitations.

AOH

## PAUL BEFORE FELIX

*his story continued*

The Roman looked down from his seat of judgment with a barely concealed sneer as the High Priest moved arrogantly across the hall and took his place in the position reserved for complainants. A group of fellow priests surrounded him, and in the forefront was a smoothly shaven Greek, Tertullus, a professional advocate, who had been engaged to present their case in the fashion customary at a Roman trial. Opposite to them stood the accused, Paul, guarded by two stalwart Roman legionaries, for this was a civil trial and he was appearing before the representative of Caesar, to be judged according to the laws of Rome.

A nod from Antonius Felix and the trial opened. Tertullus stepped forward, went through the customary formalities of respect to Caesar and acknowledged the authority of Felix by a subservient inclination of the head. He paused a moment, as though for dramatic effect, and with an expression of self-deprecating subservience addressed the watching Roman. "*Since through you we enjoy much peace*" he began, "*and since by your provision, most excellent Felix, reforms are introduced on behalf of this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude,*"

An expression of grim humour flickered across the eyes of the usually impassive Roman guards. There was not a man in the hall, Roman or Jew, who was not fully aware of the flagrant insincerity of Tertullus' fulsome words, for Antonius Felix was one of the worst governors Judea ever had. By birth a slave, he had been able in company with his brother Pallas to worm himself into the court of Claudius Caesar, and while Pallas remained as the Emperor's Court favourite, Felix had embarked on a career of provincial administration by which he had handsomely enriched himself.

Two years as governor of Samaria had been followed by six years in his present position in Judea, which he ruled, says one historian, "with the authority of a king and the disposition of a slave." Relying on the power of his brother at the Imperial Court, he committed every type of crime without restraint. On the one hand he sent his soldiers against the bandits who infested the country and on the other accepted bribes from them to condone their excesses. The High Priest, Jonathan, one of the few upright and God-fearing High Priests of that troubled period, who had reproved and reasoned with Felix on account of his conduct, was treacherously murdered at his instigation. Felix himself, already married twice, had seduced Drusilla, the young sister of King Agrippa, from her husband and married her.

Corruption in high places and flagrant disregard for justice, manifested

by this unworthy representative of Empire, was reflected in every kind of violence in the land. Josephus says that it was at this time God turned away from His people because of their wickedness and left them to the fate which befell them ten years later, when Titus destroyed their cities and scattered the nation. Small wonder if the listening soldiers smiled ironically and the Jewish priests writhed inwardly as Felix accepted the undeserved compliments with a complacent smile. Ananias himself, who had seized the High Priesthood illegally after the death of Jonathan, must have remembered for a moment how his predecessor had been murdered by this man now sitting on the seat of judgment, and realised how insecure he himself might be. But his hatred of Paul overshadowed all other considerations and he turned his attention again to what Tertullus had to say – the suave voice went on "*But to detain you no further, I beg in your kindness to hear us briefly.*" It is possible that at this point Tertullus detected a trace of impatience in the Governor's attitude and decided that the courtesies had been sufficiently observed. He plunged forthwith into the accusation. The charge was threefold, to wit, that the prisoner was, first, an inciter to sedition amongst the Jews, second, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, third, one who profaned the Temple. He disowned responsibility for the matter being obtruded upon Felix' august attention. They would have dealt with the offender themselves had not the *chiliarch* – commander – Lysias "*with great violence*" taken Paul out of their hands and sent him to Felix. But now the matter had thus become the subject of an official investigation and Felix could examine the prisoner himself and realise the truth of all that Tertullus had been saying.

The next step in the Roman judicial code was the production of witnesses and the hearing of their statements. Felix waited. The ensuing pause must have constituted something of an anti-climax to Tertullus' noble effort on behalf of his employers. Most regrettably, there were no witnesses. Ananias and his fellow priests had not been present at the time of the riot in the Temple. The Asiatic Jews who caused all the trouble and were the only ones who could offer any evidence had long since gone home and by now were well on their way to Ephesus or Lystra or Iconium and had probably lost all interest in the matter. The only possible witness now available was the Jerusalem garrison commander Claudius Lysias, and he was not likely to be helpful to their side of the case. So after a moment of silence a babble of priestly voices rang out, assuring the governor that all Tertullus had said was true and the prisoner could be condemned and sentenced without further ado. Felix regarded them with sardonic disdain. He knew these Jews – he ought to, having governed them long enough. He

had no illusions and probably saw through them at once. He looked now at the prisoner and made a peremptory sign with his hand. Paul had permission to speak.

Of course Paul also knew the character of the governor but quite evidently had no intention of trying to placate him by flattery nor show resentment at being arraigned before him. He treated him simply and solely as the rightful representative of law and order and the man authorised to hear the case and pronounce the verdict. His opening statement is a masterpiece of respectful courtesy without servility. *"Realising that for many years you have been judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defence.* It is very likely that his evident respect for Felix' position, coupled with the total absence of either fear or flattery, evoked the governor's interest as no other attitude would have done. He was not used to men who neither cringed before him nor sought to propitiate him. The length of Paul's recorded defence compared with the brevity of Tertullus' accusation indicates that Felix must have given serious attention to the Apostle's words, any trace of possible former impatience gone. The impatience now would have been among Ananias and his fellows.

In quiet and logical fashion Paul met the three accusations with a calm and unequivocal denial. He refuted the charge of sedition by reminding Felix that from his own knowledge of Jewish custom he would know that Pentecost was only twelve days in the past. Paul had arrived in the country just in time to attend the feast and one could not preach much sedition in twelve days. As to the question of profaning the Temple, he flatly denied it and declared that they could not point to any possible action on his part which could be so construed. The third accusation, that he was a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes, needed no defence, for that was no crime in the eyes of Rome. Christianity was, at that time, just as legal a religion as Judaism. Tertullus, for all his professional acumen, had slipped up when he included this particular charge at a Roman trial. *"But" said Paul, "this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers...having a hope in God... that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust".* Here is Paul back on his main theme, the purpose of God in relation to the destiny of man; but this time he was preaching, not to the Jews who had already rejected the testimony, but to one man, the guilt-laden judge who occupied the bench above him. So he desisted from further explanation of his mission and explained the circumstances of his coming to Judea, how he came to bring alms to his fellow Jews and to undergo purification rites in the Temple and concluded by claiming, what the governor was probably already thinking inwardly, that the people who raised the original riot should have been present to accuse him if they had anything against him.

Felix made up his mind. He must have already given weight to his subordinate's estimation of the prisoner's innocence and saw no reason to differ from Lysias' conclusions. There was probably another factor also. Luke says that when Felix heard these things, "*having more perfect knowledge of that Way*" he ended the proceedings. "The Way" was the expression used in those early days for the incipient Christian community everywhere. "Brethren of the Way" they called themselves and were so known by others. Somehow, in some manner, Felix had acquired a knowledge of the distinctive features of the faith that Paul was now proclaiming before him. He saw, more clearly than Ananias had given him credit for, the real reason for their hostility to the prisoner, and he was not prepared to hand Paul over to his enemies. At the same time he saw no reason why he should offend the Jewish priestly hierarchy unnecessarily. He closed the proceedings by saying that he would defer his decision until Lysias should have occasion to visit Caesarea and until then the prisoner would be kept in custody. Baulked again of their prey, Ananias and his fellows had to return to Jerusalem, sullenly furious at their lack of success and doubtless reflecting on the improbability of Felix doing much more about the matter. In that they were right, for Paul was not brought to trial again during Felix' term of office.

For the next two years Paul was held in a kind of preventive custody which shielded him from physical danger but gave him full liberty of intercourse with his friends. It is tolerably certain that Luke remained with him and in fact there is every probability that it was during this time Luke gathered the materials for his Gospel, which was yet to be written. So far as is known this was his only visit to Judea; he would have ample opportunity to visit the scenes of Jesus' earthly life and to talk with those who had seen and known Him. The intimate details of our Lord's birth, so carefully recorded, could only have been gathered in personal conversation with Jesus' mother Mary. It is also very probable that the Gospel according to Luke was actually written during this two years of Paul's imprisonment.

This chapter in the Apostle's life was not to be closed without showing up in sharp relief the tragedy of a man who caught the vision of eternity but could not bring himself to break from his own base vices in order to embrace it. Luke tells how Felix and his wife Drusilla had frequent conversations with Paul "*concerning the faith in Christ*". There must have been some remnant of primitive nobility in this man, corrupted as he was by riches and power and self-indulgence, which responded to the shining faith of his prisoner and he wanted to know more about it. But he could not face the implications. As Paul "*reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and*

judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, 'Go your way for this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for you' ". He thought of his own misdeeds, the grasping cupidity which had made him rich by extortion and theft, of his hands stained with the blood of innocent men. He looked upon the woman at his side whom he had stolen from her lawful husband, and he shrank from the implications of the Apostle's measured words. He half believed in the truth of Paul's declaration that every man must one day render an account of the deeds done in the body. He perhaps understood, in measure, the logic of Paul's insistence that God is working for the ultimate good of all creation but that every man himself has a part to play. But he thought of his immediate tastes and desires and he could not forego them. He trembled when he reflected on the possibility of judgment to come and there may have awakened in his dark nature some feeble desire for the peace and happiness that righteousness and temperance can bring. But again the pull of the present dragged him back and he turned away from the shining vision. As he returned to the darkness, his habitual cupidity reasserted itself and he began to cherish the hope that Paul or Paul's friends might offer a money bribe for the Apostle's release. So he kept up the conversations but all the time was receding farther away from the gleam of light he had but barely seen. And there was no money forthcoming. Paul would have scorned such a method of securing his release, and both the official and personal life of Felix went on as before.

But judgment came, as Paul had declared, and sooner perhaps than either of them expected. "*But when two years had elapsed*" says Luke briefly "*Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus*". He offers no explanation, but history tells all. Felix, at last, had gone too far. There was always jealousy and strife between the Jews and the Greeks of Caesarea and riots were not uncommon. Toward the end of that two years a more than usually serious riot developed and Felix used this as an excuse for throwing his troops in, on the side of the Greeks, with tacit permission to plunder the houses of the wealthier Jews. He himself, of course, stood to receive a considerable portion of the loot. In despair at this latest example of the governor's rapacity, a deputation of leading Jerusalem Jews set sail for Rome to protest to the Emperor. Claudius, under whom Felix had originally risen to power, had been dead for some years and Nero was Emperor. Felix was peremptorily recalled to Rome to stand trial. Porcius Festus was sent to Judea as his successor. Not many months before Paul himself set out for Rome, Felix with his wife, Drusilla, and their young son, left Judea in disgrace to face the Emperor's anger. It seems that he escaped with his life but was stripped of all office and made to disgorge his ill-gotten gains. After that nothing is known about the couple and they evidently died in obscurity.

In what was perhaps a last unavailing attempt to placate the Jews, Felix, on his departure, "*desiring to do the Jews a favour*" for perhaps the first time in his life, "*left Paul in prison*". Thus it was that a man of a very different stamp, upright, just, and a firm administrator of Roman justice, Porcius Festus, landing at Caesarea to take up his duties as Governor of Judea, found a prisoner waiting for him and a civil trial on his hands.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

## DISMISS ME NOT

"*Now, Lord, you are dismissing your servant.*" Old Simeon accepted the fact. He had lived a good life, he was ready to go. And now he had held in his arms this child, through whom God's salvation would come to all the world. God had honoured His promise. What more could there be? "*Lord, you are dismissing your servant, in peace.*"

But not all servants are ready to be dismissed.

The writers of the New Testament epistles introduced themselves as servants - slaves. Paul: '*a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*' (Romans 1.1). James: '*a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ*' (James 1.1). Simon Peter: '*a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*' (2 Peter 1.1). Jude: '*a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*' (Jude 1.1). These men of note in the church considered themselves as slaves and messengers.

Could such persons be dismissed? Can the servants of Christ today be dismissed? (We are thinking of dismissal by God, not dismissal by our fellow human beings.) Not, necessarily, to loose from their present life as Simeon did, but to lose the special privilege of serving in a particular way. There was one preacher who had this fear, and he wrote the hymn 'Dismiss me not thy service, Lord'.

Thomas Toke Lynch from the age of about thirty was the minister of a small congregation meeting in London, in the area around Euston station in the mid eighteenth century. He preached thoughtfully, and was the writer of hymns, which show his high aspirations: to speak words that help and heal, revealing Christ's life within; to be truthful, wise, kind and clear; to shut up his heart against temptation; to be quiet within; to be strong and persevere; to be holy, separate from sin, and give all his talents to Christ. On the other hand, he suffered illness all his life, his body was weak and emaciated. He was apt to feel a deep sense of injustice when people did not

understand him. Even his hymns were the subject of bitter controversies. For three years he was too ill even to serve as a minister. It was against this background that he prayed, and wrote, that God would not dismiss him from his service. Surely there was something he could be doing for God?

In the New Testament it was not only the leaders who called themselves servants. All believers are servants of Christ, including those who may never be known to us. The Holy Spirit was poured out generally upon '*menservants and maidservants*' (Acts 2.18). Believers were urged to live as free... but as servants of God (1 Peter 2.16). Believers who were slaves were urged to behave '*as servants of Christ doing his will*' (Ephesians 6.6). It was to people who were Christ's servants that the Book of Revelation was given, through his servant John (Revelation 1.1). Indeed, our Lord himself took the form of a servant (Philippians 1.7).

In this service there are many varieties of duties. For example, in Romans 12.3-8 we have the classic analogy of being one body in Christ, each part with a different bodily function. The functions mentioned are preaching, serving others, teaching, stimulating faith, giving, leadership, helping those in distress [J.B.Phillips version]. These are general categories, but in our lives we apply this teaching to our own particular situations, e.g. giving leadership in my own fellowship group, helping my next door neighbour. There can be no dismissal from this obligation to show love in serving. But someone who is ill - or weak - or frustrated by other people - may find that they cannot do the things they were used to doing. Are they 'dismissed' ? or may there be for them another way of serving?

Thomas Lynch, it seems, was facing the possibility of having to serve God in a different way. He wanted no reward, only to keep on serving. And he reflected on the wider context of service, the broad fields that were open. In his day literal 'broad fields' required a large number of manual workers. Many served, many would come to serve in future (and he may have thought of the students from the colleges in London who had listened to his preaching). He thought of the biblical picture of the vineyard, the work of tending the Lord's vine. He thought back to the country life of his own youth - young men who had gone to fight in the wars, leaving children (and women) to cope with the mundane duties of daily life. All of these, in differing ways, were doing their job, and it was a picture of the different aspects of Christian service.

He had to come to terms with the fact that it was not only the eloquent, or those well versed in Scripture, or those who believe they have a confidential knowledge of what God is doing, or the deeply spiritual, who are servants. As John Milton the poet realised, when he became blind, 'They also serve who only stand and wait'. The bent and curled toe on an aged foot is

still part of the body. The 'little ones at home' in his hymn have their own part to play.

What makes service acceptable is when it is done in love. That is what God blesses, and our Master has set us the perfect example. Those who serve in love are not merely His servants, they are God's children, and children are not dismissed, for they are part of the family.

