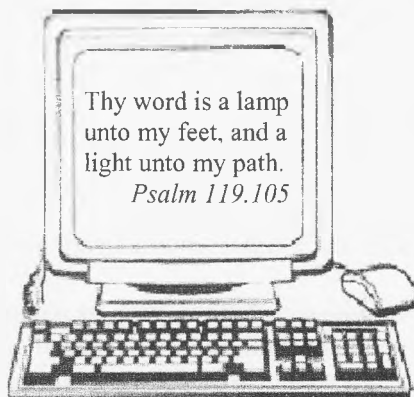
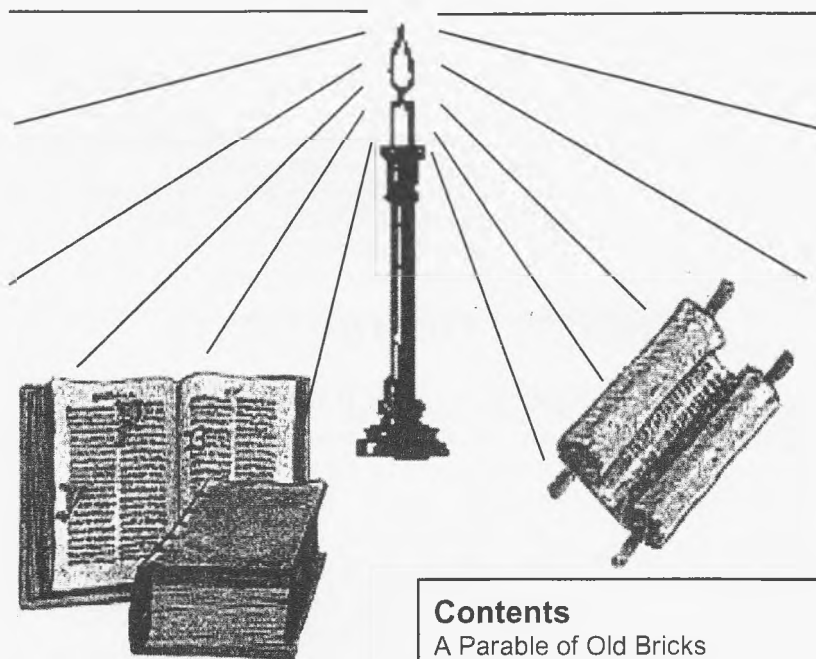


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 87 No. 1

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Thy word is a lamp
unto my feet, and a
light unto my path.
Psalm 119.105

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

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

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

A PARABLE OF OLD BRICKS

Baghdad and Basra are much in the news nowadays, even at the tail end of the Iraq war. We may forget that they are part of an ancient land. The following piece reflects on its history in times long past, yet is itself something that could not be written in our own day, in our era of swift transport by jet and helicopter and the perils of terrorist destruction. In the old days, when the possibility of a railway journey marked progress in the Middle East, the writer was looking back to a much earlier time.

"Fifty miles south of Baghdad, on the railway that runs to Basra, there is a little wayside station, a station set in a wilderness showing no signs of human habitation, a station so unimportant that the trains do not stop there except by special request. There are no station buildings; there is no station staff, no town or village busy with life and activity; only miles of broken brickwork, groups of palm trees, and a few jackals and lizards. The express trains, northbound to Baghdad and southbound to Basra, hurry past the flimsy, desolate platform so quickly that the interested traveller has barely time to read the one word, painted in Arabic and English upon a board about four feet long—"Babylon"!

"How are the mighty fallen! That wooden platform with its painted sign marks the site of what was once the mightiest and most magnificent city on the earth. It was a city that for size and wealth would have compared

favourably with the greatest cities today. It was a city that throughout a considerable portion of human history was the acknowledged queen and mistress of all nations. Merchant vessels from Africa, India, and even, it is thought, from far-off China, made their way up the great River Euphrates from the sea four hundred miles distant. They brought the produce and the riches of the four corners of the earth to her quays. Caravans of camels and asses, bearing the wealth of the interior lands of Asia and Arabia, travelled the trade routes. These ran over desert and mountain, through valley and plain, to converge at last on the market squares of Babylon. Here were gathered the rich men and the merchants of the earth, and all in the city shared in their prosperity. Sometimes native kings dwelt and ruled in her palaces; sometimes alien conquerors imposed foreign rule and sat upon the throne, but always Babylon received tribute and remained through all political changes the unquestioned commercial centre of the world. Her palaces and her temples were the admiration and the envy of all who came to see. Her public monuments, her architecture and her many works of art displayed the creative artistry, no less than the mechanical skill, of the people that had created this great city. For two thousand years she remained thus, arrogant in her proud title of the "lady of kingdoms" (Isa. 47. 5). She flaunted herself before the admiring world as the achievement of men who had given themselves over frankly and avowedly to the law of brute force. They proclaimed abroad their determination to live their lives and build a nation that should endure for all time, without God and in defiance of God. Today there is nothing left of all the glory that was Babylon save a few masses of mouldering brickwork and a wayside station through which the trains pass without troubling to stop."

Through how many cycles of power struggle and wanton destruction will the world need to pass before He comes to reign whose right it is?

HIGH LEIGH 2010

Hoddesdon, Herts., England

Monday 16th – Sunday 22nd August

Theme The Promises of God

(Past, Present and Future)

All ages are welcome.

A programme for teens and younger ones will be provided

Contact: Accommodation Secretary: Joan Charcharos 01442 381 550

THE TOP OR THE BOTTOM ?

There is a line in a poem that says; "We love to shine in public and human praise expect." And these words remind us that people are, in the main, naturally selfish and are therefore, generally speaking, prone to be principally occupied with self. They are most articulate when the topic of conversation is centred on themselves. Self can often be their greatest interest.

There are exceptions, of course, because there are times when some do think of others before themselves; inspired perhaps by the words of our Lord that, "Greater love has no man than that he should lay down his life for his friends."

But the exceptions are very definitely NOT the general rule. The proud chant, about their team, of "We're number 1 ! We're number 1 !" ringing out from football fans is fine perhaps: but when we find that it is ringing out from our hearts, it means that it is all stemming from pride and imagination and we would do well to remember the words of Mary the mother of Jesus, recorded in Luke chapter one and verse fifty-one. "*He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*" The proud expect to carry all before them and to have their own self-willed way. But our heavenly Father *scatters them in. the imagination of their hearts*, destroys their scheming and brings them low. He brings them down, by the very means with which they think to elevate themselves above the rest.

Because Pride can frequently be associated with arrogance, self-esteem and self-importance and often stems from the riches of this world, Timothy was told, in chapter 6 verses 17 - 19 of the first letter written to him, to "*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*" In other words, as John tells us in chapter 2 of his first letter verses 5-17: "*Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.*"

We should live our lives in the way that God wants us to behave: keeping our chin and head up, but our nose very definitely down, because the

pride of life is a channel by which Satan tempts us to sin. This does not mean that none of the things of the world should be sought. There is nothing wrong in possessing the things of the world, if they are used for the purposes which God intended - when they are used by his grace and to his glory - but believers must not seek or value them for the purposes by which sin abuses them. The world draws hearts away from God; and the more the love of the world prevails, the more the love of God decays.

John classes the things of the world according to the three ruling inclinations of a depraved nature. There is "The lust of the flesh" - that is of the body - the wrong desires of the heart, the appetite for indulging everything that excites and inflames sensual pleasures. Then, he says, there is "The lust of the eyes." The eyes are delighted by riches and by the value of possessions; they cause covetousness, the urge to own more, even at the expense of others. And lastly there is "The pride of life" - vanity. Being vain causes one to crave for the grandeur and the pomp of an egotistical life. This includes a thirst after Honour and the applause of others. And this self-conceit is an abomination to God, as we are told in Proverbs 16 verse 5, which says that: *Everyone proud in heart is hateful to Jehovah.* The one that is puffed up by the quantity, the value or the beauty of his possessions or because he is wealthy, is proud in heart: he becomes arrogant in his conduct towards God and towards man. He should know that, although he admires himself, and others fawn over him, in the Lord's eyes he is an abomination.

The things of the world quickly fade and die away; it won't be long before desire itself will fail and cease, but holy affection is not like the lusts that pass away. The love of God will never fail. Many unfruitful efforts have been made to avoid the strength of this passage by limitations, distinctions, or exceptions. Many people have tried to show how far we may be carnally minded, and still love the world. The way we exhibit pride when it is not justified, when we should instead be showing gratitude, and humility, can be seen in the old fictional story of the beggar who sat every day at the gate of a rich man's home. From the rich man's generous hand he received constant gifts which he was always grateful to have. Then one day the rich man needed to send a message as quickly as possible and, since his servants were all busy, he went to the beggar and asked him to deliver the letter for him. Lifting himself up with pride, the beggar astounded his generous benefactor with the amazing words, "I solicit alms, sir, but I do NOT run errands."

How many people treat their heavenly Father in this way! If it were not for Him we would not have the many blessings which come to us from His hands. Then, when He needs someone to go on an errand or to carry a

message of Jesus' love to suffering or wayward men, they say, "No, Lord; I solicit your blessings, but I do not run errands." They are like many who call themselves Christians and who proudly claim that they are ready to serve their Heavenly Father but who, in reality, are only prepared to give that service in an advisory capacity, not in humble ministration to the needy. Only doing any service for the Lord when it can be known that *they* did it or they can boast about what they've done for HIM. They forget, perhaps conveniently, that in Proverbs 6 verse 17 we're told that one of the seven things that God hates is a proud look, and this really means showing self esteem in any form.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis asked, "How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up by pride can say that they believe in God and appear, to themselves, to be very religious? I am afraid that it means that they are worshipping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really, all the time, imagining how He approves of them. This does not come through our animal nature at all. It comes direct from the evil one. It is purely spiritual: consequently it is far more subtle and deadly."

If we are to practice humility rather than show pride we must do something that will seem very hard - we must love our enemies and pray for them. Remembering, as Luke records in chapter 6 verse 32 that our Lord said: *"If you love those who love you, what thanks do you have? For sinners also love those who love them."*

We must be kind to those from whom we have received injuries. We must not only love our enemies, and bear a good will to them, but we must do good to them: be as ready to do any good for them as for anyone else, if it is necessary, and it is in our power to do it. We must endeavour to show them, by positive action, wherever possible, that we bear them no malice, neither do we seek revenge for what they have done to us.

Matthew 5 v 5 tells us that Jesus said: *"Blessed are the meek For they shall inherit the earth."*

Meekness is not insensitivity or servility and it doesn't cringe or whine. It is suffering wrong without showing bitterness. It can be seen when we demonstrate the patience and the forbearance that Jesus showed. It is the quality of love that bears all things and results in self-control and refusing to enjoy bouts of self-pity. It turns away from petty revenge and never harms another by word or by deed. It can be seen in the quietness of a still mind that refuses to fume and fret at the passing successes of those who do evil, leaving it all in the care of the Lord for Him to deal with in His own good time.

And when we ask ourselves, Who are the meek? We can not do better than to remember the definition given by a young boy who answered,

"Those who give soft answers to rough questions." The one who has Jesus in his head and heart has wisdom and doesn't need to browbeat others. Instead that wisdom causes them to speak softly and persuasively, rather than loudly and forcefully. Through the use of our tongues people will know whether we are wise or not. And they will also know that our humbleness is not weakness.

Pride, which after all is egotism, is something that Jesus very strongly condemns. For instance, a parable which He told to show the consequences of pride and the rewards of humility, is recorded by Luke, in chapter 14 verses 8 to 11, which says: *"When you are invited by anyone to a wedding, do not recline in the chief seat, lest a more honourable man than you may be invited by him. And he who invited you and him shall come and say to you, Give place to this man; and then you begin with shame to take the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes, he may say to you, Friend, go up higher. Then glory shall be to you before those reclining with you. For whoever exalts himself shall be abased, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."*

Even in the common actions of life, Christ's eye is upon us, and He takes note of everything that we do - not only in our devotional lives, but in our daily lives as well. He is telling us here that by taking the lowest seat at the table we show that we are not proudly anxious for any distinction or desirous of claiming the Honour which may properly be due to us.

Because we have shown a humble attitude, by choosing to sit at the bottom end of the table, people will treat us with approval when we are invited nearer to the head of the table. But it is a universal trait of the world that "men" will perpetually try to bring down and humiliate those who try to exalt themselves, and it is also the way in which God will deal with people. It is a part of God's regular plan to abase the proud and to bring down the lofty, but to elevate the ones who are humble, and show His favours to those who are poor and needy.

Being a Christian does not mean that we must always act according to the letter of certain rules and regulations - this is the way that the Pharisees thought everyone should behave. Being a Christian means following a living Christ: behaving as he behaved: doing as He did, and imitating His example in everything we do. It is putting our old ways behind us; keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and allowing the traits and features of His character to be imprinted on our new nature so that they are reproduced in our life and behaviour. We should be trying always

to be a reflection of Christ and a witness for our heavenly Father to the world in which we have for the time being to reside. In our leisure or our business lives people should be able to say: "This an example of what GOD can do; a model of what Christian teaching can achieve."

James, in the fourth chapter of his letter verses 4 -7 says; *Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever desires to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us yearns to envy? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

James says that there is enmity between God and those that trust in themselves and their own righteousness. The ones who despise others and say, I am holier than you; those that are proud of themselves, their enjoyments, their gifts, their external righteousness, and holiness, and are puffed up with their riches, and their goods, and possessions, thinking they're in need of nothing. These He opposes, He sets himself against them and He thrusts them away from him, he sends them away empty, and scatters them in the imagination of their own hearts; counting as nothing the things of which they are proud. He frustrates all their schemes and, as Psalm 2 says, He sits in the heavens and laughs at them.

James tells us that we should submit to God - to continue to bow to all his decisions, and to all his dispensations. And that we should resist the devil. He cannot conquer us if we continue to resist. Strong as the adversary is, God will never allow him to conquer the one who continues to resist him; Satan cannot force the human will. The one who, in the name of Jesus, opposes the devil, is sure to conquer him, because he trembles when he sees a saint upon his knees. Lucifer flees from the name of Jesus and from his conquering blood.

When we live in this way we become, to the worldly, either the salt that keeps society from corruption or a reflection of the light shining out from a hilltop that illuminates the world with a ray of the glory of heaven. We're told that we must let our light shine so that everyone can see that we are Christ's. To live a Holy life is a good deal better than to talk about it. When we do live a Holy life we are letting our light shine, and if it does, we do not need to tell anyone that it does. The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses do not ring bells or fire cannons to call attention to their shining - they just quietly shine so that all can see.

Let strong faith humbly challenge the power of Almighty God and see what He will do.	TH BSM 1942
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VOYAGE TO ROME

A story of St. Paul

Setting off

Paul was committed to appearing before Caesar. He seems to have viewed this prospect with considerably more confidence than he had the trials and inquiries to which he had been subjected in Judea. At this early date there was no official Roman persecution of Christianity. The opposition came from the Jewish ecclesiastical hierarchy. Every Roman official having anything to do with the case, Lysias, Felix and Festus, besides the Jewish king Agrippa, had given his verdict for Paul's innocence. He evidently had sufficient confidence in the impartiality of Roman justice to expect a formal acquittal before the tribunal of Caesar. Whereas a matter of two years previously he came to Jerusalem convinced that not only bonds and imprisonment, but probably death, awaited him there. He now cherished a reasonable expectation that he would soon be embarking upon a new phase of evangelistic activity. It had long been his ambition to visit Rome and preach the Gospel in the world's capital city. Now it seemed that his wish was to be fulfilled.

It was probably a comparatively cheerful party that stood on the deck of the little coasting vessel making ready to cast off from the jetty at Caesarea. Paul himself was under guard, with a number of other prisoners also consigned to Rome, but Julius, the centurion in charge, appears to have been a kindly and considerate man and allowed Paul to associate with his friends, Luke and Aristarchus. These two had determined to go to Rome with him and were most likely on the boat as fare-paying passengers. Luke may have had with him his manuscript of the major portion of the Book of Acts, or at least the notes and documents on which the Book was to be based. It does not come readily to the mind that in the ensuing shipwreck this invaluable literary work might easily have been lost. Through all the vicissitudes of that experience the "beloved physician" must have been at pains to preserve his work intact, that he might complete it during the ensuing two years spent with the Apostle at Rome.

The "*little ship of Adramyttium*", a port of Mysia not far from Troas in Asia, was built only for close inshore sailing. Julius could expect to get part of the way to Rome by its means, but when it reached the ports of Asia he would look for a larger ship bound directly for the Imperial City. The first port of call was Sidon, sixty miles or so along the coast, and this was reached after one day's sailing. Whilst cargo was being loaded and

unloaded Julius gave Paul leave to visit his friends in the town. One can imagine the hurried coming together of the believers and the short session of fellowship and exhortation before the three travellers had to rejoin their ship. From Sidon the normal route lay across the sea south of Cyprus to the port of Myra (modern Finike) in Lycia but at this point rumblings of the approaching storm became evident. *"We sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary."* The Etesian winds, which blow with gale force from the north-west during the summer months, should by now, late August, have given place to a soft south wind which the shipmaster would be relying on to take him home to Asia without trouble, but had failed to do so. So he had to tack round the north side of Cyprus under the shelter of the high mountains of the Asiatic mainland in order to escape the full force of the adverse wind and so attain his objective.

Travel by Corn Ship

Myra was a kind of maritime interchange point where vessels plying between Judea and Asia made contact with those sailing between Egypt, Greece and Rome. Julius was probably not surprised to find, riding at anchor in the harbour, one of the giant Egyptian corn ships whose function was the transport of wheat and barley to Rome, for Egypt was the principal source of Rome's food supply in those days. In the name of the Emperor, Julius demanded, and obtained, passage for his soldiers and prisoners. He may very well have used his good offices to include Luke and Aristarchus also. At any rate, any seagoing captain would accept passengers for a suitable consideration so that without doubt the Apostle's two companions experienced no difficulty in getting accommodated.

Several detailed descriptions of Alexandrian corn ships exist in the works of ancient Roman writers and it is possible to visualise the vessel which was involved in the shipwreck. Built especially for the transport of wheat, they were about three hundred feet long and could carry something like fifteen hundred tons of cargo. They were, of course, sailing ships, having one enormously strong mast bearing a gigantic sail carried on long cross spars, and usually two lesser masts with smaller sails for use generally in stormy weather, when it was dangerous to use the mainsail. In order to keep the ship moving in times of calm or to manoeuvre her in difficult positions, rowers handling huge oars, four to six men to an oar, were often included. Steering was not by rudder as in modern ships, but by two large paddles, one on each side of the stern. Under full sail and a fair wind the vessel could make about seven knots, equal to eight miles an hour. When in the open sea they sailed by day and night, steering by the sun and the stars; in the vicinity of land it was usual to anchor at night for safety. Under these conditions the run

from Egypt to Rome could be accomplished in about a fortnight. A great many ships were engaged in the trade and when, as sometimes happened, during seasons of prolonged stormy weather the arrival of the ships was delayed for a protracted period, Rome suffered famine conditions.

So Paul found himself on the second stage of his journey to Rome. At the outset there were difficulties in consequence of the persistent adverse wind. *"And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone."* Leaving Myra, the vessel coasted close to the land, the high mountains of the Asian hinterland shielding it from the north-west wind which was still blowing with unmitigated force. From Myra to Cnidus is about a hundred and fifty miles, no more than a two day cruise with a good wind, but under these circumstances, constantly veering and tacking against the head wind, they *"sailed slowly many days"*. At Cnidus, where the coast of Asia turns sharply northward, the vessel encountered the full force of the wind blowing down from the Aegean Sea, so that the captain had no choice but to turn and run before it in a more or less southerly direction towards the island of Crete, passing the eastern extremity and immediately running under its southern coast to secure the same kind of shelter he had just lost on leaving Asia. The ship, protected from the wind by high cliffs, could now veer and tack its way along the coast of Crete and make some progress.

Facing Winter

After about a hundred miles of this they reached the port of Fair Havens—no longer existing—and it was here that the captain began seriously to consider whether he should put off the rest of the voyage until the following spring. It was customary to treat the period October to March as a "close season" for sailing; ships caught in mid-voyage would "lie up" at a convenient port and wait until the passing of winter made the seas safer for navigation. Verse 9 indicates that this time had been reached; *"now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was already past..."* The "fast" referred to is the Day of Atonement, 24th September in that year, roughly at the end of the sailing season. The unusual persistence of the north-west Etesian gale, which should have subsided a month before, justified the captain's doubt as to the wisdom of proceeding.

This is where Paul comes to the fore-front, a position he maintains until the end of the story. He advised staying where they were; he believed there was grave risk of damage and loss if the voyage continued. Paul could speak with some authority; he was no stranger to sea travel. During the course of his missionary journeys he had crossed and re-crossed these same waters a

number of times and he had known storm and shipwreck before. To that might be added the probably not inconsiderable maritime experience of Luke. It is not likely that there was any Divine revelation to either of them in this matter; more likely that their combined judgment was adverse to proceeding. It seems that something like a vote was taken and the majority thought was against them. The wisdom of staying in Crete for the winter was conceded, but a strong body of opinion advocated taking a minor risk and pushing on another thirty-four miles to Phenice (modern Lutro) which had a better harbour and, from the point of view of shore amenities and attractions, was preferable to the rather third-class port of Fair Havens. The vessel had a total complement, crew, passengers, soldiers and prisoners, of two hundred and seventy-six and most of them would be greatly dissatisfied if there was not enough amusement and excitement on shore to keep them occupied. As if to justify the decision to make the move, at long last the persistent north-west wind dropped, a full month late, and was replaced by the usual seasonal south wind which could normally be relied upon to continue for a considerable period. With alacrity and no doubt some enthusiasm the anchors were hauled in, the mainsail spread, and the vessel began to scud along the Cretan coast in good style. Past difficulties and delays were forgotten; thoughts were centred on the more cheerful prospect of a few months' respite from the daily round amid the pleasures and attractions of Phenice while the ship lay at anchor waiting for springtime.

Driven

Their rejoicing was premature. Before they had reached the safety of Phenice a new and more serious danger presented itself. Without warning, a raging hurricane, the dreaded "Levanter", as it is called nowadays, swept down from the mountains of Syria and whipped the sea into fury. The Levanter is a wind of gale force originating over Syria and blowing westwards across the sea; when such a gale meets the south wind from the African coast the result is a cyclonic storm, a typhoon. (The word itself is derived from "Typhon", the storm-demon of Greek mythology. "*Tempestuous*" in v.14 is "typhoon" in the Greek). Caught in the grip of this storm the mariners were helpless. To make Phenice was out of the question; the gale was driving the ship in a south-westerly direction away from all land and there was little or nothing they could do about it. Their entire attention had to be given to keeping the ship afloat and in front of the wind to avoid the danger of capsizing.

Twenty-three miles from the mainland of Crete lies the rocky islet of Gozzo, known in ancient times as Cauda. The account says "*when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive; and*

running under a certain island which is called Cauda, we had much ado to come by the boat, which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, struck sail, and so were driven". All of which is quite unintelligible until the nautical expressions are sorted out and the map consulted. The storm struck the ship somewhere between Fair Havens and Phenice. For twenty-three miles she pounded along with her huge mainsail bellied out to full capacity by the raging wind, her mainmast straining and threatening to snap under the tremendous pressure, the ship's timbers creaking and groaning as if to give way. Her south-westerly course, dictated by the wind, brought them within a few hours and by good fortune within sight of the little islet. This was probably a bit of good seamanship. The ship was brought round to the "lee" side of the island, protected by its shelter from the full force of the gale. This is what Luke means by *"running under a certain Island."* With this temporary respite they first took in the boat. Ancient ships always had in tow behind them a small boat; in a storm there was danger that it might be swept away and so they took it up on board and made it secure. Next *"they used helps, undergirding the ship"*, an ancient practice known as "trapping", consisting of passing strong ropes completely round the hull to hold the timbers together against the hammering action of the heavy seas. The quicksands here mentioned are those known as the Greater Syrtis, off the North African coast near Cyrenaica, some two hundred miles southwest of Crete. The sailors knew that with the wind in its present quarter they stood in grave danger of being blown directly on the sands, so they "struck sail". This is a term implying that they lowered the mainsail and set the smaller storm sails in such fashion that the vessel no longer ran directly before the wind. This allowed her to drift westerly several points out of the wind and they hoped to pass well to the north of the quicksand and so avoid the danger.

The policy was one of despair, for they were thereby committed to drifting, at the mercy of the elements, without any guarantee of reaching land before the vessel succumbed to the battering of the waves and foundered with all on board. The storm continued and now black despair settled on the ship's company. *"When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay upon us, all hope that we should be saved was taken away"* (v.20). The compass was unknown in those days; ancient ships set their course by the sun in the daytime and the stars at night. The sky was obscured by heavy clouds and the mariners had no idea where they were. They might be hundreds of miles from land in the open sea; they might be dangerously close to unknown reefs or rocks. Their vessel was

waterlogged and liable to go to pieces at any moment; they gave up hope and waited for the end.

That night Paul saw a vision; the angel of the Lord appeared to him with a message of assurance. "*Fear not, Paul*" he said "*thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee*" (v.23). Such visions were no new experience to the Apostle; several instances are recorded in the New Testament and it does seem as though the Spirit-filled mind of Paul was peculiarly receptive to other-worldly revelations, particularly at times of stress such as this. There was evidently much more in the message than is recorded, for in the morning Paul recounted his experience to the entire company, exhorting them to be of good cheer, for that although the ship must be lost, they themselves would be saved, cast upon a certain island. The extent to which he was believed is debatable, but in quiet certainty Paul reiterated "*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*"

Wrecked

At midnight on the fourteenth day since leaving Crete, there was a sudden excitement on deck. The lookout believed he had sighted land! Perhaps a light, perhaps the darker outline of a mountainous mass silhouetted against the darkness of the night sky with its storm clouds. Eager to clutch at any straw, the sailors dropped their sounding line and found the sea-bottom at twenty fathoms – a hundred and twenty feet (orguias – practically the same as the English fathom). That at least confirmed they were not far from land. The vessel drifted a little farther and they tried again; this time the depth was only ninety feet. They were evidently approaching a shore, but on what coast and of what nature they had no idea. "*Fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks*" they dropped four anchors to hold the ship stationary "*and*" says Luke rather quaintly "*wished for the day*".

Again Paul took the lead; throughout the voyage he was the one most in command of the situation. He reminded them that for fourteen days they had eaten virtually nothing, in their labours and anxiety they had ignored the necessities of life. He recommended that now there was prospect of escape they would be wise to build their strength; there was no knowing what may be demanded of them in the next few hours. Assuring them "*there shall not an hair fall from the head of any one of you*", and taking bread, he solemnly gave thanks to God and began to eat. Heartened by his example, the whole company followed suit. The knowledge that, for the moment at least, they were at anchor not far from some kind of land, and the example of Paul's own confidence and doubtless that of his companions, changed despair into hope. "*Then were they all of good cheer.*" The storm continued; the ship was still taking in water and in danger of foundering even as she rode at anchor, so

that after the meal *"they lightened the ship and cast the wheat into the sea"* (v.38). This wheat was, of course, the cargo. There must have been at least a thousand tons of grain in the vessel. It is not necessary to suppose that all of it was jettisoned, but a considerable quantity, enough to remove the immediate danger; went overboard, and by that time it was daylight and the most experienced among the crew began to scan the coastline in an endeavour to judge where they were.

No one recognised the land. As they looked across the heaving waters they did see what appeared to be a wide creek with a flat beach and the possibility of running head-on into that beach and so getting to land became the focal point of discussion. The wind would be behind them and if the mainsail could be raised a bit and the vessel get some way on, their manoeuvre might succeed.

Unknown to them at the time, they were at the north-eastern tip of Malta, having drifted nearly five hundred miles during those fourteen days. Luke's description of the place is so precise that the exact spot has been identified and is now known as St. Paul's Bay, seven miles from the Maltese capital, Valetta. The *"certain creek"* which the sailors perceived, although it looked like a creek from the position of their vessel, is not really a creek at all. A small island now called Salmonetta is separated from the mainland by a channel only a hundred yards wide; strong currents enter this channel from both sides of Salmonetta and meet in the middle, creating a tumultuous mass of rough water. This is the place described in v 41 as *"a place where two seas met"*, a fine example of St. Luke's accuracy of description. Confident that their plan was workable, the crew raised up the anchors and *"loosed the rudder bands"* (v.40). During the long period of drifting the two steering paddles had been lifted out of the sea and lashed to the deck for safety. They were needed now for this operation and consequently were unloosed and lowered into the sea, with strong men ready to manipulate them as necessary. The great mainsail was slowly hoisted, and as the still fierce wind filled it the ship began to move forward towards the shore.

Too late, the steersmen, bearing heavily upon their paddles, realised the true nature of what they had taken for an inland creek. The other end of the channel came into view, and beyond it, the open sea on the other side of Salmonetta. Before anything could be done they were in the middle of the maelstrom formed by the opposing currents meeting head-on. Beneath this meeting-point of the waters there is an extensive mud-bank. Luke says that *"the ship ran aground, and the forepart stuck fast and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves"* (v 41). It was this mud-bank in the middle of the channel upon

which the ship had stranded; the bows were held firm but the stern, still floating, began to be battered to pieces. A vessel three hundred feet long could easily break in two in such circumstances and that is what appears to have happened in this case.

They were only fifty yards from land. The water was rough but the distance not great. Those who could swim threw themselves into the sea and got to the muddy shelving beach without mishap. The remainder followed them, riding over the breakers on planks or anything that would carry them. *"And so it came to pass"* the narrative concludes, that, just as Paul had foretold, *"they all escaped safe to land"*.

(To be continued)

AOH

THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN TIME AND ETERNITY

"If you take away from me the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ, which is to be a crisis of human history as definite as the First Coming, I am the most pessimistic of men. If you tell me that the work of the missionary is to convert the world by preaching, I am hopeless indeed.

"But when I realise that the work of the missions is to evangelize the world by the preaching of the Gospel for a witness, and that beyond the (Second) Advent there will be a new age in which human history will be perfected, then I wait with patience for the crisis which is to come, and serve as God helps me in order to hasten that coming, the coming of the Lord Himself.

"May God deliver us from taking away so great, so stupendous and sublime, far reaching vision of the wisdom which transcends our finite theory, in order to formulate a doctrine that God has chosen a few people to be saved and left the rest to be damned forever. That is an unwarranted (unscriptural) deduction.

"The plan of the Church existed in the mind of God from eternity. He predestinated the Church that it should be conformed to the image of His Son.... He predestinated men and women that they should be conformed to that likeness. The Church then is not an experiment in human history. It is part of the plan of God. It is the conception, the Plan of God from eternity.

“Finally, the Church is eternal in yet another sense. The Consummation is eternal, for the Church is to serve the purpose of God in the coming ages. Through the Church in its union with Jesus Christ, there will be revealed in the ages to come - ‘the exceeding riches of His grace’ and there will be unveiled before the angels - ‘the manifold wisdom of God’.

“This is the first note of the central preaching of the letter to the Ephesians. The Church of God is eternal. Its conception in the past eternity was the plan of God. Its construction in time is by the power of God. Its consummation in the coming ages will be for the fulfilment of the purposes of God. Are we of the Church? If we are, then we were in the heart and mind and Plan of God in the ages gone; we are to fulfil the purpose of God in the ages to come, and the plan of the past and the purpose of the future are linked by the power of the present; for plan, power and purpose are alike eternal.”

Dr. G Campbell Morgan

HOSEA

Part 2 Israel's Elopement

Hosea chapter 4 begins the sordid story of Israel's ‘elopement’ with Baal. Israel had adopted some of her neighbours’ idolatry. God’s people had found it too difficult to cope with a God they could not see. In spite of all the miracles that he had done in the desert and since they arrived at the banks of the Jordan, Israel adopted other gods. Now established in the land as an agricultural people they sought the Caananite agricultural god Baal and attributed to him all the wonderful gifts in the natural Creation, the blessings of grain, and flax and wool and vineyards.

We might ask why did Israel so treat God? We might just as well ask why are all humanity so stupid as to disobey God – but we all do. The way in which the nations govern themselves, organise their commercial and industrial enterprises – their love of power, violence, their endless quest for wealth and pleasure – even their explanations about Creation – all demonstrate the changeless acceptance of the Devil’s temptation to disobey God. How much better are we, ‘the Israel of God (Gal.6.16)?

Hosea’s record of Israel’s apostasy is a tragic catalogue of woes. Idolatry is not just entering a heathen temple and acknowledging a false god. It affects the whole way of life – wrong attitudes to other people, wrong attitudes to animals and destruction of this wonderful planet.

Environmental damage is not a new phenomenon – it is the ongoing sin of the human way of life that fails to fulfil God’s command to be stewards of His workmanship.

“Their deeds to do not permit them to return to their God”. God wants the fellowship of His people and of all mankind, but there can be no union of darkness with light. It is sin that separates us from God. As their national life began to deteriorate so their enemies subjugated Israel. But God’s people didn’t ask Him what they had done wrong but sank lower in their immoral way of life.

At the end of chapter 5 we have God saying “I will return again unto my place until” that interesting little word ‘until’ which we also find in the New Testament in Matt.23.39 which records Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, “For I tell you, you will not see my face again until....” After the ‘until’ comes the time of which James spoke at the council of Jerusalem when he quoted Amos 9.11 “After this I will return and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which is fallen; I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up that the rest of men may seek the Lord.”

To return to the problems of Israel in Hosea’s time, their ‘love is like the morning cloud’ – it quickly vanishes, it has no stability. Yet in chapter 6 verse 3 we have the key to all Earth’s problems – pressing on ‘to know the Lord.’ This is the knowledge that really counts and it is the way by which we shall receive an abundant entrance to God’s kingdom. It is a knowledge based on an intimate relationship with God that can only come through true fellowship with Him. This is no passing acquaintance, not even a distant adoration of someone great. Nor is it an academic knowledge about God and His purposes, but a personal knowledge of One with whom we spend every day, in the rough and the smooth experiences of life. As we go through the Scriptures and look closely at the lives of the great men of God, it is worth noting the number of times that this ‘getting to know God’ occurs.

Hosea 6.6 must contain a very important principle because the Gospels have a record of Jesus having quoted it in two different incidents, which means he probably quoted it on a number of occasions. Perhaps there is good reason why it was uppermost in the Lord’s mind. It has the greater impact upon our thinking if we interpret sacrifice in terms of formal outward religion whereas God desires real, inward piety. Jesus quoted from Hosea 6.6 when in Matthew’s house at a meal with some tax collectors. The Pharisees criticised him for eating with such people. Jesus says that God desires mercy – or in Old Testament language – God desires ‘covenant love’ (Heb. *chesed*) rather than sacrifice or formal ritual. On another occasion when He was walking through a grain field with His disciples, they picked some grain, rubbed it in their hands and ate it. Again the Pharisees

criticised their breaking of the Law by gleaning and winnowing grain on the Sabbath. Jesus defended his disciples against the criticism by reminding them of Hosea's words that God wanted mercy not sacrifice or love rather than outward religion. Jeremiah makes a similar point in 7.21 when he makes it clear that God is more interested in obedience than ritual. Micah reinforces the same lesson (Mic.6.8) when he affirms that what God really wants is justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with Him.

There is a small point at Hos.6.7 worth noting. The translation should read "**At** Adam" and not "**like** Adam". A small point but it may be that the wrong translation has led many to infer that God made a covenant with Adam but that is not confirmed anywhere else in Scripture.