*"For now that you have faith in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God. All of you who were baptised 'into' Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ. Gone is the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female - you are all one in Christ Jesus.... God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry 'Father, dear Father'. You are not a servant any longer; through God you are a son."* (Gal. 4.26-28; 5.6,7)

GC

*Dismiss me not Thy service, Lord,  
But train me for Thy will;  
For even I, in fields so broad,  
Some duties may fulfil;  
And I will ask for no reward,  
Except to serve Thee still.*

*How many serve, how many more  
May to the service come:  
To tend the vines, the grapes to store,  
Thou dost appoint for some;  
Thou hast Thy young men at the war,  
Thy little ones at home.*

*All works are good, and each is best  
As most it pleases Thee.  
Each worker pleases when the rest  
He serves in charity;  
And neither man nor work unblest  
Wilt Thou permit to be.*

*Our Master all the work hath done  
He asks of us today;  
Sharing His service, every one  
Share too His Sonship may:  
Lord, I would serve and be a son;  
Dismiss me not, I pray.*

T.T. Lynch 1818-71

# STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

## Part 13 1 John 3 4-8

*"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."* (1 John 3,4-8 AV).

This is a sudden change of thought from the lofty tones of the first three verses. There, John had taken us up into the very heavens themselves, exalting our minds with the celestial vision of the future glory that will without doubt be ours. The conditional qualification of verse 3, reminding us that a process of purifying is going on within each one who has this hope within him, seems almost intended to be nothing more than a reminder. The assurance and certainty of verses 1 and 2 is as though no failure is contemplated or possible. We *are* sons of God; that is indisputable. We shall be like Him; that is equally indisputable. Then verse 3 just hints at the fact that without purification the promised glory may never materialise. Verse 4 comes right down with a stark and uncompromising declaration that there is one dread power which might conceivably ruin and nullify the whole glorious promise, and that dread power is sin!

Of course John had spoken about sin before. In ch.1 v.2 he touches upon its blackness several times. But whereas in chapter 1 he treats sin as a defiling influence resting upon us largely because of our inheritance from Adam, that can be cleansed away by confession and repentance, in chapter 2 he speaks of sin as the general effect of our worldly environment and our own fleshly weaknesses. That can be extinguished by "abiding in Him". Here in chapter 3 he shows how sin can be a more subtle and a more personal thing, a principle that may be received into the heart and allowed to control life's actions. This is not because of the seductive influences of the world, the flesh and the Devil but because the unregenerate heart may in some cases love the darkness more than the light. It rejoices in deeds of evil for the very sake of evil. That is the darkest and the deepest manifestation of sin that can proceed from a man, the one most difficult to blot out. Weakness of the children of Adam will no longer have effect in men's lives in the Millennial Age. The snares of this world will disappear with the ending of this world; but nothing else than true conversion to Christ will ever put an end to secret

sympathy with sin. The real purpose of Divine dealings with the Church in this Age and with the world in the next Age is to eliminate from all hearts the love of sin for its own sake, the last stronghold of the Devil. John, knowing that in these last days, just as in the days before the Flood, the hearts of men would be "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked", has taken care to warn all who may hear or read his words of the danger that surrounds those even who live the nearest to God. *"Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."* It seems such a self-evident statement that one might wonder at first why John troubled to make the remark. *"Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness."* Of course he transgresses, everyone knows that; for sin is against the law. There must be something deeper in the thought, something that does not come to mind until after a few minutes' reflection. What law? The law of Moses? It could be so, but the law of Moses is altogether too restricted a framework in which to fit the implication of this verse. John's words were addressed to Christians, too, and the law of Moses is not the rule by which our lives are to be guided. The law of Rome, then? Hardly that, for again the Christian is bound by a law which is higher far than the laws of Rome. That is the clue, of course. God constituted immutable and fundamental laws for the ordered progress of His creation. They are for the guidance of those intelligent beings he purposed to create, away there right at the beginning. And sin is the violation of that primitive and fundamental law. No man-made code can reproduce all that is contained in that Divine rule in its entirety. Neither did the Mosaic law fully reflect all that it contains and demands.

The original Divine law, implanted in the constitution and in the heart of Adam in the day of his creation, and now held before the Church of this Gospel Age as the ideal towards which it must strive, is the law the violation of which is sin. Any infringement of the rules that God has devised for the orderly conduct of His creation and the happiness and well-being of those He has placed upon it, is sin. And whosoever infringes those rules, whether deliberately or unwittingly, is a sinner. There is really no better expression of this truth than is contained in the words of the Authorised Version. The plain, forthright English expression "sin is the transgression of the law" cannot possibly be improved upon when once we realise that it is Divine fundamental law that is meant.

Here comes a parenthesis. John misses no opportunity of impressing upon his readers that there is a remedy for sin and a way of escape from the power of sin. So here, immediately after the dark shadow of sin has fallen across the page, he draws aside the curtain, as it were, and lets in the light that chases that shadow away. *"You know that he appeared to take away sins,*

and in him there is no sin" (v.5). The Vatican manuscript omits the word "our" and in so doing immeasurably strengthens the passage. There is hope for all, all who repent, no matter how heinous or deliberate their sin nor how tardy their repentance. If the Parable of the Prodigal Son had nothing else to teach us it would always have that. No matter how far away the erring one has strayed nor how deeply he has sunk, nor how long he has stayed away, if he but sincerely repents and begins to make his way back, his Father will come to meet him!

Now at this point John has to embark upon an admittedly difficult subject. He has to bring another deep doctrinal truth to his readers in such fashion that they can grasp the principle he wants to expound. He does so without them misunderstanding the implication of his words, that they assume a position before God to which they have no right. He wants to show his disciples that because of their repentance and sincerity they have been awarded a justification in the eyes of God which allows Him completely to ignore and put behind His back the content of sin in their mortal bodies and in their earthly lives. He has to make them realise that in the final analysis, sin is the fruit of the *desire* to act in violation of fundamental Divine law, and righteousness is the *desire* to act in accordance with fundamental Divine law. He also says that it is from those desires that the concrete things which we call evil and good, spring forth. It is what lies in the heart rather than on the hands which constitutes a man sinful or sinless. Jesus began to lead the minds of His disciples to such an understanding when He told them that the mere desire to sin is the same to God as if the sin had actually been committed (Matt. 5. 27-28). That was a "hard saying" to those who had been accustomed from childhood to the Mosaic Law which laid absolute stress upon the performance of the letter without any regard to the spirit. The later Papal doctrine of cleansing by penances really had quite a good prototype in the typical ceremonies of the Tabernacle. The Israelite who learned that by the bringing of appropriate animal or vegetable offerings to the priest, he could be cleansed from his sin, might very easily be tempted to conclude that for so much sin the price of cleansing was so much offering, or payment. That system, initiated by Moses and practised by Israel through so many centuries, was a very necessary step in the process by which God must reveal His deepest spiritual truths to man. But it was a stage that had to be completed, and then superseded in Christ by something deeper and nearer the fundamental. The tragedy is that even in our day, so long after the ending of the Mosaic Law, there are so many who fail to realise that slavery to sin, or freedom from sin, does not lie so much in the expression of our motives through our bodies. It is in the motives themselves.

So John ventures upon this new and uncharted sea by a first tentative

approach. *"Whoever abides in him sins not."* (v.6). It is a startling statement to make. Taken in the ordinary sense and with our ordinary everyday definition of what constitutes the practice of sin, it cannot possibly be true. But the statement, coming as it does from the inspired Apostle, cannot be other than true, and if it seems a difficult and incomprehensible remark to make we must perforce search our minds and attune ourselves to his thoughts until we understand what he means. Thus doing, we shall realise how true it is. We must not be unmindful of the fact that in chapter 1 he has already said "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us". Whatever meaning we attach to this last statement of John, it must not do violence to the earlier ones. We must understand it in such a way that both are true.

The Twentieth Century translation tries to lessen the impact of this disturbing teaching by rendering it *"No one who maintains union with him lives in sin"*. That is a way out of the apparent difficulty but that is not what John said. The Greek is as bold and uncompromising as the AV: "Everyone abiding in him sins not". The only possible answer to the enigma is that the words do mean just what they say and that here in this passage John is representing things as seen by God Himself. In chapter 1 the viewpoint is from the earth and of ourselves. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" for the results of other men's infractions of Divine law are present in our bodies, and those of our own individual infractions of Divine law, willing or unwilling, deliberate or of ignorance, are also present in our bodies. But God, looking down upon us from above, says *"Whoever is abiding in Me, sins not"* for only those who at heart are sincere and in full sympathy with Divine law can be truly said to be *"abiding in Him"*. And these, despite their fleshly, Adamic imperfections, their stumbling and failings and frequent falls from grace, the Father knows are at heart in harmony with Him and entirely out of sympathy with sin in all its forms. These, transferred to a perfect environment and being given bodies not handicapped by inherited imperfections and weaknesses, would live fully sinless lives in harmony with Divine law. Hence, knowing what they *would* do if they could and knowing that they have already pledged themselves to the standards of righteousness and have no desire for, nor sympathy with, any of the *"hidden things of darkness"* God declares that such *"sin not"*. He knows that their motives and intents and sincerity are beyond question. From the Divine point of view they are without sin, even although in real life the motions of sin still work in their mortal members.

That, after all, is justification, to be declared righteous, upright, in the sight of God. That is the justification that is of God. *"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth!"* (Rom.8.33).

Now, immediately, and as if to guard against our taking the wrong thought from this wonderful statement defining our standing in the sight of God, John adds an antithesis. "*Whosoever abides in him sins not*" – yes, but – "*whosoever sins has not seen him, neither known him*" (v.6). Here we are brought back to earth again and compelled to view matters from our own standpoint once more. "*Whosoever sins!*" It has already been told us that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; we, who are the sons of God, admitted to this spiritual presence. Now, says John, whosoever sins has neither seen nor known him. Clearly here again he is talking of sin from another standpoint than that which is taken in chapter 1. How logical it is to conclude that if, in chapter 3 verse 6, the one who, abiding in Him, sins not in the sense that his motives and sincerity are perfect in the Father's sight, then conversely, the one whose motives and sincerity are not perfect, neither sees nor knows the Father. John has already told us that much, previously in his epistle; now he reiterates this truth in even more solemn tones. It is not the one who has failed by reason of some human weakness who "has not seen him, neither known him", else not one of us in the flesh could justly claim the privilege. It is the one who, like Simon the sorcerer, has a "*heart not right in the sight of God*" (Acts 8. 21) who, being one that sins, neither sees nor knows Him.

John wants to impress this lesson even more forcefully before he leaves the subject, but he wants to go very carefully. He must have known how that some in after days would seize upon his words to claim for themselves an actual fleshly perfection which they do not in fact and can never hope to possess. Also how others, more sincere of heart, would nevertheless mistakenly conclude that God had granted perpetual freedom from the thralldom of sin without the possibility of its bonds ever again encircling them. Also how there would be those, so blind to the essence of God's ways, that they would hail this declared freedom from sin as licence to plunge into those very excesses which must inevitably brand them as sinners in the sight of the Most High. "*Let no man deceive you*" he warns "*He that does righteousness is the righteous one, just as God Himself is righteous*" (v.7). That is not quite the A.V. rendering but it is perhaps a very readable paraphrase. It must be expected that the one whose inward purity and sincerity has earned for himself the Divine approval and hall mark of justification must show something in his outward life and actions to correspond. A good tree does not bring forth evil fruits and a grape vine planted in good ground will normally produce good grapes. Likewise, says John, it is with the sinner. "*He that commis sin is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning.*" (v.8). Just as God sets his seal upon those who are truly His, and proclaims them righteous in His sight, so the devil brands with his hall-mark those who have

given themselves over to him, and proclaims them his slaves. Thus it is, and thus it has been from the entry of sin into the world. There is a subtle thought here that is not apparent in the Authorised Version. The Greek omits the definite article; it is grammatically correct to read 'a beginning'. Although it does not necessarily follow on that account that the indefinite article and not the definite article 'a' instead of 'the' is intended and should be read in this instance, it is at least a possibility. We do not know just when the fall of Lucifer occurred. It might have been at the time of Eden. It might have been earlier, and he waited his time, for an opportunity to put his rebellious designs into effect. What we do know, and perhaps this is what John had in mind at this point, is that Satan's rebellion and sin did have a beginning. *Divine righteousness had no beginning.* That latter existed, with the Most High Himself, "from everlasting". It will exist, after sin has been utterly destroyed, "to everlasting". This same theme, the perpetuity of righteousness and those who stand for righteousness in contrast to the transience of evil and those who embrace and retain evil, is hinted at in the next sentence. *"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil"* (v.8). Not created or born, but manifested. He already existed. There is no note here of the time when He was not. From a time long before whatever "beginning" it was that first saw the evil and sin of the Devil, the Son of God was. Now He is manifested, made plain in this world from whose sight He was formerly hidden, to destroy the works of the Devil. This "manifestation" must therefore include both His First and Second Advents and all that is associated therewith throughout all the past ages. While sin began and spread apparently unchecked through the earth, and the "prince of this world" ruled without let or hindrance, the Lord of All remained concealed from the world, unknown to mankind. On the historic day when the last of the Prophets, lifting up his eyes from the swiftly flowing waters, cried aloud "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world", that manifestation began. It has continued ever since, and will continue, throughout the Millennial Age of glory that is to succeed this Age. It will continue until the final judgment has completed this promised destruction of the works of the Devil. Then all mankind is ushered into the Divinely ordained sinless eternity that is the consummation of God's purpose for this world.

(To be continued) AOH

*If you agree with God's purpose, He will bring not only your conscious life, but all the deeper regions of your life which you cannot get at, into harmony.*

O. Chambers

## Legal Questions

### A Bible Quiz

1. What is perfect and revives the soul?
2. Who is the man like a tree by the water?
3. What is the benefit of God opening our eyes?
4. Where is the law to be found under the new covenant with Israel?
5. What justification did the Jews claim for killing Jesus?
6. What came through Moses and what came through Jesus Christ?
7. What is by no means abolished?
8. Why does keeping the law not put men right with God?
9. What law sets me free?
10. What principle sums up all the law?

Answers on page 200

The following scriptures may be useful: Psalm 1.2,3; 19.7; 119.18; Jeremiah 31.33; Matthew 5.17; John 1.17; 19.7; Romans 3.20; 8.2; 13.10.

## IN THE BEGINNING

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1. 1-2).*

Those are the opening words of the Bible. They speak of a time earlier than the seven creative days which picture the development of the earth into a habitation suitable for man.

There are several beginnings mentioned in the Bible. Jesus spoke of one beginning when, talking of the institution of marriage, He said *"He which made them at the beginning made them male and female"* (Matt. 19. 4. Mark 10. 4). That was the beginning of the human race and of human history upon earth. Satan, said Jesus on another occasion *"was a liar and a murderer from the beginning"* (John 8. 44) and this clearly refers to the same time—that of the Eden story. The One presented as the personification of Divine Wisdom in Prov. 8. 23 says *"I was set up from of old, from the beginning, before the earth was"*; of Him again it is said in John 1. 1-2 *"In the beginning was the Word . . . and He was in the beginning with God"*. This beginning "before the earth was" must obviously be earlier in time than

that of Gen. 1. 1 in which God is said to have created the earth.

It has to be concluded therefore that Gen. 1. 1 does not refer to the beginning of Divine creative work but it does refer to the time when what we call this material universe was created and our sun with its attendant worlds came into existence. The account then has to be read as though given from the standpoint of an observer upon this planet, and tells of a time when the primitive earth appeared in the midst of the surrounding heavens.

The word for "heavens"—*shamayim*— means "the heights", and comes from a Hebrew root "*shamah*", to be high. (Some expositors make it refer to a belief in the existence of waters above the heavens by prefixing *mayim*—"waters" with the adverb *sham*—"there"—so manufacturing a rather clumsy word "there-waters" for *shamayim*, but there is no warrant for this). Genesis 1. 1 tells us that in the beginning of things God made the heights above and the earth beneath, without any reference to what had gone before.

It is certain that the spiritual or celestial world had already come into being, for Job 38. 7 tells that at the foundation of this earth "*the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy*". It is impossible to deny that somewhere away in another sphere of Divine creation there were intelligent beings witnessing the processes which brought our universe into being.

Science is still uncertain precisely how the solar system—the sun with its planets—came into existence; several theories compete for acceptance but it is agreed that at a time between two and five thousand million years ago, a vast cloud of gaseous material existing in space consolidated to form a star—our sun—and a number of smaller bodies, the planets, of which our earth is one. The earth was most probably mainly in a molten condition and much of the metals and other solid substances with which we are now familiar vaporised forming a kind of thick and heavy atmosphere around the central core. All water was in the form of steam and there was no free oxygen and no breathable air. Because there was no air no sunlight could reach the surface and the planet was swathed in impenetrable darkness.

That condition of things is aptly described by the next words. "*And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep*". This expression "without form" denotes a waste or desert condition, and is translated elsewhere in the O.T. by words such as waste, wilderness, confusion, vanity, and so on. "Void" is a word meaning emptiness, so that the phrase really means that the earth, although exist-

ing, was a desolate, empty waste. There was no life and no growing thing; just a mass of dead material suspended in space. Another example of the same expression in the Old Testament serves to illumine its use. Jeremiah, seeing in prophetic vision the desolation that was to come upon Judah in consequence of the imminent Babylonian invasion, expressed himself thus *"I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light ... I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of heaven were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger"* (Jer. 4. 23-26). In this lament Jeremiah likened the state of his homeland to the desolate and waste condition of the earth before God created man.

At this point some reference should be made to what is called the "Disruption theory" which is still advocated at times although the reasons which called it into being have long since lost their validity. Briefly, this hypothesis claims that prior to the creation of the Adamic race and the events of the seven creative days there had been a pre-Adamic race of beings living upon the earth and that a great cataclysm occurred which destroyed that race and completely desolated the world so that it became "waste and void". Exponents of the thesis claim that the "was" of Gen. 1.2 should properly be rendered "the earth became waste and void" so that verse 1 refers to the pre-Adamite world, verse 2 the cataclysm or "disruption" which overwhelmed it, and verse 3 onwards the restoration of the earth by Divine power in readiness for the race of Adam yet to be created. A variation of the proposition says that these pre-Adamite beings were destroyed because of grievous sin and became the "fallen angels" of later Old and New Testament narratives.

There is no textual foundation for this suggestion. The grammatical sense of verse 2 is accurately represented in the Authorised Version. It implies that, at the time of which it speaks. God created the earth a waste and empty mass. After that, the account goes on to explain, God began to develop the earth into a suitable home for man, and at the end of the narrative man appears as the obvious climax. Grammatically the expression is identical with Jonah 3. 3 *"Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh . . . Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city"* and Gen 3. 1 *"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field"*. The suggestion that Gen. 1. 2 asserts the existence of an originally complete and perfect earth, later destroyed and then re-created to be a home for the Adamic race, was first made by Dr. Andrew Chalmers in 1814 and elaborated by Dr. Pye Smith in 1838. At that time geologists knew very little of the earth's origin, but discoveries then being made appeared to conflict with the Genesis account. In particular the

growing evidence that the planet had passed through a succession of cataclysms which left their mark in the twisted and contorted rock strata - and the fossils and bones of prehistoric animals that were increasingly coming to light - were hard to reconcile with the prevailing belief in a literal seven day creative week. The idea of a pre-Adamic destruction of the world was held to account for these conditions, and made it possible to maintain belief in the seven literal creative days by relegating the long ages of the fossil remains to a time before the first creative day. Once it is realised that the creative week of Genesis covers the entire span of geological time the "disruption theory" has no place.

There is a significant expression at this point. *"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"*. "In the beginning" God had created the earth, but it was a dead earth, waste and sterile, an unorganised mass of assorted chemical substances of which some were solid, some liquid, and some gaseous, all intensely hot and interacting with each other but all dead. And the Spirit of God brooded over this chaotic world; that is the meaning of the word translated "moved"; as a bird hovering over and brooding over its young. The word is rendered "fluttereth" in Deut. 32. 11 *"As an eagle . . . fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings ... so the Lord alone did lead Israel"*. The Holy Spirit of God came down upon that lifeless creation to bestow life.

The story of how life came to earth and developed upon it, in ever increasing degrees of complexity until at last the time came when God said *"Let us make man, in our image"* is the theme of the seven creative days. The narrative commences in the third verse of Gen. 1. The first story of the Bible consists of two verses only and it tells, simply, how Divine power, Divine energy, brought together the material substances which compose our earth, setting in motion chemical changes which eventually made it capable of supporting life; and then the Divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, came down to bring the seed of life that the earth might one day teem with living creatures, and finally become a fitting home for man, the crown and glory of terrestrial life.

Energy and life; these are the twin principles of the universe as we know it, emanating from God. Many intellectual men are trying hard to discover the source and nature of both but they are still very much in the dark. The first two verses of Genesis give us the answer; they both come from God and therefore they are, to man, forever unknowable. But God is not only life and energy; He is also Love and Wisdom, and One with whom His children can enter into personal relationship and have communion. He is not only the Creator, He is also the Father; we are not only the work of His hands, we are also His children. We are still in the

formative time, not yet grown up, just as the earth we inhabit has not yet attained the fulness of perfection it will know eventually. Nevertheless the day will come when men shall be called the Sons of God because they will have, at last, attained the ideal which God had in mind in that far off day when "In the beginning" He created the heavens and earth.

AOH

## WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Things go wrong, even for characters in Bible stories. Nowadays, among the younger generation, Bible stories are not known so well as they once were, but let us assume our readers will be familiar with the ones we refer to. Stories, and Jesus told many of them, can be easily remembered, whether they are fact or fiction, and it is possible to understand them at different levels. Sometimes one may find an allegory for God's plan, or an insight into God's character, or just a tale of something that happened. We aim here to consider some stories at the personal level, and to focus on a point in a character's life when things went wrong. So we take note of what happened to a religious activist who was being deported, the problems of a migrant widow without means of support, how a teenager was hit by a severe recession and the reaction of a tycoon whose whole world collapsed.

Paul the apostle was in protective custody at Caesarea. His Jewish enemies were trying to get him out of Roman hands so they might have an opportunity to kill him. To prevent this, he used his right of Roman citizenship to appeal to the highest court and be judged by Caesar at Rome. (This would have the incidental benefit of enabling him to reach Rome, which he had hitherto been prevented from doing.) At first the journey to Rome went well. Julius, the centurion in charge of prisoners, treated Paul kindly. They changed ship, and despite unfavourable sailing conditions, had reached the island of Crete. Then a dispute arose whether it was safe to continue to Rome in winter, the closed season for sea travel. Paul warned that if they carried on, the ship and its cargo of wheat would be lost, perhaps their own lives. He was overruled, and they set sail again, hoping at least to reach a better harbour in which to lay up the ship for winter. But a terrific gale sprang up, the ship was driven off course, and was in imminent danger of sinking in the violent storm. So Paul faced, not a journey to Rome to defend the gospel, but death at sea.

Things had gone so wrong because of the mistakes of the centurion

and the ship's captain. What was Paul's reaction? He did say, 'I told you so'. But God's angel had stood by him and assured him he would reach Rome, and that all their lives would be saved. So Paul made it his business to encourage them all and give advice, which Julius now paid attention to.

Paul faced this situation with prayer, and with determination. He prayed on behalf of all those aboard the ship. He knew he was under God's personal care, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of his ministry. How do we react when the mistakes others make leave us in a hole? Do we find it in our hearts not only to pray for them, but to trust ourselves to our heavenly Father in the situation, and be sure our ministry (however small!) is in His care?

To be an economic migrant is no new thing in the history of the world, especially when the spur to migration is famine. Faced with extreme climatic conditions the only thing to do is move on. At least, that is what Elimelech thought when he took his wife and two sons to live across the border in Moab. Perhaps he was one of the more go ahead inhabitants of Bethlehem. Perhaps he was wrong, for in later years there were still men living in Bethlehem who had survived the famine.

We all know that in Moab Elimelech died, his sons married Moabite girls but also died, and so the crisis point came for his widow Naomi. She went back to her own people, accompanied only by the widow of one of her sons. Originally her hope must have been to establish their clan in Moab, to have all her grandchildren around her, to maintain the family line. Now all that was gone. She returned home bitter.

Was it her own fault? She interpreted the series of events as the Lord dealing bitterly with her. It would be easy for someone outside the situation to say the family should never have left Israel, and it would be speculation to count up how many other widows have been brought to beggary by the death of their menfolk. What happened to her was a real tragedy. Certainly she was sensible to go back to where she had kin, where the rules of society covered the treatment of widows. Did she pray for guidance? for strength? She must have had a real faith for Ruth to choose to accompany her, to join her people and worship her God. Then, when rescue came through this daughter in law, she saw it as the Lord's kindness which had not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi's story could be matched in part in today's world, an everyday story of famine and migration. She did not choose what befell her. She acted as best she could, with faith. She did not know her family's future. When things go wrong for us, do we know the future?

This story is in some ways parallel with the story Jesus told about the young man whose troubles were very much his own fault. He too left his home, and the settled order of family life. He too eventually found salvation by going back to his roots. But apart from his youthful impatience, did he have any good reason for throwing up the discipline of work which was the key to prosperity; for making use of inheritance customs which seemed to his immediate advantage; for spending as if there was no tomorrow, and finding there was no tomorrow? I have no patience with young men like this, of which our own society has too many, thrown out from night clubs and still drinking on street corners. It is said that the current recession - depression - imposes a salutary discipline upon our society. The 'prodigal son' discovered discipline in its starkest form - utter hunger, and no welfare state to pick him up.

His objective had been to live the good life as he understood it. His failures were nothing more than immaturity, thoughtlessness, impatience, selfishness. His father still loved him. Which was a good thing, because his father was still there when he came to his senses.

The prodigal's father is possibly idealised. Many young men in trouble in our times may not find their family quite so sympathetic, even if they are truly sorry for their mistakes. But Jesus in telling the story, shows that in God our Father we have the ideal parent. What a shame it is to test His patience by letting things go wrong in our lives which do not need to happen.

The things which happened to Job were not by any means his own fault, except in so far as they were a reaction to his goodness and success. He was a successful tycoon according to the methods and standards of his day. He brought up his family well. He was blameless and upright. And then in one day all his wealth and family were destroyed, and next he lost his health to a loathsome disease. What price his religion then?

His first reaction was "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He also said, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" These brave first responses hid a real hurt and despair. Job went on to express at length his misery and his desire to 'have it out' with God, displaying a faith that was wistful rather than assured.

The story of Job is written in a formalised way, in order to bring out the questions around God's permission of evil. Should we ourselves lose everything, even if it is not riches like Job's; should our work be destroyed, if only in part; should our lives fall apart, even if we do not think of our life

as God's personal gift; the same questions arise. Things went wrong for Job in the biggest possible way, but if we have less hideous problems we may still think that life is not fair. God is not fair! And like Job, we come to realise that we cannot understand just everything. It is God who understands the mystery of suffering, and when His Son became a man, even for Him things went wrong, by any normal standard, in a spectacular way.

Our focus in these stories has been on the critical moment when trouble strikes, and not on the 'happy ending' which they all have. This perspective may be useful, because in our human lives this is the place where we are at, in the thick of life, where there are lessons to be learned and character to be built. And yes, for each of us and for the world, God has in mind a happy ending to this chapter, a time when things will not go wrong.

GC

## GOOD TIME CHRISTIANS

*The king made a feast . . . in the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble; the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble." (Esther 1. 5-6.)*

Words of ease and comfort! What a pleasant place must have been that Persian court in which the Jewish maiden found herself reigning as Queen! Life must have been very comfortable and the ugly things of the world kept at a safe distance – until Haman brought her face to face with reality.

That is the position of the good-time Christian. There are so many fellowships and groups which have rendered Christian service in past years which now stand in grave danger of degeneration into a comfortable community. The world is becoming such an ugly and unsympathetic kind of place that the temptation for us to withdraw into our own circle and enjoy ourselves in our own way was never stronger. And it seems so obvious a way of being "in the world but not of it", especially when we are getting on in years and continued disappointments and disillusionments remind us that the placid backwaters of study and meditation on the river of Divine Truth do not rock the boat so much as do the turbulent main stream

of evangelism and witness. After all, we reason, we are older than we were twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. The Devil is always very solicitous about our advancing years and counsels us not to strain our failing powers too much. And so there are meetings at which the faithful gather together to listen to "*a very lovely song of one that hath a very pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument*" (see Ezek. 33. 32) and after the service to shake hands and congratulate one another on the good time they have had. The pity of it all is that there is such sincerity and real love for the Lord manifested in this; there is no denying the thoroughness of the consecration to God and the desire to be true copy-likenesses of His Son. That is not the issue at all. The real trouble is that having secured our own assurance of heavenly glory we fail to remain imbued with the passionate longing to bring others into the same happy condition.

It is essential that we have our conventions, our gatherings, our Bible studies and our fellowship. These things are the breath of life to us and they play an important part in our spiritual development. But do not let us use them as a means of escape from the obligations resting upon us of being lights in the world. Do not let the wealth of good things that we enjoy at the Lord's table so dull our senses that we do not realise our responsibility of ministering these same things to others outside.

The Christian faith is a missionary faith; the Christian group that ceases to evangelise eventually ceases to exist. Whilst it can be argued that such must be the ultimate fate of the Church in the end of this Age, it must also be pointed out that our Master has not entrusted *us* with the task of ending the Church's earthly career. A soldier is expected to be prepared to die for his country if and when necessary. But his true duty is to avoid death as long as possible and keep himself in such condition that he can inflict the maximum of damage upon the enemy before he does have to yield up his life. And is it so very different in the Christian Church? Is not our Lord best pleased with those who are constantly on the alert for the first appearance of the enemy that they might be ready to leap up and engage him in mortal combat? Else why are we bidden to emulate the Roman soldier and stand, arrayed in the complete armour of God, ready to suffer hardship and sacrifice, that we may please him who hath called us – *to be a soldier?*

It is in that spirit we can make a sober appraisal of our position and resolve that we will by our lives and our works give a good witness to the world in which we live. It is a world which is rapidly going to pieces before our eyes, a world which contains men and women – millions of them – who sadly need the oil of joy and the garments of praise which we can give them. Let us take strength from our fellowship and studies together and give that strength to those around us, that we may prepare, even though in only slight

degree, for the Kingdom that is to come. Let us take an intelligent interest in our fellow-beings, Christians and non-Christians, the converted and the non-converted, taking to each the message that is most appropriate in the particular case, according to the opportunities we have or can make. Let us resolve that we shall not rest until we find work to do for the Master that is going to cost us something in labour and sacrifice and vitality. We are destined to deal with all men in the Millennial Age, a little practice now will not come amiss.

Does this course of life place us at risk from the 'Hamans' of this world? It may be so, but when Christ would put peculiar honour upon His servants He often suffers them to be brought low in the sight of men. If the saints are favoured to suffer reproach for Christ's sake, then they will own the honour put upon them to be thus conformed to their Master. He turns loss to gain and honours faithful servants. He comforts persecuted ones.