In chapter 7 we have a series of word pictures that describe Israel's weak spiritual condition. The first is in v.8 which describes God's people as a "half baked cake". George Adam Smith dryly commented "how better describe a half-fed people, half cultured society, half-lived religion, half hearted policy than a half baked scone." Ephraim, one of Israel's largest tribes, often stands for the whole group of tribes that had broken away from Judah. They had mixed with pagan peoples and their love was lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, as in the church at Laodicea (Rev.3 15).

In Hosea 7.9 there is mention of grey hairs that they don't know about. They are like a man who thinks he is still in his prime and hasn't noticed his gradual decline. So with Israel, the spiritual deterioration was not all at once but had gone on slowly throughout their history in Canaan. Even in those supposedly wonderful days of David and Solomon, the friendship with the Phoenician peoples on the coast was bound to have serious effects on Israel's society. Those who travel abroad sometimes bring to the homeland wrong ideas from abroad, and commerce was their major objective. Israel was rich in the things of this world but unaware of how poverty stricken she was spiritually. We reap as we sow and as Paul writes, if we sow to the flesh we reap corruption.

Israel are described as a frantic dove in 7.11; like a silly bird that flits aimlessly from one perch to another. Israel kept faith with none in its diplomatic duplicity but was constantly leaning first one way and then the other between rising conquerors in the east and their old ally Egypt.

Israel are like a treacherous bow (7.16) unreliable and unable to save life at a critical point. In chapters 8 and 9 Israel's false prophets are fools and Israel as a nation have forgotten their Maker.

Finally in chapter 10 there is a reference to Israel as a luxuriant vine. But the more they materially prospered the more their false religion grew also. When their forefathers had been in the wilderness, twelve men, one from

each tribe were sent to reconnoitre Canaan to discover the land. They reported back that they had seen a bunch of grapes so big that it took two men to carry it. The Vine was the national emblem, emblazoned on the Temple gate. Its significance is seen in the Old Testament in Psalm 80.8; Isa.5.1; Jer.2.21; and Ezekiel 15. Most important of all is the New Testament reference, in Jesus' parable in John 15.1-6 when He showed that He was the true vine and his people are the branches in that vine. Unlike natural Israel, the spiritual people of God must bring forth spiritual fruit. DN

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD LABOURERS

Sometimes known as the "Parable of the Penny", this story of Jesus in Matt.20.1-16 has been explained in a variety of different ways, but not often is it connected with the incident of the rich young ruler recounted in the previous chapter. The chapter division is at an unfortunate point; the passage from verse 16 of chap. 19, to verse 16 of chap. 20, is all one account and should have constituted a chapter by itself. It tells of the rich young ruler – some suppose there is evidence that he was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary – who came to Jesus asking what good thing he should do that he might have eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all that he had, to give to the poor, to take up his cross and to follow him. At that the young man, we are told, went away sorrowful, *"for he had great possessions"*. And Jesus took advantage of the incident to warn his disciples with what difficulty a rich man must enter the Kingdom of God, a warning that puzzled them greatly, so greatly that they asked *"Who then can be saved?"* To their minds it seemed inconceivable that if the rich, with all their advantages, could not attain the Kingdom, any other man should do so. Peter, with his habitual quickness of mind and impulsiveness of speech, came out with a blunt enquiry as to what *they*, who *had* given up all for his sake should have. By then it was becoming apparent that some sound instruction was necessary; so Jesus told this story of the man who hired labourers to work in his vineyard and what happened to them at the end of the day.

We shall miss the point of the parable, therefore, unless we bear in mind that it is intended to teach the disciples the truth regarding this matter of ultimate rewards in the heavenly Kingdom. Here is a rich man who was debarring himself from entrance because he would not give up his riches; there were other men who hoped to attain to glory and power in that Kingdom because they had given up their scanty possessions. But there was some-

thing else beside. They had "followed" Jesus: the rich man had failed to follow. The sacrifice of worldly possessions was not of itself enough; there must also be the willing acceptance of the life of labour *"with him"* if the desired end was to be reached. And above all, the idea and the thought of personal advancement in front of one's fellows must be eradicated from the mind; there can be no ruling over one another, no taking precedence or assuming superior glory, in the Kingdom. All will be brethren, and there will only be one Master, Christ. The story of the request made by the mother of James and John, that they should be given special favour in the Kingdom, comes immediately after the parable and probably not without design. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them, said Jesus, *"but it shall not be so among you"*. So the parable of the vineyard came readily to the Saviour's lips in furtherance of his purpose to show his disciples the better way.

"For the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." It is vintage time; the husbandman has tended his vines assiduously throughout the growing season with the help of his own regular servants—he had a steward according to vs. 8 and therefore must have had servants in house and field—and has brought his crop to fruition. But the vintage must be gathered quickly and he needs additional temporary help, and so, as morning dawns – 6 a.m. in the East – he goes to the marketplace where the casual labourers congregate and engages sufficient men to complete the work. It is important to the right understanding of the story that this point be appreciated. The householder engaged all the labourers he needed, at the normal time for starting work. Other employers would be there too, engaging men for their requirements, until the demand was satisfied, and then, just as in later and, to us, more familiar days, the unfortunate ones who had not been engaged would resign themselves to another day of idleness and loss of wages.

But the particular employer who occupied the centre of the stage in this little drama which Jesus, with his consummate skill, was working out for the benefit of the enthralled disciples, was not as other employers. He left his own duties and went out into the market place again about nine o'clock and, probably as he anticipated, found men standing about idle, not having been hired. He had no need of them, but – he sent them into his vineyard to labour, and they evidently went gladly. At noon, when the work of the day was half-way through, he went again, and found more men idle, and sent

them in similarly. Came three o'clock in the afternoon and the sun swiftly dropping down the western sky, yet a little knot of men, renewed hope in their faces, wending their way to the householder's vineyard for three hour's work before the night came in which no man could work. Truly a strange but a welcome employer to have this altogether unusual concern for the unemployed and hopeless.

The disciples must by now have been wondering toward what this story was leading them. They were of the working classes themselves, and they had no illusions about the characters of employers. In certain circles today there is what is glibly termed the "reservoir of labour". This means that there is a permanent proportion of unemployed workers that are part of the system. Enough is known, from sources quite outside the Scriptures, of the economic conditions of our Lord's time, to establish the fact that it was just the same then. An employer who went out of his way to employ, and pay, labourers he did not really need was just as much a rarity then as it is now. No wonder the disciples were interested. But Jesus had not finished the story yet.

Five o'clock came; it was the eleventh hour. In sixty more minutes the sun would sink suddenly below the western horizon and darkness would quickly and completely fall. The day's work was virtually over; and yet here is the householder, once again in the market place, asking the few remaining stragglers why they stand there all the day idle. "*Because no man hath hired us*" they answer, perhaps resentfully, perhaps wonderingly. A strange question to ask; he knew very well why they thus stood. But the rejoinder was stranger still. "*Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*" They needed no further encouragement, and an hour later were standing before the steward, probably thankful for the small moiety of payment they expected for one hour's nominal labour. They received, each one of them, a full day's wage!

By now, more than one or two of the other labourers were convinced that this householder was not altogether accountable for his actions. A whole *denarius* for one hour's work; such a thing was unheard of! It looked as if some of them who had been fortunate enough to start earlier in the day would take small fortunes home to their families. They stepped up in their turn, covetous eyes seeking to discern what their fellows were getting, and – "*received every man a denarius*".

Of course, there was disappointment, and expostulation, and talk of injustice. The householder was called to the scene, and listened to their complaint. Quietly he told them that none of them had suffered loss; all had received the amount for which they had bargained, the amount they had expected, the amount which, if commonly accepted observation be true, was the normal day's wages for a labourer at the time. True, they had worked

longer and harder than had the late comers, but it was their good fortune that they had obtained work in the ordinary way, the others' misfortunes that they were without work. Their material needs were the same; their families at home needed food and clothing in equal measure, and the householder had recognised that fact by giving to each, *not according to his accomplishment, but according to his need*, and without injustice or hardship to any one of them.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that, said Jesus to his listeners. They sat round him, chins supported in cupped hands, flowing robes gathered closely, seeing in the mind's eye that coming day in which they would sit, each on a throne, twelve men on twelve thrones in all, judging the tribes of Israel, and the rich man who could not find it in him to sacrifice wealth and position *now*, bereft of it *then*, taking his place amongst the crowd. A group of men, some having worked long and hard, others for a little time only, all receiving the same at the end, without distinction in position or reward. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like that!* What Kingdom of Heaven is this?

Evidently from the fact that the parable is given in consequence of the disciples' question regarding future reward for present sacrifice, it has reference to the spiritual phase of the Kingdom of God in the next Messianic Age. Then the Church of Christ, glorified and associated with him in the spiritual realm "beyond the Veil" will have ceased from their labours in the vineyard of this Age and appeared to receive their 'hire', the 'reward' of their consecrated walk before him. The householder, of course, is the Lord himself, going out himself to find disciples who will serve his interests in this world. His "going out" thus continues during the whole of this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until the setting up of the earthly Kingdom. But the third hour, sixth hour, and so on must refer, not to the early, middle and late centuries of the Age, but to stages in the lives of individuals at which the call comes to them. Quite obviously no one has laboured from Pentecost until today, for life does not last so long. But some there are, and such there have been at every point of time throughout the Age, to whom the call came in youth or early life, and who heard and obeyed the call and laboured zealously and faithfully until old age ended their labours. These are they who were sent into the vineyard "early in the morning". Others receive the call in middle life; these are they who respond to the householder's invitation at the third or the sixth or even the ninth hour. And some are already in the evening of life when they give themselves in whole-hearted surrender to the Lord Christ; they come in at the eleventh hour but the Lord has work for them to do and a work to do in them.

So it will be, then, when the hope of every true believer is realised, and

the "General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" has become an accomplished fact. We shall meet our fellows and our companions of the pilgrim way, those that have gone before us into the glory land. These are the saints, martyrs, prophets and apostles of earlier times. We shall find that we are all equally citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, thinking no more of station or rank, of preferment one above another, but all rejoicing together in the wondrous companionship and overlordship of Christ our Head, the heavenly Bridegroom. *"With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace."* The "penny" which each one will receive is the prize of eternal association with the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of his Kingdom, and before the presence of the Heavenly Father. For the duration of the Messianic Age there is the inestimable privilege of working together with the Saviour for the conversion of the world.

Some may ask now, what there may be in this happy state to correspond with the "murmuring". Is there to be murmuring in heaven, amongst the redeemed and glorified saints? The idea is both absurd and unthinkable. Jesus meant something quite different from that. His story showed the disciples what **they** were making of the calling to which he had called them, and was yet to call others. **They** were the men who were manifesting the spirit of self-assertiveness, who wanted to be greater than others in the Kingdom, who even quarrelled among themselves as to which of their little band should be greater than the rest. That is the spirit, said Jesus in effect, that would lead you at the end to murmur against me when I finally apportion the crowns of life in the Kingdom. It was a warning, and the subsequent history of the disciples shows us that, though in some cases the lesson was long in being learned, at the end it was learned, and well learned.

Conrad Noel suggested in his *"Life of Jesus"*, (1937) that this parable was given to define the 'economic' basis of life in what he called the Divine Commonwealth and what we call the Messianic Kingdom. He sees here an expression of the Divine intention that all men shall take their place in the world's work and labour according to their ability, and receive of that provision which the world affords, according to their need. There is no doubt that the principle is there. Jesus may very well have intended some such thought as a secondary teaching, applicable, not to the Church, but to the world of men. They will be engaged in learning those new laws of life that are to be promulgated during the Messianic Age. *"Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"*. It is perfectly true that in that day men will have to learn the same lesson that the disciples of Christ are learning now. All, whether in heaven or on earth, who enter into everlasting life in that perfect condition which lies beyond the dethronement

of sin and death, will give of their best and rejoice with their fellows in absolute equality of citizenship. Each will seek the welfare of others; all will be servants of all, and in that blessed relationship, hallowed for all time by One who himself came to serve and minister, will enter into their reward.

AOH

THE 'FIRST' QUIZ

Each question in this quiz is connected with the word 'first' in scripture.

1. Who is listed as the first of the apostles?
2. What is the first and greatest commandment?
3. On which weekday did Christ rise from the dead?
4. What was the first thing Andrew did when he met Jesus?
5. Where were the disciples first called 'Christians'?
6. What was the first book Theophilus received?
7. Who in the early church had a higher place than prophets or teachers?
8. Who broke the first tablets?
9. Who seems to have a good case?
10. What takes priority over material possessions?
11. What must you do before making a gift to God?
12. What was the first of Jesus' signs?
13. Why do we love?
14. What was written as the first of the Lord's acts of old?
15. What is uncertain about the reward of leaving all to follow Christ?
16. What did Jesus say the Son of Man would do before appearing in glory?
17. Who had the first experience of the power of God through the gospel?
18. Who should take precedence in throwing stones at the wicked?
19. What teaching did Paul regard as of first importance?
20. Who died and is alive for evermore?

Answers on page 37

I have loved thee with an everlasting love Jer.31.3

Marvellous and transforming is the sweet love of God. It dispels the darkness. It lightens the gloom. It straightens the crooked. It sweetens the bitter. It smoothes the rough. It calms the commotion. It breaks the bondage. It sets the fettered free.

B. McCall Barbour

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 15 1 John 3.10-12

"Whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he that does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that you should love one another." (1 John 3.10-11). This declaration is a bridge between John's words in verses 4-10 and the things he is going to say in the rest of the chapter. He has already been at pains to stress that we, the disciples of Christ, have a standing in righteousness before God, dependent upon our sincerity and purity of mind and purpose. Without that righteousness we cannot claim to be of God. That righteousness, that justification, is an inward possession, known only to God and the believer, and not of itself discernible to the onlooker.

Now John would tell us that there is a means by which our righteousness is manifested to those around us, to our brethren, our neighbours, and others. That means is our love for our brethren, our neighbours, for all. It was Jesus who first proclaimed the law of love and He made it incumbent upon His disciples to develop a love for all mankind of the nature that He Himself possessed. Nothing short of a deep and sincere love and solicitude for all who have been made in the image and likeness of God can be acceptable in those who are eventually to be entrusted with the task of reconciling men to God.

But even John's fellow-brethren, accepted into Christ and constituted sons of God as they were, could not reach up to that height at once. John must lead them by a succession of steps, appealing first of all to that which lay nearest to their hearts. So he confines his argument at the beginning to the family circle, the fellowship of the believers, the community of the Church, where of all places the love of each true hearted believer should be most manifest. If that love, the love of the brethren, is not present, says John, then without any further argument it can be definitely stated that the professed child of God is not so in fact. He that loves not his brother is "not of God".

Now that does not mean that we must as a matter of obligation extend the full privileges of our fellowship and receive into all the implications of brotherly love anyone who chooses to come into our midst. Not all who profess acceptance of our beliefs and standards and claim to be a brother or sister in Christ are genuine. There has often been a certain amount of loose thinking in this connection and not infrequently "wolves in sheep's clothing" have taken advantage of the too-ready friendliness of earnest disciples endeavouring to follow out what they believe to be the requirements of the

Scriptures. When John says "his brother" he means just those who can truthfully be described by the term, those who are in deed and in truth children of God and therefore brethren of other children of God. There can be no denying that there is a love that we should bear toward the world in general, and towards our enemies, and toward all, no matter how evil or depraved or far from God they may be, but that is not what John is talking about here. He is talking, for the moment, of matters exclusively concerned with the circle of believers, the brethren. His major theme, to which he returns time after time in the course of his exhortation, is that we must first recognise the strictness of the standards by which a true child of God is to be identified. Given that, we must necessarily find that we feel a love toward him that transcends all other affections and friendships. The love of the brethren ought to be the greatest thing in our lives and the most powerful force in our fellowship.

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (v.11). What beginning is that? Certainly not the beginning of Israel's existence as a nation, for although the Mosaic Law certainly did command men to love God above all things and then to love their neighbours as themselves, the same Law provided for things that were the very antithesis of love. *"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life"* - that certainly is not the law of love as we understand it today. And love cannot be commanded; the Mosaic Law gave commands and the only love it could inculcate was duty love. The love that Jesus brought to light in the world was so much beyond the loftiest reach of Moses' precepts. Jesus could justly say *"You have heard that it has been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy', but I say unto you, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven'."* (Matt. 5. 43-45). That must have been the beginning of which John is speaking.

In these words of Jesus we find the same association between the possession of all-embracing love and being a child of God. John, so far as he has gone in the course of his exhortation here, in the middle of chapter 3, is for the present only asking for love for the brethren. But he appeals to the right authority. For him and for all who then and thereafter were to read his words, Jesus is the beginning. The words of Jesus constitute that *"message that ye have heard from the beginning"*.

And how whole-heartedly the Church of the first few generations did enter into the spirit of that exhortation! It is impossible to read the thrilling stories of the Acts of the Apostles without sensing the atmosphere of Christian love in which the fellowship was born and developed. There were

rifts and the occasional quarrels, it is true. The Grecians murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations (Acts 7). The Jews resented the extension of the call to the Gentiles and at first refused to count them brethren, causing Peter and others some difficult times before agreement was attained and harmony restored (Acts 15). Paul himself was not always received in the manner befitting an Apostle and an elder of the flock. But on the whole these were only incidents in the life of the Church. In the main the joy of salvation and appreciation of the High Calling to which they had been called overshadowed all other considerations.

This made the early Christian fellowship so joyous and happy that those outside envied the believers for the possession of what they themselves could neither understand nor emulate. "How these Christians love one another!" cried Tertullian many years afterwards; that word has lingered and echoed down the ages to our own time, where it has mingled with another expression "the love of the brethren". As it was in the first century, as it was in Tertullian's day, so it is in our own time that the spirit of Christian love manifest in assemblies of God's people today, is still one of the most potent means of conversion. It is a solemn thought that loss of that spirit may be a contributory factor in the decline of the number of conversions we observe. It is in our fellowship that we have opportunity to show the enquirer how our beliefs and hopes work out in practice. If our practice does not match our profession we pardon the candidate for conversion being a little sceptical. If we would persuade others to accept for themselves the rule of life which we have accepted and found good, we must expect to be judged by our manifestation of that life in actual practice under everyday conditions. *(To be continued)*

AOH

Book Review

From time to time we come upon a book which inspires us. It is good to tell one another of such books, because they remind us of the many-sided ways in which God is working among His people. They may not be new books, simply new to us. Here is an example.

Baroness Cox— A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

Andrew Boyd Lion Publications 1999

Caroline Cox retired as deputy speaker of the House of Lords to work with Christian Solidarity International. In frequent visits to Poland, Eritrea, Russia, Burma and Sudan she identified with persecuted Christian minorities. She helped them, represented them publicly, and publicised their sufferings and

needs wherever she could. She took great risks and became a wanted person by persecuting governments. In Southern Sudan she found and reported frequent opposition from those who denied her claims. The book is a story of courage and suffering with and for others, because of her indomitable faith and honesty. JT

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

In the seventh year of the reign of Amenhotep II, Pharaoh of all Egypt, there occurred a succession of unparalleled disasters that humbled the pride of Egypt to the dust and left the nation stunned and sorrowing. The empire had attained a pinnacle of power and glory that had not been known before. The land was adorned with palaces and temples, monuments and works of architecture, the admiration of all nations. However, with a mighty hand and stretched out arm the Almighty, the Eternal, delivered the children of Israel from bondage so that as a dedicated people they might serve Him without restraint or hindrance in a land of their own.

The Ten Plagues of Egypt stand as one of the spectacular events of Old Testament history. The extent to which the fearful calamities described in Exodus were freaks of Nature or miraculous interventions of God has been a subject of debate for centuries but there is no denying the reality of the happenings. The fame of them spread to the nations round about. Israel never forgot them. They formed the subject of triumphal song and poetry for generations after the events. Two of the Psalms of David, Psalms 78 and 105, memorialise the Ten Plagues as examples of the irresistible judgments of God. The Philistines, four centuries afterwards, when faced with the spectacle of the Ark of God brought into battle against them, told each other that here were the gods which smote the Egyptians with Plagues that long time ago (1 Sam.4.8). Such was the impression left upon the minds of men by those unprecedented disasters, the cumulative effect of which finally persuaded Pharaoh to let Israel go.

The difference between these plagues being natural events or their being direct acts of God is not so marked when it is realised that "miracles" can only be such in the eyes of those who do not understand the processes involved. The dictionary definition of "miracle" is a wonder or marvel or supernatural event. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a supernatural event unless the term is used in the sense of that which is not of this terrestrial world. All the processes of Nature are controlled in the last place by God and the fact that men may not understand the whole of

those processes does not make them any the less natural. The ancients credited any happening they did not understand to the intervention of God, but many such are well understood today and no longer require direct supernatural Divine intervention to account for them. The word 'miracle' in the Old Testament means merely a sign or a wonder; in the New Testament it is used to translate two words, one of which means a sign and the other, an act of power. It is only necessary therefore to accept the fact that the Most High, in His administration of the affairs of His creation, orders and exerts natural forces to accomplish His special designs at any particular moment in time.

The plagues on Egypt may very well have been manifestations on an unusual scale of phenomena already known to the Egyptians; the supernatural aspect lay in the timing of the events, whereby they came at the moment necessary to effect a desired result, and this timing constituted a direct intervention. The fact that any remarkable incident recorded in the Scripture as caused or directed by God for a definite purpose can often be shown as a relatively natural phenomenon does not detract in the slightest from its 'miraculous' nature. It is a sign, a wonder, occurring at a particular moment, to bring about some desired result in connection with the Divine Plan.

It is probable that Moses came away from his second interview with Pharaoh with this impression on his mind. God would now exert His mighty power to deliver Israel; Moses was sure of that. He would do it by the powers of Nature let loose in much more than their usual intensity, until Pharaoh would give the people their freedom. Moses was sure of that too. He did not know, as yet, just how the great event was to be brought about. He did know that in times gone past God had sent His judgment upon the earth by a flood of waters and again by a holocaust of fire, and he was ready now for whatever might betide.

So there came a morning when Pharaoh with his court went down to the brink of the river and found Moses and Aaron waiting for him. The prophets sternly reminded the monarch of his refusal to acknowledge the Lord and release His people and told Him that in consequence the waters of the river were to be turned into blood. Aaron stretched his staff over the water, and *"all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood, and the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river."* (7. 21-22).

If the plagues were in fact amplifications of natural customary happenings, the sequence of events can best be understood if it is considered that this first act of Moses took place in the June before the Exodus. At this time of year the Nile is normally in full flood, and in ancient times inundated

the land, to the satisfaction of the population, who depended upon this annual inundation for the growth of their crops. In recognition of this vital part played by the river in the country's welfare an annual ceremony, the "festival of the Nile" in which Pharaoh took a leading part, was conducted at the riverside on 12th June, and worship was offered to the Nile-god. It might well be that the statement in 7.15 *"Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; wait for him by the river's brink..."* is a reference to this festival, and if so this fixes the time of the first plague as June.

It is only necessary to understand the narrative to imply that the waters took on a blood-red colour, not that the whole mighty river and its streams and canals were literally transformed into actual blood. This conclusion is evidenced by v.24 which states that the Egyptians *"dug round about the Nile for water to drink; for they could not drink the water of the Nile."* Whatever it was that made the water objectionable was filtered out as it percolated through the soil along the river's margin so that the people, digging, found drinkable water. Had it been literal blood it would of course still have been blood even after passing through the soil. It is said by observers of Egyptian natural phenomena, with minor variations of detail, that the Nile has a greenish tint before the annual inundation. As the waters rise, it becomes clear, and then for about three weeks or so it takes on a reddish tinge due to the presence of vast quantities of minute plant life of a red colour, originating from the tropical regions from which the river comes. In extreme cases these masses of algae cause the river to take on a deep blood-red colour and on such occasions the water has an offensive smell. If this is a fact then the first plague was simply a most extreme case of a happening which was familiar to the Egyptians. The rapidity with which it occurred at the raising of Aaron's rod, and perhaps the unusually widespread extent of the red water, *"upon their streams"* (rivers) *"upon their rivers"* (canals) *"and upon their ponds"* (cisterns) *"and upon all their pools"* (reservoirs) marked the occurrence as a visitation from God. Perhaps because the affliction was recognised as no more than an extreme and very inconvenient case of a common occurrence it does not seem to have worried Pharaoh a great deal; he probably reasoned that it would soon pass anyway. In the meantime the magicians were called in to see what they could do to help matters.

It is commonly assumed that the expression in 7.22 *"And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments"* means that they mimicked Moses by also turning water into blood. How they could do

so when all the rivers, streams, canals and reservoirs in Egypt had already been thus treated is not explained. In fact what the magicians really tried to do was to reverse the process and make Moses' act of no effect. The word translated "did so" is "*lahatim*" which comes from "*lahat*", to burn or set on fire. The meaning is that the magicians carried out ceremonies and incantations involving the use of lustrous fires and burning incense, in supplication to their gods to have the affliction removed. To use a modern slang phrase that nevertheless accurately expresses the meaning of the original, the magicians 'did their stuff'. It is not stated either that they succeeded or failed, but the fact that v.25 volunteers the information that the river remained in this condition for seven days appears to point to the latter.

It should be noticed here that in the first three plagues the magicians appeared, and in each case it will be seen that they endeavoured to counteract the plague, and failed. At the third attempt they declared that the hand of God was in the thing and withdrew; they are mentioned no more. The first three plagues affected Israel in common with Egypt; after that Israel was immune from the remaining plagues. It seems as though the early plagues partook largely of the nature of natural events which in lesser measure had often afflicted the land previously, but as the series progressed so the supernatural element became more and more marked. The hand of God becoming increasingly manifest until in the final blow, the simultaneous death of the firstborn, there could be no natural explanation whatever.

A month or so passed by before the second plague. As the Nile inundation reaches its maximum the frogs become evident and the people normally take but little notice of them. This time they did. Perhaps because of the unusual conditions the river was choked up with vegetable organisms left over from the first plague. Because of the quantities of dead fish involved as remarked in 7.21, and the abnormal climatic conditions which had brought this condition about originally, the frogs were breeding in enormous and unheard of numbers. The Hebrew word in 8.3 "*bring forth* (frogs) *abundantly*" is '*sharats*', which means to swarm as though in uncontrolled numbers. This was the immediate visible consequence of Aaron's rod being stretched for the second time over the river. The frogs "*came up*" and covered the land, entering into the houses and even into the ovens and domestic utensils. Again were the magicians summoned; they "did so" with their enchantments, tried everything in the rules of their art to overcome the plague, but nothing they did had any effect; the waves of little creatures came steadily on.

This time Pharaoh did take notice. "*Entreat the Lord, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people*

go" (8.8). Moses wanted to establish beyond all dispute that the removal of the frogs would be due to God and not just in the natural course of things and so he bade Pharaoh name his own time for the act to be performed. 'Tomorrow' said Pharaoh. Moses prayed to the Lord and on the morrow the frogs died out everywhere except in their natural habitat, the river. *"And they gathered them together upon heaps; and the land stank"*. The coming of the frogs may well have been an extension of the customary natural process; the manner of their going was assuredly an act of Divine intervention. But Pharaoh changed his mind and would not let the people go.

October had dawned before the third plague struck. The account does not tell of further interviews with Pharaoh, but it is probable that the onset of each plague was preceded by a formal demand to Pharaoh, a demand that was brusquely refused. Perhaps six or eight weeks had passed since the frogs had been cleared from the land; now the well known form of Aaron was seen extending his rod, not this time over the river, but over the fields, with a swift, decisive movement, striking downward to the earth. And from that earth there began to arise clouds of minute insects – lice in the AV – insects which multiplied and filled the air to such an extent that it seemed as if the very dust of the earth was itself being transformed into those masses of tiny flying creatures. So the plague of the lice upon the Egyptians was very great.

The account says that it was the dust of the earth which produced the lice; *"all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt"* (8.17). It is said that as the rising Nile waters, toward the end of the inundation, begin to flood over the agricultural lands, millions of insect pupa – flies and midges of all kinds – that have been deposited in the soft soil during the dry weather, come forth into life and take to the air. It is almost as if the dust is bringing forth. The plague of lice might well therefore be another well-known happening distinguished only by the enormous scale on which it occurred on this occasion. Never before, the Egyptians might have thought, had the country known so tremendous a visitation of flying insects.

"And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not; so there were lice upon man and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God." (8. 18-19). Once more the familiar ceremonies and rituals were performed but to no better avail than before. The A.V. reads as though they tried to emulate Aaron and themselves *"bring forth"* lice, but this is the exact opposite of the real meaning. *"Bring forth"* here is *hatsa*, which means to send away, to cause an exit, to bring out or draw forth, and means that the magicians

tried to cast the lice out or send them away. They failed, and, says the narrator, "*so there were lice upon man and upon beast*". Despite all that the magicians could do, the lice remained. Incidentally, notice should be taken of the difference in meaning of "*bring forth*" in 8. 3 which as noted above is *sharats*, to swarm, and "*bring forth*", *hatsa*, in the verse now under review. The magicians gave up. "*This is the finger of God*" they told Pharaoh. Three attempts to counteract the power of Aaron had all failed and they had had enough. They took no further part in the proceedings. Nevertheless Pharaoh still refused to let the people go.

(to be continued)

AOH

WHAT DOTHTHE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE?

"What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6. 8).

We know nothing of the circumstances in which these words were originally uttered. "*He hath shown thee, O man, what is good*" the prophet says, as if to remind us of what we already know perfectly well, something that God has manifestly and admittedly shown us already. And that is the first keen truth that comes home to us. *We do know these things*. We have enough of the original law written in man's heart to realise that justice, goodness and unselfishness are fundamental in human relations and that without them we cannot make progress toward the Heavenly city. God has shown us that and inwardly we know it. We might do very well by writing in our hearts the one line "*He hath shown thee, O man, what is good*" for in calm, quiet reflection upon those nine words there is a wealth of spiritual instruction.

The Israelites of old were treated as servants and given a code of laws in which every crime and penalty was clearly defined. As the writer to the Hebrews says of that law "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward". We, of the New Creation are treated as sons, as men and women whom the Father trusts to work out the Divine law for themselves on the basis of certain cardinal principles that He has laid down. Hence we do need calmly and quietly to think out the implications of those principles.

Justice has become a harsh, unyielding word to us in the English language, calling up visions of transgressors having meted out to them the due of their deeds. Of course the true idea behind the word is that of rightness, or righteousness. The man who takes into account all that is due

to his God, his fellowman, and to his own self, and renders to all the due that is theirs, is a righteous and a just man. This involves a sober recognition of the purpose of God in creating man and placing him upon the earth, and a willing taking up of the duties and responsibilities of a citizen of earth.

Those who have consecrated their lives to God and become footstep followers of Jesus Christ, have the added duties and responsibilities of that calling to consider. These have entered into a family, the brethren of Christ, and there are family obligations to be honoured. How many there are who look upon the fellowship solely from the doctrinal angle and fail to realise that it is a brotherhood which has its basis upon things far deeper and more potent for good than mere intellectual understanding of God's Plan? There are many who are very correct in doctrine but have utterly failed to appreciate and honour the family relationship which must exist between those who hope ultimately to "reign with him".

This first principle, then, must be understood along the lines of righteousness; not a cold, austere, "holier-than-thou" righteousness the possessor of which thanks God that he is not as other men. It is not a bigoted, rigid cast of mind which sees nothing save its own narrow conception of the Divine dealings; but a warm, generous, zealous attitude of heart which manifests itself in a constant endeavour to maintain the highest ideals of faith and conduct before men. It is a refusal to compromise those standards under any circumstances, and a firm conviction of the rightness of God's ways and the certainty of their eventual triumph that nothing can shake. Our consecration to Divine service does not absolve us from our Christian duty to our fellow-men. Rather it intensifies that duty. We are not of the world, but we are in the world, and whilst so we cannot escape the obligations which properly devolve upon us as God's representatives in the world.

The monastic form of life that involved a complete separation from ordinary affairs and ordinary people was a retreat and an escape upon the principle that all created things were inherently sinful and corrupt and that withdrawal from them, and a physical mortification of the flesh, was pleasing to God. All this is wrong, for God himself is the Author of creation and what He has made is very good. Paul's words regarding the mortifying of the flesh were intended to teach and inculcate quite another truth, one that was perhaps best enshrined in the words *"except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone, but if it die, it brings forth much fruit."* (John 12.24). The Church of this Age is called to suffer and die in Christ that, like him, they may be sown to bring forth fruit, new life, in the coming Age.

Benevolence and kindness are not to be attained by reading about them in a book, even though that book is the Bible. They are essentially practical virtues, and a man becomes a good man, a kind man, a benevolent man, only by means of his dealings with his fellows. To love mercy therefore implies a desire to practise mercy and this in turn leads to a way of life that finds scope for the practice of the desire. There is so much opportunity for the exercise of goodness today and it is not limited to those possessing money or exceptional talents. The Christian commission to *"bind up the broken hearted"* is one aspect of *"loving mercy"*. One may very conceivably do more good to a sad soul by giving assurance of the coming Kingdom than by a present of money. Sympathy and friendly compassion may upon occasion be more sorely needed than food or clothing. The word in season, the helping hand, the friendly endeavour to lighten a burden whether in a spiritual or material connection are evidences of the attitude that God requires of us, that we *"love mercy"*.

"Pure religion and undefiled before God" says James *"is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"*. Once again there is that intimate association with practical Christian endeavour toward the distressed of this world and a separateness from the world that is the hallmark of the instructed Christian. To move among these people, ministering to their distresses, but not of them, professing and manifesting a citizenship which is not of this earth, this is experience that will stand us in good stead when the time comes to turn the "pure language" to all people. These things are duties toward man.

Of supreme importance is our duty toward God. *"Walk humbly with thy God"*. Can we amplify these words to include that life of reverence and worship that must be ours if we would eventually see his face? "He that abides in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" said the Psalmist. All our right doing and goodness will avail us nothing if it is not lived in "reverence and godly fear". Above all our outward activities we must place the importance of the inner life, that life which finds its all in complete consecration and submission to God. Our behaviour towards our fellows will bring us rich lessons of experience that are necessary to our future work, but our dwelling in the secret place of the Most High will show us the Divine character and transform our minds and hearts into a copy likeness of his Son. Unless we have attained that likeness all the benefit of life's experiences will have been lost so far as our High Calling is concerned.

Many there are, claiming with justice to have performed many wonderful works in his name, who will nevertheless be rejected from among the number of the triumphant Church. We must diligently follow after those

things that will increase our perception of the inward life of the Spirit if we would truly come to know as well as worship God in spirit and in truth.

The active, businesslike, "practical" Christian often finds this a hard thing. There is so much to be done in active service, so many opportunities of preaching the message, so much of distress and suffering to be relieved, and he, by nature and temperament well fitted to undertake such labours, is very apt to give insufficient time and thought to that calm, quiet, leisurely communion with God in the things of the spirit that comes so much more easily to less active souls. He does not realise his loss, until, it may be, the failure of his activities, or disappointment at their outcome, awakens him to realisation of the things he is missing. In all our activities let us always leave room for walking "humbly with God." TH

x x x

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2.10

"When I was young, my dad had a zip-up cardigan that I liked to wear. It was way too big for me, but when I put it on it was like being wrapped in his arms. Dad died a few years ago, and now the sweater is mine. It fits me better now, and I still feel as if my dad's arms are wrapped around me when I wear it.

"The sweater is a lot like my Christian walk. Along the way I have been asked to do things that didn't seem the 'right fit' but I did them anyway. Some were straightforward simple tasks such as learning to read the Bible. Others were more challenging, such as leading a new ministry at church.