AOH

### ***From my Bookshelf***

#### **- not only a student but a servant**

'My joy is unrelenting pain.' Paul Brand, the surgeon who pioneered work in the rehabilitation of people with leprosy, wrote a book *'The Gift of Pain'* which is even more fascinating than the title. It is really his life story which began in the mountains of southern India. Son of missionaries, Paul was brought up in a home where values of the spiritual and natural worlds were much more important than the gaudy luxuries of western affluent society.

His work among those suffering from leprosy centred in a life-long study of the human nervous system. He restored patients to normal life and at last convinced medical colleagues across the world of the true nature of leprosy.

Into all his very remarkable life was woven the strong fabric of being a committed Christian. He accomplished so much because of his walk daily with his Lord. Into his personal story of work in India and later in the USA, Paul threads colourful strands of Christian philosophy and ethics. Yet it is not a difficult book to read and a little effort to understand his professional descriptions is amply rewarded by clear lessons for the Christian life.

The book was published by TLM, the trading branch of the Leprosy Mission, but is now out of print.

DN

## Gainsborough House

This is a retirement residential centre, operating as a charity, with individual flats, quietly situated in pleasant gardens. It is within 25 miles of the coast and so is well situated for exploring the local area.

The flats are self-contained and a midday meal is provided each day. It is ideal for a holiday letting or a permanent stay.

At the moment, for Gainsborough House to continue to function, we need more residents and visitors, as it has to pay its way. We are now struggling and have only four residents so we need your prayer and support. A few years ago it was thriving, with lots of brethren residing, but most of the older ones have now finished their earthly course, so we are looking for new residents.

Brethren meet on the third Sunday in the month for an address by a local or visiting brother in the chapel at Gainsborough House.

We also need new trustees, especially a secretary, while Brother John Haines would like to pass the treasurer's duties to someone capable. We, the Trustees, are all getting older, so new blood is necessary. If there is anyone interested, please contact John and Gillian Haines, 5 Simmonds Road, Hucclecote, Gloucester GL3 5HY or telephone them on Gloucester (01452) 613167.

## Back Issues of the Monthly

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The **Bible Study Monthly** is for readers of all ages, taking advantage of modern translations and having a variety of subject matter. Where old articles are reprinted they may be updated in keeping with their original perspective. Everything we print may not necessarily be the opinion of those responsible for editing, but is considered worthy of thought.

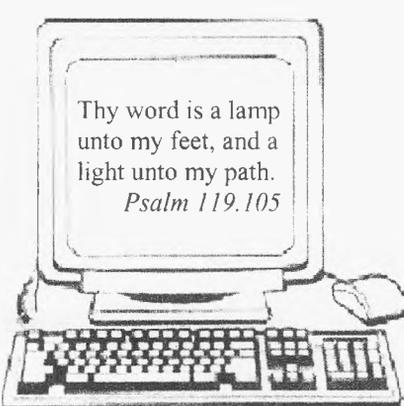
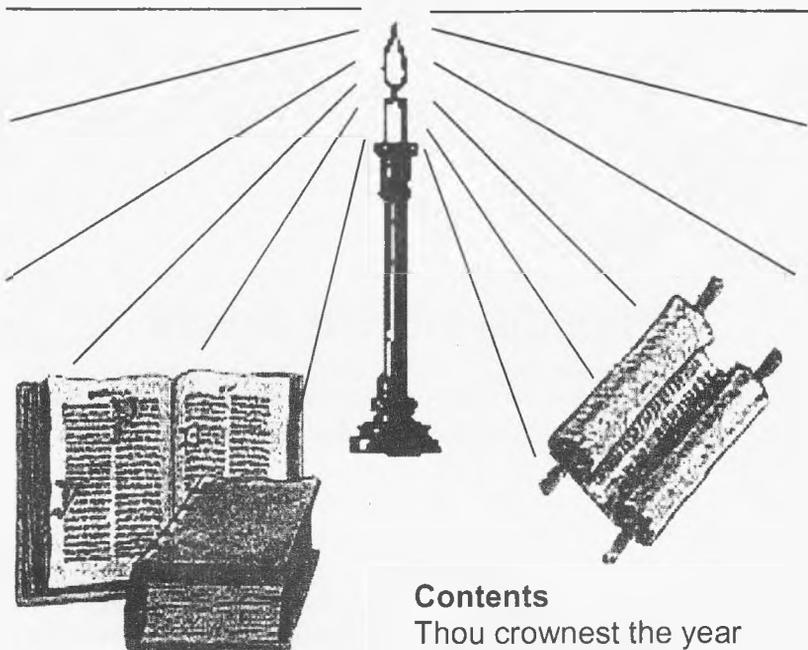
### *Legal Questions - Answers*

1. *The law of the Lord*
2. *His delight is in the law of the Lord*
3. *To behold wondrous things out of thy law*
4. *I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts*
5. *We have a law*
6. *The law; grace and truth*
7. *The law and the prophets*
8. *Through the law comes knowledge of sin*
9. *The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus*
10. *Love is the fulfilling of the law*

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# 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)

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"Have you understood all that?" "They answered 'Yes'"* (Matt. 13:51 NRSV). And they thought they had! He had told them about the men who had received the seed of the Word, some into good and some into stony ground. Other men, he said, who sowed, some, the wheat and some the tares, in the wheat-field. There was the man who discovered hidden treasure in a field; and the merchant who invested all his assets in one magnificent pearl, the fishermen who drew a net full of fish to the shore and found it contained some good and some bad. When he had finished he asked them if they had understood all that He had told them, and they said yes, we understand it all. And of course, they did not.

Their knowledge was limited to the confines of Judaistic theology in which they had been brought up, which limited their comprehension within the frame which allowed them to interpret his words, only in line with their own Messianic beliefs, the coming of an all-conquering Messiah riding on a war-horse and wielding a great sword with which he would lead them to martial victory over the ungodly, the rejected ones of the parables. In their day they could do nothing else than equate those with the hated Gentiles and picture his own followers at the head of the righteous, the accepted ones of the parables, the people of the Lord, his Israel. The manifold peoples of this wide earth, many of whom they did not even know existed, and the long sweep of two thousand years of coming history, of these they had no

conception, how could they have? Nor could they know anything of the preaching of the gospel over all the earth, the extent of which was known to none of them in that day, or the magnitude of the resultant harvest at its end; how could they have any knowledge of the reality? "Yes, Lord, we understand completely and there is nothing more left to learn."

Are we so very different? We come to an understanding of Divine truth based on these same sayings of Jesus and we see so much more in them than they could ever hope to see, limited as they were by the state of human knowledge, and by the current conception of the Divine purpose which was inevitable in their day. Like them we immediately conclude that we have that greater degree of understanding of truth. In a totally different context the Lord reminded the Pharisees of that claim that if they had lived in the days of their fathers they would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets (Matt.23.30), but of course, events proved that they were. And so in our turn, unless we are very careful and honest with ourselves, we too are apt to condemn past generations for their refusal to walk in the light of the progressive truth and then do the same thing ourselves. If at the end of our Christian walk we have no deeper understanding of the faith than we had at the beginning we have not learned much.

But that is not the same as rejecting advances that have been made, and going back to the position obtaining in past and earlier days. Progress in Christian understanding must of necessity be based upon what has been attained to date, but it must enlarge into a deeper and more accurate understanding as time goes on. It cannot stand still. The Christian cannot be like the old-time steam-roller, forever going forwards and backward over its limited stretch of road until that road is completely flattened.

*"And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Cor 3.18 NRSV).*

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We must always remember that the ministry of light does not terminate with us. The blessing of light upon us is given that it may shine through us. Every sunbeam calls attention to the mighty source whence it springs: every moment that it shines the sun is magnified.

## THOU CROWNEST THE YEAR WITH THY GOODNESS

Christmas comes at the end of the year, after the harvest has been gathered in and men's labours have measurably ceased. It comes after all the activities of summer days, all the out-workings of plans and schemes, all the planting and building, have reached their climax and attained their object. Christmas is a time for casting the mind back upon the events and achievements of the past twelve months, and for rejoicing in that which has been done. The work of the year is complete, and Christmas crowns that work.

The Israelites began their civil New Year in the Autumn, after the fruits of their labours had been gathered in and sowing for next year's crops was about to commence. It was then that they observed their Feast of Tabernacles, and in the fiftieth year sounded the Trumpet of Jubilee that proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, calling every man to enter once more upon his inheritance. It was an inheritance which, perchance, he had lost many years before by reason of sin or misfortune. The Feast of Tabernacles was to Israel what Christmas is to us – the glory of achievement for one year's work, the anticipation of another year of sowing and reaping and building and sitting down under the vine and fig tree. It is small wonder that it was a time of rejoicing. It is small wonder that our God, in His wisdom, chose this season of the year for the coming to earth of His Son – for Christmas, the traditional birthday of Jesus, was not actually the time of that event. It was Autumn when He came. Autumn, the time of the beginning again, the time for a fresh start in the things of men and the things of God. We, in our day, are more accustomed to think of the turn of the sun to longer and brighter days as being the beginning of better things. We look longingly for the "shortest day" and then say one to another "the evenings will soon be drawing out again". It is therefore appropriate that we look upon Christmas as did Israel upon the Feast of Tabernacles, and celebrate with our friends and neighbours the birth of Jesus, the dawn of new hope for the world, and a guarantee that there shall be a beginning again.

But the people of the world in general do not see that dawn of hope. The statesmen of the world still grope their way unseeingly, feeling for peace, and finding it not, because the way of peace is not in their hearts. The shadow of war still hangs over us. The menace of rivalry between great world powers glowers at us from the darkness. Distrust is rampant

everywhere. Food shortage and housing shortage is world-wide. There seems, on the surface, little enough reason for man to look up to God and say "*Thou crownest the year with thy goodness*".

The reason is not far to seek. It is because the shadow of sin still lies over mankind. There is to be a day when God will "*destroy the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations*" (Isa. 25. 7) but that day is not yet. We look for the coming of a Kingdom that will remove sin from the hearts of men and then all these evils from which the world now suffers will take flight and be gone. But that Kingdom is not yet here, and we must take heed of the present. It is a great and glorious part of our commission to tell men of the coming Age with its rule of righteousness and its opportunities of blessing and advancement toward human perfection. It is good that we comfort weary hearts with the golden promises of the golden future, with its shimmering vistas of a world at peace, a world in which disease and pain, sorrow and crying are done away.

All this is part of the Christian gospel. But there is another part which is terribly important because it is related so closely to things that are around us every day. It speaks, not of health, but of pain; not of peace, but of war; not of good, but of evil. It points to the fact that the cause of all these things is sin and that sin must be removed. That sin cannot be removed until there is first repentance, and conversion, and a coming to Jesus in full surrender of life to be moulded by Him into the fashion of that new life of the future Age. Although it is true that the great day of this work is the future day, the Millennial Age, it is also true that the gospel we preach now is the same gospel that will be preached then. We too, in this our day, must call men, as Peter called men two thousand years ago, to repentance and conversion, before they can properly appreciate the glorious promises of the Age.

We tend to come short in this. We are too apt to assume a Christian standing in those to whom we witness, and endeavour to convert them to our own understanding of God's Plan before we are sure that they are already converted to Christ. We think, perhaps, rather too much in terms of adding adherents to a fellowship and not enough of adding believers to Christ. Do we, one wonders, need to take to heart more seriously than we have done, the words of Jesus "*Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and. . .*"? In this dark day of the world's distress surely we need above all things to establish the faith of men in Christ the Lord, and on that basis begin to instruct them in things concerning His Kingdom.

Another thing we tend to forget is that we cannot convert others until we have converted ourselves. We cannot lead other men into a Kingdom into which we ourselves have not yet entered. There is a very real sense in

which we, who have 'come into Christ', are called to enter His Kingdom here and now. Have we done so? Is it true of us that *"the Kingdom of God is within you"*? Have we *"entered into rest"* (Heb. 4.3) or are we like those of old who failed to enter in *"because of unbelief"*?

Men will ask us concerning our faith and hope for the future, and the way of life which we declare that men will be called upon to follow in that day, "Does it work?" Unless we can show that it **does** work, and **has** worked, in our own lives now, how can we expect them to heed our witness regarding the future? There is danger of spiritual complacency. We are so sure of our own personal salvation, and it is a good thing to be sure, but that very certainty tends to beget a carelessness with regard to others. When, as at the present time, men are generally indifferent to the message, there is a tendency to leave the world to its sin and unbelief and take refuge in the consciousness of personal acceptance with the Lord. Evangelical fervour is dulled by apathy, and the final result is seen in those little companies who have frankly and avowedly abandoned the Christian commission to preach the gospel and are waiting in quietude and seclusion until they are carried away to heavenly glory.

All of this is because we have been unable to *"endure to the end"*. It is only when the end has come that we can expect to see the fruition of our work, and only by patient continuance in well doing that we shall receive the prize of immortality (Rom.2.7). It is noteworthy how often the Scripture stresses this fact. *"The Gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come."* (Matt. 24.14). *"Go thou thy way till the end be"* (Dan.12.13). *"Receiving the end of your faith"* (1 Pet.1.9) *"At the end it shall speak, and not lie"* (Hab. 2.3). *"Then cometh the end, when He... shall have put down all rule and all authority and power"* (1 Cor.15.24). It is at the *end* that we shall realise the fruitage of our sowing and reaping.

We can, therefore, read a new meaning into the Psalmist's words, putting emphasis on "crownest" instead of on "goodness". *"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness!"* It is not until the **end** of things that God as it were puts the topstone on his structure and his goodness stands revealed to all men. It is not until the **end** of this present world that the light of the glory of the Kingdom shines to all men; not until the **end** of the Church's career in the flesh that she shines forth *"as the sun"* in the Kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13.43).

So Christmas becomes a symbol and an earnest of the end that shall come, even though the past and present be dark and discouraging. We enter upon its familiar customs with knowledge that a greater and more glorious time of festivity and gladness awaits the world "at the time of the end". The

short passage in Psa. 65 in which this phrase "*thou crownest the year with thy goodness*" occurs is quite evidently framed to fit Millennial conditions. If not a direct prophecy of the coming Age, it certainly is a wonderful illustration and the "crowning" of that Age with God's goodness, the natural climax.

*"Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts, We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple."*

(Psalm 65.4)

AOH

## GOD USED THEM

*This article is based upon a talk which  
told of women who were used by God*

### *Part Two*

Two very different women played significant rôles. One was, you might say, 'important' – a Judge, Deborah, who ruled over Israel at a time when the people had once again been (as Judges ch.4 says) 'doing evil in the sight of the Lord' – worshipping idols, forgetting God. As a result, they fell into the hands of a local Canaanite tribe, ruled by King Jabin. We read that Jabin's Army Commander, Sisera, had 'nine hundred iron chariots, and he had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years.'

The situation was grave – it was a time when everyone 'did their own thing' and lawlessness was rife, but Judges ch.4 gives a strong impression of the authority which Deborah the Judge was wielding for God at that time. We can visualise her, sitting in the shade of what the Bible calls 'her' palm tree, between Ramah and Bethel, hearing and sorting out all kinds of local disputes.