"But God uses us in the way God needs us. I find that the more I journey into the tasks God has for me, the more comfortable I become with trying on new roles in serving the Lord. When God speaks to us about doing some good work, we can go ahead and put on that sweater. It may be the perfect fit. And even if it is not, we may grow into it over time."

Trish Krider, from The Upper Room

Quiz Answers

1. Simon Peter Matt.10.2
2. To love God Matt.22.37-8
3. The first day of the week Matt.28.1
4. He found his brother and told him John 1.41
5. Antioch in Syria Acts 11.26
6. Luke's gospel Acts 1.1
7. Apostles 1 Cor.12.28
8. Moses Ex.34.1
9. He who states his case first Prov.18.17
10. The kingdom of God and his righteousness Matt.6.33
11. Be reconciled to your brother Matt.5.24
12. Water into wine at Cana John 2.11
13. Because God first loved us 1 John 4.19
14. To create Wisdom Prov.8.22
15. The last will be first, the first last Matt.19.30
16. First He must suffer many things Luke 17.25
17. Jews Rom.1.16
18. The one without sin John 8.7
19. That Christ died for our sins 1 Cor.15.3
20. The First and the Last and the Living One Rev.1.17-18

THE SPIRIT OF WORSHIP

All the best hymns are firmly grounded in scripture— perhaps! Be that as it may, it is a good study to take a favourite hymn and lay it alongside the word. For example, there is

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Forgive our foolish ways,
Reclothe us in our rightful mind.....*

What are the foolish ways? To talk of the follies of mankind is normal in Christian circles— the follies of war, the folly of resources spent in showing off our riches, even our personal follies and sins. But it is interesting to note that the hymn writer had something more specific in mind.

This hymn was written as part of a longer poem, entitled 'The Brewing of Soma'. Soma is a plant whose intoxicating juice was used in ancient religious ceremonies. The worship of soma involved ecstatic experiences, a feeling of renewed youth, a kind of 'drunken joy'.... In short, the sort of thing people have been seeking from drugs through the centuries. Even Christians have been involved in such excesses, doing things in the name of religion in order to 'get a lift'. Music, for example, or incense, may be used to carry you away into a realm of emotion. It is such foolish ways as this that the hymn originally had in mind, and it calls us not to frenzy in worship but to peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the writer, was a Quaker who in his early life became involved in a frenzy of activity seeking freedom for the American slaves. He entered into politics, journalism, public speaking, being attacked and run out of town by slave owners, until a breakdown of his mental and of his physical strength forced him to live a quieter life.

In his poem he turns from describing mind-blowing religion to praying for a rightful mind, pure lives, Christian service and deeper reverence. This is the section of the poem which has been taken up as a hymn, and which uses pictures from scripture.

*In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee*

'As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they

were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.' Matthew 4.18,19.

Worship means trust in the Lord shown by practical obedience.

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love.*

'And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.' Mark 1.35

Worship means getting away from the busy-ness of life, and appreciating the greatness of God and his pervading love.

*With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down.*

'And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."' Exodus 16.14,15

Worship means becoming aware of God's quiet blessings.

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.*

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.' John 14.27

'The peace of Christ rule in your hearts.' Colossians 3.15

'Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' Philippians 4.6,7.

Worship means accepting the peace Christ gives, letting it have control, and consciously deciding to trust God in practical matters.

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!*

'And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.....' 1 Kings 19.9-12

Worship means resting from violent activity, and listening for God to speak when we are quiet.

This hymn has been sung to various tunes. The best known, *Repton*, was written by an Old Etonian who became a professor of music at Oxford. It was taken from his oratorio *Judith*— he did not like writing oratorios— and along with '*Jerusalem*' it is perhaps one of Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry's best known tunes.

We sing the hymn as a prayer for forgiveness— forgiveness for you and I when we forget how to worship, forgiveness for humankind in our collective folly. A spirit of true worship is what characterises God's Kingdom in our own time whenever we obey Him, a spirit which will prevail over all the earth in the day to come. Then, humankind will realise, as Whittier wrote in another of his poems,

*To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly word a prayer.*

GC

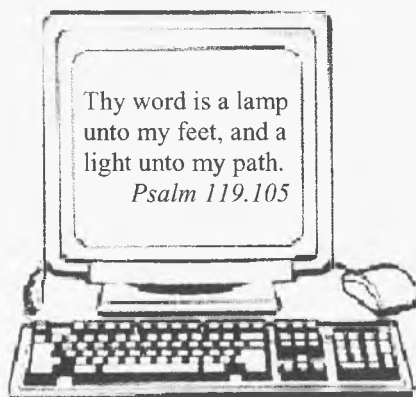
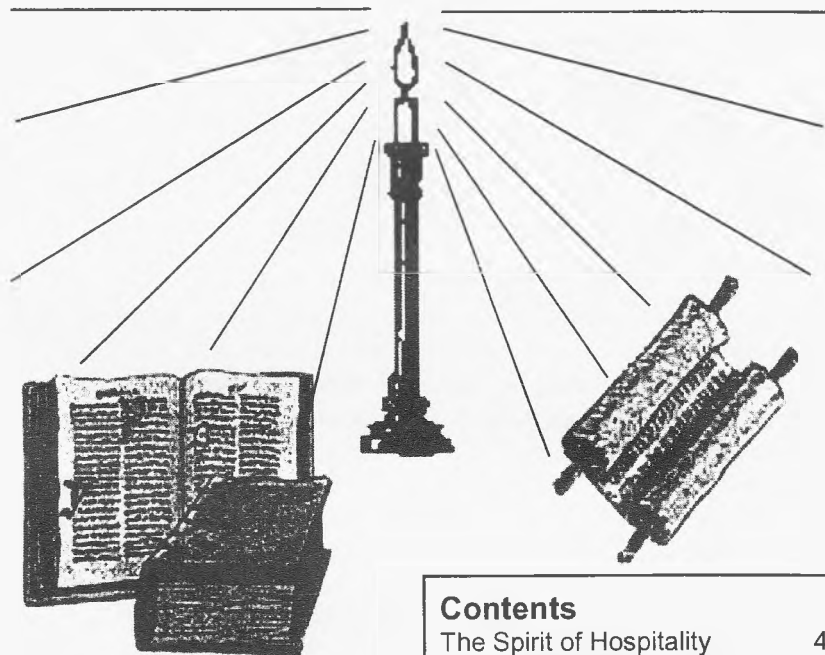
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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.

THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY

Love is shown in many ways, and those who have a home can express it by their hospitality. Even if we do not have a home with walls and a roof, we can welcome others into our personal space, to share what we have—maybe a place of refuge, or a meal to share, or company and conversation, sharing our circle of friends, our fellowship, our faith.

Among the qualifications for elders Paul specifies *"a lover of hospitality"*, and under his general exhortations to Christians he lists *"given to hospitality"* (Rom. 12.13). Peter says, *"Use hospitality one to another without grudging"*, while Heb. 13. 2 reads, *"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"*. The deliverance of Lot out of Sodom depended upon his hospitality to the angels. In Biblical times the practice of entertaining strangers was a very necessary one, when there was no other provision for lodging travellers as there is in modern society.

Hospitality is usually associated with providing food and lodging, but it is by no means limited to this. If we really entertain others we do more than put a meal in front of our guests. We shower love and attention upon them. We do our utmost to make them welcome and to make them feel at home. Indeed so important are these other factors, especially under present-day conditions, that we should not consider it hospitality without them; neither indeed would it be, for this is the very spirit of hospitality.

But the spirit of hospitality is expressed not merely by inviting others to our houses, for this is often done for selfish motives. We can invite them into

our fellowship and into our affections, making room for them and their convictions in the spirit of liberty, even though at temporary inconvenience and sacrifice to ourselves. The spirit of hospitality will create in us an earnest desire that we may be able to give some blessing and help to others on their earthly pilgrimage. It will make us generous, not only in what we give, but in what we allow in our judgment and in our treatment of those from whom we may differ in matters of interpretation. We shall have the spirit of Jesus who taught us to pray, "Forgive us, as we forgive".

The hospitality of the widow was put to the test very sorely when Elijah told her to first bake him a cake out of her last scanty handful of meal upon which the lives of her son and herself were depending. But her compliance in faith with this request brought a reward beyond her dreams. The Shunammite woman, whose hospitality freely provided a little chamber for the prophet Elisha, was also greatly blessed by God, who is no man's debtor, and never overlooks the least service done to those who belong to Him. The spirit of hospitality in our hearts, in seeking to give freely of our love and service, will most surely receive generous recompense from the Giver of every good and perfect gift. *(Forest Gate Bible Monthly)*

HIGH LEIGH CONFERENCE

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

Monday 16th – Sunday 22nd August 2010

The High Leigh Conference Centre has grown over the years, and at meal times we find ourselves in the company of other Christians from varying backgrounds. Our own meetings are held in the modernised Barclay Room or the traditional Oak Room. The talks, discussions, studies and devotionals are varied, holding loosely to the conference theme and allowing freedom of expression. The keynote is mutual love and concern, whether in conversation or in prayer, whether sitting with the less mobile or running after the children or singing God's praises together.

Theme The Promises of God (Past, Present and Future)

All ages are welcome. A programme for teens and younger ones will be provided

Contact: Accommodation Secretary Joan Charcharos 01442 381 550

THE WILDERNESS TEMPTATION

Setting the course for His ministry

"Then was Jesus led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." (Matt.4.1)

The baptism of Jesus was not the result of a sudden decision. He came to Jordan with His mind already set on the mission before Him. He had for many years been studying the Old Testament Scriptures, perceiving more and more clearly what His lifework was to be. He came to John at just the right time, when he was thirty years old and therefore 'of age' under the Jewish law. The same Holy Spirit of God that had supervised and guided His every action since childhood, had opened His mind to the meaning of the Scriptures, and drawn Him to Bethabara where John was baptising. Now, the Holy Spirit was leading Him – Mark says *driving* Him – to the next phase of His experience, the sober consideration of how and in what way He was to carry out His mission of saving the world. It was inevitable that the temptations should come, and in the very nature of things that they should come right at the beginning of His ministry, when, conscious of His Divine power, He would very quickly realise the possibilities.

"He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry." He had gone into the wilderness *"in the spirit"*, a condition of mind something like that of John in Revelation, when he was *"in the spirit on the Lord's day"* (Rev.1.10). Or perhaps of Ezekiel when the Spirit lifted him up by the river of Chebar, and he saw visions of God (Ezek.7.3). In such a condition of mind Jesus would be more than usually insensible to His surroundings and His bodily needs. His mind, fully occupied during those forty days and nights with the prospect before Him, going over all the details of the mission He was setting out to accomplish, would give but little heed to the claims of the body. It is not likely that He ate nothing at all during that time, but that He spared time from His rapt condition of mind only to take the barest sustenance, so when at last He began again to become conscious of His environment the claims of hunger asserted themselves.

"And when the tempter came to him." In this story of the temptations the whole idea conveyed is that of a personal being with whom our Lord held converse. This was certainly the general belief in our Lord's own day. The Book of Wisdom, which was written within fifty years of the time of Christ, is an accurate reflection of Jewish thought at the time of the First Advent. In Wisdom 2.24 it is indicated that the devil (*diabolos*) is the one through whom death came into the world at the beginning, as related in the third chapter of Genesis. It is important also to remember that the story as we have it must have come from

our Lord's own lips, for no one else could have told these things to His disciples; and there is an interesting fragment in the so-called "*Gospel of the Ebionites*" that asserts this much: "*The Lord told us that for forty days the Devil spoke with him and tempted him*".

It might be said of course that the account could have been given to the Evangelists by direct inspiration, but in that case the accounts would surely have been in the same order. That they differ as much as they do, points to their having been written from the recollections of the disciples as to what Jesus did say actually to them, even although without doubt they were guided in their writing by the Holy Spirit.

We can picture Jesus, sitting with His disciples on a grassy bank, or walking with them through the fields, suddenly making some allusion to that time which was the preface to His ministry. He would tell them of the insidious suggestions that came into His mind, and the replies with which He countered them, when for forty days and forty nights He was alone with Satan.

This temptation of Jesus is the preface to His life and work, just as the temptation of the first Adam was the preface to the life and work of man. The first Adam failed under temptation; the second triumphed. There is a striking analogy between the first and second temptations. The tree of Gen.3.6 was good for food; in Matt. 4 Jesus is invited to make the stones into bread. The tree was pleasant to the eyes; Jesus is urged to create a magnificent spectacle by throwing Himself down from the Temple. The tree was "*greatly to be desired to make one wise*"; all the power, wealth, and honour of this world is offered to our Lord.

Mark puts in a detail that has escaped the other Evangelists. He says that Jesus "*was with the wild beasts*". A strange phrase; connected with it perhaps is the old Christian tradition that when Jesus spent those forty days in the wilderness all the wild beasts of the world came before Him to pay homage. Perhaps there is a profound truth behind the tradition and behind Mark's statement. Perfect man possessed powers of control over the lower creation which were lost at the Fall. Jesus must have possessed those powers and doubtless exercised them in the wilderness. Leopards, wolves, hyenas and jackals lived in that same wilderness in the Lord's day, and there may even have been an occasional lion, for they were plentiful there in earlier days. Wolves were seen there even in the twentieth century. The Lord may well have told His disciples of His exercise of such power and Mark records the bare kernel of what He said.

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread." Not that Jesus might allay His hunger; the suggestion was more subtle than that. It was nothing less than that He use His powers to satisfy

the material needs of man there and then. Jesus had come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. Here was a short cut to that glorious fulness of human life to which Jesus intends eventually to draw "whosoever will". Why not do that at once, without waiting for the much longer outworking of God's purpose. It would be so easy to transform the economic system of the country, to drive out the Roman soldiers and the tax-gatherers and all who became fat upon the misery of the people. Why not make the barren land fruitful and productive and the vineyards and olive-groves yield tenfold their former fruitage. *"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."* It would be so easy to bring about literal fulfilment of those old prophecies, and to bring in the Times of Restoration at once, instead of waiting God's own time.

That would have deprived humankind of needed experience of obedience, it would not have dealt with sin, and death would still continue even though man's lot had been immeasurably improved. Jesus knew that the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment, and He knew too that there could be only one possible answer to the suggestion. That was found in Deut.8 *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

Then followed another temptation. *"The devil took him up into the holy city, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down'; for it is written 'He shall give his angels charge of you...'"* This "pinnacle of the temple" was probably the parapet of the portico of Herod, overlooking the valley of Jehoshaphat seven hundred feet below. It was not literally, but spiritually, that Jesus stood on that parapet and heard the insidious voice suggesting that by some such spectacular feat He could attract the notice of all men to His mission. Perhaps He remembered the tradition, current in His own day amongst the Jews, that the Messiah would appear suddenly from Heaven descending upon the crowd of worshippers in the Temple court. But there was more in the temptation than that. Judas in later days was beset by the same temptation, and fell under it. Jesus, standing in spirit on the pinnacle of the temple, realised all that the sacred edifice stood for to the patriotic Jew. Two parties at least, the Pharisees and the Zealots, longed desperately for the day when the alien usurper would be driven out from Judah's land and the people of God enter into their inheritance again. To all such, the Temple became the symbol of their hopes and their cause. Jesus must have thought how easy it would be to assume the leadership of those political parties and from the pinnacle of that power gather every element in the country to a swift descent upon the Roman authority,

driving it far beyond the boundaries of Judea and establishing the mountain of the Lord's house in the top of the mountains.

That would be setting up the Kingdom of love and peace by means of the sword, and Jesus knew that *"they who take the sword must perish with the sword"*. Hezekiah the Zealot had tried it, and failed. His son Judas the Galilean nearly won through, but he failed. In the year A.D.70 the entire nation, driven to desperation, tried again, and failed so utterly that they lost all and were scattered among the nations. Jesus turned away from the alluring prospect, knowing that this was not the way of God.

"The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these things I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me'." Luke says that the Devil showed Him all these kingdoms and their glory *"in a moment of time"*. John Bunyan's scornful comment on that observation was "it did not take the devil long to show all that he had". As Jesus thought of the great panoply of human might represented in the kingdoms of this world, He might well have pondered on the manner in which He would eventually succeed to the throne of the world. Instead of confining His mission and work to the land and people of Israel, why not reach out to the lands beyond, to Egypt and Greece, and to Parthia, Rome's great rival in the East. Why not wrest the rule of Rome itself from the feeble fingers of the ageing Tiberius Caesar, and from that great city rule in righteousness.

Jesus rejected the short cut, the easy way, the course that could lead only to temporary alleviation of human misery and none at all of human sin. He re-affirmed His determination to follow, at all costs, the pathway marked out for Him by His Father. He answered all the suggestions with "It is written" (quoting Moses in Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8), and the Devil, baffled, left him for a season.

AOH

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"All the trouble that ever came into the world came by two things—listening to the lies of the devil and disbelieving God. Every conceivable blessing comes by the converse of these two things—turning a deaf ear to the devil's lies and fully believing God."

"The word of God shows clearly where to step now. If we take the next step in the light the lamp moves with us, until we come to the eternal day."

WHEN ?

The four men were concerned. Jesus had been saying some dreadful things - or were they perhaps hopeful things? - and the four disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, wanted to know when it would all happen. They saw Jesus sitting looking across at the great Temple in Jerusalem, and they came quietly to him, and asked him, When?

The four had been the first disciples, chosen by Jesus at the lakeside in Galilee. Jesus had come into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1.15). They had felt that this was the time their ancestors had prayed for. Micah had said "Many nations shall come, and say 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.... that he may teach us his ways.... Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples.... they shall beat their swords into plowshares.... they shall sit every man under his vine and his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid" (4.1-5). Was this the time? Jesus had set about his task. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.... release to the captives.... recovering of sight to the blind.... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4.18-19). Everybody was wondering if he was the 'One who is to come', and he sent word to John the Baptist in prison, "....the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me" (Luke 7.22-3). It was all true.

In the midst of all this excitement the Pharisees had come to Jesus and asked him to say when the kingdom of God was coming. Jesus had replied that the kingdom was already in their midst. A safe answer, perhaps, since it avoided ranging himself alongside the zealots whom the Romans were so regularly putting down. But it was true. It made them all think about what they understood by the kingdom of God. How did they react to what Jesus was teaching and doing? The kingdom was in the hearts of those who were ready to obey him, and in the powerful activity of the Spirit at work.

But to the disciples Jesus had been saying a different thing. The 'days of the Son of Man' are future - they knew the words of the Scripture in Daniel 7.13-14, "With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This

was an experience for the future, something they would long for. As for the present moment, Peter and Andrew, James and John and all the others were perplexed. Jesus was telling them that first he must suffer many things and be rejected (Luke 17.25). So what was next?

There was a day of glory and excitement when the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with palm branches, but Jesus' mood included a grief that did not match the occasion. Then, in the days that followed came challenge after challenge. It was not just the leaders who felt their position threatened (he did weigh into the scribes and pharisees). It was the ingrained habits and emotions of the people. He dealt with the animals for sale in the courtyard of God's House, but that did not take away the insidious greed that put them there. He used crowd psychology to frustrate those who were questioning his authority, but how could self-assertion and self-glory be part of the Kingdom? The disciples themselves had learned a lesson about that—that child he set among them.

Jesus was well aware of the hatred that some felt toward him. They wanted to murder him. He confronted his enemies with a story which linked them with those who had killed God's prophets in the past. This could only stir them to action against him. Some were trying to turn the people against him because he was not anti-Roman, or to turn the Romans against him as a dissident. He dealt with their trickery, but did the way to the kingdom of God consist of avoiding political traps? And there were the clever-clever Sadducees with a trick question of another kind. While the disciples watched, money was flooding into the temple treasury from the rich who could well afford it, as a way to show their religion and their importance.

The situation boiled up. Jesus left the temple. He told the people they would not see him again until they were ready to accept and not reject One whom God had sent. As he went, someone remarked on the temple building. It was a magnificent construction at the centre of national life. Jesus said, it would be destroyed.

We may not know exactly what the four disciples were thinking. Their hopes that their nation would be redeemed and God's kingdom set up among them were fading. Jesus himself was expecting to suffer: death? But then he would come as the Son of Man in glory. But he said that their great Temple would be demolished, stone after stone. Must everything be broken before the new age could come? And when? when?

When Jesus spoke the words we find in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, he was encouraging some distressed and puzzled men, the four who asked him, and the others too. It may not have been one long spiel, a

conversation rather, and perhaps the answers he gave to the various questions have been recorded together. Although his words have been subjected to the ingenuity of prophetic students, and read by Christians for almost two thousand years, they were first addressed to the needs of these beloved four disciples who would soon be left on their own.

First, they must not be taken in by the self-proclaimed Messiahs that were apt to set themselves up in that era. They should expect there to be a full ration of wars, riots and rumours of war - these were inevitable, but did not mark the end of the present order. Neither did international conflicts, famines, earthquakes, epidemics, fearful happenings in the sky. These things were a beginning, not the end. Don't be rushed into thinking the end has come.

Second, before these world troubles, they themselves could expect trouble as his followers. He would not be there with them. Jewish council and synagogue would call them to account, and also the Roman authorities. They should use all this as an opportunity to tell about Him and his message, not in a pre-planned way but trusting the Holy Spirit to give them the right words at the time. Even the 'good news' would have the effect of dividing families. They must endure what came, trusting God for ultimate salvation.

Jesus did not answer their 'when' question directly. They must settle down to endure for a long time - right to the very end. And they would be saved.

They wanted to know about the Temple being rased. In this, there were signs to be looked for, notably when the temple - holy to the Lord - would be abused, the 'abomination of desolation' in the Holy Place. And when foreign armies come, get out. It will be very bad. The foreigners will have their time of domination. The end will not come until the gospel has spread into all the non-Jewish world.

Jesus repeated the warnings he had given not to be taken in by false Messiahs. The day of the Son of Man would have nothing hole and corner about it, it would be as universal as lightning. There would be a time of terrible suffering. Astronomical disturbances should not terrify them, but inspire them with hope that the end was coming. Even if the whole world is shattered by meteor or tsunami and people live in fear, they will see 'the Son of Man coming with power and great glory'.

Don't be terrified of any of this. The troubles you see may be just the beginning, like the first leaves of spring. The kingdom of God is as certain as the harvest. It is only a lifetime away.

When? When? No one knows, only the Father. So that means you must always be ready, just like servants waiting for their master to come back from a journey. Everything prepared, doing their job, looking out for

him.

There is such a lot you will have to endure. Pray, pray that you will have the strength to come through. Then you will stand before me in the kingdom.

The Book of Acts and the reports of history tell how the future worked out in the lives of these four men. In their immediate future, Jesus was captured, killed - and rose to life again. His visible disappearance into the skies marked the end of his time with them, but the Holy Spirit took His place. And the troubles of which He spoke began to occur, and also the opportunities.

So are there lessons for us? Readers may have their thoughts, but here are two suggestions:

(1) When the Pharisees 'asked when', concerning the kingdom of God as they conceived it, they failed to appreciate the kingdom in their midst, shown by Jesus working in people's lives. Let us be aware of the kingdom wherever it is already under our noses.

(2) When the disciples 'asked when', they could not be told a date. Instead their Lord looked on them in love, and encouraged them to settle down to a life of faithful endurance as they waited for Him to come back. Does He ask anything different of us? GC

Sometime

*Sometime we're going to do a kindly deed,
Or speak a word to some lonely heart,
Sometime we're going to plant the living seed
In soil where it will thrive and do its part.
Sometime we'll stop to help a wearied soul
That staggers underneath a heavy load;
Sometime, we'll pause, while rushing towards the goal,
To aid a brother on the rocky road.*

*Sometime we're going to stop the ceaseless grind -
This everlasting fevered life we lead,
And be more loving, tender, true and kind;
More thoughtful and more ready to forgive.
Sometime we'll only see the good in men,
Be blind to all the worthless and the bad,
And recollect our own defects, and then
Just strive to make the whole world bright and glad.*

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body." (1 Cor. 10. 16-17).

In these burning words Paul has laid bare for us the fundamental principle of our fellowship. Throughout his busy life he strove consistently for one supreme object, the union of the Body of Christ, the welding together of all who named the Name into a unity of the Spirit that would defy all attempts to break. He succeeded only partially; the visible Church of Christ has never measured up in full to the spirit of our Lord's last prayer "that they may be one, even as we are" (John 17. 22). The human element has often failed the inspiration of the Spirit. But the prayer of Jesus has not gone unanswered. In every generation from Pentecost to the present there have been some who have entered so fully into the spirit of Christ's message that they have over-ridden the bonds and bars fashioned by men and found themselves at one with others of like understanding. True Christians may recognise each other wherever found and there is a unity of the Spirit which transcends and ignores all denominational barriers.

An outward expression of that unity is to be found in the Memorial of the Last Supper and the coming together from time to time in regular assembly for the simple sharing of bread and wine—a symbolic feast that at one and the same time expresses our one-ness with each other and our oneness with the Lord. Whether that celebration be as often as once a week or as seldom as once a year it always symbolises, not only our acknowledgment of the saving power of our Lord's death, our acceptance to ourselves of his shed blood and sacrificed life, our association with him in the offering of life to the world; not only all this, but also that kinship, that brotherhood, that oneness with each other as brethren in Christ, without which none of the other significance can be really appreciated by us or true of us. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, asks James, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen? So the one that has not entered truly into living relationship with his brethren may by no means be in living relationship with Christ. His acceptance by and standing with Christ may be, and is, the result of an individual decision and based upon his personal justification by faith, but he can effectively maintain that acceptance and standing only by becoming one of "the brethren", a fellow-member of the Body. He must enter and accept the communion of saints.

Paul chose a wonderful word to express this relationship, and he used it in a variety of connections in order to show how intimately this "common-union" enters into every aspect of our Christian walk in the flesh, and extends

beyond this life into the future glory. And this text in 1 Cor. 10 is a fitting commencing point for a sober consideration of all that the word implies, just as the ceremony itself is the centre and basis of our Christian life and fellowship.

"Communion"! What does it mean? What is there in the word to stamp it as particularly and peculiarly expressive of all that is deepest and most precious in our dealings and intercourse the one with the other? "Communion" in the Greek means the act of using a thing in common, or as we would say, sharing together in the use of a thing. It has its origin in the word which is translated "common" in Acts 2. 44, "*all that believed were together and had all things common*" and Acts 4. 32, "*they had all things common*". Now this is a good pointer to the principle behind the word, for it is beyond doubt that the primitive Church of the days immediately following Pentecost, when they sold possessions and parted to every man as each had need, grasped this thought of the family relationship perhaps more clearly than did the Church at any other time. Here, it seems, is the basis for the Apostle's expression "the communion—*common sharing*— of the body of Christ". The same word is used in Titus 1 4 "*the common faith*" and Jude 3 "*the common salvation*" where the meaning, that of something to be held and shared together, is obvious.

But this word "communion" is also sometimes translated "fellowship", sometimes "communicate", sometimes "partaker". Each of these aspects of our Christian life is an aspect of the communion of the saints and as such is intimately associated with our understanding of the act of celebration. The early Church, we are told, "continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine *and fellowship*"—communion (Acts 2. 42). James, and John, and Peter, extended to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of *fellowship*—communion (Gal. 2. 9). Paul exhorted that he who is taught in the word should *communicate*—share with—him that teacheth (Gal. 6. 6). These few instances are enough to show that in the minds of the Apostles the fellowship of the brethren was the same thing as the "communion of the Body of Christ". We sometimes tend to think and speak of our "fellowship" as of a mere social contact and the enjoyment of a pleasant time together. The New Testament writers knew of no such thing. To them the fellowship of the brethren was a deep-rooted and vital association together in Christ—common-sharing in all the obligations, all the endurance, and all the joys of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus.

And as though testifying to their realisation of the practical implications of this association with all that Jesus stood for, which they had entered, the Apostles made it clear that we are sharers together in a

communion of good works, a mutual care the one for the other, extending out of the realm of spiritual things into that of material things. "*Distributing* to the necessity of saints" says Paul in Rom. 12. 13, where *distributing* is the same word as "*communion*". "To do good and to *communicate*—to share with others—forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13. 16). An account is given in Rom. 15. 26 of some in Macedonia and Achaia who were pleased "to make a certain *contribution* (communion) for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem". How tender and eloquent a way of expressing their material help so freely rendered; not a "gift", not "charity", but a "common-sharing". And that these Macedonian and Achaian believers had the right understanding of the matter as well as the right spirit is beyond all doubt. Their "common-sharing" of material things followed logically from their position in the "communion of saints". Had there been no common-sharing they would have been outside the communion, no matter how extensive their knowledge of the Truth, how eloquent their discourses, or profound their studies.

It is out of this practical brotherliness that effective fellowship in service is born. There is a communion in the Gospel which is the inspiring force behind all powerful proclamation of the Kingdom message. In writing to the Philippians Paul speaks of this "*fellowship*—communion—of the gospel" (Phil. 1. 5) and the "*fellowship*"—communion—of the Spirit" (Phil. 2. 1). To the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8. 4) he refers to the "*fellowship*—communion—of the ministering to the saints" where the allusion is to service in material, and not in spiritual things. In this really marvellous Scripture we have the Macedonians who provided the gift, Paul who carried the gift, and the Jerusalem Christians who received the gift, all joined together in the communion—sharing together—of the ministration. Could there be any greater depth of Christian unity than is implied by this relationship where the donor, the messenger and the recipient are all considered as one, sharing together in the privilege of the ministration? Herein lay the secret of the power of that early Church; they were welded together as one family, one Body, and the welfare of each was the concern of all. Thus their outward witness was powerful and effective, because it had behind it the driving power of a solidly compact body of people who maintained their essential unity in Christ and with each other.

This in turn led to a realistic understanding of their common participation in the sufferings of Christ. There was no beclouding or confusing the plain issue by theological definitions of doubtful value and full of incipient sources of argument and misunderstanding. To these earnest, enthusiastic souls, participation in the sufferings of Christ was a sharing the life that He lived and enduring the same trials and distresses that came upon

him in consequence of that way of life; and this participation was a very real thing to them. The history of early Christian persecution and martyrdom shows that. The ordeal of fire which so many of them went through and endured until death released them from their sufferings is too terrible to recount—historians have already described it in sufficient detail. Let it be realised that nothing but the one-ness of the Church in which all members suffered with one, and so the strength of all was given to one in the hour of need, could have enabled them thus to endure. Many in later times have wondered how those stoical souls withstood the fiendish cruelty of their pagan persecutors. The answer is that their strength was not of themselves, it was of the Body, and from him Who is the Head of that Body. And without the true unity of the Spirit the strength would not have been theirs. Paul knew this when he desired that he "might know . . . the *fellowship*—communion—of his (Christ's) sufferings" (Phil. 3. 10). He knew that in that common-sharing there resided a source of strength such as his own self-resolution could never give him. To the Corinthians he says "as ye *are partakers*—common-sharers—of the sufferings (both of Christ and of his disciples) so shall ye also be of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1.7). That word "consolation" is full of significance here. It means the arrival of help at a time when it is needed (*paraklesis*—a being alongside to help). That is the effect of conscious sharing in the sufferings of one another and of our Master—it gives strength to withstand all that makes our Christian way difficult and arduous.

There is then a "being alongside to help". What wonder, then, that Peter, in the calm maturity of his old age, bids his suffering brethren to "rejoice, inasmuch as ye are *partakers*—common-sharers—of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4. 13). And it is Peter who takes us to the highest level of this communion of saints, for in two eloquent Scriptures he relates it to the consummation of our glorious hope. In 2 Pet. 1. 4 he tells us that we shall be "*partakers*—common-sharers—of the divine nature" and in 1 Pet. 5. 1 that we shall be "*partakers*—common-sharers—of the glory that shall be revealed". The communion of saints is not only one of suffering, it is also one of glory. The fellowship that is begun here below in conditions of "weakness and much trembling" is to be continued forever in that eternal kingdom where it will be expanded into the glorious fellowship of the general assembly of the Church of the First-Born, whose names are written in heaven.

Seeing then that we know these things, how ignoble and petty become those specious arguments which limit and restrict the unity which

can exist between all who name the Name. We who have a glorious hope for mankind, a clear perception of the Divine Plan, and a noble tradition going back to Apostolic days, should we be one whit behind those who in those same early times took their Lord at his word, and because He bade them "share together", brought that spirit of sharing into every phase and aspect of their fellowship, and in that joyful union found a strength and a power that in its outworking shook the pagan world until that world tottered and fell? If we in our day could by any means achieve a unity such as that, what man could foretell the magnitude of the blessing that would flow out from the "communion of saints"?

TWO SIMONS

The story of an opportunity

The last few days of Jesus' earthly life were full of mental and physical strain. Luke says (21.37-38) *"And in the day time He was teaching in the Temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the Temple, for to hear him."* Following this came the last Passover and a long talk, then the Garden with its anguish and agony. An armed company came to take one defenceless man. He was betrayed by a kiss, bound and led away to trial. Mocked, humiliated, insulted, scourged and crowned with thorns, Jesus began his journey to Calvary. Bearing his Cross for himself, he went forth to die. (John 19.17 RV).

When the journey began Jesus was "led" forth carrying the cross but before the place called Calvary was reached and probably at a point just outside the north gate of the city (note *"as they came out"* in Matt. 27.32) it was necessary to transfer the heavy cross to someone else's shoulders. Moreover whereas at the beginning of the journey He was "led", at the close of it, such was his physical exhaustion, that He was "brought" or "borne along" (Mark 15.20,22). Even his sinless body had its limits of endurance and they were reached that day. For three and a half years He had daily poured out his soul unto death, giving forth his vitality and strength. Now like the Psalmist (Psa.73.26), he could say, *"My flesh and my heart fails but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever"*. His faith never faltered though his steps might. A passer by was 'impressed' by the Centurion in charge, one Simon, a Cyrenian, and he walked behind Jesus bearing the cross.

Perhaps he was one of the "scattered abroad" Jews mentioned by Peter, come up to keep the Passover and *obliged* to lodge himself outside the city. Suddenly he found himself compelled under the law of Rome to carry a burden laid upon him by the Roman soldiers. The unlooked for happened and he found himself with his day's programme changed, walking in a direction opposite to that he had intended, following a Person with whom he had never thought to be associated and bearing a burden he had never dreamed of carrying! How came it that the moment at which Simon met the procession was the very one at which the Centurion decided that somebody was wanted to carry a *cross*? If Simon had been a little earlier or later, if he had entered by another gate, if the Centurion's eye had looked in another direction; but there are no *ifs* in the outworking of God's purposes. Behind apparently chance circumstances lies the planning of the wise God, that was why Simon's name that day found a place on the page of Scripture. Nothing happens by chance where God's providences are concerned. It is not likely that Simon welcomed the interruption of his day's programme but it was God's way of bringing him into touch with Jesus.

It must have happened like that in thousands of cases since; some trivial circumstance, some slight incident, some strange turn of event has made all the differences in the life. Sickness, sorrow, loss, the breaking up of a cherished plan, these and a host of other unwelcome happenings have resulted in bringing many into touch with the Lord Jesus.

Peter, the leading Apostle; how was it he was not carrying his Master's cross at that great moment? If he had been as good as his word and had lived up to his boast he would have been so close to Jesus that morning that it would have been impossible for any other to be chosen to carry the cross. A few hours previously Peter had said, "*I am ready to go with thee, to prison and death*" and when somebody was really needed to go with him to the place of death, Peter was not there. He was afar off hiding his tears and his shame, far off with that last look his Master gave him burning into his tortured mind. The echo of his own denials and curses was still in his ears; so Simon Peter lost the opportunity that could never come back. Never again was the Son of God to walk that sorrowful way of the cross and because Peter was not there he lost the right to carry the cross for his Lord and go step by step with him to Calvary. Think of it! Their Lord and Master who had shown such willingness to serve them in the most menial of tasks – washing their feet – needed such a service at such a moment. Not one of his own disciples was at hand to render it, so that to a stranger the undying honour must fall.