Nehemiah ch.9 describes the Judges as 'deliverers, who rescued God's people from the hand of their enemies', and there can be no doubt that Deborah was the most powerful person in the land, at that time :

*[Judges 4] Deborah sent for Barak and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.' " Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going*

*about this, the honour will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh, where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.*

Eventually, with God's help, the Israelite army led by Barak and Deborah duly defeated the Syrian army, and General Sisera had to flee for his life, on foot. And that's where an 'ordinary person' comes in :

*Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him. "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone here?'" say 'No.' "*

*But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead. On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him.*

Deborah and Barak celebrated their victory in song, with a magnificent piece of Hebrew poetry which survives for us in Judges ch.5 :

*Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.*

*Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead.*

*Through the window peered Sisera's mother; behind the lattice she cried out, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?' "*

*So may all your enemies perish, O LORD!*

God used Deborah the Judge – and he used Jael, the ordinary housewife, too ! – so, surely, he can make some use of you and me, as well.

The 'Royal Personage', Esther, was not herself of royal blood, but

although a Jewess, she was chosen by King Xerxes of Persia to become his Queen – a fantastic promotion, from captive exile to reigning monarch ! – God's hand was clearly at work there !

All down through history, the Jews have always used their periods of exile to better themselves, but, sadly, this has often led to outbreaks of anti-semitism, and that's exactly what happened at the time when Esther was in the Persian Royal Palace. An ambitious and ruthless man called Haman – an Amalekite (and the Amalekites were sworn enemies of the Jews) – worked his way into Xerxes' favour and then hatched an evil plot to have all the Jews who lived within the Persian Empire slaughtered, on a single day, on the entirely spurious grounds that they were disloyal to Xerxes and a danger to the native population.

What really lay behind Haman's plot was envy, malice and anti-semitism; but God had other ideas – Queen Esther's guardian, Mordecai the Jew, sent a message to her (in the Harem) that, in order to save her people, she must report Haman's wicked plot to the king, even at the risk of her own life. She knew that if she approached the king in the inner court without being summoned, she would be put to death— unless the king spared her. Mordecai sent word to her:

*"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

In the event, as the result of all this prayer, King Xerxes did indeed offer Esther his royal sceptre to touch, and eventually, of course, in a superb twist of fate (worthy of an Agatha Christie novel !) Haman was 'hoist with his own petard' [the expression (from *Hamlet*) means 'to be blown up by your own mine'] – and he was hanged on the high gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai !

God used Queen Esther to make a self-sacrificial gesture for him, and we need to recognise that at some time he might ask you or me to make some self-sacrificial gesture for him, too. Would we be up to it, I wonder, as Esther was?

The 'foreign immigrant' I mentioned in Part 1 is Ruth the

Moabites. The Bible traces the people of Moab back to a descendant of Lot, born as the result of Lot's incestuous coupling with his elder daughter, who had made him drunk with wine; so relations between Moab and Israel were never of the best. The Moabites lived in the hill-country, east of the River Jordan.

We all remember the story of Naomi and her husband Elimelech, how their sons married Moabite women, and when the menfolk had died Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, but at that stage her daughter –in-law Orpah decided to go home.

*"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth [the other daughter-in-law] replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.*

It was Farmer Boaz who eventually married Ruth. God used Ruth, the foreigner, and she became an ancestor of Jesus Christ ! So he can use you and me, whoever we are and wherever we come from.

Our final example – the 'effective evangelist' I mentioned – is probably the one most familiar to us, for it's The Woman at the Well, from John's Gospel, ch. 4. We all know the story : Jesus meets a woman at Jacob's Well, near Sychar in Samaria. He asks her a seemingly innocent question: 'Could you give me a drink of water?', but ends up having a deep conversation with her which reveals the many mistakes she's made in the past. Then he tells her about that wonderful 'Living Water' which could come to her only from knowing the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The woman was so thrilled by what she'd heard that she simply couldn't keep this Good News to herself – it just 'bubbled over' ! :

*[John 4] Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way towards him. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."*

God used that Samaritan woman to tell others about Jesus; they believed her, and they were converted (= turned around). We don't even know her name, in fact, but it might be no exaggeration to say that she's the most effective evangelist we can read about in the New Testament between John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle ! That woman was far from perfect, and yet God used her to speak out for him. Well, you and I are far from perfect, too ! – but he can use us in that way also, if we'll only make ourselves available to him.

So – we've looked at lots of women in the Bible whom God used – young women, old women, rich women, poor women, local women, foreign women – and, obviously, we could have looked at lots of men whom God used, too.

'God can use you and me like that, too' – but is it really as simple as that? – what was it about all these women, exactly, that meant that God was able to use them?

One quality is availability (how do I use my time? - am I too busy for God? – am I always talking too much to hear what he's saying to me?)

Another necessary quality? – recognising our spiritual gifts (the things we can do confidently for God, and the things we have to work at).

Spending time in the Word of God – that's how we grow in grace.

More Prayer – a popular chorus: 'Spirit of the Living God' – the usual version: 'Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me'; an alternative version: 'Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me'.

This article is called 'God used them.' OK – we can be used by God, but are we actually useful to God? – that's not quite the same thing. You remember how Paul and Barnabas fell out over the usefulness of John Mark, who Paul felt had deserted them while they were on one of their missionary journeys. Barnabas could see the potential in Mark, and he took Mark with him on his next trip – at that stage, Paul was obdurately unforgiving. How good it is then, later on, to find Mark back at Paul's side in Rome, when he really needs support, and then – even later – to find Paul writing to Timothy [2 Tim 4:11] : *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark, and bring him with you, because he is useful to me in my ministry.*

The KJV says 'profitable'; some other translations say 'helpful'. They're all good and appropriate adjectives, in fact. The Greek word is 'euchrēstos' – it's a word that's very rarely used in the NT, and it's used only by Paul. Another place in which it occurs is in Paul's letter to his friend Philemon, asking him to receive the runaway slave Onesimus as a Christian

brother. As J.B. Phillips puts it, Paul says, 'Once, he was pretty useless to you, but now he's become 'euchrēstos' – useful – to me.'

Thayer's Lexicon translates the word, 'easy to make use of' or 'useful'. As his life drew towards its close, Paul wanted to have John Mark near him, because he was 'easy to make use of' – he was useful to him in his ministry.

God can use me, yes – but do I make it really easy for him to make use of me? – do I get in the way too much? - do I follow my own agenda too much to be really available to him? Am I, in fact, really useful to him?

It's a question which each of us must answer for himself, for herself. But answer it we must – for one day, as Paul writes to the Romans [14:10], 'we shall all stand before God's judgment seat', and then we shall know just how useful – or how useless – we have been to him.

And that, dear Brothers and Sisters – dear 'useful' Brothers and Sisters – is a pretty sobering thought.

B K-S

## HOSEA

### *The Prophet who learned to love*

The prophecy of Hosea is the next after the book of Daniel. It is the longest of the so-called Minor Prophets. Hosea was a native of the northern tribes of Israel and prophesied for much of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. He is an answer to the Pharisee's false idea that no prophet came out of Galilee. He lived and delivered his message from God during the same historical period as Isaiah and Micah were prophesying in Judah. His name is similar to 'Joshua' and is the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek name Jesus meaning 'God saves' or 'salvation'.

Hosea's life as related in his prophecy is a parable revealing God's relationship to Israel. In the record, events of Hosea's life are intertwined with Israel's terrible idolatry. In chapter 1, we are confronted with the most extraordinary command by God that Hosea should marry Gomer. The daughter of Diblaim is immediately identified as a girl who will be unfaithful to the prophet. She has three children, the first of whom is almost certainly Hosea's child. The second is of doubtful parentage and the third is definitely the child of Gomer's illicit relationship.

God requires Hosea to specifically name his children so that they reveal God reactions toward Israel's failure. The giving of the Law and making of

the covenant at Sinai had clearly stated that God would be Israel's God. He revealed Himself to Moses as a God of compassion. He alone is God, a living and loving God.

The first born of Hosea's household was called Jezreel, because in that vale, God would allow His people to be punished for Jehu's cruelty to Israel's royalty. There the Assyrians would humiliate Israel and commence the process of dismembering their nation. The second child was to be called Lo-ruhamah which means 'not pitied'. Yahweh's compassion, was unique, as the one true God. This was a characteristic unknown among the man made gods of pagan worship. But this pity would be shown to the 2-tribe Judah and not the 10-tribe kingdom of Israel.

Thirdly, Lo-ammi means 'not my people'. God's covenants are sometimes identified by the expression 'I will be their God and they shall be my people'. Covenants are the formal arrangement of a relationship between two parties. Israel had repeatedly rejected their covenant with Yahweh by worshipping idols.. God is now saying in the name of Hosea's daughter that Israel has broken their covenant with him so often that they can no longer be his people. But He does not leave them without hope of some day restoring the covenant to Israel and Judah together.

There is a New Testament reference to this aspect of the covenant in 1 Peter 2. 9,10 speaking to believers in Jesus Christ. *"But 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. Once you were not my people but now you are God's people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

Even as early in the prophecy as chapter 1 verse 10 we have the prophecy of Israel's restoration in the reference picking up the promise made to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the sea shore. The dark situation into which Israel had placed itself was going to be reversed, for they shall yet once again become *"sons of the living God."*

In chapter 2, Hosea's children are told to plead with their mother to give up her illicit relationships and to turn back to her real husband. It is a picture of the disastrous consequences of idolatry that are to be described in the chapters that follow. But just as Gomer would not be persuaded, so Israel ignored all the warnings against the worship of false gods and found herself lost and eventually a homeless slave, in captivity.

Hosea searched for his lost wife till he found her. He redeemed her from slavery and took her home. Firstly, Gomer was disciplined so that she could resume her rightful duties as Hosea's wife. Eventually she was

restored to the full privileges of marriage. The record of Hosea's matrimonial experiences show the deep love that he had for his wife. It was a love that could by-pass the legal requirement to punish her by stoning. From that story it can be clearly seen that God will redeem Israel, and restore her to her own land after she has been disciplined.

In chapter 2. 15 there is a reference to the change in Israel's fortunes in the Valley of Achor. When all the Israelites first entered Canaan by way of Jericho one of their number was foolish enough to disobey God's command. He stole some valuable items that should have been destroyed with the city. In Joshua 7.16-26 we read that Achan and his family were executed in the Valley of Achor. It had become a valley of trouble and so it was known from that day onwards, to remind Israel of the consequences of disobedience. But the Valley of Trouble is to become a Valley of Hope – the day of disobedience is to end and Israel is to be an obedient people to the Lord. In that verse we have a signal – a sign of hope. In that day Israel will learn that all the gifts of Creation are of God's bounty and that the grain, the wine, the oil the wool and flax, are not the bounty of the Baal or any other false god. Today, people still worship false gods and mistakenly believe that such adulation provides the good things of the Earth.

Israel and all mankind must learn the hard way, in discipline, that God's relationship and His gifts are the outpouring of His overwhelming love. So in chapter 3 we find that just as Hosea's love for Gomer inspired him to search and restore her to his side, so God in His love for His people will search them out and restore the covenant relationship .

This is not the human, emotional love that is right and natural to man and wife, but the agape love which is a much deeper and richer love. It is the sacrificial love that still operates in true marriage even when eros love is having a rest. 'Agapao' loving is what Paul writes about marriage in Ephesians 5. If this love is really the basis of the marriage contract, there will be no heartbreak or break down in the marriage bond.

The depth of this parable, lived out in the lives of Hosea and Gomer, reflects God's love for His people Israel, and for the whole of mankind. It is so great, so profound that He is prepared to restore to the uttermost the fallen, degraded, slaves of Satan, of sin and shame, until they have been totally and fully restored to full union with Himself. His redemption is not twenty pieces of silver but the gift of His dearest and best, the Son of His love, given for the life of every member of the human race. This story reveals the depth of that love which is determined to have the whole of creation restored to beauty and perfection (Col.1.20)

DN

## PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

Paul's defence before Agrippa ranks as one of the highlights of the Book of Acts. In masterly style he presented the case for Christianity as the logical development of Judaism to a man high in authority in Jewry, one qualified by birth, education and experience to understand the force of the argument. Perhaps, if only we knew, he came within an ace of persuading his listener. No one has ever really understood what lay behind Agrippa's cryptic remark "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*".

The new governor of Judea, Porcius Festus, was an upright and resolute man and not one to let the grass grow under his feet. He had been appointed to succeed Felix, following the latter's disgrace and recall to Rome. He took up his duties with the intention of stamping out the corruption and lawlessness that had flourished under his predecessor. Had he lived longer, history might have been different. He died in A.D. 61 only a year after assuming office, and his successors did nothing to arrest the mounting lawlessness which culminated ten years later in the horrors of the Jewish War and the dispersion of the Jews among all nations.

Within a few days of Paul's appeal to Caesar and the consequent decision of Festus to send his prisoner to Rome, the new governor received a courtesy visit from the highest Jewish dignitary in the land, no less a person than King Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa was a king in name only, his title being a courtesy one given him by Rome in recognition of his descent from the Herodian family, and on account of his father's personal friendship with the Emperor Claudius. He exercised no imperial authority of any kind in Judea. He was, however, designated the Protector of the Temple, and this fact, coupled with his very considerable wealth, gave him considerable standing and power with the priestly hierarchy and the ruling classes generally. His great-grandfather, Herod the Great, the slayer of the 'Innocents' soon after Jesus birth, had been dead for many years and so had his great-uncle, Herod Antipas, who executed John the Baptist. His own father, Herod Agrippa I, by whose orders James the brother of John had been executed (Acts 12. 2) had died sixteen years earlier in this very town of Cassarea, following the celebrated oration on account of which the listeners had hailed him as a god. Now the last of the Herods was to come face to face with the foremost of those who espoused the 'Cause' against which his own forbears had fought in vain.

So this Jewish nobleman, in all the regalia of his meaningless royalty, accompanied by his sister Bernice who shared his pseudo-imperial state,

came to pay his respects to the representative of Roman rule and with the intention doubtless of establishing a business understanding for the future. Agrippa is known to have been an astute 'man of the world' but also a zealous orthodox Jew upholding the State religion and the Law of Moses. On the other hand he also took good care to keep on the right side of the secular power emanating from Rome. It was by Agrippa's energy and initiative that the magnificent Temple, begun by his great-grandfather, Herod the Great, forty-six years before the time of Jesus (John 2.20), was at length completed. It had taken three quarters of a century to build. Ten years later, as Jesus had predicted, it was totally demolished by the Romans under Titus at the siege of Jerusalem.

The Jewish king had no thought of that calamitous ending of his life's work on the day he entered the old Herodian palace at Caesarea, now the official residence of the Roman governor, to make the acquaintance of Festus. Neither could he have suspected that at this moment, like his forbears before him, he was to be brought into contact with the challenge of Christ. Unlike them, he was not to fight against it, but in measure to further its interests. There is not much doubt that Agrippa's considered judgment in the matter at issue was a contributory factor to Paul's acquittal when he stood his trial before Nero two years later.

After several days' discussions on matters of State, of Roman policy and Jewish intransigence, Festus brought up the matter that was troubling him. He had this prisoner on his hands, Paul the Christian, who after two ineffectual trials had appealed to the tribunal of Caesar and must now be sent to Rome. Festus' problem was that he had no idea of with what crime under Roman law Paul was to be accused. It was quite obvious that Festus, like Felix and the commander Claudius Lysias, believed Paul innocent of any crime, but the insistence of the Jews that he was worthy of death made it necessary to get to the root of the matter. Had it been a matter of transgression against the ordinary civil law Festus would have known where he was, but realising his ignorance of matters Jewish, and finding, as he said rather helplessly to Agrippa, that the accusations related to "*questions of their own religion, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*" he felt at a loss. He rather welcomed the opportunity of getting the advice of so acknowledged an expert as Agrippa.

The king probably beamed expansively. There might have been another factor. He could not but have been well aware of Paul's name and reputation. Secretly, perhaps, he would long since have liked to meet and hear him but the dignity of his position forbade. Here was a golden opportunity. "*I would also hear the man myself*" he remarked. "*Tomorrow*" promised a greatly relieved Festus "*you shall hear him*". The ensuing proceedings were probably

the most elaborate of any at which the Apostle had been the central figure. Festus did not do anything by halves. When Paul was ushered into the council chamber he found himself facing all the exotic pageantry of an Eastern king. Agrippa sat in royal state with his consort Bernice and their retinue, gorgeously arrayed in a blaze of colour and ornament. In addition there was the armed might of Rome, commanders and centurions with their men in gleaming armour, and the civic leaders of the city in their robes of office. Everybody who was anybody in Caesarea was present, and it is to be hoped that Agrippa was suitably impressed by the organising ability of Festus and his efforts to make this a memorable occasion.

*"And Festus said, King Agrippa and all men which are here present with us, you see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him....I have no certain thing to write to my lord. Wherefore I have brought him before you, and specially before you, King Agrippa, that, after examination, I might have somewhat to write, for it seemed to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to signify the crimes laid against him". (Acts 25.24-27).*

This was not a trial, as were the two previous occasions. Having appealed to Caesar, Paul had taken his case completely out of the hands of provincial officials. This function was an invitation to Paul to state his own position before a leading representative of his own nation who could be relied upon for a true appraisal of the position and advise the Governor accurately. Paul himself understood this and was ready accordingly. Agrippa looked down upon him from his seat and invited him to say what was on his mind. *"You are permitted to speak for yourself"* he said urbanely.

*"I think myself happy, King Agrippa"* Paul responded, *"because I shall answer for myself this day before you touching all things whereof I am accused of the Jews, especially because I know you to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews"*. This was not fulsome flattery. There was probably no living Jew better qualified to weigh up the logic of his arguments. Paul would seek to prove that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled in his person and life all that the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures, had foretold concerning the suffering Messiah and his relation to the out-working purpose of God. Agrippa was an educated man and thoroughly conversant with the literature and the history of his nation. He was not a religious fanatic, and he was not biased in favour of the priestly hierarchy of his people. All the evidence goes to show that he took Paul

and all he had to say very seriously and judged the entire matter on its merits.

Paul was now well launched on his favourite theme. He knew that the man before him was well able to understand the thesis he had to propound. He commenced on the basis of the age-old hope of Israel, that it might be the Divine instrument for the conversion of the world under the leadership of the Messiah in God's good time. *"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers"*. From this he swung quickly into the connecting link between that promise and its claimed fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. *"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"* Gentiles might doubt such a thing, but never Jews. In all the fierce conflicts that Jews had, first with the Greeks and afterwards with the Romans, during the troubled two centuries before Christ, the fixed belief of every Jew, faced with death at enemy hands, was that God would raise him from the dead. One of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism was that at the Last Day there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust, and that rewards and punishments would then be distributed. It is true that, in general, Jewish thought equated the just with the Jews and the unjust with the Gentiles, and looked forward to sanguinary vengeance upon all their opponents when the day of the Messiah should dawn. In this they have not been so very much different from many of their Christian successors. The only real points of difference in Paul's theology were that Jesus of Nazareth was that promised Messiah and that Gentiles as well as Jews had part and lot in the Divine purpose. To neither of these propositions would orthodox Jewry give assent. Agrippa, however, was a man of broad mind and liberal education and he probably saw the force of Paul's argument much more clearly than has usually been supposed.

The Apostle proceeded, describing the circumstances of his conversion to Christ on the Damascus road, his sudden change from being a persecutor of the disciples to an adherent of their cause, his call to preach Christianity to the nations outside Israel and his implementation of that command.

Festus could contain himself no longer and broke in with a loud exclamation *"Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad"* (Acts 26.24 RSV). With exquisite courtesy the Apostle turned to him, *"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner"*. Swinging round again to face the Jewish monarch, his voice rang out with that stentorian challenge which was the dramatic climax to this dramatic scene. *"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe"*

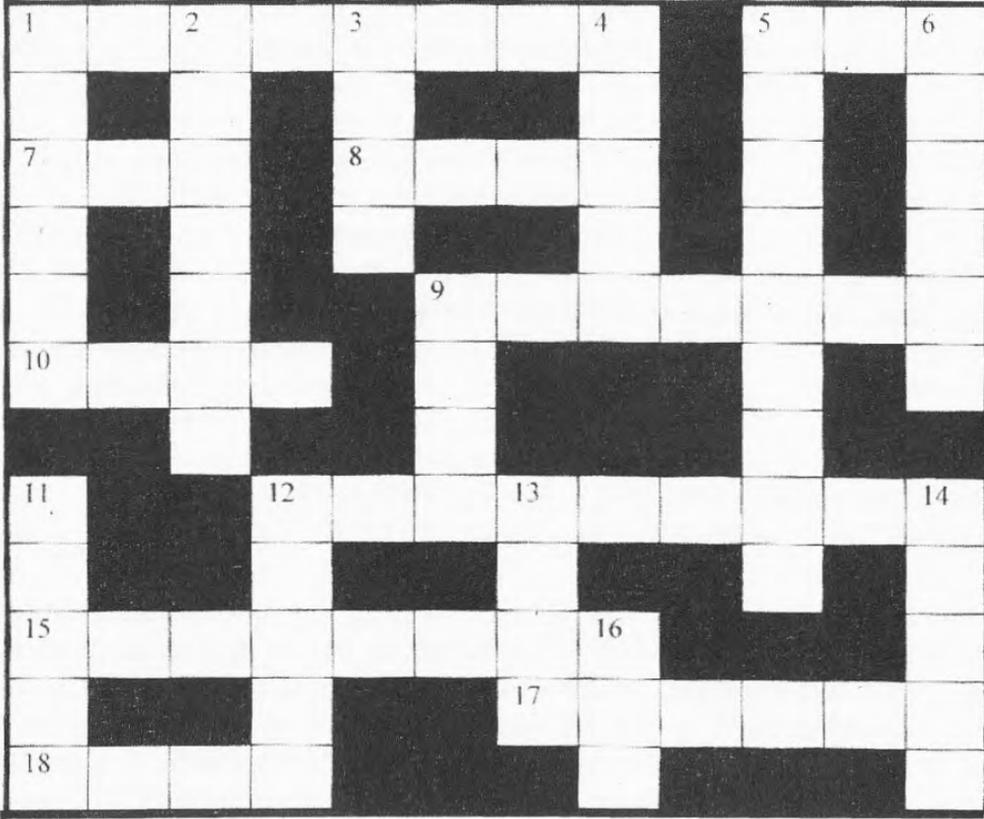
Agrippa's historic answer, "*Almost you persuade me to be a Christian*", has been hailed as an intimation that the king was within an ace of being converted to the faith. On the other hand, many scholars have criticised this rendering of the Greek phrase in Acts and averred that the king really passed a somewhat sarcastic remark to the effect that Paul expected to convert him much too easily. There is a certain difficulty in translating the expression and room for some difference of opinion. It does not seem likely, however, that Agrippa was being sarcastic or treating the matter lightly; the narrative goes on to show that he did in fact take Paul's words very seriously in his subsequent discussion with Festus. The word translated "Almost" has the sense of something little in respect of size, few in respect of number, brief in respect of time, and so on. There is no evidence that the remark was a question. Agrippa did not say, as some have suggested, "Do you expect so easily to make me a Christian?" It is to be feared that popular exegesis of this verse has been somewhat influenced by a refusal to believe that Agrippa was in any way whatever influenced by Paul's appeal, but this is both unjustified and unworthy. It is quite possible that the sense of his reply, expressed in present day idiom, was something like "with a little effort you will persuade me to become a Christian" as though not much more was needed to turn the scale. It is not likely that Agrippa was really on the point of conversion, but it is possible that his thoughtful mind had perceived the logic of Paul's presentation and was more than half inclined to accept the intellectual premise on which it was based. His use of the term "Christian", which was not as yet a widely used term, shows that he already had some knowledge of the progress of the new faith.

The hearing was concluded. Agrippa rose from his seat as a sign that he had heard enough. Taking Festus and a few high officials aside, he conferred with them in private. Paul was guilty of no crime against the law; "*this man might have been set at liberty*" was Agrippa's judgment "*if he had not appealed unto Caesar*". Without much doubt the king helped Festus draft the document which was to go to Rome in explanation of Paul's despatch to the Imperial tribunal. It is quite likely that the opinion of Agrippa as to Paul's innocence was added to the letter and that opinion must have carried weight when the trial took place. After two long year's inactivity in Caesarea, Paul's heart must have beat faster in anticipation of the imminent attainment of his great ambition – to see Rome.

*(To be continued)*

AOH

# CROSSWORD



## Clues

### *Across*

1. Do not boast about it (Prov.27) (8)
5. Fluid filled pouch (3)
7. He did what he pleased and became great (Dan.8) (3)
8. Wicked brother (4)
9. Large game bird of the crane family (7)
10. Itching parts of the anatomy (2 Tim.4) (4)
12. Seven times a day I praise you for your.....laws (Ps.119) (9)
15. Murder in the womb (8)
17. Old Macdonald for example! (6)
18. The lamb opened the second one (Rev.6) (4)

*Down*

1. God is seated on His holy one (Ps.47) (6)
2. One body has many (Rom.12) (7)
3. St Paul wrote— I have finished the..... (2 Tim.4) (4)
4. Hen's 'chick protectors' (Luke 13) (5)
5. The Lord is my light and my ..... (Ps.27) (9)
6. Chariots of God (Ps.104) (6)
9. Loud noise (4)
11. Inhabitants of the land where Paul went 'immediately) (Gal.1) (5)
12. Of the countryside (5)
13. Part of the livestock— not left behind (Ex.10) (4)
14. The morning ones sang together (Job 38) (5)
16. Short sleep (3)

JZC

Solutions are on page 239.

## **ELIJAH THE TISHBITE**

### **Part 6 The Chariot of Fire**

Elijah's work was done. The time had come for him to sleep with his fathers and leave another to carry on the work he had commenced. The Lord at Sinai had told him to take Elisha as his follower and successor and Elisha had willingly accepted the call and was ready now for all that it involved. And as the story goes on in the sacred record it seems that Elisha executed even greater works than had his leader, but that may only appear so because, maybe, all that Elijah did do has not been recorded, at least upon earth. If that should be the case, it would not be altogether a strange thing, for many of the Lord's followers in later days have performed great works of faith and expended all their efforts in fully dedicated lives without anyone to record in writing what they have done. When at last they have come to the end of the way and all their own generation who knew them and knew of their works have gone, likewise there are none to remember and recall. All that they have done is forgotten and is as though it had never been. At least that is how it is in human memory; but in the records of Heaven their deeds are recorded in letters of gold and will remain for ever. Perhaps in the age to come, the day of Christ's kingdom upon earth, when all men will learn of the things of God, those records will

be made known. They will then be a help and inspiration to all who are walking the Highway of Holiness to reconciliation with God and to eternal life.

So Elijah set out on his last journey, and his faithful follower Elisha went with him. So simple a story it is, bereft of any incident until the final scene when a fiery chariot separated them and Elijah was carried up into heaven; at least that is what is so often assumed. All kinds of elaborate theories have been woven around that expression, for instance that Elijah was translated into Heaven without dying even, though the Scripture says "*what man is he that liveth and shall not see death*". None could enter Heaven before Christ at His Ascension and that was many years later. But we have not got to that point yet. Here Elijah is setting out from Gilgal to go to Bethel because the Lord had sent him there, but nothing is said as to why he had to go and what he did when he got there. It is difficult to understand this part of the story, likewise the next part when the Lord sent him onward to Jericho and again nothing is said why he had to go or what he was to do when he got there. It appears almost as if Elijah was trying to shake off Elisha from following him. Was it final test of his loyalty, Elijah having some strong idea of what was about to happen, and testing to the limit the faithfulness of the one upon whom his mantle would fall?

The name "Gilgal", the place where Elijah started his last journey, means "a circle" and denotes a circle of erect stones having a sacred significance. There were several such stone circles in Israel, each bearing the name, each reminiscent of the first Gilgal in the plain of Jordan near Jericho, where Israel erected the Tabernacle after they had crossed Jordan and entered the Promised Land. It is not likely that it was from that Gilgal that Elijah commenced his journey, for 2 Kings 1.2 says that he and his attendant Elisha went to Bethel. That was up in the hills whereas the original Gilgal was in the plain. This Gilgal was in Samaria a little to the north of Bethel and does not figure in Israel's history. It seems to have been no more than a centre where its stone circle marked it as a place holy to God, unlike so many other centres which had started in the same way but had now relapsed into idolatry.

If this were so, then Elijah started his last journey from a place of holiness and communion with God and went thence to Bethel. It was once a place of God – for the name means "house of God" – but had now for many years been controlled by a decadent and idolatrous priesthood. There he found a few "sons of the prophets", who retained their faith in God.

*"Knowest thou the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?"* And they saw him go, knowing they would see him no more in this world.

So Elijah went on to Jericho, at the bidding of the Lord. Jericho was a secular town, living by the trade between Israel and Moab across the river. It gave

no heed whatever to the things of God and nothing is recorded of Jericho from the time it was rebuilt by Hiel the Bethelite in defiance of the Lord's interdict not many years previously until the days of Jesus in the New Testament.

At the Lord's behest, Elijah went on to Jordan still accompanied by his faithful disciple Elisha. Always in Christian symbolism Jordan is the transition from death of a human to life in the spirit. In Bunyan's famous allegory, Mr. Standfast came to the brink of Jordan, and, *"so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side"*. So did Elijah pass over.

The final picture has to be fully sketched in. The terrible apparition, a chariot and horsemen of fire, bearing down upon them. As they moved instinctively to opposite sides of the track, it came between Elijah and Elisha and parted them. In its wake was roaring hurricane, not a whirlwind as in the Authorised Version. It was a tornado, an irresistible force that picked up Elijah and carried him away in the heavens, and Elisha saw him no more. And he cried out in his grief *"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel"*. And he mourned, because he too knew that he would see Elijah no more in this life.

What was the chariot of fire? Only Elisha returned to tell the story of what he had seen. The chariot of fire must have deep significance. God, coming forth to judgment, is depicted as coming in just such a way. Isaiah, speaking about the final events of this end of the Age, when the kingdoms of this world are about to give way to the Kingdom of our God, saw just such a sight in vision as Elisha saw in that desolate land beyond Jordan. *"Behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh"* (Isa. 66. 15-16). And immediately after that the prophet saw the Lord sending the ambassadors of Israel to the nations which have incurred that judgment *"to the coastland afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations"*. Is that why Elisha cried out when he saw that chariot *"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel"* sensing perhaps in prophetic vision by the Spirit that which Isaiah in turn saw a century or so later? The sons of the prophets searched three days in the mountains for Elijah, and found him not. Like Moses he had disappeared from among men, and *"no man knoweth of his sepulchre until this day"*.