Simon the Cyrenian in a very real sense took Simon Peter's place that day. How glad we are that the grace of God restored Peter to his place, for he was in peril of losing, not only his opportunity of service in carrying the cross after Jesus but also his crown, "*Let no man take thy crown*". The sight of a man carrying his cross was quite familiar in Jerusalem. Our Lord had chosen the figure of a cross bearer as an illustration of a true disciple and added the paradox concerning losing life by saving it and saving life by losing it. Everyone seeing a man carrying his cross saw one whose life here was ended. So it is with one who sets out to carry his cross, he is severing his connection with old pursuits belonging to the old life, and following Christ into the new life. Simon the Cyrenian had this signal honour; alone of all the characters of Scriptures he was the embodiment of our Lord's own illustration of a true disciple – a man carrying a cross after Christ! See him associated with Jesus in his shame, all his strength devoted to the carrying of a cross, walking pace for pace behind the Lord himself, but with this difference – Simon carried Christ's cross: the disciple carries his own. The disciple's cross is Christ's only in the sense that he bears it voluntarily, gladly for "*my sake*". (Mark 8.35). Paul is our example. He was always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor.4.10) and filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ (Col.1.24). He counted all things but loss and dross that he might win Christ and be found in him.

We may suppose that Simon the Cyrenian never forgot that morning's burden carrying, nor the incidents that came after. If the Centurion who laid the cross on him was constrained before the day was out to say "*truly this was the Son of God*", we may believe that Simon's heart was reached. Simon is mentioned in Mark 15.21 as being the father of two sons, Alexander and Rufus. These two men were evidently well known Christians at the time Mark's Gospel came to be written, the evangelist doubtless mentioned them by name because they were known to those Christians to whom he was writing. This in itself is strongly in favour of the assumption that Simon was so moved by his experiences on that eventful day that he became a follower in the deeper and spiritual sense of him whose cross he bore, and trained his boys to do the same.

TH

God's comfort is a deposit—a trust. Your only power of comforting others is that you were brought into some deep place and God met you. Afflictions are qualifying you for ministry.

A. Daintree

THE STRANGER

There was no point in looking back. Three crosses etched against the sky, brutal, violent, bloody. Scars in the memory.

The two travellers were wrapped within themselves, encircled by pain and despair, so didn't notice the man waiting at the side. He made them start, appearing as he did from the quickening shadows.

May I journey with you?

They nodded silently, barely glancing at him. And so he fell in step with them, yet it seemed a struggle for him to check his stride to theirs, so full of life and vitality and exuberance was he.

Conversation was stilted and disjointed, until in the exasperation the bigger of the men looked at the stranger.

Look! We don't want to talk.

He put his hand on the side of his head.

We've had it up to here, do you understand?

Leave off will you?

The stranger nodded slowly yet did not withdraw from them. And they walked on and the silence seemed heavy. But it was impossible for him to be silenced and in the end he had to ask,

Why do you grieve so much?

The other traveller needed to talk and with a deep breath he turned to the stranger,

We watched our friend die, he began, and in the dusk he saw again, in the face of the stranger, the look of the man he loved and his grief caught him and his voice broke and he turned away to smother down the pain.

He was more than our friend, the first traveller rapped out furiously.

More than that. Bigger, stronger.

He felt the rage growing inside him.

We had such dreams, such hopes, such belief that we would change the world, feelings and thoughts bigger than words can ever describe.

But as he spoke, the rage started to erupt into an angry tide within, obscuring sense or reason.

But he's dead! He shouted at the stranger.

D'you understand? Dead and cold and empty, just like our hopes and dreams. D'you know what it's like to be like that? To really believe in someone and then he's gone? And you think he'll walk back in through the

door or it's his voice in the crowd or he's just round the corner. And then you remember— he's dead. It's finished and nothing's left.

The traveller stopped, dimly aware that he was towering over the stranger, pushing him back with the force of his rage. And he felt very cold, and his eyes were filled with death and his voice was very quiet,
And worse than all the anger, all the hate, all the guilt, is the pain. Because at the heart of it, we loved him so very much.

The traveller slowly dropped his hands and turned back to the road.
You could never understand this hell.

And because the light had dropped and their hearts were not seeking, they did not see the look on the face of the stranger or they would have recognised one who had lived through hell, through pain at its most searing, through human grief at its deepest.

But the light had dropped. And the moment passed and the stranger fell back in step with them. And this time, somehow, it was different. This time, they all talked— of the past and the present, of dying and living, of God and themselves. And the journey flew by and they forgot their weary hearts and Emmaus was before them.

They hesitated at the crossroads, suddenly awkward at parting. Didn't want to let go.

Come with us, they said. And then the man whose sorrow was caught with rage, held out his hand in welcome.

Please! Come home with us.

Simple words, simply offered, simply received. And the house of the mourning lit the lamps, and the families gathered round the table and watched the stranger with respect. And the stranger took the bread and blessed it, and as his strong fingers tore it in two he bowed his head and it was as if he could no longer bear their lack of seeing, for when he looked up his eyes shone with a truth and with arms flung open, he offered broken bread.

Jesus!!

This imaginative insight into the walk to Emmaus was found by our editor among his papers. We do not know its source, but we would like to thank the unknown author, and hope our readers will have enjoyed it.

HOSEA

The Prophet who learned to love

Part 3 Restoration.

It is said by some commentators that Hosea chapter 11 is one of the 'boldest' in the Old Testament. Yet the early verses in that chapter describe the God that Christians should have come to know. They speak of Him as the God who very tenderly nurtured Israel in its early years as a father does his child.. If God is not seen in this light by Christians it is a reflection on the church that He has not really been thought of as Jesus taught us, as a Father. That was part of Israel's trouble. They did not want a 'father' who would teach by discipline but they wanted a god who could supply their every want and accede to their every whim however selfish. So they turned to the Baals, figments of human imagination, and worshipped at their altars. No matter how much God took care of them and watched over them, their loyalty and allegiance was to idols that could neither see, nor hear nor speak to them.

Yet God pleads with them – how could He allow them to become like the cities of the plain Admah and Zeboim, associated with Sodom and Gomorrah. (Deut 29.3). He assures them that He will be the 'Holy One in the midst.' Israel's unfaithfulness is described as chasing the wind, lusting after things that are valueless and non-existent. When they should be listening to God's prophets they are sacrificing on pagan altars. Then comes the terrible indictment and the only course open to God is to permit a discipline through suffering and exile.

Israel became a trafficker, like one who dealt in the world's wares and they were absorbed in commerce. So they became rich and decadent. It is the way of the world and Israel, like the world in general, suffered the consequences. As later prophets were to show so clearly, they had become rich in the world's wealth, yet the majority of its people lived in poverty.

Such a state of things cannot go on forever. God allows it until the bitter lessons are learned. If men will not learn at the tender hand of a loving God, then they must learn through bitter experience. But God has a purpose through it all. He foresaw in the life of Hosea that the day would come when Israel will be brought back from its bitter exile and through discipline will learn the way of righteousness and peace.

The final chapter, 14, calls Israel to repentance. There is no other way to God and His Word. Preferably the sooner and earlier it occurs the better but all too often it is later. Mankind, individually, can only approach their Creator by one way and that is in total contrition and repentance, and that state of mind must not only remain but become richer and sweeter.

Israel's national life had begun with the Patriarchs. By one means or

another they had matured spiritually, through difficult experiences which required some kind of repentance and discipline. As the nation grew it repeatedly rebelled against God who sent them prophets. They repeatedly brought Israel to repentance and the true faith.

As a prophet, Hosea discovered God's love more fully than most of God's people throughout the ages. Israel seem to have believed that because they had enjoyed specially favours from God with the Patriarchs as their forbears, they had freedom to do as they like and did not readily repent of their sin. They discovered as Christians have to discover that the rules apply to them as much as others. They needed continually be brought back to God. Children bought up in a Christian family by God-fearing parents cannot change the rules. Coming to know God in the fullest sense of the experience requires learning through total repentance and obedience to His will. Yet there have been many who believed that because they were within the security of some large denomination or small tightly knit community of devout and well versed Christians, they needed no personal repentance from their own sin. It is to be hoped that they found out their mistake, as many Law abiding Jews had to at the First Advent.

We all need to learn, as did Israel, that mighty ones, like Assyria, cannot save us. We have to learn that the work of our hands, our idols, cannot save us. But God is ready to take us to Himself, when the lesson is learned, when discipline has done its work and we realise, like Israel of old, that there is only one source of good in the Universe. Then we are ready like Israel to *"live beneath His shadow."*

Most of the great prophecies end on this happy note. Whatever God brings upon His people, or allows to come upon them, in the end He will redeem, restore and find lodging for them close to Himself. The fact that, during this present time, the Church of Jesus Christ has had the role of being God's mouthpiece to the world makes no difference to God's promise to Abraham, that by his descendants, all families of the Earth will be blessed. In the present time the Christian Church as the wild Olive has grafted into the original stock of God's people. But Paul explains that the natural branches can be re-grafted back. Not only so, but all the wicked mentioned in Romans chapter one, now locked up in disobedience, will yet receive God's favour (Romans 11.32). Then all His whole creation will be thoroughly restored.

The planet will be at the right temperature. There will be no need to worry about species dying out. The mineral wealth of the Earth will not be ransacked to provide a few with profit. Best of all, mankind will have been brought close to their God to enjoy the sunlight of His presence forever more. All this will be accomplished because our God is a God of infinite – infinite love and His people will be learning what real love is.

The lesson of Hosea is that of love. It teaches us that God's love for Israel is like that of a man who has been robbed of his wife by her unfaithfulness and who is prepared to search for her until he finds her, until she gets to her extremity and has no one to turn to. He refuses to give up but will go to extraordinary lengths to redeem her from the slavery to which she has sold herself, to take her back to his home and teach her the discipline of faithfulness in marriage. When he has succeeded in that he will restore fully to her marriage partnership.

Hosea's parable tells of the love that transcends our wildest dreams. The knowledge of that love is more valuable than all the academic and intellectual learning we could ever acquired by study listening to a scholar or by reading his books. It will out distance all our efforts to serve God's people and it will make us ready to step into the presence of the mighty King of kings.

As we sow, we shall reap. If we sow in love, a love, that forgives to the uttermost never holds any imagined hurts against our fellow human beings, then we shall reap rewards far beyond our imagination — rewards such as have never entered our hearts and minds. So shall we begin to learn that John had the key to life — God is love

DN

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Part Two

There now comes a significant development. The remaining plagues did not affect the land of Goshen, which was inhabited mainly by Israelites. The natural aspect of these visitations was becoming more and more overshadowed by signs of direct Divine intervention. This, declared Moses, was an evidence of the power of God, making a distinction between Egypt and Israel. From now on Egypt was to be driven more and more into a corner from which there could be no escape. From now on, following the defection of the magicians, Pharaoh was probably losing the support of his councillors, his nobles and his people to an increasing degree. But he was not ready to give in yet.

One hundred and twenty days after the 12th of June—four months—it was the custom to hold what was called the second festival of the Nile, to celebrate the successful culmination of the inundation. From now on the waters would cease to rise and presently, as they receded, the peasants would

rejoicingly commence sowing crops in the rich sediment left on their land by the departing waters. It is almost certain that it is this second festival to which reference is made in 8. 20, in which, after the third plague, the Lord says to Moses *"Rise up early in the morning, stand before Pharaoh. Lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him ..."* In the ordinary way this day was a great national holiday with Pharaoh as the chief figure giving public thanks to the Nile-god for his beneficent work for the year. It must have been with considerable chagrin on this November morning that Amen-hotep, surrounded by his court, came down to the river and found Moses waiting for him again.

Once more the demand: *"Let my people go ... else, if thou wilt not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies upon thee ..."* So the fourth plague came, and all the houses of the Egyptians were filled with what has been variously considered either a particularly virulent species of dog-fly, or else the flying beetle, the scarab beetle which to the Egyptians was the symbol of life. Pharaoh showed the first sign of cracking; he offered to let the people go and sacrifice to the Lord in the wilderness provided they did not go very far away.

The plague was lifted, and Pharaoh broke his promise. Inevitably there came the fifth plague. In December or perhaps early January a widespread epidemic of disease decimated the Egyptians' cattle. *"Bui of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one"*. The effect of previous plagues probably contributed to the inability of the cattle to withstand disease. The expression in 9. 6 *"all the cattle of Egypt died"* need not be interpreted too strictly; in vs. 19 they still had some left. The intention clearly is to indicate that by far the larger proportion succumbed; Egypt was left virtually without cattle.

The pestilence raged for perhaps a month, and was then superseded by a greater horror, an epidemic of eruptive boils breaking forth upon man as well as beast. Perhaps the very magnitude of the calamity made effective medical treatment for any but a very few of the population impossible; men and women suffered without hope.

And now the pace of events is noticeably quickening. The boils on men followed hard on the pestilence among the cattle. Before the people could begin to find measure of relief there fell upon them the seventh plague, a fearful succession of violent storms of thunder and lightning, with torrential hailstones which flattened the young growing crops and broke down the trees. Egypt normally has very little rain; storms such as this must have been quite unknown. In fact the chronicler declares (9. 24) there had been nothing like it since Egypt became a nation. The time of year is clearly indicated, for the barley was in the ear, the flax was in blossom, and the wheat and rye were not yet grown, (31-32), which points to mid-February or early March. It is likely

therefore that these three plagues, pestilence, boils and storms finished up with all three afflicting Egypt more or less simultaneously, for there is no indication of any of the three being lifted as with earlier ones.

Pharaoh's nerve really began to give way under this crushing burden. He *"sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time"*—a masterly understatement—*"the Lord is righteous and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord, (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."* (9. 27, 28). And Moses besought the Lord, and the Lord removed the plagues, and when Pharaoh had received of the goodness of the Lord, his heart hardened itself yet more, and he would not let Israel go.

Within a fortnight, by the middle of March at latest, the locusts came. Locusts have always been a plague to Eastern lands. Even to-day they are a grave menace and the most modern extermination methods are often powerless against them. In all Old Testament imagery nothing is more descriptive of universal utter destruction than the coming of locusts. The Egyptians had no illusions as to what such a visitation meant, and when Moses stood before Pharaoh and declared that if he still refused to let Israel go the Lord would send locusts so numerous that men would no longer be able to see the ground under their feet, and everything that the previous plagues had left they would eat up and strip the land bare, Pharaoh's servants were stricken with terror. *"How long shall this man be a snare to us?"* they cried to the obstinate monarch. *"Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?"* (10.7). It is obvious that popular support for Pharaoh's policy was by now non-existent; the people of Egypt wanted nothing else but to see the last of the Israelites and the wrath of their powerful God. Pharaoh himself was apprehensive; he sent for Moses and Aaron and tried to negotiate terms. Moses was not prepared to negotiate. Unconditional surrender to his demands was the only thing he would accept and his opponent, furious, had them driven from his presence.

By the time the locusts had finished, Egypt was destroyed. *"There remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt"* (10. 15). Such of the growing crops as had escaped the hail had now been consumed by the locusts and there was no food either for man or beast. Without doubt the year of the Exodus was a famine year for Egypt and in fact it must have been many years before the losses suffered in the Plagues were made good. Pharaoh, horrified, besought Moses in haste; *"entreat the Lord your God that he may take away from me this death only"* but it is to be feared he was only concerned with the immediate calamity, for directly the west wind blew and carried all the locusts away into the sea he

reverted to his old intransigence, *"he would not let the children of Israel go"*. Though his empire crash in ruins around his feet and his subjects perish, the proud Amen-hotep refused to bow the knee to this despised Hebrew. Reaction was swift. The day of deliverance was very near in the Divine calendar, perhaps not more than a week or so away. Nothing can stay the execution of God's decree once his clock strikes the hour. The locusts had hardly been swept clear of Egypt when the stupefying darkness which was the ninth plague spread over the land, a darkness so profound that *"they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings"* (10.23).

It was probably the same west wind that expelled the locusts which brought the darkness. Round about March each year there is frequently a strong south-west wind from the deserts bringing clouds of fine sand, blowing in spells of two to three days at a time. The sandstorms are so dense that on occasion they blot out the sun and it is quite conceivable that a particularly thick and sufficiently widespread sandstorm could produce the total darkness upon the earth which is stated of this plague. The fact that the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, was unaffected, strengthens the case for thinking this was the cause of the darkness. Goshen lay farthest away from the western deserts and would be least likely in the natural order to suffer from such visitations.

Once more Moses and Aaron trod the familiar road to the palace, both of them more confident than ever, Pharaoh more edgy and apprehensive than ever. He was ready to concede all their demands but one; they must leave their flocks and herds behind. To do that would have been a virtual death sentence on the host; their flocks and herds were essential to their sustenance whilst in the wilderness and Moses rejected the proposal with scorn. *"There shall not an hoof be left behind"* he asserted flatly and at that Pharaoh lost his temper and ordered Moses to see his face no more *"for in that day thou seest my face thou shall die"*.

"Thou hast spoken well" said Moses curtly. *"I will see thy face again no more."*

(To be concluded)

"By reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus"
John 12.11 How would you like a testimony of this kind? Because of him or her many believed in Jesus. What an epitaph for your gravestone! To so live and serve that others were drawn to follow Christ! How worthwhile! The Christ-life will attract the observer. Let us go in for reflecting His beauty.

J R McM Keswick Calendar

SAFE TO ROME

Malta

"The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the roots of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever; yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God." (Jonah 2.5-6).

That eloquent thanksgiving by the Hebrew prophet Jonah after his deliverance from this same sea may have echoed in Paul's mind upon finding that he and all with him were safe on dry land. It was dry only in a relative sense for apparently the rain was beating down remorselessly, and in the early morning it was biting cold. So says Luke who, like the rest, stood there dripping wet after scrambling up from the sea. The wind blew strongly and the great waves came rolling up the beach. Out in the channel the ship from which they had escaped was rapidly breaking up. They were safe, but they needed warmth, shelter and food.

Their plight did not go unobserved. The inhabitants of the island quickly came to their aid. *"The barbarous people (natives) showed us no little kindness"* continues Luke *"for they kindled a fire and received us, every one"* (28.2). The term "barbarian" as used by the Greeks did not indicate an uncultured people, as would be denoted by English usage. It was a word describing any people outside their normal circle of contacts in the Roman and Egyptian worlds, without reference to the stage of culture or civilisation achieved. The Maltese of that day were descendants of the Phoenicians and just as cultured as the Greeks and Romans. They were friendly too, and set about doing something practical for these shipwrecked mariners so unceremoniously introduced to their country. Probably some kind of encampment was set up to house the two hundred and seventy-six, and a great fire made around which the shivering men could dry themselves and take stock of the position.

Julius, the centurion, soon turned his official position as a military officer to good account. Not far away was the residence of the Governor of the island, one Publius. Paul and his fellows, Luke and Aristarchus, together no doubt with Julius and his senior men, were entertained at the house of Publius for three days, probably whilst suitable permanent lodgings were being found. This visit heralded a short season notable for the last recorded exercise of miraculous power by Paul and therefore the last to be noted in the New Testament. It is rather remarkable that when, later on in Paul's life, there were two instances of close personal friends

and valued fellow-workers, Onesiphorus of Colosse and Trophimus of Ephesus, being seriously ill the Apostle did not use this power to heal them. It is almost as if its exercise was strictly reserved for purposes connected with the witness of the Gospel to unbelievers and not for the converted. At any rate, when Paul found that the father of his host was lying sick of fever and dysentery. The "*bloody flux*" of the Authorised Version reflects the hazy knowledge of medical matters possessed by our seventeenth century translators. Luke uses the correct medical term ('fever and dysentery' RSV). Paul lost no time in effecting a cure, and in consequence was soon besieged by suppliants from all over the island bringing their sick and diseased for healing.

It is not likely that any question of "faith-healing" in the modern sense of the term is involved here. The subjects of these cures were pagans, worshippers of Roman, Greek and Oriental gods and goddesses. No suggestion is made that they believed in Christ and by faith in the power of His Name were made whole. Paul prayed, and laid his hands on the sufferer, and the healing was effected. Any faith involved in the transaction was that of Paul himself. In this, the proceeding differs from certain similar instances during the lifetime of Christ, when the suppliant was specifically told that if he had faith, then he could be healed. In at least one notable instance the Lord could do no mighty works because of unbelief. When Peter healed the lame man in the Temple porch he said "*His Name through faith in his name has made this man strong*" (Acts 3.16), but here in Malta there was nothing of that, only the belief that Paul possessed a marvellous power of healing. The account is certainly literally true; Luke is too sober a historian to embellish whatever happened with imaginary details and as a physician he must definitely have known whether these were genuine cures or not. His professional outlook would lead him more likely to tone down the record to a sober note of the facts. One remembers that John Mark wrote of the afflicted woman who had "*suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse*" (Mark 5. 26). Luke, in his account written a decade or so later, feeling perhaps that Mark had rather overstated the case, merely remarked tersely that she was incurable. The presence of Luke as a witness here is therefore a reliable guarantee that Paul did call upon Divine power and that Divine power was exerted to heal.

To what extent that demonstration advanced the Christian faith in Malta is not recorded and is unknown. There is every reason to surmise that at least a number of those concerned, or of the onlookers, were led to become Christians in consequence of what they witnessed, and that when Paul

sailed away from the island he left behind him a nucleus which afterwards played their part in furthering the cause of Christ in the world.

Thus passed three months. With the approach of February the seas became safer for sailing and Julius began to look around for a means of getting away. He found another Alexandrian cornship which, more prudent than the ill-fated one that nearly cost them their lives, had laid up for the winter at Malta and was now preparing to resume its voyage to Rome. A passage for the legionaries and their prisoners, and for Paul's companions, was soon arranged. The crew of the wrecked vessel probably remained at Malta until they could find a means of returning to Egypt and home.

The last lap

Before long the travellers were on the last stage of their journey. Rome was now only four hundred miles away and the weather was propitious. The vessel called first at Syracuse in Sicily, across the Straits to Rhegium (modern Reggio) and a day later to Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) near Naples. Here Julius landed his party with the intention of completing the remaining hundred and forty miles to Rome by road. Perhaps the ship itself was going no further. In this seaside town, says Luke *"we found brethren and were desired to stay with them seven days, and so we went toward Rome"*. Christianity was already well established in Italy if this little place, so far from Rome, possessed a company of believers. The centurion Julius must have been a very accommodating man to wait here a week with his other prisoners purely for Paul's benefit. It is quite likely that he held the Apostle in some esteem, realising that he and his men owed their lives to him. It is evident that Paul was not regarded by the authorities as an ordinary prisoner and Julius probably had orders to treat him with consideration. So for seven days the little party of missionaries enjoyed a brief season of fellowship with their fellow-Christians at Puteoli amid the scenic loveliness of the most beautiful part of Italy. Much of that loveliness was to be destroyed eighteen years later when the sleeping volcano Vesuvius, just across the bay, awoke in fury and blotted out the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum, less than twenty miles distant. In both these towns, since their excavation in modern times, there has been found evidence of Christian worship, so that Paul might well have met believers from these places also during that short stay.

The week passed all too quickly; the travellers took their leave of the brethren and set out on the road with their escort. Twenty miles

farther on, the party reached the Appian Way, the main highway traversing the length of Italy and ending at the capital. It is not likely that they walked; they were probably provided with horses or asses on which to ride. The legionaries marched on foot, but they were accustomed to that. The journey must have occupied at least a week or ten days. Forty-three miles from the city, at the village of Appii Forum, they were met by a party of Christians from Rome who had heard of the Apostle's approach and had come this distance to welcome him. Ten miles farther, at another village called Tres Tabernae (the "Three Taverns" of Acts 28.15) they were met by another contingent *"whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage"*.

Rome

It must have been with quickening interest that the Apostle strained his eyes for his first sight of the city about which he had heard so much. This was Rome, the capital of the world and the mistress of all nations. This was the city whose iron rule had imposed a Roman peace upon all the earth and made it possible for Christianity to spread in the way it did. Paul had a certain admiration for Roman rule and administration. His words in Romans 13 and 1 Tim. 2 illustrate the importance he placed upon the position of the "powers that be" in the Divine scheme of things. These "powers that be", he insists, are ordained by God and those who resist them are resisting the ordinance of God. He counselled that in the Christian services prayer should be offered for kings and all who are in authority, *"that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all goodness and honesty"*. It must be realised that Paul wrote these words at a time when Christianity was not subject to persecution.

Later on the position was decidedly different, and by the time the Book of Revelation was written, ten years or so later, Rome had become synonymous with Babylon, the persecutor of the saints and an object of Divine judgment soon to come.

Rome in Paul's day was a city of four million inhabitants, covering an area about two and a half miles square. It was therefore just about the size of a modern English city such as Leicester. Although adorned with many magnificent public buildings and monuments, temples and palaces, and a greater proportion of parks and open spaces than most English cities, it nevertheless consisted, to a great degree, of tall multi-storey tenement buildings. In these the working classes and the poor lived in crowded and insanitary conditions. At first Paul passed through the outer suburbs, containing the better class houses and villas of the wealthy. Then he came to the poorer quarters, blocks of flats, five and six stories high, teeming with

occupants. Finally he entered the centre of the city where were concentrated government buildings and the palaces of the Caesars.

Here the journey ended. Somewhere near the Forum, the centre of Rome and the centre of the world, the little party entered the barracks of the Praetorian Guard, and the centurion Julius handed over his prisoners. Before entering, Paul might have set eyes on the *Miliarium Aureum*, a tall column marking the centre of the city and having engraved on its sides the names and distances of the distant cities to which roads radiated from Rome. Jerusalem appeared there as the capital of Judea; Paul might also have noticed another name which was also there, one not so familiar to him. Londinium, the capital of a far distant province called Britain. He may have noticed it; he could not have known that many centuries later that same city of Londinium was to possess a great cathedral of the Christian faith bearing his own name – St. Paul's Cathedral!

Temporarily, he was parted from Luke and Aristarchus, and those two faithful friends went off to find lodgings in the city. It is almost certain that the Christians who had come out to meet them would accompany them back to this point so that the two were not likely to have any difficulty in finding an abiding-place. And it was not long before Paul was reunited with them. The nature of the charge against him did not demand confinement in prison and he was allowed a measure of freedom. He was not to leave Rome but he could make his own arrangements for a place to live and conduct himself as he pleased, the only stipulation being that he must be constantly under the surveillance of a legionary who would remain with him day and night. His occasional references to his chains at this time have given rise to the assumption that he was chained to this soldier. This is possible but it might well be that the reference is metaphorical, and that he was merely not at liberty to be out of his guard's sight.

It must have been the first time for many long years that Paul had a house in which to live. He had been more or less constantly on the move from place to place; now he was perforce compelled to rest. He had "*his own hired house*" in Rome (Acts 28.30) perhaps sharing it with Luke and Aristarchus, the three of them working at their respective trades in order to support themselves. There was no knowing how long a time would elapse before his case would come up for trial; in the meantime he could realise his long cherished dream of preaching Christ in Rome.

Three days after thus settling in, Paul called a conference of the leading Jews. This does not imply that he ignored the Christian community in the city nor that they were not already well known to the Jewish colony. The fact that Paul was a Pharisee made him unique among the Christians; it gave him a standing in the eyes of orthodox Jews which no other

Christian in Rome possessed. The Jews were prepared to come to him and enter into discussion. Perhaps Paul felt that in the liberal atmosphere of Rome he could expect a more tolerant and dispassionate examination of his claims for the Gospel than could be had in fiercely nationalistic Jerusalem. He certainly had a good hearing. They came to him without prejudice or antagonism and were anxious to know what he had to say, remarking only that there was a general prejudice against the Christians among Jews everywhere. It is apparent that they welcomed this opportunity of hearing an authoritative exposition from the most famous Christian apologist of the day. From morning until evening Paul talked to them, *"persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the prophets . . . and some, believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not"*.

So far as can be discerned, this was the last time Paul tried to convert his own people. With the close of the Book of Acts at this point we are dependent on stray allusions in the Epistles for information as to his future activities, but it does seem as if from now onward he devoted himself entirely to the Gentiles. That is in keeping with his pronouncement as the disagreeing Jews departed from his house. *"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it"*. Christianity was now spreading like wildfire throughout the Roman empire and eastward into Asia. Christian communities existed in countries so far apart as Britain in the west and the north-west of India in the east. No one really knows how the Gospel spread so quickly; there is not much doubt that many Roman soldiers became Christians and carried the faith with them as they were moved from place to place. The activities of the twelve Apostles, apart from those of Peter and Paul, are only vaguely known. It is fairly certain that several of them were as active in the lands east of Judea as Peter and Paul are known to have been in the west, but there was no Luke with them to act as chronicler and historian. By one means and another during the years between the Crucifixion in AD 33 and Paul's arrival at Rome in AD 60 the Gospel had penetrated every part of the Empire and quite a few places outside. The bigoted refusal of orthodox Jewry to recognise this universal appeal of the Gospel, that God is the God of Gentile as well as Jew, was still reflected in the thinking of most Jewish Christians and in consequence the purely native churches in Judea and Galilee were either stationary or retrogressing. The Jewish rebellion of A.D. 67-70 which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the depopulation of all Judea virtually extinguished hope of further missionary work from that centre and although the Jerusalem church reformed after the catastrophe the flaming torch had left them for ever. As the years went by those native Jewish churches dwindled until there was nothing left. Words spoken by Jesus half

a century previously had become burningly true, *"the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"*.

This is where Luke concludes his narrative. Paul, dwelling two years in Rome in his own rented house, under constant guard but free to preach and teach as he saw fit, received all who came in to him. Most of those who came were Gentiles – Romans, Greeks and men and women of all nations who for one reason or another had business in Rome. The Christian assemblies in the city were growing in numbers and must have owed much to Paul's continued fellowship and ministry. During this period he wrote what are called the Pastoral Epistles, to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and that to Philemon. He received visits from some of his old friends from Asia – Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Demas, Timothy, John Mark – and confident of release when he was called to trial, laid plans for the future. The indomitable spirit of the Apostle refused to consider any relaxation from service while any remained in the world to whom the Gospel had not been preached. The Book of Acts concludes with this remarkable man still at work *"preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him"*

. (To be continued)

AOH

Studies in the Epistles of John

Part 15 I John 3.12-16

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." (vv 12-13).

John, strangely, does not use the word 'hate' in describing the attitude of Cain towards his brother. He leaves it to be inferred. in the light of all that he has just been saying, that Cain failed to love his brother. He could have quoted no more terrible example of the consequences that can follow such a failure. The sin of Cain has stirred the consciences of all generations of men throughout all history. He has become the standard archetype of the fratricide, and the expression "the mark of Cain" has passed into the realm of proverbs and popular allusions. There is probably no other character of history, except Judas Iscariot, who has commanded so much popular detestation as has Cain.

We know nothing of Cain's earlier life with Abel, but it is evident that

he had not loved him as a brother should. Some have deduced from John's expression here, "who was of that wicked one", that Cain was in fact the offspring not Adam and Eve, but of Satan and Eve, and doomed from the outset. The plain statement of Gen.4.1, ought to be sufficient to expose the fallacy of such reasoning. Cain was "of the wicked one" in exactly the same sense as those Pharisees to whom our Lord said "You are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father you will do". (Jn.5.44). He was "of that wicked one" because he had allowed sin to take root in his heart and exercise control over his actions, and in the end it led him to slay his brother.

Cain did not love his brother; that much is evident. That failure led to hatred, and hatred to murder. It is unlikely that Cain seriously intended things to go so far. There is no hint of animosity when they made their individual offerings, side by side, to God. When Cain's offering was rejected it was to God he first addressed his complaint and it was only after being told that acceptance followed righteousness, and rejection unrighteousness, that the implied contrast between his brother's goodness and his own evil evoked the feelings that led eventually to the crime.

That is the position to which John is leading us here. The world hates the Christian because of its realisation of the contrast. The darkness hates the light because its own deeds are evil. Abel suffered, innocently, because of his own rightness of heart. The very sight of him standing there, or going about his work, was a reproof to Cain and to the evil that he cherished; and Cain thought to remove the reproof by obliterating the sight of his brother, by killing him. So does the unregenerate man try to do away with all that savours of God and His holiness, and is no more successful than was Cain.

So the message comes to us, that we should love one another in sincerity and truth, realising that this is the evidence we have that we have indeed passed from death to life. The world will hate us, but we are bidden not to be surprised at that. Greater cause for surprise would we have if it were found that the world did not hate us. "*Woe to you, when all men speak well of you*" said Jesus. He did not mean that we should always be expecting and seeking the scorn or active dislike or downright persecution of the world. Some have taken it that way and gone out of their way to make themselves obnoxious to their fellows, hailing the consequent – natural – resentment as persecution incurred for Christ's sake. He did not mean anything like that. What he did mean was that we should expect to find the *darkness* in the world hating the *light* that is in us. That of itself will bring all that the Lord intends us to have of disesteem or reproach or persecution. Apart from that, we should expect to find ordinarily decent men and women in the world appreciating and even applauding that which is good and Christlike in our daily lives and our disposition and outlook. The world has

fallen to a low level in many ways, but it is not so hopelessly degraded that there are not some who can appreciate and approve the things of Christ that we hold out before them.

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3.14-15. RSV)

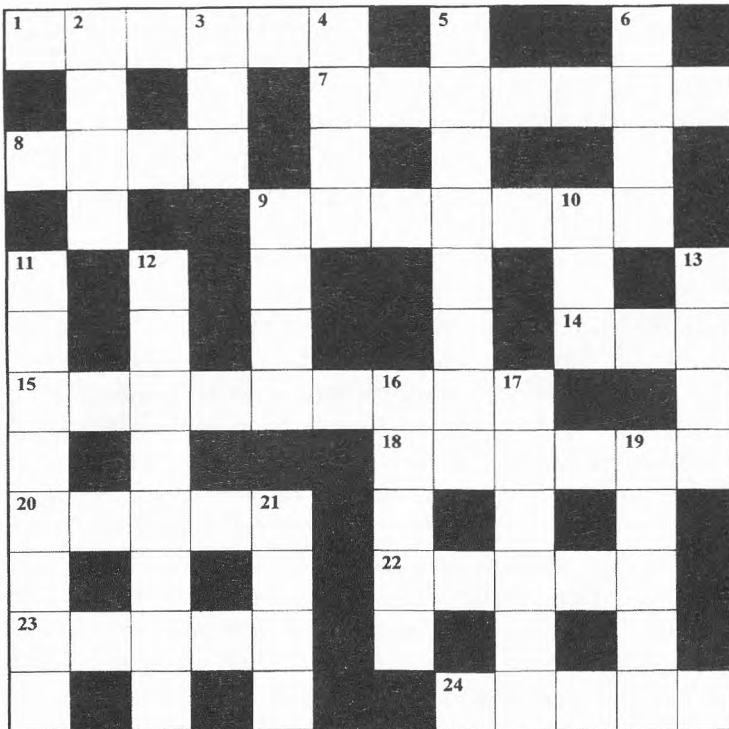
In chapter 2 the one who loves his brother is abiding in the light; in this chapter he is passed into life. In chapter 2 the one who hates his brother is walking in darkness and knows not whither he goes; in this chapter he is abiding in death. Once more the analogy between light and life, and between darkness and death, which forms so prominent a theme in John's epistle, is impressed upon our minds. Abiding in the light, we pass into life, through love. Walking in darkness, we eventually abide in death, because of hate. These are simple and easily-remembered equations and they are important ones too.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (v.16.) John is not thinking so much about the Majesty on high as he is about the Love that reached down to earth. And so sure is he that his readers are following with him in thought and entering into his thoughts that when he comes to refer to his Lord and their Lord, Jesus the Redeemer, he uses the personal pronoun instead of the proper name. "Hereby perceive we **the** love, because **he** laid down his life for us ". He has been talking so much about love, love of the brethren, love for the brethren, love of the saints for the world, love of a man for his brother, but now he rises to the height of the greatest love that ever has been. Hereby perceive we *the* love, the love that is manifest above all others. " *Greater love hath no man than this* " said Jesus " *that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" That man was Jesus; and because every one of John's disciples and brethren and readers knew Jesus to be that one, John had no need so much as to utter His name. "*Because he laid down his life for us.*" There was only one who did that, only one who *could* do that, and although the love of God the Father in heaven was just as much involved in this as was the love of Christ the Son on earth, John refers to it just as " *the* love " because of all manifestations of love that the earth has ever known none can reach up to the level of this.

This laying down of his life for us was not only His death on the Cross but also His daily dying on man's behalf throughout the three and a half years of His ministry. "*He poured out his soul unto death* " cried

Isaiah. " *I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished* " said Jesus. It is in that way that we, in our turn, can lay down our lives for the brethren. There is value in that "laying down of life". Every sacrifice, every service, every loss, every suffering, incurred in the laying down of our lives on behalf of others, whether of the "brethren" or of the "world" lays up in store something which is of value in bringing men and women closer to Christ and nearer to reconciliation with God.
(To be continued.)

AOH



CROSSWORD

CLUES

Across

- 1 Brother of Simon Peter Matt.4 (6)
- 7 Modern people might have needed this at Sinai Ex. 19.16 (3,4)
- 8 Among (4)
- 9 Is not above his teacher Matt.4 (7)
- 14 Grief, sorrow, misery Rev.8.13 (3)

- 15 River - where the sixth angel poured out his bowl Rev.16 (9)
- 18 Origin of the Magi (6)
- 20 Father of Esau and Jacob Gen.25 (5)
- 22 Saul kept a jealous eye on him 1 Sam.18 (5)
- 23 Female relative (5)
- 24 One of twelve Gen.49 (5)

Down

- 2 Significant attribute Matt.1.21 (4)
- 3 He who spares this hates his son Prov.13 (3)
- 4 Opposite of 18 across (4)
- 5 Supervises and instructs actors (8)
- 6 With moths, destroys Matt.6 (4)
- 9 A great blazing one fell from the sky Rev.8 (4)
- 10 Sing to the Lord a ... song Ps.98 (3)
- 11 Every thought captive and to Christ 2 Cor.10 (8)
- 12 Rev.4 or Isa 6. Said again. (8)
- 13 Begins on Ash Wednesday (4)
- 16 Similar to frogs (5)
- 17 'Perishable' metal 1 Pet.1 (6)
- 19 Brother of Abihu Lev.10 (5)
- 21 Saved with all the passengers Acts 27 (4)

Answers on page 80.

JZC

PALM TREE CHRISTIANS

We are told in Psalm 92 verse 12 that "the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." This statement of the psalmist means a lot more when one is acquainted with the growing habits of the palm tree. People who live in tropical and semitropical areas are familiar with their graceful towering beauty; they are a very common tree to them. But few realise what meanings the characteristics of this stately tree have.

The first simile is life. The life of this tree comes through its centre or heart. Just as all other trees, it draws moisture up through its roots from the earth. But instead of the sap going up on the outside between the bark and the wood of the tree, in the palm tree the sap goes up the very heart of the tree. Simply removing the bark completely around the tree for about an inch or two can kill most trees. The life of the palm, however, does not lie so close under the surface, and is not affected by surface injury. It must be completely cut off, to be killed.

The same applies to 'palm tree Christians'. The Word of God states this so aptly in Romans 10.10 "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." A 'palm tree Christian' is not affected by outward environment, but draws his life and strength through the heart.

The palm tree is perennially green. Life flows within its being continually. Those who are considered 'palm tree Christians' never change. They are the same vibrant witnesses of God's grace day in and day out, because Jesus Christ Himself is "the same yesterday, today and forever."

It is impossible to graft a palm tree into another palm tree. It will die. This is a unique characteristic and applies equally to 'palm tree Christians' Our Lord said, Matthew 6.24, that "no man can serve two masters".. His affections and obedience would be divided, and he would fail altogether in his duty to one or the other. When we allow pride to become our master, it takes the place of God in our hearts and we automatically cut ourselves off from Him, yet there are many who still try to serve both God and themselves. JGH

Book Corner

A Classic Devotional

Last year I received a birthday present of 'Streams in the Desert'. I expect many readers know the book, it was first published in America in the 20s and later on in Britain too. It is a compilation of daily devotional readings for one year, collected by Mrs Cowman, a retired missionary, at a time when her husband was seriously ill. Based on KJV texts and quotations from writers of earlier generations, the language is beautiful but—some would say— out of date. The book I was given was a version in modern language, prepared by James Reimann in the 1990s, at a time when his second son was seriously ill.

The theme of these readings is very often how God uses our troubles as a means to bless us. In the new edition there is a list of daily topics, which includes 'difficulties' 60 times, and 'suffering' 20 times— but also 'faith' 60 times, 'prayer' nearly 40 times, and 'trust', 'waiting on the Lord', 'stillness', 'blessings' and 'victory' about 20 times each. It was clearly written to help those passing through a spiritual 'desert' - and which of us does not sometimes pass that way.

The daily messages can be inspiring, but sometimes the words in the original version are not quite clear. For example, the KJV text used for January 2nd reads: *"And there was an enlarging, and a winding about still upward to the side chambers: for the winding about of the house went still upward round about the house: therefore the breadth of the house was still upward and so increased from the lowest chamber to the highest by the midst"* (Ezek. 41.7). Doing a little study, one finds that this is an architectural

detail of part of Ezekiel's temple, a vision which was given to encourage the Jewish exiles in Babylon (c.600BC) that God's favour would return to them. But the daily reading picks out the words 'still upward', and uses them out of context as a watchword for Christians— to strive to live their best, moving on to 'higher ground'. There are paragraphs from C.H.Spurgeon and J.R.Miller. In the modern version it uses the NIV, a lot clearer architecturally speaking, which reads: "*The side rooms all around the temple were wider at each successive level. The structure surrounding the temple was built in ascending stages, so that the rooms widened as one went upward. A stairway went up from the lowest floor to the top floor through the middle floor.*" The higher we climb, the more spacious the rooms!

Using the book prayerfully, and setting criticisms to one side, this year I have found Streams in the Desert a challenge and an encouragement. GC

Study Brought to Life - a testimony

Practical experience helps bring theoretical study to life. The colour is added, all three dimensions are present. So it was with my study of the raising of Jairus' daughter.

When a close relative fell suddenly and seriously ill, I was devastated. All my material interests and ambitions paled into irrelevance. I turned to prayer. Could Christ intervene? I opened an old bible, given me when I had attended Sunday School. Some passages were marked in ink. I was led to a passage I had once studied as a child, a passage which I suppose I had read as a story then. It seemed burningly relevant. The illness of the woman who touched Christ on the way to Jairus' house was an 'issue of blood'. That was relevant to the situation. Regarding Jairus' daughter I singled out two passages in particular: 'Fear not: believe only and she shall be made whole.' 'Weep not; she is not dead but sleepeth.' (Luke 8.41-56)

I had to travel a lot between the hospitals involved and my workplace. To be able to read the gospel on the train I took a small illustrated St Luke, bought from a gospel-stall in the street over twenty years previously. It had cost 2d.

I was also struck by the verse: 'For with God nothing shall be impossible' (Luke 1.37). The three verses above were meditated upon particularly during the period of crisis. They still are. I felt it difficult to do but I read the gospel at the patient's bedside. My own faith strengthened, I thought as I read of the double miracle of the possible significance of the twelve year period involving both people cured— how this shows the link between those whom Christ loves.

The crisis passed and the patient was made whole. I offer this short note in thanks, in the hope that others will derive inspiration from it, and also

to underline the importance of the work of those who spread the Word of God, whether inside churches or outside. *Brian Taylor*

Notices

Readers please note We are always pleased to hear from readers. *It would greatly assist us if, when readers write to us, they quote their reference number usually found at the top of the BFU address label.*

Readers of the BSM come from many different parts of the world and from many different religious and social backgrounds. Every effort is made to provide spiritual food for all. Not every expression of thought found in the BSM is necessarily the opinion of all those involved in the magazine's production.

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Gone from us: Rosemary Webster (USA)

Crossword Answers

Across 1 Andrew 7 Ear plug 8 Amid 9 Student 14 Woe 15 Euphrates
18 Orient 20 Isaac 22 David 23 Niece 24 Tribe

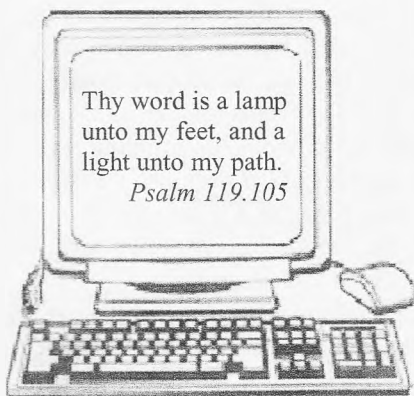
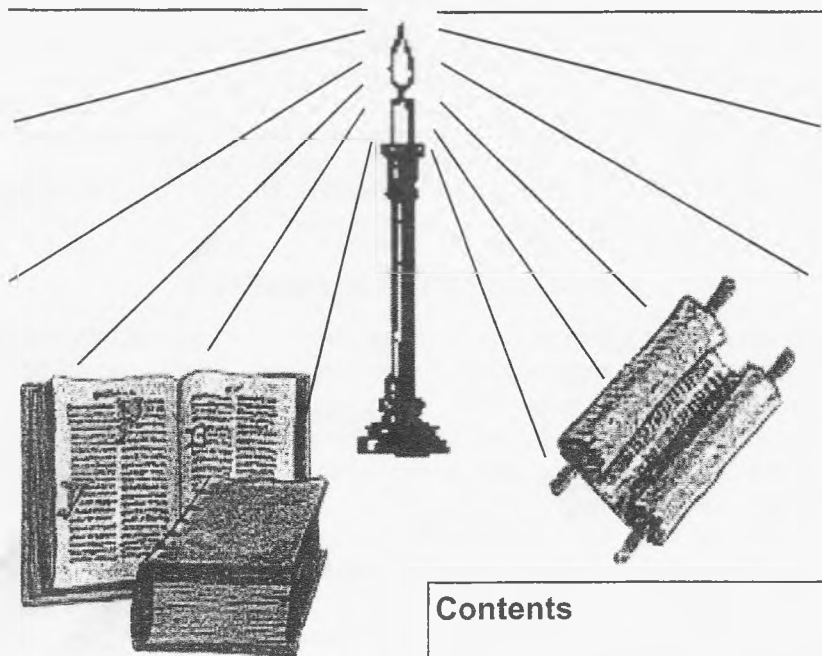
Down 2 Name 3 Rod 4 West 5 Producer 6 Rust 9 Star 10 New 11
Obedient 12 Repeated 13 Lent 16 Toads 17 Silver 19 Nadab 21 Crew

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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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AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

"Am I my brother's keeper?" is a famous question, which we may ask when we wish to disclaim responsibility for one another. When Cain asked it, he wished to deny he was responsible for his brother Abel, whom he had in fact murdered (Genesis 4.9). In the New Testament John contrasts this attitude with one of love. *"For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."* (1 John 3. 11,12)

On what grounds did John make the assertion that Cain's previous actions were evil? It could have been based on verse 7 where Cain has conversation with God and is told that in his offering he has not done well and sin is couching at the door. Questions about this could multiply because we are given only a few sentences about what happened, which may have taken many hours. Why was the fruit of the ground less acceptable as an offering than one of an animal? To some students of Leviticus (and the whole sacrificial system) the answer will be obvious, concluding with John the Baptist's proclamation *"Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world"*. Perhaps it is possible that John, as a good Israelite, did not raise such questions but just accepted the facts as given. For him, Abel's choice of 'a firstling of his flock' was obvious and natural.

John may have been arguing back from what Cain did next in the Genesis story – he must have been evil and wrong minded because he killed

his brother. No one kills unless he is evil and governed by emotion rather than controlled by logical thinking (although most people will make an exception for those serving in a national armed force. Israel did so.)

Brotherly care depends on love, and love must be based on justice (righteousness) as more than one commentator has pointed out. Jesus said that being angry with a brother is murder and if there is any evidence of disruption to fellowship with a brother there is no possibility of fellowship with God (Matt.5.21-26). Hatred is the essence of murder and a murderer does not have eternal life (Stott). But a murderer can repent and go on to eternal life (Morris). We now tend to think of 'eternal life' as the quality of life that is given by God. Lack of love is lack of God likeness (godliness). *"God is love"*

Cain lacked the motivating power of love. That is easily said from John's point of view but would Cain have agreed? For us, two thousand years later still, in which the life and precepts of Christ have been worked out in the daily life of thousands (millions) of Christians, the need for love should be even more obvious, but is it? Is that first commandment from the beginning obeyed better now than at any time in human history? Jesus had said *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."* (John 13.34). Jesus showed love in action in the story of the Good Samaritan and the love of the Father in Heaven in the parable of the Prodigal Son. To that may be added many stories from the Old and New Testament, and further to them are countless stories from the lives of Christians, many of them from Christian missionaries. They make wonderful reading and leave us feeling that we still need much growth in grace in our own lives for us to keep Jesus' commandment.

We must learn to think in terms of love. We must want the highest and best for others, all others. We can go on protecting our own interests or good name but love is the sacrifice of self. That is how Jesus taught it and demonstrated it. Contrition not pride; willingness to give and not count the cost; others rather than self; answering genuinely the question, What would Jesus do?

So we must come back to the question 'Am I my brother's (or sister's) keeper? It's all very well to talk about loving one's brother but if we follow the example of some in the Corinthian Church in the first century as reported by Chloe's people (1 Corinthians 1.11), what opportunity do we have to express our love in Christ for our brethren. Does not division within the Church preclude that privilege except that we can pray for one another? How often is separation from brethren in Christ due to lack of love? We need to think about this question very carefully and how we

think and speak of others who claim to be following Christ. Is our 'judgment' of them as Christians based on intellectual knowledge, or upon the way they live their lives in their profession to follow Christ?

'Love in Christ' is not a matter of words and questions but of genuine desire and action. Ultimately, we have to face every situation in company with Christ and in doing so we must respect love in each other. The answer to the original question is quite definitely that we are our brother's (and sister's) keeper. We must take every possible opportunity to express that brotherly and sisterly love and we are spiritually poorer for not doing so. We will be heading in one of two directions – to the righteous way in Christ or the unrighteous way in Satan.

Constant fellowship with God will dispel any fear of failure in love. God does not want us to fear. He knows the influence of Satan and is patient. He truly and really is love, and just waits for us to turn to Him. He is utterly patient with the prodigal son (or daughter). Let us not fear or worry or wonder if we can 'make it'. Let us all be positive; we can reach the goal of our hopes – because God is on our side; and the 'tender shepherd' to whom many of us prayed as little children – is still more tender than we can ever imagine. Saying that we are sorry is not weakness – it is the fruit of strong love. But love is not a natural quality in the children of Adam. It has to be learnt in the school of Christ.

DN

Brother John Haines

Sadly, we record the death of Brother John Haines on Sunday 28th February. In the last 10 years he had been greatly used by the Lord in very spiritual discourses at conventions and conferences, in Britain and USA. He also worked very hard since 1995 in the administration of the Bible Fellowship Union as a member of the council and treasurer. In a similar capacity he served the Gainsborough House retirement centre as a trustee and treasurer. He not only had a valuable knowledge of accountancy but also of the building trade, which he used to good effect at Milborne Port.

John suffered various health problems during his latter years, although he never complained or looked unwell— perhaps due in large measure to the loving care and consideration given to him by our Sister Gillian. Now to her our thoughts and prayers must turn, that she may have our Heavenly Father's comfort and guidance, for she will miss him more than anyone. But John will be greatly missed in the USA and here at High Leigh and Gainsborough House. John was quiet but very firm in his spiritual and ethical beliefs. The Lord will reward him for his labours among his people, and we look forward to sharing his fellowship in the days that are yet to be.

PREPARING FOR THE KINGDOM

an exhortation by Brother John Haines

Whatever view we hold concerning the way the Second Coming of our Lord will occur, the great need is to be ready for His appearing. There can be no substitute for readiness or alertness, and knowledge of what is promised, without the resulting preparation of heart and mind, can only result in disappointment. It is an event which, so far as the church is concerned, should be regarded as something that may occur at any moment. *“Like a man going away, leaving his house, and giving authority to his servants, and each man’s work to him, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Then you watch, for you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, at evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or early: lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all. Watch.”* (Mark 13.34-37)

Before that glorious event occurs we are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, so that we may be found worthy to be a part of His Church. Not that we can do this in our own strength, but because we have shown our willingness to follow His will in every aspect of our lives we will, through the undeserved grace of our heavenly Father, be considered to be worthy to be granted the privilege of ruling with Christ in God’s future heavenly Kingdom.

In whatever we are going to do, the preparation is important. There is not much point in planting a packet of seeds in the garden if you do not dig and clean the ground first. Unless first of all you properly prepare the ground, then it is quite possible the seeds will not come up, and even if they do manage to start to grow, the weeds that you did not bother to clear away will probably choke them. Our Lord said much the same thing when He told the parable of the Sower. The seed He was talking about was the seed of the word, and the ground was the mainly hard earth of men’s hearts. He was telling us that unless we prepare the soil of our hearts, by getting rid of the hardness, it will stop the seed of His word from taking root in us. Then if we do not carefully dig out the weeds of worldliness, that will choke the new growth. Unless we clear away the stones of

materialism, which prevent the seed from being able to put down a good root system, the seed of His word will wither and die in the first spiritual drought, because we are relying on material things to sustain us, not the word of the Lord. What we should be doing is to be cleaning the ground of our hearts, clearing from it everything that could be a hindrance to the growth of the seed, then fertilising it with study of God's word in the scriptures, so that no trouble that arises can stop the seed of the word from growing.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians (3.2) to "*be mindful of things above, not of things on the earth*". We have, of course, to pay proper attention to some earthly things, such as doing our job to the best of our ability, but we should never put doing earthly things before our duties to our Lord. When we do keep our thoughts on earthly things, we are in effect making an idol of them, that could deprive us of our heavenly inheritance. So our aim should be to become more heavenly minded: not in a mystical sense, but in the way of practical Christ-like godliness.

Our loving Father wants all men to be saved - He would have no man die. Jesus made this quite clear in two of His parables; first when He told how the Father, as soon as he saw the prodigal returning to him ran - he did not walk, he ran - to meet the wanderer. Our heavenly Father does not wait for the prodigal to come to Him on bended knee to beg for forgiveness. But as soon as the errant one, of his own free will, turns his face back towards his heavenly home, God in His delight actually hurries to meet the one who went away, and then celebrates that prodigal's return.

We are told that if one of His flock of sheep drifts off, He will search until the lost one is brought back to the fold, and when that wanderer is brought back He rejoices. So if our heavenly Father is not satisfied with only 99 out of a flock of 100, He certainly won't be satisfied until He has done everything possible to prevent one of His children from harming themselves through self-will, disobedience or just plain stupidity.

In these two stories the prodigal is the one who deliberately follows a life that will take him away from the Father, whilst the sheep pictures the one who drifts away through sheer foolishness - the one who does not think about consequences. The whole point of these

stories is to show us that God is more understanding, more merciful, more forgiving, and that His love is far greater than any man's.

Our heavenly Father is preparing a holy spiritual Temple in which He will dwell, and we can be quite certain that He has set a time for the completion of His preparations. So far, this heavenly Temple, the Church, the Body of Christ, has been steadily growing for nearly 2000 years, and from all the signs in the world it must be nearing completion: but even though God appears to delay, He is never inactive. He is a God of order and organisation. He is never too early and never too late. Every member is being prepared according to his attributes. Their abilities are being sharpened and their powers ripened for their work of joy throughout the coming ages, a work that will bring a blessing to all the families of the earth. Then, at the appointed time, we shall arise, equal to the task

The sons of God must walk by that faith for which we are earnestly to contend, and live by the hope and the earnest desire for the revelation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *"We all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord's Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3.18). The work of building our character is going on all the time. From a thousand sources come the influences that make it grow: the lessons we get from others, the influences that friends exert on us, the truths we discover in our reading, the impressions which life leaves on us, and most of all the inspiration we receive from the Holy Spirit. The work never stops from the time we first believe until the time we fall asleep. So, *"Consider it pure joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."* (James 1.2-6 & 12).

These thoughts are taken from a convention address given by our brother in 2006.

THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE

Luke 18.9-14

There were some in Jesus' day who *"trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"*. To them He addressed this parable, and not to them only, for self righteousness is still rife among those who claim to be His true followers, and the lesson is as important as ever. The rigid, bigoted Pharisee of the story has had his counterparts in every generation since that day and has them still. The parable of the Pharisee and publican has a very topical application to us today.

Both men went up to the Temple to pray. They both acknowledged the same Law, at least outwardly, but that is about as far as the similarity went. The Pharisee, accustomed to the respect of men and sure of his standing before God, returned thanks that he was the man he was. He could think of no element in his life capable of change for the better. He was already all that God could possibly want him to be. And he preened himself in the pride of that knowledge. The publican – tax-gatherer – came, conscious only of one thing, his inadequacy in the sight of God. He had come short of the Divine glory; he knew that. He needed forgiveness; he knew that too, and in an agony of self-abasement he pleaded for Divine mercy.

The Pharisee was probably a very good man. There is nothing in the account to say he was not, and the brief picture given us is at least sufficient to show that Jesus intended his hearers to picture the typical orthodox Pharisee. He was zealous for righteousness and the observance of the Mosaic law; bigoted almost to the point of fanaticism in his allegiance to the "traditions of the fathers". He was punctilious in the discharge of every duty which custom and ordinance required of a son of Abraham. He duly fasted on the third and fifth day of every week and took care that his neighbours and business associates knew about it. He rendered the tenth of his income to the things of God as the Law required. Verse 12 should read *"I give tithes of all that I acquire"* not *"possess"*; he tithed his income, not his capital. Like the rich young ruler on another occasion, he could say, referring to the Divine Law, *"all these things have I kept from my youth up."* Unlike that young ruler he did not add *"what lack I yet?"* for in his own mind he had no idea that anything was lacking. He had done all that God had required of him and now he looked to God to do the handsome thing and acknowledge the fact.

"The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself: " There is more than a suspicion here that the man was praying to himself, at any rate God does not appear to be much more than an equal partner in the matter. There is

no plea for forgiveness, no acknowledgement of the superior position of the Most High, no supplication for help in leading a better life, or guidance in approaching more nearly to the Throne of God's holiness. In fact it hardly seems a prayer at all, more of a boastful statement of the position. "*I thank thee, that I am not as other men are*". He wanted to say out loud in the hearing of his fellows that thing which he liked to believe his fellows thought of him. As a Pharisee he was one of God's chosen ones and all others were inferior. One day when Messiah came and the Romans were expelled his superiority would be manifest even more than now, for then he would advance from his present position of moral leadership to actual political leadership and not only Israel but all the Gentiles would bow down before him. After all, he and his brother Pharisees were the present successors of the tradition established in the days of Ezra when the first Pharisees stood in the breach to defend the nation against prevalent indifference to the things of God, and preserved the Law and all that it implied for future generations. It was only right that God should acknowledge the services he and his had rendered Him and honour him accordingly.

Whilst thus he stood and congratulated himself the publican came into the Temple court. He was under no illusion; he knew himself to be unclean in God's sight. He came with nothing in his hands and with nothing wherewith to commend himself in God's sight. His prayer was brief and eloquent in its simplicity. "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" The Greek has the definite article, *the sinner*, as though he counted himself a greater sinner than other men, just as the Pharisee had counted himself greater in his righteousness than other men. He asked nothing of God; he came in repentance and threw himself on God's mercy.

And God looked down from Heaven and saw those two men standing there. "*I tell you*" said Jesus "*this man*" – the publican – "*went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted*". We hardly need the comment for ourselves as we read the story, for it seems so obvious. How could anyone justify the Pharisee in his arrogance and count him as more worthy in God's sight than the publican?

And yet, it happens so often among Christians. There is a type of mind which, whilst thoroughly loyal to God, takes pride in its exclusiveness and separation from "the world" and not infrequently from fellow-Christians who do not share the same outlook on the faith or the same conception of Christian service. "Spiritual pride" is a very real thing and an ever-present danger to the disciples of Christ. The very love and zeal for Him which

leads us to Him at the first is liable to drive us into an excess of devotion which can bear fruit at the end in an unreasoning and unseeing bigotry which of itself stultifies our further efforts to do Him service. We all do well to remember our Lord's own injunction, "*—when you have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do*" (Luke 17. 10). The difference between the best of us and the worst of us, great though it may seem in our sight, is very little in God's sight. Repentance and devotion mean much more to him than mighty works and lavish gifts. Jesus commended the scribe who said "*to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*". (Mark 21. 33). "*Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*" Jesus told that man. The publican in this parable was not far from the Kingdom of God; the Pharisee had not even realised his need of that Kingdom.

AOH

THE RULE OF THE IRON ROD

A familiar scripture to those who read the Bible and who look for the coming reign of Christ, is in the Second Psalm "*Thou shall break them with a rod of iron; thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*". Many gentle disciples have felt a thrill run through them as they picture a day in which all opposition to the Kingdom of righteousness is relentlessly crushed. Many have solaced themselves in present distress by anticipation of a coming day in which the tables will be turned on those who set themselves against the Lord's Anointed, and the proud and mighty of this world are compelled to bow at the feet of earth's rightful Sovereign.

A number of Scriptures, mostly in the Books of Psalms and Revelation are habitually cited to buttress this idea of an all-powerful Dictator ruthlessly crushing all opposition and setting up his rule of absolute righteousness and justice by the exercise of brute force. The end is considered to justify the means, and the Scriptural assurance that as a result of Christ's reign all humanity will come into harmony with the Divine law of selflessness and love is held to stamp the means employed with the hallmark of Divine approval.

However, the whole tenor of Christ's teaching discountenances the use of coercion or force. He himself resolutely refused to employ any other agency than love, even although He faced death, the death for which He had come into the world. He refused to call upon the twelve legions of angels

to come to his aid, and trod the winepress alone. When in surprise and mystification Pilate queried "*Thou art a King then?*" Jesus uttered those memorable words which have resounded down the ages, "*My kingdom is not of this world (kosmos) else would my servants fight*". Not for him the standards of kingship by which this world measures kings. It was in the passive and yet overpowering force of love that the early Church went forth conquering, and they conquered.

But if the teaching of Christ at his First Advent definitely repudiated the use of force as a means of accomplishing the work of his Kingdom, how shall statements of so definite a nature as Psalm 2.9 and Revelation 2.27 be understood? Certain it is that as students of the Divine Word, we can neither afford to ignore them nor to wrest them to mean the opposite of their plain implication. We can only approach them, armed first with a clear knowledge of the principles upon which Christ will deal with mankind in the future Age, and then look at these Scriptures in the light of their local meaning and the significance they had for the Israelites who lived in the day in which they were uttered. So we can deduce what prophetic indication is there given, in the guise of a familiar reference to some everyday incident or custom.

It is generally agreed that the work of the Age to come is portrayed in miniature and in principle by the life of Jesus Christ, by his words, actions, miracles, and so on. It is equally definite that He preached the overcoming of hate by love, of greed by selflessness, of force by persuasion, of selfishness by service for others. This then is the law of the Kingdom, and however the rule of the iron rod is to be understood it must in no sense do violation to the principles which underlie the teaching of Jesus. In a very real sense it must represent fairly and accurately the law of the Kingdom of God on earth. What then is this rod of iron?

The figure, like so many in the Psalms, is a pastoral one. The shepherds of David's day, in the unchanging East, went about their occupation provided with two implements, the pastoral staff and the iron club. The iron club was the shepherd's weapon of defence, not only for himself, but also for his sheep. The Palestinian shepherd followed his calling in very different circumstances from those that are associated in our Western minds with the care of the flock. The pastures were often found in mountainous and desolate places, and whilst roving bands of robbers threatened danger to the shepherd, wild beasts such as hyenas, jackals, bears, leopards and lions were liable to attack the flock, and the safety of the defenceless sheep depended entirely upon the watchfulness and strength of the shepherd.

A number of Scriptures attest the familiarity of Israel with the fact of wild beasts in their midst. For example, 1 Sam.17.34-36, 1 Kings 13.24, Jer.5.6; and to realise this aspect of the shepherd's work is to understand more clearly the import of our Lord's own words in John 10. 11-12 (RSV) "*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them*".

The rod of iron (*Hebrew – Shebet*) was the shepherd's iron club, his weapon of defence and his means of defending the sheep. But since in the ordinary course of events the shepherd's care for his sheep transcended all thought for himself, the iron club became in a very special sense associated with the protection of his flock from every kind of danger. This is borne out by the Scripture in a very remarkable manner. The quotation in Rev. 2.27 "*He shall rule them with a rod of iron*" employs a Greek word (*poimaino*) which has the significance of 'shepherding' in the sense of 'feeding'; and the phrase would be more correctly translated "*He shall shepherd them with the shepherd's club*". In addition to its use for defence against robbers and wild beasts, the club was used for beating a way through jungle or undergrowth in the search for fresh pastures, and so its association with feeding as well as defence became obvious.

The same word is translated "feed" in John 21.16 "*Feed my sheep*" 1 Pet. 5.2 "*Feed the flock of God*"; Rev. 7.17 "*The Lamb which is in the midst of them shall feed them*" and in several other places. In the Old Testament the same allusion occurs in Micah 7.14 "*Feed thy people with thy rod*", where *rod* again is translated from 'shebet'.

In the same connection also is the word of the Lord to the Israelites of Ezekiel's day "*I will cause you to pass under the rod (shebet) and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant*" (Ezek.20.37). "*He will smite the earth*" says Isaiah "*with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked*" (Isa. 11.4). This 'iron rod' is in very truth a means of sustenance and defence to those who are the "*children of the Kingdom*", who stand in need of that which the Kingdom is designed to provide.

What is the significance of that parallel expression in Psalm 2.9 "*He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel*", and its companion text in Rev.2.27 "*As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers*"? Another every day eastern custom is alluded to here. A common occupation in the east was the making of 'homrah', broken pottery reduced to a very fine powder by constant grinding with heavy stones, and used in the manufacture of cement. The common use of earthenware vessels of all kinds rendered an abundant supply of broken pottery continually available. With painstaking care the makers of 'homrah' squatted upon the ground with a little pile of

potsherds between their feet and rolled the heavy boulder to and fro until the fragments were reduced to the finest dust. Not until then was the 'homrah' ready for the next stage in the making of cement for use in lining water cisterns and aqueducts, and for many other purposes.

Here then is afforded an eloquent picture of the disintegrating forces which break down and scatter not only the kingdoms of this world but all that is lifted up in defiance against Christ. The vivid picture drawn by Daniel when he expounded to King Nebuchadnezzar his dream of the great image is similar. The image is broken to the ground and pulverised to dust by the 'Stone' Kingdom (Dan.2.34-35).

This disintegration is not of individuals, but of institutions, governments and organisations of man. *"Everything that can be shaken will be shaken"* says the writer to the Hebrews (12.27). Many students are thoroughly familiar with the lines of Scriptural reasoning which indicate that at the time when the reign of Christ begins, it is the institutions of man that crash to destruction. This is so that every individual member of the human race may be given the opportunity of ascending the "Highway of Holiness" to perfection of life.

With this destruction of every man-made institution the individuals comprising them are set free to be built into that new and universal Kingdom that is the New Jerusalem, come down from heaven to earth. This is just as the broken potsherds were ground into dust in order that they might be welded together in a new and indestructible 'cement' that should endure forever. The broken potsherds, having outlived their usefulness and like a *"garment, waxing old, ready to vanish away"* (Heb. 8.13) are converted into new and imperishable structure which shall serve the needs of man for all time. Could there be in all the range of Scripture allegories a more perfect picture of that "Stone" Kingdom which *"shall break in pieces and devour all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever"*.

Thus the entire picture is one of the beneficent reign of Christ in which evil will be restrained and the "flock" *defended* from those wild beasts of iniquity and sin that would otherwise still lie in wait and dog their footsteps. The willing ones are led by *"green pastures and still waters"* of Psalm 23, where they may, in perfect confidence and security *"obtain joy and salvation"* whilst *"sorrow and sighing will flee away"* (Isa. 35.10).

Meanwhile the enlightening influences of this day will have played their part in bringing about that *"time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation"* (Dan.12.1; Matt. 24.21). In the course of that, all the broken potsherds of human government will be reduced to dust and upon their ruins will arise the fair edifice of that 'city' that has foundations, *"whose builder and maker is God"* for which Abraham looked so many

long years ago (Heb. 11.10). The "iron rod" is a guarantee of Divine protection and sustenance to all peoples. The "breaking as a potter's vessel", predicts the final collapse of the power of man and the reconstruction work of God's Kingdom, founded upon love, peace, persuasion to good things, that the words of Isaiah so many centuries ago may at last come to rich fulfilment—

*"And the work of righteousness shall be peace;
and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

AOH

GOD'S WILL FOR US

A Practical Essay

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from unchastity... for God has not called you to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." (1 Thess.4.3-8)

Many Christians ask the question "How do I know what God's will is for my course in life?" God's will is the same for all His people – sanctification. So the question follows "What is sanctification?" It is translated from the Greek 'hagiasmos' and is related to holiness. Paul sometimes says those to whom he writes are "*called to be saints*". These words relate to all God's people, all who are part of the Divine family and wish to share the life of Christ. They do not relate to just one or two special Christians.

So God's will for all His people is that they should be holy, and this is similar to Heb.12.14 which tells us that we must strive for that holiness without which we cannot see the Lord. The writer there infers that to reach a state of holiness requires effort over a period of time, and so it is with sanctification. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor.1.30) wrote of "*Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness, sanctification and redemption.*" Christ becomes our righteousness the moment we accept Him as our Saviour from sin and at the end of our lives is responsible for the moment we are delivered from "*this body of death*", again in a moment of time. But the time between those two points may be many years and during that time we undergo a process which in theological terms is our 'sanctification' – the process of being made holy. But although this requires effort on our part, that sanctification is not possible without Him, His life in us by the Holy Spirit is the only way to God and through that process

we become like Him.

In Thessalonians Paul is writing to young converts; men and women who had turned from a pagan way of life, along with Jewish converts in Paul's first visit to Europe. They had discovered salvation in Christ, and he had become their righteousness. Just as the pagan way of life had made those Gentile converts more and more unholy, similarly, their Jewish brethren failed to be made holy through obedience to the Law of Moses. The believers at Thessalonica had begun in the way of Christ but before them lay perhaps many years of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit before they could enter the presence of the glory of God.

There must be many new converts who feel 'on cloud nine' – on top of the world – when they have just become a member of God's family. They feel joyful yet at peace, and they know the doctrine of Christ. They may think that they can gain an adequate knowledge of God's Word in a very short time. Be that as it may, that knowledge and understanding of God's truth has to become a reality in their lives before they can be ushered into the very presence of God. They can only discover their immaturity when in the weakness of their old nature they face the opposition of the world and Devil and begin to realise how far short they are of the glory of God. There is often a long hard journey with Christ, learning by the temptations and trials of life, and this is the long process of sanctification.