Many have seen in the life of Elijah a significance for their own time. Four centuries after him, Malachi, the last of the Hebrew prophets, predicted God would send Elijah the prophet back to his people Israel at the

Last Day to convert them again to the true God. Israel ever after has looked for the Tishbite to reappear unexpectedly as the herald of that Day and o the appearance of their Messiah to take the lead among his people. To no other Hebrew prophet was that honour accorded. And when Jessus' disciples asked him about this He told them that so far as they were concerned in that day, John the Baptist was the fulfilment of that prediction, speaking and acting "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*". The disciples then thought that they were living in that Last Day, but they later found it was true only in a limited sense. The true Last Day awaits the Second Advent of our Lord. There are some today who look to see a similar herald that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"

The earthquake, wind and fire that Elijah experienced, followed by the still small voice, were seen in the early twentieth century as signs for that day. The tempestuous wind could be a symbol of war. The earthquake could be a social revolution, the fire, world anarchy. The still small voice would be God's voice speaking peace to the nations.

The catching away of Elijah in a great wind has been likened to the 'catching away' of the church to be with Christ at the end of the age, amid the wars, revolutions and anarchy.

The continuing work of Elisha after Elijah had gone can be taken as a picture of the future age, much as when, in our Lord's day, John the Baptist had laid down his life and Christ Himself took up a greater work, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

So, Elijah's life had come to an end, but now Elisha carried on his work and to a vastly greater extent in that he purified the poisoned water, he multiplied scanty food, he healed the lepers, he raised the dead—all pictures of Millennial work. But the sturdy man of Gilead in the experiences of his life and death left behind an allegory which reaches down the ages to our own time and takes us beyond, to the final scenes which are yet to be displayed.

AOH revised

## **THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS**

**Luke 5 31-37**

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and

his other friends to a feast in his house. It was unusual, however, for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently though their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality. Most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and his personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said. But there was a coolness between the two parties, which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest of honour. This exceeded all the bounds of breeding and good taste in view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus *"do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with

Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and his disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with his own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them his answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. *"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of His words.

Some of those at table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees - it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics - so are the Pharisees. We, and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally mix with all men irrespective of class or creed, careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", He said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, in contrast with Jesus' disciples, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed his second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them. We often fall short in precisely the same respect. "*No one*" He said, *'puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wine skins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'.* His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and his hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to His object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean? What was His object in speaking thus? The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined before they commenced. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine truth, which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old

bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt.5.17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must show Himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col.2.14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa.42.21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and establish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long, long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject Him, and His call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name. This would be a Church whose members would at the last be exalted to be with Him in the celestial sphere. They expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they ever going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, generally, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of His teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hidebound (fitting word) in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were 'old bottles', they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master's use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the outworking purpose of God. But, generally, the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for his

servants. *"He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust"*. A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life. Why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of today becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft-quoted phrase *"the heresy of today is the orthodoxy of tomorrow"*. And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth. As soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little panner.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the "hearing ear". This time was no exception. He left on record his own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept Him and His claims and His message. *"No man,"* He said *"having drunk old wine straightway desires new; for, he said, the old is better."* The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is "straightway". Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. "The old" they say "is better". Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the oxgoad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept His message; that the rulers would put Him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence *"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."* (Matt.21.43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of His teachings and His mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

AOH

## IF WE ONLY UNDERSTOOD

Could we draw aside the curtains  
That surround each other's lives,  
See the naked heart and spirit,  
- Know what spur the action gives -  
Often we would find it better,  
Purer than we judge we would;  
We would love each other better  
If we only understood.

Could we judge all deeds by motives,  
See the good and bad within,  
Often we would love the sinner  
All the while we loathe the sin.  
Could we know the powers working  
To o'erthrow integrity,  
We would judge each other's errors  
With more patient charity.

If we knew the cares and trials,  
Knew the efforts all in vain,  
And the bitter disappointments -  
Understood the loss and gain -  
Would the grim external roughness  
Seem, I wonder, just the same?  
Would we help where now we hinder?  
Would we pity where we blame?

Ah, we judge each other harshly  
Knowing not life's hidden force;  
Knowing not the fount of action  
Is less turbid at its source,  
Seeing not amid the evil  
All the golden grains of good,  
Oh, we'd love each other better  
If we only understood.

*Poems of Dawn*

## STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

### Part 14 1 John 3.9-10

*"No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil." (1 John 3.9-10 RSV).*

This is a striking statement, more so even than that in verse 6 for it is couched in even bolder terms. *"Doth not commit sin" . . . "he cannot sin!"* These are daring words indeed. Even with all in mind that has just been said, can they be justified? Can it be truthfully said, from any possible standpoint, that we who are born of God, born from above, as Jesus put it to Nicodemus, **cannot** sin?

Most of the early twentieth century translators seemed to be uncertain how to take this. They adopted a variety of expedients to get around the literal meaning of the words. *"Is not habitually guilty of sin"* says Weymouth. *"He does not value sinning"* is Ferrar Fenton's suggestion. *"No one who has received the new life from God lives sinfully"* is the rendering adopted by the Twentieth Century version. They all give an impression of dubiousness, of perplexity. None of them mirror the simplicity of the Greek — *"is not able to sin"*. The one born of God cannot accept and practise the way of sin because it is unthinkable that he should do so. A good example of the principle is afforded in the case of Joseph and his master's wife. *"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin before God?"* (Gen.39.9). Physically and in fact, he could have done so, but nonetheless his allegiance to Divine law made it a perfectly true thing to say that he **could not** commit this sin. That is the heart attitude of all who are born of God; they do not and cannot have any sympathy with the violation of God's laws, and even though they may and do come short of their ideals, their inward sincerity remains unblemished, and God, looking upon them and judging them according to that perfect heart-attitude, declares that they, the born of God, are sinless in His sight.

There is an important but somewhat obscure phrase here in the AV *"His seed remaineth in him."* Whose seed? Remains in whom? Grammatically, the "seed" referred to might be of God or it might be of the one born of God. It is not altogether clear why it is that the one who "doth not commit sin" finds himself in this honoured position by reason of the fact that *"his seed remaineth in him"*. What is the explanation?

It seems most likely that there is a direct connection between the fact of being "*born of God*" and the remaining a receptacle, so to speak, of this "*seed*". It is almost as if there is an assurance against sin coming in and defiling one who continues in possession of a purifying or vitalising "*seed*". Weymouth has it "*a God-given germ of life abides in him*". Moffatt "*the offspring of God remains in him*" and the Twentieth Century "*the very nature of God dwelleth in him*". Rotherham, more obscurely, renders "*a seed of him with him abideth*". In most cases, at all events, the translators appear to take this "*seed*" as a vitalising or living influence from God, entering into the man and remaining there. That view, at any rate, makes the verse intelligible, and in harmony with all other scriptural doctrine regarding our spiritual quickening and "*begetting*" and "*birth*". Whoever has experienced this "*new birth*" has been "*born of God*". Thereafter and throughout life, whilst faithful to his calling, has an inward possession of the life-giving and quickening Holy Spirit. This not only sustains the inward spiritual life but also causes us to grow and develop spiritually so that in due time we shall be fitted to be clothed upon with our "*house which is from heaven*".

The continued possession of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee against our being brought into bondage to sin; conversely, our lapsing into the power of sin indicates that we have lost the Holy Spirit. The expression "*his seed remaineth in him*" does not mean that it must inevitably remain in us without possibility of loss for the remainder of life. No more can the parallel expression "*he cannot sin*" mean that it is impossible for one to repudiate his Lord and his consecration and his faith and turn to unrighteousness like the "*sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*". (2 Pet. 2.22). What it does mean is that **while** that seed remains, and **because** it remains, the new birth, the being "*born again*" remains a truth, and freedom from sin is a truth also.

There are not many who would seriously claim that one thus accepted into this relationship with God is thereafter rendered incapable of turning his back upon the sacred things and embracing again the evil from which he has escaped. "*Once saved, always saved*" is certainly a theme not altogether unknown among some groups of Christian believers, but the belief, when analysed, is seldom found to be so extreme as the bare utterance of those four words would seem to imply.

Our final conclusion, in the light of all that John has to tell us in this remarkable passage, would seem to be that complete faith in Christ and in His atoning sacrificial death, gains for the believer a judicial decree of righteousness, and of sinlessness, in the sight of God. This also requires absolute sincerity of heart in one's personal consecration to God. This is

judged by God's own fundamental standards and is backed up with such good endeavours in words and conduct as the weakness of the body and the outward influences of the world permit,. That blessed condition rests upon the basis of faith and consecration and while that basis and standing before God persists. But if the basis be destroyed, the whole edifice that is built upon it is destroyed also. If one turns aside from the paths of righteousness and commences deliberately to violate Divine law, knowing that he is violating Divine law, then the Holy Spirit, the "seed", no longer remains in him. Such lose their standing of justification and they are no longer born of God and it is no longer true that he "cannot sin". Such manifest that they are no longer children of God but are children of the Devil. If it is possible for a man to be delivered out of the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, it must be equally possible for one to be delivered into the bondage of corruption out of the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The great truth that can give the weakest of the Lord's sincere children supreme confidence is that our Father, having accepted one who has come to Him, will never of Himself let that one go. He who has promised to perform a good work in us will abundantly complete that work and fulfil that promise, no matter how unpromising and unsatisfactory the human material with which He has to work, if we on our part will let Him. But there is one barrier the Father cannot and will not break down — the barrier of the human will. He will, and does all that lies in His mighty power to turn us away from sin and toward righteousness, but we have now and shall have for all time the power within ourselves to choose the way of evil, if we will. If, after every possible means of persuasion has been used, and failed, and we remain obdurate in our determination to continue in the way of evil, the Father can do nothing but leave us to the logical consequences of our choice. He will ever abide faithful, but attainment of the promised prize rests not only upon God's faithfulness to us, which cannot be questioned, but also upon our faithfulness to God, which is much more of an uncertain matter. We have been "once saved"; of that there is no doubt nor dispute, and so far as the Father is concerned we are, thereafter "always saved". So far as we are concerned we do well to remember that we shall remain "saved" only so long as we ourselves comply with the conditions which alone can keep us "saved" in His sight.

*(to be continued)*

AOH

## From my bookshelf

It was a book which had been nestling on the shelf for many years. Finding it aroused memories, and made me think.

The memory was of a brother who loved to take this world's strugglers under his wing. He had given the book to a friend like this, with high hopes, that his 'faith and love for God become as great as that of the man written of in the book'. The book began with the text 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart' (Psalm 37.4). Alas, this hope for his friend was not realised.

The thought which the book provoked concerned the way in which the man who was its subject approached scripture. Approaching the Bible as a student, I myself like to know who wrote each part, to whom it was written, under what circumstances, and what was God's message to the first readers who received it. Another approach to scripture is that of brethren who already know what the Bible teaches, and interpret each text in the light of the idea of God's plans that they have in mind. But in the present case, the man in the book was taking scriptures out of their context, and without any consideration of God's whole purpose, and was applying them personally to himself.

For example, the text "Open thy mouth and I will fill it" (Psalm 81.10) In its context, this is part of God's appeal to stubborn Israel. The Psalm is intended for Temple worship - 'to the Leader', 'according to the Gittith', a psalm of Asaph. Its whole tenor is that the people God has chosen in His purpose and brought safely out of Egypt and whom He was more than willing to help and support, were less than willing to obey Him, let alone 'Sing aloud to God our strength' (v.1).

But George Muller, as he meditated in the Scriptures, and taking this verse personally, was forcibly struck by it. He was already a man of prayer. He had learned to rely on God alone for the needs of his own family. Now, he asked God, in faith, to provide the needs for the establishment of an orphanage—premises, finance, and staff. When God answered this prayer, 'filling' the 'open mouth', it would be proof of His reality and His love.

How God answered prayer then, and all through George Muller's life, is a matter of history.

*'George Muller—Delighted in God' by Roger Steer 2nd edition 1981*

GC

## A View of God's Purpose

"God's plan is not to abandon this world, the world of which he said that it was 'very good'. He intends to remake it. And when he does, he will raise all his people to new bodily life to live in it. That is the promise of the

Christian gospel.

“To live in it, yes; and also to rule over it. There is a mystery here which few today have even begun to ponder. Both Paul and Revelation stress that in God’s new world those who belong to the Messiah will be placed in charge. The first creation was put into the care of God’s image-bearing creatures. The new creation will be put into the care, the wise healing stewardship of those who have been ‘renewed according to the image of the creator’ as Paul puts it.

“In God’s new world, of course, Jesus himself will be the central figure.... He is, at the moment, present with us, but hidden behind that invisible veil that keeps earth and heaven apart.... But one day the veil will be lifted; heaven and earth will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee shall bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God’s new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities. That is what the Christian vision of salvation.... is all about.”

*From **Simply Christian** by Tom Wright SPCK 2006*

*And a poem, which marks the human aspiration of pilgrims who come together, and breathes something of the life of the kingdom to come.*

O life that makest all things new,  
The blooming earth, the thoughts of men:  
Our pilgrim feet, wet with thy dew,  
In gladness hither run again.

From hand to hand the greeting flows,  
From eye to eye the signals run,  
From heart to heart the bright hope glows;  
The seekers of the light are one:

One in the freedom of the truth,  
One in the joy of paths untrod,  
One in the soul’s perennial youth,  
One in the larger thought of God:

The freer step, the fuller breath,  
The wide horizon’s grander view,  
The sense of life that knows no death -  
The life that maketh all things new!

*S.Longfellow 1819-92*

## MRS DEACON

Mrs Deacon (some people have a similar surname 'Deakin') would not think of herself as a particularly unusual Christian lady. She has lived a full and useful life, and done what she could. While health permitted, she met regularly with her fellowship group, and took an active part doing whatever was needed. When a service was held at an old people's home she chose the readings and led the service. She is meticulous in giving her weekly collection money, she takes pride and interest in all her family (one of whom has become a preacher), she is concerned and prayerful about her neighbours in the wider world around her.

Why mention her name? The family name is said to have come from some who were deacons in the church. 'Deacon' today can mean different things - perhaps, 'a minister ranking below a priest', perhaps, 'a lay officer who assists the minister'. In one denomination a deacon would serve communion, distribute alms for the church, and be part of its advisory council. Long ago, 'deaconing' was a term for reading out one line or two of a hymn at a time for the benefit of a congregation who either could not read or did not possess any hymn books. 'Deaconing' also once described the practice of arranging fruit on a market stall with the best on top!

'Deacon' comes from the Greek word '*diakonos*' which means 'servant'. This word in Scripture is translated in different ways. Sometimes the term 'deacon' is used to refer to someone appointed to serve a church. Sometimes the translation is 'minister' (we have the phrase ministering angels, or minister of the gospel). There was Peter's wife's mother ministering to her guests. Sometimes the translation is simply, 'servant'.

The servant might be just any ordinary servant, like those who obeyed Jesus' instructions and poured out water which became wine (John 2.5,9). It was servants who ejected the guest who did not come properly dressed for the wedding feast, in Jesus' parable (Matthew 22.13). Magistrates and civil rulers were described as 'servants' by Paul, because they did a useful and necessary job: in fact they were God's servants (Romans 13.4).