So Paul urges the new converts in Thessalonica to avoid all forms of unholiness – everything in life which does not please God, everything that would in any way interfere with our walk with Christ and His brethren. That which so often disturbs the Christian life and hinders our progress is not blatant rebellion against God but the seemingly unimportant, little infringements of God's law (Jesus called them 'little foxes') and the restlessness that goes with them. Nor can we be sure of what we are actually doing when we are rushing about doing what we think are 'good works'. We need rest, not a sitting down doing nothing attitude, but a restful mind, waiting on God, seeking quietly in prayer 'the way of the Lord'. Jesus revealed that the 'rest' that God had after His initial creative work was completed was not quite the same as the attitude to the Sabbath that the Jews displayed. Holiness is to be reached by an active faith in Christ and that is the goal of the writer to the Hebrews and he deals with this 'rest' quite early in his letter. It is a rest of total dependence and utter acceptance of God's way and this can only be as 'we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word' in the words of an old hymn. The words of John's first letter are clear "*when we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and blood of Jesus his son cleanses us*

from all sin."

Peter expressed this viewpoint when he wrote *"sanctification by the spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ."* (1 Pet.1.2). It is difficult to know precisely how Israel viewed all this in the earlier phases of its history, so much of which was quite obviously not working towards anything that could be regarded as remotely holy. More often it was idolatrous rebellion. In his own life time Peter would be left in no doubt as to what was wrong with the society of his day – pious Jews in Judea and further afield across the Empire, thought they could achieve holiness by doing what the Law of Moses demanded.

Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians described it in a very different manner. *"We beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another."* (2 Cor.3.18). In six legged invertebrates, little is seen of the wonderful changes within the pupa as it changes from the crawling imago into the beautiful flying insect. The wonderful systems for eating, moving, breathing and reproducing itself all develop silently out sight of the observer. It is a wonderful illustration of how the child of God (the new creation) develops to the maturity that prepares them to live in the 'Eternal Light' of God's love – that love which is His glory and which they receive and reflect.

Jesus described it by the Covenant illustration, 'The Vine', when he said *"every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the Word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you."* (John 15.1-3). Paul had a similar thought when speaking of the relationship of husbands and wives. *"Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved (Gr. agape) the church and gave himself for her in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word."* (Eph.5.25,26). The word cleansing in the Greek is much the same as Jesus used in the quote from John 15 in the cleansing of the vine branch. Therein lies the value of the Scriptures – the Word of God. It has a cleansing effect if allowed to do so. This is not academic learning for its own sake, which appears to be the purpose in some Bible study analysis and deduction. Rather it is the *"washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which he poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified through his grace and become heirs of the hope of eternal life."* (Tit.3.5). We do not live monastic lives separated from the dark influences of the world. Worldly media has been a growth industry for more than a century and is not conducive to 'holiness'. J.B.Phillips translation of Romans 12.2 is appropriate here and opens our eyes to the power of world. *"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the*

plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity."

We have the privilege of taking every demand on our time and skills and energies, to the Lord remembering the words of Paul in Romans 14.23, "whatever is not of faith is sin" How we earn our daily bread and how we relax between times, is all subject to the questions "Can I do it with the Lord?" – "Will this take me nearer to him or further away?" "If I could see him face to face – what would his response be?" But the more time we spend with Him, the thinner becomes the veil between us.

Is there a 'mess of porridge' we exchange for our birthright? If so, what is it? What is so important that we can jeopardise our eternity? We do everything, we say everything and we think everything in the 'light of eternity'. Does that make us a little more careful about the way we think, and speak and act? It is God's will that we become holy like him.

In our modern world, with more 'leisure' time and vastly greater opportunities to use 'relaxing' in sport, games, books, hobbies, gardening, (the list is seemingly endless in this computer-internet society) we must again ask pertinent questions such as "Can I do it with the Lord?"; "would I do it if I could see him? And what would Jesus do?" We reach maturity in Christ when we know what he wants, and are able to spiritually advise others. God speaks to our hearts and in the context of what is happening in our lives.

"Do not worry about anything but in prayer with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" Phil 4.6.

Real holiness demands that we have that gentleness – that readiness to forego our legal, moral rights – and treat everyone that touches our lives with a willing forgiveness.

'If I in thy likeness O Lord may awake and shine a pure image of thee, Then I shall be satisfied when I can break the fetters of flesh and be free.'

DN

MISSION TO THE WEST

Paul's further travels

It was springtime, A.D. 62. The Apostle Paul stood in the streets of Rome, a free man. His trial was over and he had been acquitted. Henceforward he was at liberty to go where he would and conduct his evangelical work without hindrance.

Those two years in captivity had been ones of great activity. Not only had Paul enjoyed the constant companionship of Luke and Aristarchus throughout, but at some time during the two years Timothy, John Mark, Demas of Thessalonica, and Epaphras of Colosse had arrived to remain with him. With these six stalwart friends of long standing at his side it is easy to understand why the Christian cause in Rome prospered as it did. The faith spread among the slaves and the poor, the highborn and the wealthy, even into Caesar's household. These were the halcyon days when the joyousness of the teachings of Christ overwhelmed and extinguished the gloom of paganism. None knew of the ferocity of persecution that lay only a few short years ahead.

There were visitors who came and went. Epaphroditus arrived from Philippi and after a short stay returned home bearing with him Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (Phil.2.25). Onesimus, the runaway slave from Colosse, reached Rome, came into contact with the faith and was converted. When he returned to Colosse, a Christian, in company with Tychicus, the pair took with them the Epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and that to Philemon (Col. 4.7-9, Eph.6.21, Philemon 12). Paul's enforced stay in Rome had been a productive time, and our New Testament is the richer in consequence.

Reconstructing the story— west, or revisit the east?

From this point the only clues to Paul's activities are casual allusions in his epistles to Timothy and Titus. Two of these were written during his subsequent journeys and the Second to Timothy whilst he was in prison in Rome for the second time. Why Luke ended the Book of Acts just before the first trial when it is obvious from Paul's own testimony that he remained with him to the end, is not known; this has been a matter of speculation for centuries. The fact remains that there is no record of Paul's later life and in consequence any picture of that period has to be founded on a reconstruction of these few allusions plus such basis of truth as can be concluded may lie beneath the traditions of the Early Church and the scattered statements of Early Church writers.

There are some half-dozen such reconstructions, all attempting to describe Paul's movements between his acquittal in A.D. 62 and his death in A.D. 67 or 68. Most of them seem to suffer from the demerit of having been built up on the basis of the literary allusions, without looking at the map. Consequently, they imply a bewildering sequence of to-and-fro crossing of tracks without any credit being given the Apostle for an orderly and economical planning of his journeys. A presentation of all the facts, evidence, and arguments for these unknown travels of St. Paul would take up a great deal of space and would be outside the scope of this treatise, but a brief

outline of what seems to the writer to have been a possible sequence of happenings is offered and this will be based upon two important factors which do not seem to have received full weight in other expositions of the subject.

The first is Paul's own conviction that he had been called to preach the Gospel to the whole world of the Gentiles, which in that day meant the entire Roman Empire. Long before his appeal to Caesar he had cherished the idea of going to Rome as the first step in a wider programme embracing the western side of the Empire. Writing to the Roman church many years previously he had told them he proposed to visit them on his way to Spain. Now he was in Rome, free to go where he wished. Almost certainly, before returning to the East, he would want to fulfil his original plan and proceed farther west to preach Christ in Spain, and, a little less likely perhaps, extend his ministry through the remaining provinces of the west, Gaul and Britain, before making the long journey home. Once back in Asia, at his time of life – he was now sixty years of age with indifferent health – he might have thought it unlikely that he would again have the opportunity to return to the West. So if Paul went to Spain at all – a point on which there has always been some doubt – it must have been directly after his release.

The second factor is also connected with his age. Paul would have been less than human if he had not desired to see his Asiatic converts again before he died, and particularly his old friends of his own home Church, Antioch in Syria. After all, it was the Antioch Church which had originally commissioned him to set out upon these travels and had it not been for the riot in Jerusalem, his arrest, and despatch to Rome, he would long since have been back among them with his report. Memories of his fellow-elders in that Church, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen, must have inspired a longing to see them again and tell them of the experiences he had undergone. A final visit to Antioch after he had reached the uttermost parts of the Empire with the message, perhaps to end his days among his early friends, must have played an important part in his planning. Added to these considerations, to references in Timothy and Titus, with statements by Clement of Rome, Eusebius, Jerome, Chrysostom and other early writers, all are satisfied by the assumption that immediately upon his release Paul set out for Spain. During the next two or three years he travelled through the western part of the Empire, returning by way of Northern Italy and the eastern side of the Adriatic Sea. He went to the converts he had previously made in Illyricum and Crete, back through Greece by way of Corinth, Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi. He would go

across the sea to Troas with the intention of visiting in sequence Ephesus, Colosse, Laodicea, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and the other churches of the Asian hinterland, again taking ship at Tarsus, his birthplace, for Antioch in Syria as his terminus. The programme could take five or six years and he might well have felt by that time he would be too old for further travel. If, then, it so fell out that he completed this itinerary as far as Troas or perhaps Miletus and was there arrested and sent back to Rome, every requirement of the references in Timothy and Titus is met. This at any rate is the basis upon which this final picture of Paul's life is here drawn.

It seems, then, that on this spring day in A.D. 62 there was a rapid reappraisal of the situation and a deployment of forces. Timothy was to go at once to Philippi (Phil.2.19). When next we hear of him, some years later, he is at Ephesus (1Tim.1.3). John Mark was to stay for the present in Rome, where during the next two or three years he would work with the Apostle Peter who seems to have arrived in Rome shortly after Paul departed. He would write the Gospel according to Mark, the first of the Gospels to be written. When next we hear of him he is also at Ephesus. Of Demas nothing is said. He may have stayed at Rome or gone to Greece. Luke certainly accompanied Paul wherever he went and was with him at the end. The other member of the trio, Aristarchus, who joined Paul during his third missionary journey and had stayed with him ever since, is likewise not mentioned. It can be taken as a tolerable certainty, that if Paul and Luke were off on another journey then Aristarchus would be insistent on going with them.

To one of Paul's ardent temperament there was no time to waste and probably before many days had passed he was taking his leave of the Roman brethren, with whom he had fellowshiped for the past two years. There was Flavius Clemens, nephew of Vespasian the coming Emperor, and Linus, soon to become Head of the Church in Rome after the martyrdom of Peter. There was Clement, a young man now but in later years to succeed Linus as Bishop of Rome, and a host of others some of whose names are recorded in Romans 16 and others in 2 Tim. 4. The three missionaries boarded the ship at Ostia, the port of Rome, and sailed out into the west, seven hundred and fifty miles across the blue Mediterranean, until the coastline of Spain appeared and the vessel tied up at the quays of the port of Nova Carthago (now Cartagena).

Spain? Gaul? Britain?

It is quite impossible to say what St. Paul achieved in Spain, if in fact he did go there. Not a whisper of tradition beyond the confident assertion that he went to Spain has survived. He would naturally make for the main centres of population and the first would most likely be Cordova where there was a considerable Jewish colony. From there he could make his way

northward, perhaps spending a time at Toletum (Toledo) and Caesar Augusta (Saragossa) so that after eight hundred miles or so and the expiry of perhaps nine or ten months he found himself on the borders of Gaul (France).

Long distance travel was very easy in the days of the Romans. The famous road system covered the whole of the Empire and every road was equipped with Government rest houses a day's journey apart at which horses or asses for travellers able to pay for them could be secured for the next stage. Order was maintained by the legionaries, and military detachments were constantly traversing the roads en route to garrison duties in distant lands, so that travel for civilians was safe. It was safer than in later centuries after Roman power had been withdrawn. It must not be imagined that Paul had to pick his way over trackless wastes in imminent danger to life and limb. From this point of view there is nothing incredible in the idea of his having visited any part of the Empire, however remote.

At the conclusion of this ministry in Spain the Apostle would have to face alternatives. He could retrace his steps along the eight hundred miles to Nova Carthago and sail back to Rome and so eventually home to Asia. Alternatively, he could follow the road over the frontier to Lugdunum (Lyon) in Gaul where there was an important meeting point of roads to Spain, Italy, Northern France and Britain. One can hardly imagine the Apostle resisting this challenge. If he went to Spain at all and found himself on the northern frontier he would surely have continued into Gaul to preach the Gospel there. So, after another four hundred miles, the three companions could have arrived in Lyon.

The origin of the Church in Lyon is shrouded in obscurity. The celebrated Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, lived in the 2nd century and the Church was already old in his time. No one really knows who founded it. The fact that a church existed apparently from the very earliest period at this important meeting place of the roads is at least an indication that some fervent missionary of the faith must have evangelised this district in the First Century.

Here again the Apostle had a choice. He could now consider his ministry in the West at an end and take the road for Italy and Rome, or by diverging before reaching Rome he could travel overland to Greece and home. On the other hand he could take the northerly road and set out to preach Christ in all Gaul as he had just done in Spain. He could cross the Oceanus Britannicus – the English Channel – and preach Christ in Britain. There are not many scholars and protagonists who insist that there is sufficient documentary evidence to make it a certainty that Paul did in fact visit Britain and preach in London at this time. It is fair to say that the

consensus of authoritative opinion is against the evidence being conclusive but there is no doubt that many early traditions do point this way. What does not depend upon tradition or documentary evidence, however, is that unless Paul did spend a couple of years or so in the west or north of the Empire it is difficult to understand why he only got as far as western Asia before being arrested the second time. During his five years or so of liberty he got no farther east than Troas in Asia – not even to Ephesus where Timothy, whom he so ardently longed to see, awaited him. The conclusion is irresistible that Paul must have spent a considerable time in hitherto unvisited lands before he returned to Greece. The traditions concerning his visit to Britain may therefore have more substance in them than is generally supposed.

Did Christianity then really come to Britain on a day when Paul, Luke and Aristarchus walked across the gangway to the wooden pier at ancient Dover, where the ships from Gaul disembarked their passengers and unloaded their merchandise? No one can say for sure; Roman intercourse with Britain was only some twenty years old and even the Roman legionaries, some of whom were known to be Christians and took the faith with them wherever they went, had only been there that long. One thing is certain; there was a British Church in existence very early in the First century, nearly six hundred years before the famed Catholic Augustine had landed with his monks at Sandwich in Kent to introduce the Papal brand of Christianity. Paul may well have found believers here already to welcome him and accept his apostolic ministry. Nobody really knows; there must be some kernel of truth underlying the persistent traditions and assertions of ancient historians to the effect that the Apostle did in fact set foot in this country and preach Christ. And there certainly was a British church contemporary with the last days of the life of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

(To be concluded)

AOH

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

The Tenth Plague – Exodus 11

The tenth chapter of Exodus closes whilst Moses is in audience with Pharaoh about the three days of darkness. Pharaoh had just told Moses to leave the audience-chamber and not come back. *"See my face no more"* he said *"for in that day you see my face you shall die."* *"You have spoken well"* retorted Moses *"I will see your face again no more"*. The eleventh chapter, if

read as continuing the narrative in consecutive order of events, introduces the apparent contradiction of a subsequent interview with Pharaoh following the one at which those words were spoken. There was in fact no further interview; verses 1-3 of chapter 11 constitute a parenthesis in the narrative and refer to something that occurred before the ninth plague. Verse 1 should properly be rendered *"Now the Lord had said unto Moses . . ."* etc. It was before Moses had gone in to Pharaoh over the ninth plague that God told him about the coming smiting of the first-borns and its consequences, the deliverance of Israel. At the same time Moses was told to instruct the people that they ask of their Egyptian neighbours gifts of gold and silver. The words for "borrow" and "lend" in the Hebrew are equally applicable to the asking for and receiving of gifts, and the shade of meaning intended has to be related to the context. It must have been obvious on this occasion that there could be no question of "lending" in the commonly accepted sense of the word since the Egyptians knew perfectly well that the Israelites intended going away and not coming back. Since by this time the Egyptian people generally were terrified of their inconvenient neighbours and wished nothing so much as to see the last of them, favours of this kind would doubtless be granted with alacrity and the Israelites were probably well loaded with the treasures of Egypt by the time they did leave the country. The suggestion sometimes made to the effect that this "borrowing" was a bit of sharp practice on the part of Israel can hardly be sustained. Such valuables as they did acquire must be held to have been gifts – almost bribes, maybe; anything to placate these people who had so powerful a God and to get them out of the country.

The rest of chapter 11 is then, logically, a continuation of the interview with Pharaoh. *"I will see thy face again no more,"* Moses had said, but that was not his last word. Standing stern-faced and resolute before the angry monarch, he pronounced the dread sentence the Lord had previously authorised him to pass. *"Thus says the Lord, 'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die. From the firstborn of Pharaoh . . . and all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and shall bow themselves to me, saying, 'Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee'; and after that I will go out'."*

That did end the interview. What Pharaoh said in reply, if he said anything at all, is not recorded. It seems from verse 8 that he did not get the chance. According to that verse, as soon as Moses had spoken, *"he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger"*. True to his word, he never saw the face of Pharaoh again. The die was cast, the obduracy of Pharaoh had made the last dread tragedy inevitable, and Moses was finished with him.

Why did Moses manifest "great anger", so unlike his usual peaceable and unruffled disposition, at this particular time? There is nothing like it recorded in any of the eight previous occasions. It could not have been on account of Israel for he knew that the deliverance was now nigh at hand. There was no question of frustration or disappointment over the progress of events. The matter was out of his hands now and in the hand of God. He had only to deliver the final message and walk out, knowing that his work was almost immediately to be crowned with success and the Exodus become a reality. His anger could not have had anything to do with that. Was it then because Moses knew now that nothing could save all those firstborn sons of the Egyptians from sudden death and he was sick at heart at the prospect?

The people of Egypt, the nobility and officials at the royal court, urged them to go and had in fact been urging Pharaoh to give way. That is evident from Ex.10.7. Only the obstinacy of one man stood in the way, and because of that, all Egypt must suffer this cruel affliction. The character of Moses is revealed in the Pentateuch as that of an essentially kindly and tolerant man, albeit stern and even ruthless where the enemies of his God or the nation he was creating, were concerned.

Many of those Egyptian parents who were to lose their firstborns had been his own personal friends in days of youth, forty years earlier, when as the adopted son of the Pharaoh, Queen Hatshepsut, he had moved freely among them. He thought of the tragic times when the newborn sons of his own people were destroyed at birth by the cruelty of this Pharaoh's grandfather, the renowned Thothmes I, and felt concern for all those Egyptians who were to suffer the same way. In a violent upsurge of emotion at what he now knew must come, he turned his back upon his callous opponent and "*went out from Pharaoh in a great anger*".

The stroke did not fall at once. The expression in Ex.11.4 "*About midnight will I go out...*" does not mean that the Angel of Death was to visit Egypt that same night; only that the visitation would occur at midnight. Chapter 12 makes it clear that at least a week elapsed while the people were receiving instructions and making preparations for the great event. It was now April, the tenth month of the Egyptian year and the seventh month, Nisan, according to the Hebrew method of reckoning. Now there was to be a change; the month in which the Exodus took place was to be accounted the first month of the year. That was the first instruction Moses gave them. (Ex. 12. 2). For ever after, Israel counted Nisan the beginning of the year for all religious matters and retained Tisri, (October) the original first month, for secular considerations.

On the tenth day of the month Nisan, said Moses, each family was to select a choice year-old lamb or kid from the flocks and care for it until the

fourteenth day. On the evening of that day they were to kill the lamb, smear its blood on the doorposts and "lintels" — and eat together of the flesh, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in a solemn ceremonial feast. The 'lintel' is a small look-out port above the doorway of Egyptian houses of the period. They were to eat, attired as if ready for a journey and they were to remain inside their houses all night. During that night the Angel of Death would come down upon Egypt and in every house except those marked with the blood, the firstborn son would die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of his humblest subject. But the angel would pass over those houses bearing the sign of the blood, without harming any within.

Thus was born the ceremony of the Passover, an observance that made Israel unique among the nations and is kept today, a living testimony to the reality of those events transpiring so long ago. No existing national ceremonial or memorial in any other nation is so old as the Passover. For more than three thousand years it has been repeated annually in every part of the world where the descendants of the people of Israel are to be found. The continued existence of this ceremony leaves no doubt that the events which gave it birth must have happened as related. They are evidence of the absolute truth of the Exodus from Egypt.

The 12th chapter recounts in full the Lord's instruction to Moses and Aaron respecting the detail of the Passover ceremony. The command to keep it as an ordinance for ever was included and that command has been faithfully obeyed.

There is an interesting reference in vv.7-20 to the "seven days of unleavened bread" following the feast, during which no leaven might be used in their food. The first and seventh days are additionally to be marked by a cessation of all labour and made holy to the Lord. It probably marks the introduction to Israel of a seven-day week with one day, the Sabbath, a rest day. The Egyptian calendar at that time was based on a ten-day week and no rest day at all. It is likely that this part of the instruction was intended for future Passovers. Its implementation at the moment of the Exodus would not have been very practicable.

Further stipulations (vv.24-27, 43-49) required the people to instruct their children in the meaning of the ceremony and the details of their escape from Egypt. To this day at each Passover a lad formally asks why they keep this feast and is answered by one of his elders in traditional words. They provided for the position of non-Israelites among them. Such could become adopted into the commonwealth of Israel by undergoing the rite of circumcision who were then entitled to partake. Otherwise no foreigner or stranger was allowed to share in the ceremony.

The instructions had been given, so *"the people bowed the head, and*

worshipped. *And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron; so did they.*" (Ex.12.27-28). It is evident that the entire community was now fully persuaded that the promise was to be fulfilled and their deliverance effected. There were no objections and no doubts. A few days must have elapsed whilst word was passed throughout Goshen to everyone of the two to three million Israelites involved and very busy days they must have been. It says much for the organising skill of Moses and his lieutenants that so great a number of people at so short a notice should be ready. On the evening of the fourteenth day of Nisan, the April moon being at the full, in the year now dated 1440 BC, they were gathered in their houses attired as for a journey. The slain lambs were on the tables before them and the doors were marked with the blood, awaiting the tremendous event prophesied more than four centuries earlier to Abraham. *"Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs . . . that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge, and they shall come out with great substance. . . in the fourth generation they shall come hither again."* (Gen.15.13-16). In many a shuttered and bolted house those words must have been recited, and prayers for deliverance ascend to God, as they waited in faith for the Lord to come down.

(to be continued)

AOH

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A TRUTH IN THREE HYMNS

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3.16

This verse seems to refer to a wide range of religious music, and nowadays different fellowships have their own preferred music, ranging from loud songs and hearty choruses to the austere melody of solemn chants. As a person brought up on 'traditional hymns' I am repeatedly astonished at how writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries combine the joy of music with the opportunity to teach, as God's word 'dwells in them'.

Recently there have come to my mind three hymns, each beginning with the words 'God is love'.

'God is love, His mercy brightens all the path in which we rove...' was written by John Bowring in the early eighteen hundreds, and emphasises God's love as it affects us personally. His mercy brightens our path, arouses

happiness and lightens our burdens, because He is not only loving but wise. His mercy remains constant, while we in our own lives are exposed to chance and change and the march of 'progress'. His brightness shines in the darkness, His glory shines everywhere. Alleluia!

The author, who was born of a puritan family in Exeter, published his book of hymns in 1825, and afterward he had a varied career for nearly fifty more years - as a man of letters, a Member of Parliament, an industrialist who was a model employer, and Governor of Hong Kong - ending up as Sir John Bowring. But what I personally appreciate most about him is what he wrote in this hymn - did he find it true in his own life?

'God is love, His the care, reaching each everywhere', written by Percy Dearmer in the early twentieth century is inspired by how God's love is revealed in Jesus. His care extends to each one, everywhere. So our care and love too, reaches out to our neighbours; in loving them, we love God. (Which of my own neighbours do I in fact love?) Jesus rules our hearts, 'light and life, friend and king' - saving us by the truth He gave us. He is our pattern, showing God's beauty. *"Sing aloud... God is love, God is truth, God is beauty. Praise Him!"*

Who was Percy Dearmer? An Anglican priest who wanted everything about worship to be beautiful. He was a chaplain during the Great War, at which time he lost his first wife from fever. His belief in doing good carried him into politics. He wrote many hymns, of which perhaps the most memorable are those which speak about Jesus, such as *'Jesus, good above all other'* or his translation of the carol *'Unto us a boy is born, king of all creation'*.

'God is love, let heaven adore Him' comes from the pen of Timothy Rees, a boy from west Wales who as a curate saw life in the Welsh mining valleys, then was a college lecturer, then a monk with the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield. He too became a chaplain with the army in the Great War, and ended by serving as a bishop of the Church in Wales. He too wrote many hymns. One, *'O crucified Redeemer'* shows mankind repeating through the centuries the same anguish that was inflicted on Jesus Christ in his life on earth - love outraged, hope killed, torture; a cross of greed, battlefields where brother men slaughter one another, and economic battles where might is right and self is king. On the other hand, in another hymn Timothy Rees sees the Holy Spirit giving life in this sinful world - forming the mind of Christ in members of the church, setting sinners free, binding men together in fellowship.

In 'God is love, let heaven adore Him', the emphasis is once again on God shown as Love. He laid the earth's foundations, spread the heavens above, breathes through all creation. He enfolds all the world in His loving care, every child of every race. And when we suffer and our hearts are breaking, God suffers too. Despite our sin, God's eternal loving kindness holds and guides us. In the end, sin and death will not win: God is Love, so *'love for ever o'er the universe must reign'*.

GC

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 16 1 John 3. 17-24

"But if anyone hath this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him (1 John 3.17 RSV)

The Apostle John, for all his deep spirituality, was eminently practical. His Christianity was a faith to be exercised on earth toward others as well as in heaven toward God. The Christian society to him was much more than a congregation of individuals, each of whom individually had been made right with God and each of whom had to make his or her calling and election sure. The Christian society was a brotherhood in the deepest sense such as the world had never known before. It is impossible, therefore, John insists, for any truly to be regarded as a member of that brotherhood if they fail to act up to the spirit of the brotherhood. It just means that there can be no such thing as destitution within the Christian community unless all are destitute. At least that is what it means in theory; in practice because the Christian community in the world has never reached up to the ideal set before us, it cannot be said that this condition is truly attained.

Yet a great number of those who are Christ's, are in possession of "this world's goods" to more than a usual degree. There are many indications that they have truly appreciated the spirit of this injunction and do minister to the material needs of their needy brethren. The Lord who sees in secret will one day reward them openly but they do not do those things for a reward. They do them because the love of God that is in their hearts leads them irresistibly to make use of their ability to give happiness and comfort to the Lord's afflicted ones.

No one can love God who does not love his brother and all men are brethren in God's sight. A man who at first does not love God, if he has true love for his brother and his neighbour in his heart, may soon become a lover of God also.

The expression 'bowels of compassion' (AV) is not used in modern English and can be meaningless. The word has changed its meaning since the days of the Authorised Version translators. At that time the inward parts including the heart, were a symbol of the affections. The same Greek word is better translated in 2 Cor.7.15, "*His inward affection is more abundant toward us*" and in Luke 1.78 "*Through the tender mercy of our God whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.*" The Septuagint uses the same word in Proverbs 12.10, "*The righteous man regardeth the life of his beast, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.*" This meaning "inward affection", should be applied wherever this word is used in a metaphysical sense, in the New Testament, that is 2 Cor.6.12; Phil.1.8 and 2.1; Col.1.2 and Philemon 7, 12 and 20. It will be noticed, all these occurrences are in the writings of Paul. He evidently had a great love for the sentiment that this word denoted.

Incidentally, in classical Greek, the word is used by Herodotus, to denote the inward parts of sacrificed animals, the lungs, liver, heart, etc. which were roasted by fire and eaten by the offenders. These were supposed to be the life-producing and life-sustaining organs – as indeed they are – and in the same way did the High Priest of Israel offer these same organs on the Brazen Altar of the Tabernacle during the progress of the Day of Atonement sacrifices. It has often been said that the 'inward parts' thus offered in the sacrifice, represent the heart's devotion and best endeavours of the consecrated life; here is the physical basis for that thought.

"Little children let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything. (1 John 3.18-20 RSV)

This is a better rendering of the Greek in verse 20 than the AV, and completely alters the sense of the passage and makes it more harmonious. The AV has it "*If our heart condemn us God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.*" It can be fairly argued from that sentence that John is issuing a warning. If we have, as it were, a guilty conscience, a heart that is telling us inwardly that we are doing wrong, we may depend

upon it that God, who is greater than our heart knows all about that wrong doing also. He who searches the heart can read our inmost thoughts and there is nothing hidden from his penetrating gaze. Now that is perfectly true but it is not what John is talking about here.

He is giving comfort and assurance, not warning. He is telling us that in every such time of self-condemnation, if in our natural depression and foreboding on account of inward sense of sin, we condemn ourselves unduly, this knowledge that we are loving him and his children, not only in word, but in deed and in truth, will constitute an assurance to us. We shall assure our hearts that God who knows all things, knows of the sincerity of our love and has taken note of the actions that accompany that love. In so doing he has counted us acceptable in His sight notwithstanding our weaknesses and shortcomings on account of which we tend to condemn ourselves too severely.

It is admittedly true that some disciples do not view in sufficiently serious light their failures to reach up to the Divine ideals. There are almost certain to be some particular weaknesses or failures or indulgences – different in different people – which we do not repress or condemn so strictly as we should. However, on the whole, it is probably true, that most of the Lord's children are too severely self-condemnatory. Usually the more earnest they are in their consecration, the more they tend to condemn themselves too severely. It is good for us that our Lord judges us neither too leniently nor too harshly – and, too, in his judgment he guides us in his way so that we may do better in future.

It is our part, therefore, to see to it that our love, expressed in word and speech, is worked out in our lives. It is easy to read about the virtues of love, or to listen and give mental assent to discourses extolling the quality of love; and all that may fairly be described as 'loving in word'. It is nearly as easy to talk about love, to profess the characteristics of love, to exhort others from the platform or pulpit, or in conversation, to love in daily life. That is truly loving with the tongue. John certainly does not mean us to understand that we are not to read, hear or talk about Christian love. But all of this, desirable and good as it may be, is of no value to us unless that same love is demonstrably effecting its good works in our hearts and lives. It is quite possible for any one of us to "*preach to others and oneself be a castaway*". After all it is not until one begins to put these things into practice that one really finds out what they mean. Many an audience has sat listening to an eloquent exhortation to Christian love, with much nodding of the heads and many eyes riveted on the speaker. After it is all over many in that audience have gone back to their daily routine without any intention of applying the things said to the incidents of daily life – it has just not occurred to them to

do so. John wants us to take his words very seriously and make them our own. But do not be content with that. He wants us to go away and put them into practice and see for ourselves how they work out.

"Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (vv.21-23).

This expression "if our hearts condemn us not" is not an antithesis to v.19 but is a development of that verse. The fact that we know our love to be one that is practised in our lives gives us assurance in heart against unnecessary and unjust self-condemnation. Since our heart no longer condemns us, we have a confidence – a boldness, is the real meaning of the word – toward God which enables us to approach him in full confidence and full assurance of faith. As the writer to the Hebrews says *"Having therefore brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."* (Heb.10.19-22). When in his wisdom and mercy and love our Heavenly Father accepts our proffered offering, the dedication and consecration of our hearts and lives to his service also gives us the privilege of access to him. We ought to realise and hold as a fundamental article of our faith that He has cast all our sins and shortcomings behind his back. He stands ready to help us over every obstacle, even though many of those obstacles are of our own making. We may have that confidence all the time that we retain the witness of our own heart's sincerity.

That is why John can say so confidently that *"whatsoever we ask, we receive of him"*. It is because we *"keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight"* that we receive whatsoever we ask. We ask only for those things that it is his will we should have. True, all of us voice many requests for things both spiritual and temporal that we never receive. There is a reason. We attach to every such request the unalterable proviso 'if it by Thy will' If the request is not going to be in accordance with his will – and at the time of proffering the request we do not know whether it is so or not – then that part of the request is not granted. So that if such a request is not granted, that is just what we ask for! It is literally true therefore that if we are keeping his commandments that include desiring his will to be done in all things, we do receive the answer we want to every request we make. It is 'yes' or 'no' according to the Divine will and it is that for which we ask. We accept the decision and we shape our course accordingly. The making of the request, whether it be granted or not, is good exercise. The acceptance of the decision if it be in the

negative, is good discipline. The receipt of that which is asked for, if the Lord's will be to grant it, affords opportunity for good practice, the making use of the gift for its intended purpose to the glory of God.

At last then, John comes to the conclusion of the second 'book' in this his first epistle. Chapters 1 and 2 contained the first self-contained little treatise, chapter 3 the second, whilst chapters 4 and 5 constitute a third that introduces further and deeper doctrinal truth concerning the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. Now in vv 23 and 24 he gives a fitting conclusion to his long exhortation. *"This is his commandment, That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keeps his commandments dwells in him and he in them. And hereby we know that he abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us."*

There is so much that might be said about that final word; and yet, because it is a final word it is better to leave it to convey its own message, unelaborated. It was Jesus himself who declared that love for God is the first and greatest commandment, and love for one's neighbour was the second and like unto it. Now John translates that word into one that is of more particular significance to the Church, the members of the body of Christ. Just as those words of Jesus are true in the larger, in the universal sense, so in a more restricted sphere love of the Lord Jesus is the first and greatest commandment and love for the brethren is second. That has been John's insistence throughout his epistle. Those who realise that fact and act upon it and whose love both for their Lord and for their brethren is worked out in their lives, dwell in God and God dwells in them. The Holy Spirit gives its witness in the heart of each believer, that this is so.

AOH

GOOD IF HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN

There sometimes arises a question as to the real implication of Jesus' words in Matt. 26.24 *"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born"*. Did Jesus mean by this that there can be no possible future hope for Judas, that the enormity of his sin has precluded him from any further opportunity of repentance and reconciliation with God? It would seem hard to reconcile such view with the fact of Judas' evident remorse; *"I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood"*. It was a

remorse that led him in despair, to go away and hang himself. Caiaphas, betrayed no sign of remorse, but is to see the Lord again 'at his appearing and his kingdom' (Matt. 26. 64). Would it not seem logical to think that Judas, whose guilt, on a sober appraisal of the position, was certainly of lesser degree than that of the High Priest, should at least enjoy the same opportunity and perhaps translate his remorse into repentance and consequent reconciliation. He must have been one of those for whom the Lord prayed *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"*. If those words mean anything they must imply a future opportunity for repentance.

There is in the *"Book of Enoch"* a clue to a possible reason for our Lord's allusion. We need to remember that a number of our Lord's sayings, and those of some of the Apostles, reveal that they were intimately familiar with this book, which was in general use at the time of the First Advent. The passage in question is in 1 Enoch 38, where the appearance of Christ at his Second Advent for the judgment of the wicked is described. The Book of Enoch consistently refers to the Messiah as the "Son of Man" or the "Righteous One" and in this remark of Jesus at the Last Supper, he too used the expression "Son of Man". The Enoch passage is as follows:— *"And when the Righteous One shall appear before the eyes of the righteous, whose elect works hang upon the Lord of Spirits, and light shall appear to the righteous and the elect who dwell on the earth; where then will be the dwelling of the sinners, and where the resting-place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits? It had been good for them if they had not been born."*

The meaning of the expression in this context is clear enough. When the Lord appears in glory and the faith of his true disciples is vindicated and honoured, where will the sinners and the apostates hide themselves in shame? Where will those who have denied their Lord go to conceal themselves from his searching gaze? That in the strong hyperbolic language of the day is *"It had been good for them if they had not been born"*. This expression does not mean that they were doomed to eternal death, but that rather than face the Lord they had denied or repudiated they would better not have been there at all, having never lived.

It might well be then that Jesus, talking to his disciples and Judas, was really quoting this verse from the Book of Enoch in order that Judas might recognise the allusion. Thus he would be reminded that one day, in the day of the Lord's glory, he would be called upon to stand before the Lord he was now betraying. Then he would experience the shame and confusion that in that day will be the portion of all who have rejected Jesus in this Life.

AOH

THE HORN OF AN UNICORN

"My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil" (Psa. 92.10.AV).

This 92nd Psalm is an expression of faith in the eventual elimination of evil from Divine creation and the triumph and eternal prosperity of those who love justice and order in God's world – the righteous, to use what is a theological term. The enemies of the Lord shall perish, exults the Psalmist; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered, but the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree – the tree that in the Middle East in ancient times was the symbol of eternal life. In that day, he goes on to say, he will experience an infusion of new strength and new power because God will be with him and behind him, rendering him irresistible in all that he undertakes for God. That is what is meant by his horn being exalted like the horn of a unicorn.

The unicorn is a mythical creature known best for its place in the British royal heraldic arms. The lion and the unicorn are familiar symbols, to the English-speaking peoples at least. Because the word "unicorn" appears several times in the Authorised Version it is often thought that in some way the royal heraldic insignia is derived ultimately from Old Testament symbolism and that some connection exists, but this is not really so. The figure of the unicorn as employed in heraldry is derived from descriptions of an alleged Indian animal by the Greek writer Ctesias (400 BC) and by others in later years, including the Roman naturalist Pliny in AD 70. According to these writers the animal was larger than a horse, ox-like in shape, with the head of a stag, feet of an elephant and the tail of a wild boar. One single horn three feet long projected from its head. Strong and very fierce, it could run faster than a horse and was very dangerous to encounter. The Greeks named this creature the *monoceros*, meaning single-horned, and the Latin equivalent is *unicornis* from which the English word comes. No animal completely fitting the description has ever been discovered but there is little doubt that the old writers were repeating vague impressions of the Indian rhinoceros.

This description gave rise to the popular conception of the unicorn in mediaeval England. British royal heraldry began in the 12th century and at first the royal arms of England carried the lion, favourite symbol of royalty, and the red dragon of Wales. The unicorn was first used in the arms of James I of Scotland (AD 1424) on which two unicorns were displayed. In the 17th century when James VI of Scotland became James I of England one unicorn replaced the dragon on the British royal arms, creating the design familiar to us today.

The Hebrew word rendered "unicorn" in the A.V. is *reem* which is now known to denote the aurochs or wild ox, an immensely strong and massive beast akin to the American buffalo. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) in 250 BC the translators used the Greek term *monoceros* and this was carried into the later Latin versions by its equivalent, *unicornis*. This is how the English versions and eventually the AV came to use the term "unicorn" in the passages concerned. No modern translation uses it; the majority have the correct term "*wild ox*". In the meantime, however, this unfortunate association of the mythical unicorn with the Scriptures gave rise to many mediaeval legends, some of which, for reasons which need not be detailed here, made this imaginary creature a symbol of Christ!

The Biblical "unicorn", then, was the wild ox, a creature so strong and powerful that it became the symbol of overpowering and irresistible force. Like all animals of its kind, it possessed two powerful horns. It was the strongest and most ferocious creature known to the early Hebrews and it is for this reason that horns in the OT are so often used as symbols of power and strength. In the Pentateuch, Israel, fortified by the power of God, are likened to the reem, the wild ox. *"The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; they have as it were the horns of the wild ox"* said Balaam (Num. 23. 21-22). *"God brings him out of Egypt; he has as it were the horns of the wild ox. He shall eat up the nations his adversaries and shall break their bones in pieces"* (Num. 29.8). Moses, blessing the tribes of Israel before his death, said of the posterity of Joseph *"his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he shall push the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth. Such are the ten thousand of Ephraim and such are the thousands of Manasseh"* (Deut. 33.17). There is in these pages a magnificent picture of the invincibility of Israel when God is with them. They traversed the wilderness and entered Canaan like a charging wild ox and nothing could stop them. One might almost say of the achievements of their descendants in these latter days that there is something of this wild ox in their sensational advances against and victories over their enemies. One is tempted to reflect, if this is what they can do whilst still in a state of unbelief, what will be their achievement in the yet future day when, because of their repentance and faith, God is with them?

So here is the "horn of the unicorn", that irresistible power which resides in the people of God, doing the work of God in faith that God is with them. *"Thou hast exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; thou hast poured over me fresh oil. . . for lo, thy enemies shall perish, all evildoers shall be scattered; they are doomed to destruction for ever"* sang David

(Psa. 92.7-10). As a man in his own strength he was weak and ineffectual; "*I am a worm, and no man*" he said on another occasion; but armed with the power of the Most High he was as a wild ox, invincible. As good king Hezekiah said when faced with the crisis of Sennacherib "*Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria... for there is one greater with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles*" (2 Chron.32.7-8). Something like this was in the minds of the later prophets when they declaimed the word of the Lord "*On that day I will cause a horn to spring forth to the house of Israel*" (Ezek.29.21). "*Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze*" (Micah 4.13). And the Psalmist was in no doubt at all. "*I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame but upon himself his crown will shed its lustre*" (Psa.132.16-17). "*My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him*" (David) "*and in my name shall his horn be exalted*" (Psa.89.24). In all of these rhapsodies, Israel, as a nation or as represented in David her king, is pictured as a rampaging wild ox, horns elevated proudly in the air, waiting the moment to rush into the fray and execute the work of the Lord.

What is the moral? It is that the people of God are irresistible and invincible when God is behind them. That applies equally to the Christian now as to Israel in a past age. When the time falls due for another advance in the outworking of the Divine Plan and the "Watchers" are awake and ready to share in the work of that advance, nothing can stop them. There are times when the wild ox is quiescent, waiting quietly in his covert for the impulse which commands him to sally forth, but there are times too when there is work to be done, a battle to be fought for the King of Kings, a harvest to be reaped for the Great Sower. Those are the times when, in our turn, our horn is exalted. "*The Lord gives the command; great is the host of those who bore the tidings. The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee!*" (Psa.68.11-12). That is the spirit of exaltation and confidence which in our day is perhaps the best equivalent to the rather more bloodthirsty manner in which Israel of old attacked and destroyed the enemies of the Lord. But our object is the same – the destruction of all evil and the turning of all men to righteousness. When, in the power of his Advent and his Kingdom, our risen Lord leads his own in the final and most successful campaign to evangelise the nations and cause the knowledge of the Lord to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and in the power of his leadership our horn is exalted like those of the wild ox entering the battle, we shall cry exultantly as did David of old "*the kings of the armies, they flee, they flee!*"

AOH

DO NOT BE CONFUSED !

- a mental and spiritual exercise

This exercise is intended to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance! The **first half** of each verse needs to be joined with the correct **second half**, and the proper **Bible reference** has to be put in place. As a mental exercise, you could take pen and paper, and sort it all out. Then, when you have disentangled the verses, and have them clear before you, spend a little time as a spiritual exercise, and consider what meaning each verse may have for you personally.

- 1 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him,
for so did their fathers to the false prophets. Luke 10.37
- 2 The Lord is my shepherd
that I might learn thy statutes. 1 Samuel 15.22
- 3 Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you,
for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5.5
- 4 Blessed are the meek,
for they are without fault before the throne of God Psalm 119.71
- 5 But every man in his own order, Christ the firstfruits,
but we seek one to come. Psalm 23.1
- 6 For here have we no continuing city,
So shall thy strength be . Proverbs 6.6
- 7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord Luke 10.37
- 8 And in their mouth was found no guile,
afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Revelation 21.6
- 9 It is done, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,
then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise. Revelation 14.5
- 10 And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
I shall not want. 1 Peter 1.3
- 11 Go to the ant, thou sluggard,
which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope. Hebrews 13.14
- 12 It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 1 Corinthians 15.23

GC

BOOK CORNER

Looking through my bookshelves, which are loaded with books inherited from all and sundry, I came upon one written in 1956 entitled 'New Testament Christianity', written by J.B.Phillips. The Phillips translation of the New Testament, in its time, opened up the scriptures to a new generation, and I still find it vivid and helpful, though there have been many 'new' translations since. Scanning through his book I was interested to read the thoughts of someone who for fourteen years had been in intimate contact with the words of Christ and the apostles, putting their thoughts into the language of ordinary English speaking people. The following passage, taken almost at random, is an example of his advice. After all, he did not only study God's Word, but sought to let his life be moulded by it.

Aspects of Christian Living

"There are some essentials for the maintenance of real Christian living. The first essential need is for quiet... It is imperative that somehow or other we make for ourselves a period of quiet each day. I know how difficult this is for many people in busy households, and for some even the bedroom is not quiet and private enough. But if we see the utter necessity for this period of quiet, our ingenuity will find a way of securing it.....

"What we must do in the period of quiet is to open our lives to God - to perfect understanding, wisdom and love.... people need to be reminded that we must be completely natural and uninhibited in our approach to the God "in whom we live and move and have our being"..... He is our heavenly Father and common sense tells us that, though He respects our individuality and our privacy, yet everything about us is quite open to His eyes.... We are opening our hearts and minds to Love, and we need have no fears, no reticences, and no pretences. Strange as it undoubtedly is, He loves us as we are, and indeed we shall make no sort of progress unless we approach Him as we are.

"Prayer has many aspects... The first is the value of worship. For myself, I do not think worship can be forced, nor can I imagine that

God wants it to be. But if we make a habit of associating all that is good, true, lovely and heart-warming in our ordinary experience of life and people with Him Who is the Source of every good and perfect gift; if without forcing ourselves to be grateful we quietly recount those things for which we can be truly thankful; if we allow our dreams and aspirations to lead us upward to the One from Whom they are in fact derived, we shall not infrequently find that the springs of worship begin to flow. Sometimes a consideration of the Character of Christ as revealed in the Gospels, sometimes a consideration of the whole vast Plan for man's redemption, and sometimes a consideration of the immense complexity and wisdom revealed in a dozen different departments by the researches of Science will move us to wonder, admiration, awe and worship.

"In our prayers we should not merely confess our sins and failures to God, but claim from Him the opposite virtue. If we stress again and again our own particular failings, we tend to accentuate and even to perpetuate them.... We need to draw upon the inexhaustable riches of Christ, not as though that were some poetic and metaphorical expression, but as though it were a fact. The Gospel is not Good News if it simply underlines our own sinfulness. That is either a foregone conclusion or it is Bad News! But the whole wonder and glory of the Gospel is that into people who have sinned and failed badly God can pour not only the healing of forgiveness but the positive reactivating power of goodness. It is not the mere overcoming of a fault that we should seek from God, but such an overflowing gift of the opposite virtue that we are transformed. I cannot believe that the miracles of personality-transformation which undoubtedly occurred in such places as Corinth or Ephesus nineteen centuries ago, are beyond the power of God's activity today.....

"I should like to stress the value of intercession for other people. I do not pretend to understand the mystery of intercession, though I am sure it is never an attempt to bend the will of a reluctant God to do something good in other people's lives. But somehow in the mysterious spiritual economy in which we live we are required to give love, sympathy and understanding in our prayers for others, and this releases God's power of love in ways and at depths which would otherwise

prove beyond our reach. I confess I stand amazed at the power of intercessory prayer, and not least at what I can only call the "celestial ingenuity" of God. He does not, as a rule, directly intervene; He assaults no man's personality, and He never interferes with the free-will which He has given to men. Yet, working within these apparently paralysing limitations, God's love, wisdom and power are released and become operative in response to faithful intercessory prayer. It is all part of the high Purpose, and all true Christians are responsibly involved in such praying."

New Testament Christianity Hodder and Stoughton 1956 pp102-105

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Gainsborough House Convention June 19 and 20

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. Our thanks for two anonymous donations of \$100.

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Theme The Promises of God (Past, Present and Future)

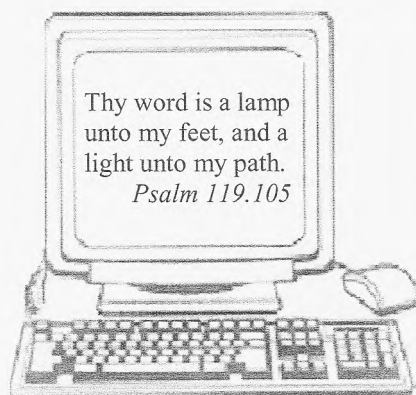
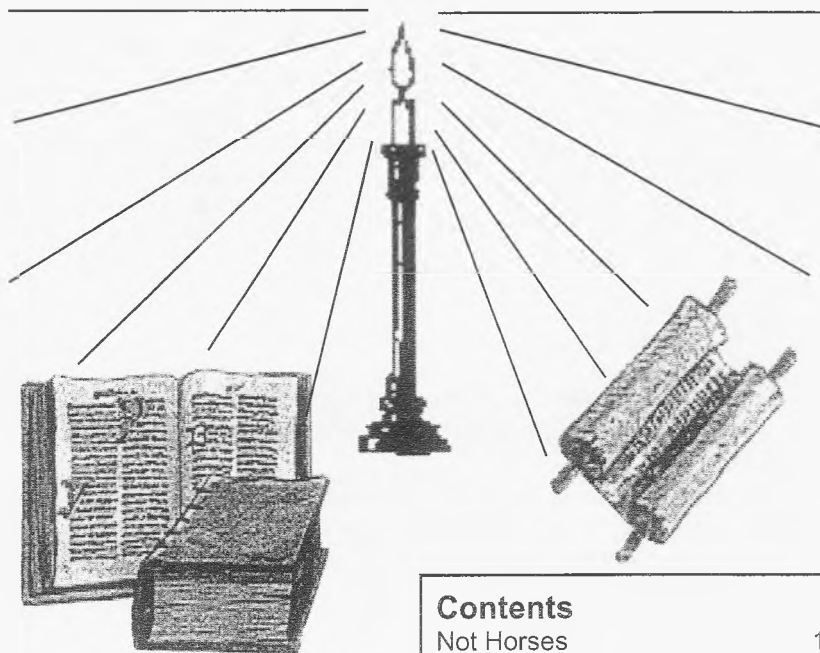
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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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NOT HORSES

"For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isa. 30.15 NRSV).

Only those who have committed themselves in trust to God realise the truth of this statement, *"Come back and quietly trust in me. Then you will be strong and secure"* (TEV). In confidence is strength, in returning and rest is salvation. It is upon this and similar promises that the Lord's people rely in these days of stress and turmoil.

Strength today is measured in a very different manner. Calm, quiet confidence and rest in God is not considered as strength and finds no place in unregenerate hearts. It was ever thus, for in Isaiah the next verse has the reply Israel of old made to this wise counsel from God, *"But you refused, and said, No, we will flee upon horses"*. They preferred their own way to the way of God, and God's answer to them was, *"therefore you shall flee"*.

The horse in Old Testament usage is a counterpart of modern aircraft, missiles, mortars and armoured vehicles. It meant confidence and strength. Egypt was distinguished for producing fine horses and the Egyptians used them much in war. God had forbidden the kings of Israel to multiply horses (Deut. 17.16) and in prohibiting them He designed to distinguish his people from the Egyptians. It was not his purpose for them to rely upon horses for

strength and deliverance but to rely solely upon their God, who had promised them victory over their enemies on conditions of faithfulness to him. Psalm 20.7 says, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God"*.

In spite of God's warning through Moses in Deut.17.16 to those who would afterward become the kings of Israel, we find Solomon violated this instruction, for 1 Kings 10.26 says, *"Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen"*. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and verse 28 says that Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt. This course finally led to Solomon's downfall and the downfall of his kingdom, as shown in the next chapter (1 Kings 11. 9-12).

Among heathen nations the horse was dedicated to the sun and driven in processions at festivals of sun worship. The ancient Persians, who were sun worshippers, dedicated white horses and chariots to the sun. The sun was supposed to be drawn daily in a chariot by four wondrous coursers. That even Israel had become contaminated by this particular type of idolatry is shown by 2 Kings 23. 11, for Josiah, in instituting his reformation, took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. In view of this we can well understand the fitting rebuke of Isa.2.7. *"Their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols, they bow down to the work of their own hands, to what their own fingers have made."*

Isa.30.16 continues, *"We will ride upon swift steeds— therefore your pursuers shall be swift."* Alas that men should rely upon what is 'swift', as Israel in Isaiah's day. Their pursuers have access to the same 'swift', whatever it be, whether the horses of the ancients or their modern counterparts, and it is still necessary for the Lord (as in verse 18) to *"wait to be gracious"*.

Yet as we continue reading this passage our hearts rejoice. In verse 19 and 20, *"Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher."* We can apply this to ourselves in our day, the word behind us says *"This is the way, walk in it."* Soon, when God says with authority, *"Stand still, and know that I am God"*, mankind will no longer need to trust in 'horses', but will in "quietness and confidence" wait for the word of God.

TH

ETERNAL LIFE

"He who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5.24).

That is one of the many New Testament statements that declare that the gift, or power, or quality, of eternal life is the present possession of every true believer. The submission of the heart and life in loyalty and dedication to Christ, the acceptance of him as Saviour and Leader, the conscious deliberate alignment of one's life with the will of God, insofar as that will is understood, result in a real change of state in the individual. This is where the life of that individual is changed in its quality from one that is essentially transient to one that is essentially permanent. *"He who has the Son has life: he who has not the Son has not life" (1 John 5.12); "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 3.36).* The life that is here spoken of is not one that is conferred after death as reward for a lifetime of piety and good works. It is one that results from acceptance of Christ and his ways and it precedes the piety and good works rather than succeeds them.

It must be admitted, though, that many other Scriptures do refer to eternal life as an object of hope and future attainment, as though it were conditional upon the attainments of this mortal life. There is no man who has left house, and so on, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, said Jesus *"who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life"* (Luke 18.30). That seems quite clearly a promise for the future, conditional upon present actions rather than present belief. Paul, writing to Titus, extolled his mission *"to further the faith of God's elect. . . in hope of eternal life which God promised ages ago"* (Titus 1.2), and again, to the Galatians, *"he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life"* (Gal.6.8).

One might conclude, hastily, that there is an element of contradiction in these two presentations and that room exists for debate as to whether eternal life is in fact a present possession or a future hope.

Perhaps this seeming contradiction is due to the rather natural tendency to think of eternal or everlasting life – the same word in the original is used for both terms – from the standpoint of that perpetual, never-ending life of the future that the Christian believes is his destiny after human death.

"There shall be no more death"; this to him is synonymous with eternal life, a condition of existence in perpetuity amid all the splendours of the future world that his theology has taught him to visualise. Now whilst all this may be very true it is not the meaning of the Scriptural term 'eternal life'.

The word "eternal", with its idea of time-perpetuity, came from the Latin versions, but in the original manuscripts, the Greek word so often rendered "eternal" and "everlasting" has the significance of enduring, of the permanent as opposed to the transient. It is true that the eternal life will endure for ever, but it is because of its *quality* that it endures for ever, and it is to its quality rather than its duration that the term 'eternal' applies.

Perhaps John 6.54 is significant in this connection. *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* Leaving aside for the present the mystic significance of the flesh and the blood, here is a clear intimation that one who possesses eternal life here and now in consequence of his vital association with Christ must nevertheless pass through the gates of death and emerge into the after-life by means of resurrection, "at the last day". The possessor of eternal life, then, dies as a human being even though the life that is in him endures in the Divine care and is afterwards manifested in a new body fitted to the new environment into which he has entered. The logical conclusion would then seem to be that a man does not enter the future state in order to receive eternal life. He enters the future state because he already has eternal life.

What of those who do not possess this quality of life? It is a manifest fact that of all earth's millions, past and present, only a relatively small proportion come within the requirements of our Lord's words. Most of the remainder have never even heard of the *"only name given under heaven whereby we may be saved"*. They live, in a biological sense, but they do not have eternal life. In that state, and unless they eventually come within the scope of our Lord's standards, they must inevitably die, and be no more. The life that is in them cannot sustain them indefinitely. This, says the Scriptures, is because of sin, sin which is the element of disorder in God's creation, the continued presence of which in the individual life makes continued life impossible, just as its continued presence in any part of the creation – in this earth, for example – must ultimately render the continuance of that part of creation impossible. The story of Eden is the record of the entrance of that disorder into this world, and the sentence on Adam *"return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you shall return"* its consequence. The position is summed up by Paul in the cogent words *"the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6.23).

If the quality of life that man has when born cannot take him into the illimitable future, then God provides for him to have knowledge and opportunity sufficient to accept this free gift of God in Christ. Many have

lived their lives and gone into death without that knowledge and opportunity. In some way and at some time every human being who has lived will be brought face to face with these eternal verities and make his choice, for good or evil, for life or death. Repentance for the past and acceptance of Christ for the future must be just as possible after death as before. The Divine response to such will always be on the same principle "*a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*"

So the period of time in history during which it is possible for the individual to turn from "dead works to serve the living God" and receive his gift of eternal life is limited. This is not by the end of that individual's earthly life, but by the close of the time-span that God in his wisdom foresees will be adequate for the whole of the race of mankind to realise the issues and to make the choice. It must be remembered that God, having created men as independent living beings having powers of free-will, cannot possibly compel them to the good life, to a forced conformity with the system of order which is his creation. There must at least be provision for a man to refuse the blessings of conscious life on the only terms on which it can be offered. It is at least conceivable that a man could be so wedded to the principles and practice of evil that he could not endure life in a system in which evil has no place and such an attitude is indicated by the Scriptures. They show that in the final outworking of things God withdraws the gift of conscious life from those who cannot accept and make use of it aright. There must come an end to the period of human probation and a time when only those who have attained to eternal life will remain to take their appointed places in the Divine scheme.

This is where the Messianic Kingdom of God upon earth becomes an important theological factor. The Scriptural presentation of a thousand-year period, following the Second Advent and the disintegration of the existing world order, during which Heaven's rule will prevail to the infinite betterment of earth's peoples is fairly generally known, with many variations, among Christians. It is perhaps not so generally appreciated that this period provides the very means necessary whereby the "unsaved dead" of past times may receive that knowledge of Christ which is essential to their salvation but was denied them in the past life. Jesus said that the day is to come when all who are in their graves will hear his voice "*and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment*" (John 5.28-29). It is easy to see in those that come forth to the "resurrection of life", Christian believers of this Age who have already received the gift of eternal life and have not subsequently repudiated it. In their resurrection they enter into the heavenly realm in the full glory and power of celestial nature and in eternal association with the

Lord Christ their Leader and Head. The others, who come forth to a resurrection by judgment, have not yet reached the point where acceptance of Christ gives them, in their turn, the gift of eternal life. They have not yet made their decision. In many cases they have not yet received the knowledge necessary to making a decision. No wonder this is called a resurrection by judgment. The entire Messianic Kingdom is a process of trial and judgment to those who are its subjects; by its close all will have come to the crisis of decision and made their choice for or against God and his ways.

That decision is necessary, final and irrevocable, because we as finite terrestrial beings cannot begin to understand that continuing, eternal life, can only come to us through Christ. He is the centre and pivot of all creation and on him all things depend. *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (Col.1.17). That is why the New Testament insists that acceptance of the Lord Christ and union with him is essential to salvation, a dogma that would seem unnecessarily severe were practice of the good life and the repudiation of evil all that was necessary. The whole living creation is a unity, each individual constituting a personal identity in his own right, an identity preserved by God through death of the organism in one world to resurrection in a new organism in another world. Yet the sum of all created individuals are all joined together to constitute a harmonious living union animated by the life which comes from God, through Christ. Said the Apostle Paul to the Christians at Ephesus, in the endeavour to expound this truth, *"he has made known to us . . . the mystery of his will, according to his purpose ... a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things in earth"* (Eph. 1.9).

This is as far as human mind can penetrate. The possibilities and certainties of the distant future are hidden from us, until in the fulness of time we have powers of thought and perception the range of which can take in the scope of those transcendent worlds which lie beyond and above the terrestrial. We can only rest ourselves in that conviction that possessed the great Apostle's Spirit-filled mind when he wrote *"what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived; what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit"* (1 Cor.2.9). There is a spiritual understanding of a life and a world yet to be in our experience, which is impressed upon our minds, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and becomes conviction, whilst as yet we cannot visualise its nature and appearance. Says the Beloved Disciple (1 John 3. 2) *"It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"*.

Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

AOH

A RELIGION OF TRUE PIETY

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit orphans and widows in their affliction; and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (Jas.1 27 RSV)

Religion is one of those topics which frequently provides a subject for discussion and even bitter argument. Some people prefer to avoid the subject because of its controversy. Others feel that religion is more about 'philosophy' than about a 'living faith'. Paul, in his address to the men of Athens on Mars Hill said *"I perceive that in every way you are very religious"*. Paul uses here a Greek word akin to the one that James uses – 'threskia' which Vine says "signifies religion in its external aspect, religious worship, especially the ceremonial service of religion."

To many, the Jewish religion is identified with the ceremony of the Law given through Moses. What similarity has this with the kind of worship of the God of Israel which is revealed through the prophets and later through Jesus and his apostles? How far, we wonder, did the saintly men of old measure up to James' definition?

The first act of piety might be said to be Adam and Eve walking in the cool of the evening with God.

Then there was Abel's sacrifice of an animal to God?

Noah made a sacrifice as a token of loving thankfulness that he and his family had survived the Flood.

Abraham when he obeyed God by going to Canaan left behind practices and trappings, those of the idolatrous worship of the people of Ur. He went to a place where he could worship God Most High in quietness and peace. When he arrived in Canaan he built an altar to the Lord and worshipped him.

His most memorable occasion of worship was surely in the mountains of Moriah when he took his son Isaac to sacrifice in obedience to God (Gen.22). The 'cutting of the Covenant' (Gen.15) must also have been a wonderful occasion of worship.

The visit of the three angels (Gen.18) when Abraham made intercession for the cities of the Plain was an act of worship without apparent ceremony, but the detailed account is an example to all who would enjoy the faith of the old patriarch. For him, piety was obedient love toward God and his fellow men.

This same quality is revealed in his immediate descendants to a greater or lesser degree. There is little about them that speaks of ritual or slavish adherence to regulations, which came in much later generations. It could be

argued that ritual and regulation did develop as a result of the Law given through Moses. The pharisees in Jesus' day claimed to be followers and spiritual descendants of Moses, but the great Lawgiver himself had nothing of their outward religion.

The sacrifices of Law Covenant were valuable in religious worship because they kept the ritual and sacrifice within godly boundaries and at the same time provided pictures of what real worship and effective atonement would be like. Rightly understood and practised the various features of the Law pointed forward to Messiah and the kind of worship that he would demonstrate. In those early days of nationhood Israel needed things they could see and handle. But that pointed forward to a day when the principle would be "*not in this mountain or in Jerusalem*" - wherever a heart was lifted up to God in spirit and truth, there the Father would be seeking his loving child.

Moses had unique experiences on the mountain with God. He saw something of the majesty and glory which reflected the wonderful character of the Lord. When he returned to live among his fellow men and women he bore something of the physical glory in his face and something of the spiritual love in his actions. So, when he was insulted by his Sister Miriam he responded nobly by pleading with God for her healing.

True piety enriches the character and we too must mind that we bear the image of the Master in our face.

DN

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We are by nature and environment of the earth, earthy, and therefore unavoidably susceptible to the beguiling influence of the things of earth. Our human instincts prompt us to be continually reaching out for these things, and we need to be constantly on the alert to set and keep resetting our affections upon the things above (Col. 3.2.). Some of us may have had the experience of trying to train some creeping plant such as the morning glory, to climb up some upright structure in order to form a floral archway. If so, we can hardly have failed to notice how persistently the plant by means of its shoots or tendrils, strives to entwine itself around every garden flower or object within its reach. It has to be constantly disentangled from these things and to be reset around the upright we wish it to cling to. Thus it is with our affections and inclinations. If left to follow their own devices they will persist in becoming entangled with earthly things before we realise the dangerous trend our thoughts are taking.

UNTO THE PERFECT DAY

"The path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4.18).

How many times that verse has been used to justify the institution of a new "break-through" in Christian thought, leading the more adventurous of Christ's disciples into widening and lengthening vistas of understanding! The promise of Jesus was to the effect that the Holy Spirit would *"guide you into all truth and show you things to come"*. This is a guarantee that the society of the faithful must expect to experience advancement and progress in their perception of the things of God. In fact it would be intolerable in this our day, when knowledge on any conceivable subject is so manifestly increasing, to think otherwise in respect of the most important subject of all. In the gloom and obscurity of the Dark Ages it was held and believed that no possible addition to the Divine revelation could possibly be made, and religious thought was static. The perennial striving of the human spirit is for something clearer than has been attained, and in this the seeker after Divine truth has been following a right impulse.

The entire emphasis of the New Testament is upon a continually increasing and deepening understanding of the Divine purpose in creation and of God himself. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out"* cried the Apostle Paul to the Romans (Rom. 11.33). Truly the shining pathway of the Christian leads straight forward into the illimitable distance and there is no end to its prospect but away on the horizon the golden light shines in splendour, beckoning the eager traveller onward and ever on. This is the promise of the Christian faith, the prospect of increasing light, increasing scope, increasing ability, and increasing achievement throughout the everlasting years of all future time.

However, we are still at the beginning of the way. This three score years and ten of human life is our babyhood, as it were, our first introduction to the wonders of sentient sharing in God-given life in a God-given environment, the first perhaps of many of a consistently widening range. For us the light is only just beginning to break through the gloom. And because we are still so immature and undeveloped in our powers of perception, it is difficult to comprehend the full sweep of this theme into eternity. Much easier it is to picture the shining light as encompassing the span of our earthly life with our fellows, and to think only of the community with which our associations and activities are bound up and the impact of

that light upon that community. Especially is it true to think of that increasing light as the radiance of the knowledge of the Divine plans in history, coming to truly dedicated Christians in this, the closing years of the Age. It is destined to become so still further in brilliancy and clarity until it merges at last with the greater glory of the Messianic Kingdom. That is a true application of the scriptural allusions in Prov.4. But there may be a purely local time of recession when, in the particular community, the light ceases to increase because the earlier impetus of that fellowship has spent itself. The passage of years, the non-fulfilment of expectations fondly held, the realisation that there is much more in the problem of existence and of God than was at one time thought, bring doubt and uncertainty to some as to the validity of the fellowship and its predominant theme.

That is not an unusual sequel. It has happened so many times in Christian history. It comes from interpreting the promise of the shining light purely in a community sense. Do we do right in expecting Prov. 4.18 to be so interpreted? Our Lord is not interested so much in communities as in individuals. We are so apt to be dazzled by the sight or thought of some spectacular work being carried on by a fellowship of zealous and dedicated Christians that we fail to remember the ultimate purpose of such things. The community is only useful to our Lord as a nursery for his disciples and in every case it is discarded when it has served its purpose. None of our organised arrangements, useful and helpful as they may have been here on earth, will be carried into Heaven with us at the end. Just as surely as flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, just so surely must all the imperfect creations of our hands, means of grace though they may be now, be forbidden entrance to that celestial world where the whole conception of worship, of service and activity, of growth in knowledge, must be on a totally different plane. So we need not mourn the passing of an old order which no longer has the power to enthuse and inspire as it once did. Neither do we well to spend time and energy endeavouring to recreate or resuscitate a system of service or of instruction that can never do again what it did at the first. For its work had been done in the hearts and lives of those who have seen the golden vision by the ministry of that work and have retained the radiance in their own hearts and will retain it until the end of their days. The organisation may be no more, the fellowship may seem to be in process of dissolving, but the individuals who are the true fruitage of such a work are progressing still in the light of that vision "unto the perfect day" as each follows his own pathway to the stars and receives his own illumination from on high.

Standing on the seaside promenade at night, one sees the path of the moonlight across the waters, ending right at one's feet. Twenty yards

farther along, one's companion also sees the moon-track, also pointing straight towards his own self. No two observers ever see the same pathway in the waters; yet it is the same moon light and from whatever vantage point leads still to the same moon. So every disciple follows in the same way to the end of the path where, like Jacob's ladder set up from earth to heaven, God waits. In the selection of those to whom He is to entrust the work of the life to come, He is exercising infinite care and patience, and each one receives individual treatment. There is no such thing as mass production in the Almighty's methods.

This is where another catch-phrase, familiar to many, comes to mind: *"a people for a purpose"*. That expression is the key to much of the apparent mystery in God's dealing with man. Why is He so long in dealing with evil? Why is the Kingdom so slow in its appearance? If Jesus died for man two thousand years ago, why is it that the world still groans and suffers, waiting for that which Jesus died to give them? The answer lies in this phrase. God is developing, in this life, a people to serve his purpose in the next. And so the whole conception of our calling and our life in Christ must be set against the background of our place in the Divine purpose. The way in which we walk and the light that shines upon that way, contribute to that ultimate purpose.

Away in the Central American country of Yucatan there lie the remains of a great ceremonial road built by an ancient people, the Maya, something like two thousand years ago. Along that road there passed, in olden time, youths and maidens who had dedicated themselves and their lives to the sun-god. Leaving all the hopes and aspirations and ambitions of life behind them, they pressed along the road, day after day, until at length they entered a gloomy tunnel leading down into the bowels of the earth. That tunnel took them into an underground cavern deep below the Temple of the God, and in the middle of the cavern, a yawning abyss at the bottom of which was a deep subterranean lake. As each one of those youths and maidens reached the edge of that gaping pit they unhesitatingly threw themselves in, a willing sacrifice to the god they served. Was it a useless waste of young life that might have been put to some good purpose?

Some Christian lives today are spent like that: a gloomy, morbid and sometimes ultra sanctimonious outlook that takes no account of the element of purpose in God's requirements with us. Given only to the maintenance of a pious mind and abhorrence of sin, there is nothing positive, nothing active, nothing that recognises the need for qualification for future work of service. Some lives like that, truly dedicated to God, are nevertheless as much wasted in his sight as were those of the Maya youngsters of long ago.

On the sandy plains of Mesopotamia, when Babylon flourished and Daniel administered affairs of State, there existed a road of another kind. The "Processional Way" it was called, and it traversed the principal districts of the

city of Babylon from the gates of the Temple of the great god Marduk, past the king's palace, to the river. Once in every year there was a great festal occasion. The image of the god was brought out of his place in the Temple, placed upon a conveyance, and taken in solemn state along that Processional Way amid the cheers and admiration of the populace. He made gracious acknowledgements to the temples of the lesser gods as he passed them. He accepted the homage of the king before the entrance to the palace. He paid his respects to that very important lady the goddess Ishtar, Queen of Heaven, as he went through the great gateway dedicated to her honour. The image eventually arrived at the river Euphrates, was placed in the state barge, and continued his journey by river. He eventually arrived back at his own temple, was duly landed and restored to his accustomed position, where he remained for another year. He had a most interesting journey, saw a lot of interesting sights and met a great many interesting people. But at the end he was back where he started; he never got any farther.

Too many Christian lives are like that. They start out on the road that is to lead them to the heavenly kingdom but the realisation of purpose is lacking. They learn a great many things and they see a great many things and they do a great many things, but at the end it has all added up to nothing so far as their own fitness for a future Divine purpose is concerned. From God's standpoint they have just gone round in circles and got nowhere. We need to remember – *"A people for a purpose."* The road we are treading will continue to shine more and more brightly until the perfect day if we remember all the time that we are called for a definite purpose that awaits us in the life to come for its full accomplishment. There is a goal toward which we are pressing and it is not attained in this life. The road we travel commences in darkness but it ends in light. That, after all, is the principle of God's creation. In Genesis the earth is without form and void, and darkness is upon the face of the deep; but in Revelation the holy city is all radiant in the light of the glory of God and of the Lamb, and there is no night there. Isaiah told of the people who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, upon whom a great light shined and John announces the Lord Jesus as that light of the world which shone in darkness and the darkness could not contain it, and so the darkness was overpowered and swallowed up by it.