Various New Testament characters are referred to as servants. Tychicus (Ephesians 6.21) would bring news of Paul and carry his letter, something also probably done by Phoebe (Romans 16.1), servant of the church at Cenchrea. Epaphras (Colossians 1.7) was a servant who carried the news of the gospel to Colosse. Like Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3.2) he was more than a messenger, but a fellow servant with Paul in the gospel, doing the same work. His servant's work included reminding believers of what the new faith meant, and setting a personal example in his life (1

Timothy 4.6). A 'servant of God' is how Paul saw himself, a servant who was inspired to a life of hardship, sincerity, insight, kindness, love, living by the Holy Spirit and the power of God (2 Corinthians 6.4-10). But he did not set himself up as an empire builder in opposition to Apollos, they were both only servants 'through whom you came to believe as the Lord gave each man his opportunity' (1 Corinthians 3.5). Paul claimed to be a servant of Christ (2 Corinthians 11.23), a servant administering the new agreement in which the Holy Spirit transcended the old relationship with God based on law (2 Corinthians 3.6), a servant enlisted in the service of the gospel by God's effective and undeserved kindness (Ephesians 3.7-9).

In individual churches people were appointed to be 'Deacons', servants of the fellowship, perhaps in much the same way as the Seven in Acts 6 were chosen, whom we refer to as Deacons (but Scripture as it happens does not use the word for them!) Deacons, along with Overseers (= bishops), had a special standing in the congregation, so that Paul writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 3.8-13) describes what must be looked for in their faith and character - serious outlook, sincere conviction, not greedy for money, men with one wife and keeping their families well in order.

The desire to be a leader in the church must arise from the desire to serve. As Jesus had said, thinking of ambitious religious people, 'the only superior among you is the one who serves the others' (Matthew 23.11), and 'If a man wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all' (Mark 9.35). Just like the Son of Man who came 'not to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free' (Matthew 20.28 JBP). As Jesus later said, 'If a man wants to enter my service, he must follow my path [to the cross and then beyond]; and where I am, my servant will also be' (John 12.26).

In the light of all this it is interesting to see what a modern denomination intend when they 'ordain a deacon'. Obviously each denomination has its own set of beliefs and its own rules about who does what and who is in charge (what Christian group has not, even if the rules are informal, and not set out in a constitution?) Leaving denominational considerations aside, consider the following:

*"Deacons are called to work... as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. They are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the church the needs and hopes of all the people. They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made*

visible. *Deacons share in the pastoral ministry of the church and in leading God's people in worship. They preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the church in intercession. They accompany those searching for faith and bring them to baptism. They assist in administering the sacraments; they distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound.*

*Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God's people, that the whole church may be equipped to live out the gospel in the world. They are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us."*

Those who are being ordained are told: *"In the name of our Lord, we bid you remember the greatness of the trust in which you are now to share: the ministry of Christ himself, who for our sake took the form of a servant. Remember always with thanksgiving that the people among whom you will minister are made in God's image and likeness. In serving them you are serving Christ himself, before whom you will be called to account. You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Before they are ordained, this prayer is made: *"We praise and glorify you, almighty Father, because in your infinite love you have formed throughout the world a holy people for your own possession, a royal priesthood, a universal Church. We praise and glorify you because you sent your only Son Jesus Christ to take the form of a slave; he humbled himself for our sake, and in obedience accepted death, even death on a cross. We praise and glorify you because in every age you send your Spirit to fill those whom you have chosen, to equip your holy people for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. And now we give you thanks that you have called these your servants, whom we ordain in your name, to share as deacons in the ministry of the gospel of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

After they are ordained, the prayer continues: *"Through your Spirit, heavenly Father, give these your servants grace and power to fulfil their ministry. Make them faithful to serve and constant in advancing your gospel in the world. May they follow the example of Jesus Christ your Son, who washed the feet of his disciples, and set the needs of others before his own. May their life be disciplined and holy, their words declare your love and their actions reveal your glory, that your people may walk with them in the way of truth and be made ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ....."*

This quotation from an ordination service makes one realise that the

calling to be a deacon is serious and demanding. So is the calling of any Christian, and all of us are called to be servants. Almost all of the quotation would apply to our own calling as rank and file Christians - ordinary, not ordained. (This is not unexpected if we accept the thought of the 'priesthood of all believers'!) Each of us is called by God to serve. And as we serve, as whatever 'part of the body', even if we are not ordained in a technical sense, our role is recognised by our brothers and sisters, however humble or great it may be. Any servant - *diakonos* - is called humbly to serve, in love, in obedience. What more can we seek? What more must we seek?

And so, Mrs Deacon, you have a good name. Keep up the good work, with the rest of us.

x            x            x            x

*Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God (Isaiah 50.10).* What is a believer to do in times of darkness—a darkness of perplexities and confusion—a darkness not of the heart but of the mind? These times of darkness come to a faithful and believing disciple who is walking obediently in the will of God. They come as seasons when he does not know what to do or which way to turn.... Dear believer, does this describe you? What should you do in times of darkness? "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God." Actually, the first thing to do is nothing. There is a saying, "When you're rattled, don't rush." When you find yourself in a spiritual fog, do not run ahead but slow the pace of your life. And if necessary, keep your life's ship anchored or tied to the dock. The right thing is simply to trust God, for while we trust, He can work. Worrying, however, prevents Him from doing anything for us.... Only the peace of God will quiet our minds and put our hearts at rest. We must place our hand in His as a little child and allow Him to lead us into the bright sunshine of His love. He knows the way out of the dense, dark forest, so we may climb into His arms, trusting Him to rescue us by showing us the shortest and most reliable road.

*Dr. Pardington in*

*Streams in the Desert Updated edition 1997*

**Crossword Solutions** *Across* 1 tomorrow 5 sac 7 ram 8 Cain 9 bustard 10 ears 12 righteous 15 abortion 17 farmer 18 seal

*Down* 1 throne 2 members 3 race 4 wings 5 salvation 6 clouds 9 bang 11 Arabs 12 rural 13 hoof 14 stars 16 nap

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Recently we had a request from a reader for a large print copy of the Bible Study Monthly. While it is not very practical to do this on a one-off basis, we wondered if there are any other readers in the UK who would like to receive their magazine in large print format. If you are interested in this possibility, please let us know, so that we can assess the likely demand and decide whether to go ahead with the idea.

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what she was going to do. So Ahab got up from his bed, and dressed himself properly, and went down to his throne room where his courtiers and attendants were sitting about with nothing much to do because their master had shut himself up and would see no one. He began again to attend to affairs of state and perhaps cherish a hope that his wife would succeed where he had failed. Knowing her nature he probably thought within himself that if so he would not enquire too closely into the means whereby she achieved so desirable a solution to the problem. Queen Jezebel was in her own apartments, busily writing letters to the elders and nobles of the royal city of Jezreel, and those elders and nobles must have been greatly dismayed and perturbed when they read the letters, for this is what she told them they must do.

*'Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the assembly. Seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring a charge against him, saying 'You have cursed God and the king'. Then take him out, and stone him to death.'*

Now no one knows whether these elders and nobles were sincere worshippers of God and loyal so far as they were able to the Mosaic Covenant. Or whether they were worshippers of Baal and so apostates from the true faith, or men who retained faith in the God of Israel in their hearts but outwardly served Baal because it was the thing to do with the pagan Queen Jezebel ruling the land. Some of them may have been Naboth's friends and he himself may well have been greatly esteemed in the city. But all this was of no account against the Queen's commandment. So, even though some of them mourned, and almost certainly some of them did, they could do naught else but obey. Any disregard of her instructions would only lead to her vengeance and their own consequent death. To save their own lives, Naboth must die.

The people of the city were called together, and Naboth arrested and brought before his judges, withal protesting his innocence, and two worthless men bribed for the purpose stood up and testified that in their hearing he had blasphemed against God and cursed the king. These were heinous offences against the Mosaic Law and punishable by death by stoning. In that same law, the testimony of two witnesses, agreeing on all points, was necessary to obtain a conviction. It was but a little step to accept that testimony without the accused being allowed to proffer a defence and so Naboth was condemned and immediately taken out of the city and stoned to death. His body was left where it had fallen to be devoured by the scavenging dogs of the city. Although this episode stands alone in the histories of those days, there must have been many such cases of flagrant injustice and cruelty during the time that Jezebel was queen over Israel.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

From the beginning of time God planned a Kingdom in which mankind would be the subjects. He revealed that purpose to men and women but slowly. The first intimation of that Kingdom was to Abraham when God promised that through the patriarch's descendants every family upon the Earth would be blessed. Until then little seems to have been known of the meaning of the prophecy given to Mother Eve and recorded in Genesis 3.14,15, concerning the future of the human race.

From the birth of Isaac, one small but very significant section of mankind had a goal and purpose. It was at the departure of Abraham's grandson Jacob, when he blessed his sons (Genesis 49.8-10), that they were told something of a future king. Just how wide the rule of one of Judah's descendants would be could not be made known then and indeed the whole revelation of God's kingdom must await the development of the people of Israel.

Four hundred years later, the descendants of Israel had become a nation, led by Moses, aspiring to have their own land and leadership. But Moses like so many of God's servants, was primarily a prophet, and in deep humiliation he made no attempt to usurp the sovereignty of God. He gave just one small glimpse of Israel's desire for a king and what God would do about it in his final great addresses to the nation. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 17.14,15 (RSV) "*You may indeed set up a king over you, him whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you, you may not put a foreigner over you.*" Those who came after Moses as leaders of that great people, at first followed his example to a greater or lesser extent and none aspired to kingship.

The decades passed and ran into centuries, with the people of Israel gaining power and tradition. God had given them a system of worship and an efficient economy, yet they continually slid into the imitation of their pagan neighbours. Children of Abraham and God's people they might be yet they were also children of Adam and frequently gravitated to his disobedient and rebellious level. Somehow imitation of the worship and commerce of their neighbours gratified their human cravings with disastrous results. Worshipping idols and craving this world's wealth soon lowered their moral standards. Just as they wanted gods that they could see, so they wanted a king to whom they could pay homage. Human beings are blind to the illogical consequences of their actions and observation of the nations and the world in the twenty-first century should be sufficient to convince God's

attention to the followers of Jesus in the same way that the Covenant parables of the vineyard, the sheepfold and the bride and groom can be applied.

So far, the kingdom described in the Gospels is about 'the Church of Jesus Christ'. How does that leave Israel and the rest of mankind, whom Jesus said He would call from the grave (John 5.28,29)? When the disciples met the resurrected Lord (Acts 1.9) they asked Him if He was about to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus told them clearly that times and seasons are not their business. Their job was, and still is, to continue the Kingdom work that He had begun. He did not say that the kingdom of Israel would not come and James in his oration through the Holy Spirit to the Jerusalem church recorded in Acts 15.16,17 spoke of David's tent being restored and the rest of mankind seeking the Lord. Glimpses of the restored Israel given in the final chapter(s) of some of the prophets' writings are yet to become a reality, not just for the descendants of Abraham but, as God promised the old Patriarch, blessing all the families of the Earth.

*"I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at the first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin against me. And this city shall be a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I shall do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity that I shall provide for it."* (Jer.33.7-9 NRSV)

*"I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel, he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar, his roots shall spread out, his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden, they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon."* (Hosea 14.4-7 NRSV).

So we could go on with Joel 3.18 *"The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water"* and Amos 9.14 *"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them."*

*Ezekiel 3.14,20 "Sing aloud O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel! At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you together; yea I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your eyes says the Lord."*

These are clearly references to the natural people of Israel and in discussing them in Romans 11, Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, quoted Isaiah.59.27 *"and so all Israel will be saved, as it is written 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'" "and this will be*

ormative time, not yet grown up, just as the earth we inhabit has not yet attained the fulness of perfection it will know eventually. Nevertheless the day will come when men shall be called the Sons of God because they will have, at last, attained the ideal which God had in mind in that far off day when "In the beginning" He created the heavens and earth.

AOH

## WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Things go wrong, even for characters in Bible stories. Nowadays, among the younger generation, Bible stories are not known so well as they once were, but let us assume our readers will be familiar with the ones we refer to. Stories, and Jesus told many of them, can be easily remembered, whether they are fact or fiction, and it is possible to understand them at different levels. Sometimes one may find an allegory for God's plan, or an insight into God's character, or just a tale of something that happened. We aim here to consider some stories at the personal level, and to focus on a point in a character's life when things went wrong. So we take note of what happened to a religious activist who was being deported, the problems of a migrant widow without means of support, how a teenager was hit by a severe recession and the reaction of a tycoon whose whole world collapsed.

Paul the apostle was in protective custody at Caesarea. His Jewish enemies were trying to get him out of Roman hands so they might have an opportunity to kill him. To prevent this, he used his right of Roman citizenship to appeal to the highest court and be judged by Caesar at Rome. (This would have the incidental benefit of enabling him to reach Rome, which he had hitherto been prevented from doing.) At first the journey to Rome went well. Julius, the centurion in charge of prisoners, treated Paul kindly. They changed ship, and despite unfavourable sailing conditions, had reached the island of Crete. Then a dispute arose whether it was safe to continue to Rome in winter, the closed season for sea travel. Paul warned that if they carried on, the ship and its cargo of wheat would be lost, perhaps their own lives. He was overruled, and they set sail again, hoping at least to reach a better harbour in which to lay up the ship for winter. But a terrific gale sprang up, the ship was driven off course, and was in imminent danger of sinking in the violent storm. So Paul faced, not a journey to Rome to defend the gospel, but death at sea.

Things had gone so wrong because of the mistakes of the centurion

of evangelism and witness. After all, we reason, we are older than we were twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. The Devil is always very solicitous about our advancing years and counsels us not to strain our failing powers too much. And so there are meetings at which the faithful gather together to listen to "a very lovely song of one that hath a very pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument" (see Ezek. 33. 32) and after the service to shake hands and congratulate one another on the good time they have had. The pity of it all is that there is such sincerity and real love for the Lord manifested in this; there is no denying the thoroughness of the consecration to God and the desire to be true copy-likenesses of His Son. That is not the issue at all. The real trouble is that having secured our own assurance of heavenly glory we fail to remain imbued with the passionate longing to bring others into the same happy condition.

It is essential that we have our conventions, our gatherings, our Bible studies and our fellowship. These things are the breath of life to us and they play an important part in our spiritual development. But do not let us use them as a means of escape from the obligations resting upon us of being lights in the world. Do not let the wealth of good things that we enjoy at the Lord's table so dull our senses that we do not realise our responsibility of ministering these same things to others outside.

The Christian faith is a missionary faith; the Christian group that ceases to evangelise eventually ceases to exist. Whilst it can be argued that such must be the ultimate fate of the Church in the end of this Age, it must also be pointed out that our Master has not entrusted *us* with the task of ending the Church's earthly career. A soldier is expected to be prepared to die for his country if and when necessary. But his true duty is to avoid death as long as possible and keep himself in such condition that he can inflict the maximum of damage upon the enemy before he does have to yield up his life. And is it so very different in the Christian Church? Is not our Lord best pleased with those who are constantly on the alert for the first appearance of the enemy that they might be ready to leap up and engage him in mortal combat? Else why are we bidden to emulate the Roman soldier and stand, arrayed in the complete armour of God, ready to suffer hardship and sacrifice, that we may please him who hath called us – *to be a soldier?*

It is in that spirit we can make a sober appraisal of our position and resolve that we will by our lives and our works give a good witness to the world in which we live. It is a world which is rapidly going to pieces before our eyes, a world which contains men and women – millions of them – who sadly need the oil of joy and the garments of praise which we can give them. Let us take strength from our fellowship and studies together and give that strength to those around us, that we may prepare, even though in only slight