So it will be with us if we resolutely press forward along this path of the just upon which our feet were once firmly planted. We are secure in the knowledge that no matter what may befall us in our earthly circumstances or our earthly fellowship, the light will continue to shine for us more and more brightly, "unto the perfect day".

AOH

CONSECRATION

Some thoughts on the Christian life

The word 'consecration' is used in the Old Testament a little differently from how we use it today. In the Old Testament the idea seems to have been that a person or an object was 'consecrated' or set apart in a holy way by a designated person.

Evangelical literature of the 19th century tended to use the word more and more as relative to the Christian calling, perhaps best defined in Francis Ridley Havergal's well known hymn "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee". That hymn denotes a person's surrendering themselves and all they are and all they possess to God. It records a person's obedience to Paul's words in Romans 12.1-2, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices.

The first disciples began by following Jesus and their baptism was for repentance in order that they might re-establish their relationship with God as his people – Israelites under the Law. As Jesus' ministry progressed so did his demands in the way they followed Him. He began to show them that following Him meant denying self ...taking up their cross and placing him first in their lives.

All this we have understood in that word 'consecration'. Paul defines for us the meaning of following Jesus when he writes to the Romans (6.4) that we have been buried with him in baptism so that we might rise with him in newness of life. It has been said that children and young teenagers are too young to understand what consecrating mean. But would waiting for baptism till late teens or early twenties even then provide us with a full and complete understanding of the Christian way, called by Jesus the 'Narrow Way'? To 'consecrate' is a beginning, but understanding grows as life goes on.

As we read and study the Scriptures it becomes clear that this is a vast subject. For James, son of Zebedee, his consecrated life seems to have been at most a year or so while for his brother John it was a very long life to about a hundred. For some it has ended like Stephen's in the death of a martyr – but for many it is a long and full life of service. For each of us, it is a lifetime that is just long enough to accomplish all that God needs us to do here on Earth and then be ready to enter his presence.

The Christian life is one of growth and development. Jesus used various pictures to describe that process and one of the most well known is his reference to development of 'spiritual fruit'. The apostles thought in terms of a walk with Christ, and getting to know Him and becoming like him occupied much of their attention. Sadly, there are many for whom this is not the

central feature of their Christian lives. Paul wrote that he wanted more than anything else to 'know Him'. That is a very different thing from 'knowing about him'.

Consecration in the New Testament sense means becoming part of God's great family and then like Jesus we shall know him as 'Father'. It begins, as Jesus said, by being 'born again'. It ends when we are truly reflecting his likeness.

A Christian has many privileges and responsibilities, but they do not include judging our brothers and sisters. Learning to love is our preoccupation – following in the Master's steps is our true joy.

DN

Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.

If life be long, I will be glad
That I may long obey;
If short, yet why should I be sad
To soar to endless day?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before;
He that into God's kingdom comes
Must enter by this door.

Come, Lord, when grace hath made me meet
Thy blessed face to see;
For if Thy work on earth be sweet,
What will Thy glory be?

My knowledge of that life is small;
The eye of faith is dim;
But tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.

Richard Baxter 1615-91

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Pharaoh capitulates at last

"And it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon. And Pharaoh rose up in the night. . . and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead." (Ex.12.30).

Perhaps Pharaoh had not really believed that this would happen. Blinded, maybe, by his own egotism and arrogance he might have reasoned that every one of the nine plagues had been lifted; the damage they had done was grievous, but not irremediable. The God of Moses had shown Himself possessed of marvellous powers in the world of Nature and had used those powers considerably to increase the magnitude of events which on a smaller scale were by no means unknown in Egypt. But to single out of all Egypt's multitudes the firstborn son of each family and encompass the sudden death of all such simultaneously on the stroke of midnight: Pharaoh knew of no gods having such power and he had dismissed Moses' final denunciation, a little uneasy perhaps but dismissed it nevertheless, as the despairing defiance of a defeated man. Now he knew better, and it was too late!

The literal historicity of the death of the firstborns is the only explanation of the existence of the Passover feast. The very centre and core of the whole arrangement, and of much of Israel's religious organisation in after years, rests upon the fact that all the firstborns of Egypt did die under the hand of God on that fateful night. Without that dread happening the Passover could have had no meaning and would never have been repeated. However inexplicable the proceeding—and the singular nature of the selection, firstborn only in every house except those marked with the blood, rules out every explanation save direct action by Divine intervention—it must have happened in the fashion described.

Egyptian history is silent on this event and the name of Pharaoh's firstborn son is not known. But there is one significant fact. The son who did succeed him was Thothmes IV, and he is well known in history. In 1886 the Egyptologist Maspero, engaged in clearing the sand which buried the lower half of the Sphinx, the huge half man, half animal monument situated near the Great Pyramid of Ghizeh, discovered between the great paws of the figure a small altar with an inscribed tablet, hitherto unknown. When deciphered, the tablet was found to be the record of a remarkable dream experienced by

Thothmes IV when a youth, before his accession. It seems that the lad had been out hunting with his servants, lain down in the shadow of the Sphinx to rest, and fallen asleep. In his dream the Sphinx-god spoke to him and promised that if he would clear away the sand which even then partially buried the monument then he should one day become Pharaoh of Egypt. Upon awaking, Thothmes was so impressed that he carried out his part of the bargain; when he did succeed to the throne he erected the tablet in the place where he had slept. The significant thing about this is that Thothmes was evidently not the eldest son of Amen-hotep or there had been no need to make this bargain to ensure his succession. In Egypt the eldest son invariably succeeded his father as Pharaoh. The obvious inference is that for a reason not stated in Egyptian history the eldest son of Amen-hotep died before his father so that the younger one succeeded. That is strong supporting evidence for the truth of the Biblical account.

How does this wholesale destruction of firstborn, with all the anguish and mental suffering it must have involved, appear in relation to the Divine character? God is love and these slain firstborns were the creation of his hands. He had given them life; now in a moment He deprived them of life. Was it not possible for God, who has all power, to deliver his people without involving the sudden death of probably several hundred thousand innocent firstborns? The answer to such questions is not easy; it involves the whole philosophy of the permission of evil. To say that God is the giver of life and has every right to withdraw life at his pleasure is not a complete nor a satisfactory answer. It is true that in past times God had visited whole peoples with judgment on account of their depravity—the antediluvians, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, and so on—but there is no evidence that all the slain firstborns were depraved. And what then of their eternal future? The situation is only tolerable when it is understood that this life is only one phase of man's development into the Divine ideal. The death of the firstborns was not an irreparable loss; they did not die without hope; there is more yet to come. In the words of a famous theologian, Dr. Farrar, Archdeacon of Westminster, *"man's destiny stops not at the grave; many who knew not Christ here will know him there. In some way or other, before the final verdict, God's mercy may reach them and the benefits of Christ's atonement be extended to them beyond the grave."* And it might well be that necessity existed to demonstrate at this time the fact that all men are members one of another, that for reasons which are too deep for the human mind to grasp the evil of one man cannot but have its repercussion upon others. The death of the firstborn was primarily the consequence of Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Was this terrible outcome a measure of the

fearful gulf which Pharaoh had created between himself and every right thought and action. As Dr. Farrar said again in another place *"It is impossible for us to estimate the hardening effect of obstinate persistence in evil, and the power of the human will to resist the law and reject the love of God."*

Pharaoh gave in. Before morning dawned he had sent messengers to Moses and Aaron and bidden them muster all Israel and get out of Egypt. It is not necessary to read vs. 31 to imply that he spoke personally to Moses. He had already seen the prophet for the last time. Probably his officials went post haste to Moses' residence with the royal mandate. According to vs. 33 they were anxious to expedite the people's departure, fearing yet further visitations of Israel's God. *"We be all dead men"* they said. The sooner Pharaoh's edict was acted upon the better.

The implication of ch.12.vs.34,39,42 and 51 is that the great migration commenced that same night. The people had no time even to prepare food for the journey before leaving their homes. The smiting of the firstborns occurred at midnight; affairs must have moved fast if the people or even a proportion of them were on the move by 6.00am and this is what the account implies. It is certain that every detail of the move had been organised beforehand. Even so it was not humanly possible for the command to be transmitted throughout the land of Goshen, more than a hundred miles in extent, within an hour or so, unless a system of signalling such as the use of beacon fires had been already arranged. It is evident that all Israel fully believed that this time the word would be given and they were ready. Verse 37 indicates a general gathering at the town of Succoth on the southern border of Goshen preparatory to an organised move toward the Red Sea. The verse states that they journeyed from Rameses to Succoth; it is likely that the Israelites in and around the capital city of Rameses had the news first and were early on the move. Those scattered throughout the country districts would be informed a little later and then join the travelling bands. It might have been several days or even weeks before all Israel was congregated together at Succoth and the real journey into the wilderness began.

But to Moses the moment for which he had planned and laboured these forty years past came when the Egyptian messengers stood before him in the darkness of that Passover night with their royal master's urgent plea *"Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel and go, serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds and be gone, and bless me also."* (Ex.12.31-32)

AOH

Book Corner

An engagement ring, a mouse-catcher in ancient Greece, a schoolmaster who is the son of a schoolmaster, a Scottish university professor, and a wonderful gift from God.... This miscellany arose from a look in my bookshelves.

The schoolmaster was born in 1873 at Blandford, Dorset. He was baptised at the age of 14, and studied the Classics. He moved on from teaching to the analytical study of the New Testament, encouraged in due course by such evangelical figures as F F Bruce and Graham Scroggie. Probably the best known of his studies to be published was his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, which came out in 1940. He was William Edwy Vine.

Looking along my shelves I noticed another book of New Testament Words. This was published in 1964 and came from the pen of Professor William Barclay, at that time the Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at the University of Glasgow. (He was famous for his Daily Study Bible, a series of easy to read commentaries.) His book is a slimmer one than Vine's (which covers every word in the New Testament from the Authorised Version in alphabetical order.) Barclay's book covers only 61 words or so, in rather more detail, with reference to their daily use in the ancient world, and arranged in alphabetical order in the Greek. It contains a series of short articles which he wrote for the British Weekly, for the benefit of students of the Bible who are not proficient in Greek. Not, be it said, to enable them to pretend they are Greek scholars when actually they are quoting his work!

The two books have a similar aim, and are based on the researches of similar groups of reputable scholars. As a quick way of comparing them I chose at random the Greek word '*arrabon*', to see what they would make of it.

Vine cites the three occasions where *arrabon* appears in the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 1.22, 2 Corinthians 5.5, and Ephesians 1.14. He says it came to mean a pledge, or earnest (we today might call it a first instalment, or down payment, the balance to be paid later). It is used to describe the Holy Spirit, 'given to us as a divine pledge of future blessings'.

In passing, Vine notes that the word *arrabona* in modern Greek means an engagement ring - the significance is similar, a pledge and promise of blessing to come in due course.

Barclay quotes the use of the word in daily life (the pieces of papyrus on which business dealings were recorded survived the centuries remarkably well and were discovered). He notes its use for a *deposit* paid in buying a cow; or a *deposit* on the services of a dancing troupe; and as an *advance payment* to a mouse catcher called Lampon, to ensure that he made a prompt start before the baby mice left the nest and were scattered everywhere.

The Holy Spirit as *arrabon* is a foretaste in advance. "It is God who established us with you in Christ, has anointed us by putting his seal on us, and giving his Spirit in our hearts as a *first instalment*." (2 Cor.1) We have a building from God eternal in the heavens (unlike our human bodies which die). We wait for the mortal to be swallowed up in life. God has prepared us for this "and given his Spirit as a *guarantee*." (2 Cor.5) The Holy Spirit is a "*pledge* of our inheritance, redemption as God's own people." (Eph.1)

The Holy Spirit may speak to us from outside, as it were, as in the case of Simeon (Luke 2.25) It is also in our heart enabling us to recognise and respond to the truth about Christ. This results in only partial knowledge (1 Corinthians 13), but this is a foretaste of the perfect state to come. As of now all our knowledge, our joy, our love, is only a foretaste. But then, face to face.

My appreciation of these expositors, no longer with us. The books are
Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words W E Vine Oliphants
1953

New Testament Words William Barclay SCM 1964

GC

A SEARCH

A 'word search' is at first sight a jumble of disconnected letters. As you study it, the words appear. You find a pattern, a meaning. It's rather like life. Life is a jumble of experiences, but by God's grace we begin to find meaning in it.

In this 'word search' look for 21 words which are connected with the work of

the Holy Spirit in our lives. One of them is repeated 6 times over. The letters which are left over can be formed into a Name, in full and also in short.

P	L	O	R	T	N	O	C	F	L	E	S
E	A	L	S	E	V	O	L	A	T	P	O
A	H	A	A	S	W	Y	T	I	N	U	U
C	E	V	O	L	E	O	N	T	E	D	N
E	S	P	R	A	Y	N	P	H	M	L	D
S	S	E	N	D	N	I	K	O	N	O	M
E	E	G	N	I	W	E	N	E	R	V	I
L	N	F	R	E	E	V	O	L	E	E	N
T	I	L	A	E	H	V	J	P	C	M	D
N	L	M	E	V	O	L	O	E	S	G	A
E	O	G	O	O	D	H	Y	L	I	A	O
G	H	T	U	R	T	W	I	S	D	O	M

DISCERNMENT, FAITH, FREE, GENTLE, GOOD, HEAL, HOLINESS, HOPE, JOY, TRUTH, LOVE, MEEKNESS, PEACE, POWER, PRAY, RENEWING, SELF-CONTROL, SOUND MIND, KINDNESS, UNITY, WISDOM.

PS There were several words I did not have room for. That too is like life - we none of us live up to our aspirations!

PPS This is not just something to amuse us. Get on with letting these things grow in your own life.

GC

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matt. 18. 21-35

It must have been after that breath-taking declaration of Jesus— *"the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Matt. 18.11) that the train of thought was set up in Peter's mind which led to his asking that question about forgiveness. *"How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?"* (18.21). Forgiveness was very much an alien thought to an orthodox Jew; the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth did not easily square with forgiveness of enemies or those who do injury to one. The popular conception of the Son of Man was one that pictured Him as coming in the clouds and tempest to execute judgment upon sinners, not to reclaim and forgive them. A Messiah who would punish and destroy the Gentiles and the rebellious, and exalt righteous Israel to everlasting felicity they could understand. One whose mission was to convert and reconcile the wayward and the sinful, to seek and find the lost ones, was a new kind of Messiah altogether and such ideas must inevitably have started new trains of thought in the disciples' minds. As usual, it was Peter the impetuous who put into words the question which probably came to all their minds. *"How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"* Even then the range of forgiveness was to be narrow; they were perhaps prepared to tolerate forgiveness of their own brethren whilst as yet the idea of forgiving enemies was not entertained.

According to Matthew, the parable of the lost sheep was spoken at this time. Luke in his Gospel groups the three parables of the lost, the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the lost son together, but this does not necessarily demand that they were all spoken together. More likely they, and perhaps many others like them that have not been recorded, were spoken at different times in the Saviour's ministry. It may be that a fairly frequent repetition of this seeking and saving and forgiving aspect of Jesus' mission had given cause for enquiry in the minds of the disciples for some time past, and now, at last, it came out into the open. *"How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"*

Jesus took advantage of the opportunity thus created. It was necessary that they come to understand this vital principle in the Divine purpose. The incident of the Samaritan villagers, upon whom they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them in the manner of Elijah of old time, showed how far they were from understanding the purpose of the coming of Christ to earth. *"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth"* God had told their

fathers in times gone by but they had forgotten that. They were not really concerned with the Samaritans' conversion; only with revenge for the slight the villagers had offered the message of Jesus by rejecting his messengers. They still had much to learn. We ought to sympathise with them for the lesson is even now only very imperfectly realised. Far too many Christians still think in terms of the punishment of the wicked rather than their conversion and reconciliation. Jesus, looking upon the serious questioning faces around him, knew that they were ripe for this advance in the knowledge of God and His ways.

First of all, a direct answer. *"I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven."* That came as a bit of a stunner. Peter had thought he was being pretty generous in going so far as seven successive acts of forgiveness. Jesus surpassed all expectation by naming a figure so fantastic in the circumstances that He might just as well have said "to infinity". At any rate, his ruling implied that forgiveness would become such a habit that they never would be able to stop forgiving, and that is most likely exactly the idea He intended to instil. Our God is a forgiving God, and we, to be like him, must be forgiving also. Having made that point, Jesus proceeded to tell them by means of this parable exactly why men should be forgiving in their relationships with each other in the affairs and the wrongs and enmities of daily life.

A certain king had the auditors in to bring his financial affairs up to date. During the course of the ensuing investigation it was found that a debt of ten thousand talents owed by one of his servants had been outstanding for considerably more than the statutory period. The unlucky man was summoned into the king's presence and immediate payment demanded. But the sum was so enormous that payment was impossible and the unfortunate debtor found that he, his wife and children, were to be sold into slavery and all his property confiscated in order to pay off at least part of the debt. This practice was a usual custom although in Israel the maximum period for which such unfortunates could be sold into slavery was six years. But the man's life was ruined; he would have to start all over again at the end of the six years. In utter despair he fell on his knees and begged for mercy. *"Have patience with me"* he pleaded, *"and I will pay you all"*. Whether he honestly expected ever to be in a position to clear off the debt is not stated and perhaps he knew within himself that the amount was far too great for him ever to be able to pay, but in his extremity he could do no other than beg for mercy.

His hope was realised beyond his wildest dreams. *"Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him*

the debt." Not only did he grant his plea for time to pay, but he went even further and in compassion for the man's hopeless position he forgave him the entire debt. The servant went out from the king's presence lightened forever from a load which had burdened him for a long time in the past but would never burden him again.

The story was half told; the other half is of darker hue. As the rejoicing servant went on his way he met one of his fellows who owed him a hundred denarii ("pence" in the A.V.). For the moment all thought of his own recent marvellous deliverance vanished from his mind; here was someone who owed him some money and he wanted that money. Laying hold of the other man, he demanded payment. *"Pay me that thou owest."* This debtor, however, was in no better position to meet his obligations than his creditor had been a few minutes before, and he asked for time and patience on exactly the same terms that the other had so recently desired of the king.

This time, however, the creditor was not so accommodating. Heedless of the fate he had himself so narrowly escaped, he invoked the full rigour of the law and had his hapless comrade cast into prison, there to remain until he should find some means of paying his debt.

The force of the Saviour's simile in this parable can be better appreciated if the import of the sums of money involved is realised. The "talent" was equivalent to three thousand silver shekels, and the silver shekel had just about the same value as the silver in an English half-crown (1970s currency). One talent would therefore be worth about £375. The Roman denarius was, on the same basis, worth about three pence and a hundred denarii amounted to three pounds. But this is not what these amounts meant to men in our Lord's day. The value of money has steadily declined throughout human history so that both the prices of goods and rates of wages have continuously increased. This is a phenomenon that is not by any means confined to the modern world. Whilst the intrinsic value of the shekel has remained at about the same since the days of the early Sumerians, the number of shekels needed to buy any given quantity of food, or pay the rent, or fill the wage-pocket, has increased to a fantastic degree. In the year 530 B.C., which would be just about the time of the death of Daniel in Babylon, one Nabu-nasir-aplu signed a contract to rent a house in Babylon from Itti-marduk-balatu for the sum of five shekels a year, equal to about 50p. (Landlord, tenant and house alike have been dust these many years, but the contract remains, safely preserved in the British Museum). But since the wage rate for a working man at the time was about thirty shekels a year, the worthy Nabu-nasir-aplu spent one-sixth of his income on rent. Of course prices in Daniel's day were considered very high compared with earlier times. For example in the days of Abraham the house could be purchased outright for seven or eight

shekels, but on the other hand a man was well paid if he got five shekels a year. The intriguing thing is that the relation between current wage rates and the cost of living seems to have remained the same from Abraham's time till now. Perhaps the financial experts of this world can explain why this should be so.

Applying all this to our Lord's day and the parable in question, we have to set the ten thousand talents and hundred denarii against the background of their value to the creditors and debtors in the story. A labouring man could earn six denarii in a week's work. These servants would probably enjoy about the same financial status. A hundred denarii was equivalent to four month's wages. The same class of labour today would expect £3,000 in wages for that same period. On the same scale the ten thousand talents represents a truly fantastic sum. To buy what £375 would purchase at the First Advent would require a sum between thirty and forty thousand pounds today. The servant faced with a debt of ten thousand talents was in the same position as a man today who owes someone between three and four hundred million pounds. No wonder he could not pay!

Why did Jesus name so fantastic a sum? No servant could ever in practice have accumulated so great a debt. *"Have patience with me, and I will pay you all"*. If he paid over the whole of his wages every week, leaving nothing for himself, and the king charged no interest, it would still take him 400,000 years to pay off ten thousand talents. Was it that Jesus indulged in the Eastern passion for exaggeration in order to heighten the dramatic appeal of the story? That is not very likely. More probably this tremendous sum was deliberately chosen in order to suggest the truth underlying the parable. This debt is one that no man could ever possibly pay. He is completely helpless unless One greater than himself extends a full, free forgiveness and sets him on his way, freed from his burden. That, of course, is the meaning of the parable. The servant owing ten thousand talents is every man, standing helpless before God, completely unable to do anything that will justify him in God's sight and earn for himself the title of God's freeman. *"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him"* (Psa.49.8). All that the man can do is to ask for God's patience. *"Have patience with me. ..."* The publican, standing afar off in the Temple, smote his breast and cried "God be merciful to me a sinner". There is the key, God is patient and will wait while he slightest gleam of hope remains that the man can be restored to his upright standing. *"You have heard of the patience of Job"* says James (5.11) *"and have seen the end of the Lord; the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."* So the provision is made; *"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"*. Repentance, conversion, reconciliation: and the ten thousand talents

are remitted, the debt forgiven. *"Being justified freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom.3.24).

But the repentance must be sincere, the conversion sincere. Faith must be demonstrated by works (Jas. 3. 17-24). The man who has received "so great salvation" must reflect towards others the glory that has come into his own life. Unless he in turn is prepared to extend mercy and forgiveness towards his fellows in everyday affairs, he has received the grace of God in vain, giving evidence that he has not properly understood or appreciated the purpose and the nature of his standing before God. So he loses that standing. In the story the freed servant threw his own debtor into prison, refusing to extend to him the mercy he himself had received. The consequence was that the king rescinded his former decree, summoned the unforgiving one into his presence, reproved him, and then delivered him into that same prison into which the servant had cast his own debtor. In a moment he lost all, and his fate, because of the magnitude of his debt, was final, hopeless.

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses." (18.35). That is how Jesus concluded the parable. A strange and in some ways paradoxical ending to a story devoted to extolling the virtues of forgiveness. Does this mean that even God will be unforgiving at the last in token of revenge for the unforgiving attitude of some recipients of his favour? Are we, following such a lead, to withdraw forgiveness from those of our fellows who show themselves unworthy of our forgiveness? Elucidation of the subject would become confusing if we allowed ourselves to argue on that basis. The truth is that we must set this statement against the fundamental principles on which God builds His purpose. The statement says nothing about God's forgiveness; does not say that the unforgiving man forfeits all the benefits he had attained by virtue of God's forgiveness, all he could have had of salvation and life. To have forfeited that, he loses all. God *"will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2. 4). He is *"long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3. 9). *"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways ..."* (Ezek. 33. 11).

That is the Divine wish, but it is contingent upon the willing compliance of the subject, and although God is patient and long-suffering and will not let go of the sinner whilst the slightest chance remains that he can be converted from his ways, the time must come when in his infinite wisdom God sees that the "point of no return" has been passed. The man will not and will never respond to the Divine Spirit, he will not and will never assume his rightful place in Divine creation, and so, with infinite sorrow, we must be

sure, God lets him go to his chosen fate. The principle upon which God has built creation, the principle upon which alone that creation can endure, decrees such consequence in the case of such an one. The door to life stood open, but the man refused to enter in. That is what Jesus meant when He said that God would do to the unforgiving man just what that man did his fellow. Divine forgiveness, reconciliation with God, eternal life, are for the repentant, and this man was not truly repentant. The everlasting continuance of creation requires that every man shall give as well as take. This man took, but he would not give, and so there was no place for him in all that God has made.

AOH

Psalm 23 through American Indian eyes

This version of the 23rd Psalm is now in the Indian section of the museum at Banff, Canada. There is no information as to how old it is but it is evidently a paraphrase written by a red-skinned disciple of the Lord Jesus, in speech familiar to his fellows. The old, old story, clothed in words comprehensible by each nation and in every age, has always the same appeal and will never die.

The Great Father above is the Shepherd Chief. I am his and with him I want not.

He throws down to me a rope and the rope of his love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water is good and I go and lie down satisfied.

Sometimes my heart is weak and falls down but He lifts me up again and draws me into a good road. His name is Wonderful.

Sometimes, it may be soon, but may be long, it may be a long, long time. He will draw me into a place between the mountains. It is dark there but I will not draw back, I will not be afraid, for it is there, between those mountains that the Shepherd Chief will meet me and the hunger I have felt in my heart all through life will be satisfied.

Sometimes he makes the love rope into a whip but afterwards He gives me a staff to lean on. He spreads a table before me with all kinds of food. He puts his hand upon my head and all tired is gone. My cup He fills until it runs over.

What I tell you is true, I lie not. These roads that are away ahead will stay with me through this life and afterwards I will go to live in the Big Teepee and sit down with the Shepherd Chief forever.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 17 1 John 4. 1

With the fourth chapter of John's First Epistle we enter upon what can fairly be described as the third "book" or treatise into which this Epistle is divided. The first, chapters 1 and 2, could be entitled the "walk by faith"; the second, chapter 3, the "walk by love"; and the third, chapters 4 and 5, the "walk by knowledge". The theme of these two chapters is doctrine, and whereas John in the previous portion of his epistle is dwelling upon and warning his readers against moral shortcomings, he now turns around and begins to talk about doctrinal errors. It is a very necessary aspect of Christian instruction. These believers of the Early Church were very prone, as are we ourselves, to belittle the importance of doctrinal teaching and to over-stress the place of the devotional and contemplative aspects of the Christian life. It was in consequence of that mistake that so many of the early Christians quickly lapsed into the grossest of sins under the mistaken impression that if the heart was pure it mattered little what was done in or by the body. John does not depart from his central theme, Jesus Christ the centre and circle of our faith and life, but he does speak of Him and His way from the doctrinal rather than the moral position.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (v.1). These "spirits" of course are the opinions, beliefs, influences, teachings, which, emanating either from the Father or from the Arch-enemy of mankind, according to their nature, whether good or bad influences, determine the course in life taken by the one receiving them. This verse has no reference to unseen angelic beings, 'spirits', whether good or evil, and there is no mandate here for investigations into spiritualistic phenomena as some have thought. We are not to accept at its face value any apparently attractive looking teaching that may be presented to us just because at first sight it looks reasonable or God-like.

We are to test the teaching to determine whether it be of God, because there are many false prophets and false prophecies, teachings, in the world and we need to be on our guard. The words of Paul to the Ephesians are appropriate here. In exhorting them to see that they are not deceived by the vain words of unregenerate men he bids them walk as children of light, *proving what is acceptable unto the Lord* (Eph.5.8-10). The believers in the Greek city of Berea were especially commended because they searched the Scriptures continually to assure themselves of the truth of the things which they had heard. In like manner also the Thessalonians were exhorted to

"despise not prophesyings (teachings); prove all things; hold fast that which is good". (1 Thess.5.21).

This is one of the Scriptural supports for that right of private judgment which is the privilege of every consecrated Christian. No matter what the 'official' teaching of one's fellowship on the subject under discussion or the weight of tradition behind the generally accepted belief, it is always the privilege, and right, and even the duty, of each individual to judge for himself and arrive at his own conclusion. None can take away that right, for it was conferred by the teachings of the Lord and the Apostles and sealed by the authority of the Holy Spirit. None may question it or deny it, for the same reason.

But this implies a corresponding responsibility. This right of private judgment is not a licence to spiritual anarchy. The Apostles' insistence on individual "searching" and "discerning" of the doctrines does not ignore or disparage the communal sharing in matters of belief that is necessary to the order and harmony of a Christian fellowship. The same liberty that accords each one the right of private judgment demands also that the expressed belief of the majority composing a group or community be respected. There are so many who have discovered – or think they have discovered – some startling new variation from a doctrinal truth formerly held, and immediately conceive it their duty to bludgeon their fellows into acceptance of the new view, stigmatising as "sectarian", "followers of a man" "spiritually blind"; etc., those who do not accept the new finding. We sometimes come across men and women who claim to have been entrusted with some marvellous understanding of new light on the Divine Word. Their actions make it perfectly obvious to the most casual observer that they are far from fit to be entrusted with a Divine commission at all. So the Apostle, writing to the Corinthians, appeals to their maturity of understanding. *"I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say"* (1 Cor. 10.15). In soberness and gravity, fully aware of the issues involved, both for ourselves and our fellows, let us use our God-given powers of judgment for our own establishment in the Truth, and also for that of others.

John's assertion that "many false prophets are gone out into the world" was not news to the more reflective of his readers. The infant church was still less than seventy years old. The first generation had to all intents and purposes passed away but the second generation still lived and there may have been a few left, like John himself, advanced in old age who remembered the Day of Pentecost with its thrilling happenings. If so they had been very young – mere youths and girls – at the time. Those

who were the leaders and teachers in the Church, men who had sat at the feet of the Apostles, learned of them, laboured with them, served them, men like Timothy, Titus and Silvanus, - knew full well that already all was not well with the life of the Church.

Some had left or were leaving their first love; some were introducing fragments of paganism and Eastern philosophies under the pretext that these were the true teachings of the Lord and represented the inner meaning of His sayings. The world, the flesh and the devil were continually seeking to break in upon the fellowship. The early expectation of an almost immediate return of the Lord and the imminent establishment of His Kingdom was fading in the light of clearer understanding of Apostolic teaching. No one had any conception of the time that was truly to elapse until the end of the Age. The time was sufficiently far away to induce a lessening of love and zeal on the part of those whose faith rested more upon the desire for immediate glory than the devotion of life, and all life holds, to the Lord, for however long that life may last. So the false prophets found ground in which their teachings could take root and begin to flourish. Jesus had forewarned them of this. Long before the End Time, He told His disciples (Matt. 24), there would many come in His name, saying "*I am Christ*", and would deceive many. "*Take heed*" He said "*that no man deceive you . . . Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many.*" Here in John's epistle, written less than seventy years later, is the melancholy record of the fulfilment of that prediction. The writings of the Early Fathers, the works of the Church historians, the records of the many ecclesiastical conferences and synods and councils, throughout the first four centuries of Christianity, all show how amply justified were those warnings of the Master and of His Apostles. Not only in the last days did perilous times come, they were there almost from the beginning.

AOH

Dear Master, in whose life I see
All that I would, but fail to be,
Let thy clear light for ever shine,
To shame and guide this life of mine.

Though what I dream and what I do
In my weak days are always two,
Help me, oppressed by things undone,
O Thou, whose deeds and dreams were one.

John Hunter 1848-1917

Dr. Cumming on the Millennium

Dr. John Cumming, (1807-1881), was a devout student and writer on prophecy, although his views on the book of Revelation might be considered sadly out of date to-day. In 1832 he was appointed minister to the National Scottish Church in Covent Garden, London. This extract is from his writings on the coming Millennial Age.

"Some say, is not this [a description of] an earthly heaven? My dear friends, earth is not essentially corrupt: there is nothing sinful in the clods of the valley—there is nothing sinful in a rose, nor in a tree, nor in a stone. I have seen spots upon the earth so beautiful, that if the clouds of winter would never overtake them, nor the sin of man blast them, I could wish to live amidst them forever. Take sin from the earth—the fever that incessantly disturbs it—the cold freezing shadow that gathers around it—and let my Lord and Saviour have his throne upon earth, its consecration and its glory, and what lovelier spot could man desire to live on? What fairer heaven could man anticipate hereafter? To me it is heaven where Christ is, whether He be throned upon earth, or reigning amid the splendours of the sky—if I am with him, I must enjoy unsullied and perpetual happiness.

"Great and solemn crisis", I cannot but again exclaim. My dear friends, if you like, reject all my views of Apocalyptic chronology, reject all my historical explanations, if you like; but do not reject this, that Christ, who died upon the cross, will come, and when ye think not, and reign, wearing his many crowns, and upon his glorious throne. Look for him, and the same Christ will come again, the husband to the widow, the bridegroom to the bride; He has promised that He will come to us, and we shall be 'forever with the Lord'.

And when I think of the time when He does come, I can scarcely realise that glorious Sabbath which will overspread the earth, that noble song which will be heard when the saints shall sing together '*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts*'. What a flood of beauty, magnificence and glory will roll over this now shattered orb, like the countless waves of an illuminated ocean, illuminated by Christ, the great central Sun, around whom all systems revolve, and from whom all beauty comes.

And, my dear friends, if there be the least probability in what I have said, is it not our duty to pause—to prepare and search if it be so? When men heard that there was a new star somewhere to be detected in the firmament, there were some thousands of telescopes directed every night to the skies, and countless stargazers searching if, peradventure, they might

discover it. My dear friends, a star comes brighter and more beautiful than any other, the 'bright and morning star', too long concealed by clouds which are about to be chased away; why should not our hearts look for him? Why should not the believer who has shared in the bitterness and in the blessings of his cross, pray and pant for him, if peradventure, he may share in the splendours of his crown? Is not the Lord welcome to us? Crushed and bleeding humanity, amid its thousand wrongs, cries, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. The earth, weary with its groans, and the sobs of its children, cries, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. The persecuted saints in Tahiti and Madeira, in the dens, and caves, and solitary places of the earth, cry, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'. And surely, many a heart that has been warmed by his love—that has been refreshed by his peace, sanctified by his grace, shall raise the same cry, '*Come, Lord Jesus*'; and the sublime response will descend from heaven like a wave from the ocean of love overflowing men's hearts. '*Behold, I come quickly*'.

My dear friends, I say to many of you 'Farewell'; and I say that in a sense in which it is not often uttered. I say it not lightly, but solemnly. May you fare well in the First Resurrection. May you fare well at the Judgment Day. May you fare well in time; may you fare well in eternity. And at that day when sighs and farewells shall cease, may we meet before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and so be forever with the Lord. Amen, Amen.

A sincere, pious, hungry soul seeks something for his soul's deepest welfare. Then he finds Jesus of Nazareth.

What do we ourselves find in him, as day by day we tread the narrow way?

Perhaps it is true to say that what I want him to be to me will depend mainly on what I want to be to him. Am I satisfied to know him as my distant friend or my occasional Friend, to whom I turn my heart just once in a while—just now and then. Or — do I want him for my near, my most intimate and desirable Friend, to whom I turn myself many, many times a day, from whom I can scarcely bear to be parted even by the urgent task of the daily round. Even here there is a tie that binds, and if that tie is one of true affinity, then as the magnet draws the steel so shall He and I be closely drawn together.

KEEPING THE SABBATH

A historical note

It was laid down by the law given to Moses that the seventh day was to be a day of complete cessation of labour for man and beast. There was no mandate to make it particularly a day of worship, as is the Christian Sunday. Worship for Israel was regulated by another set of ordinances. The weekly 'sabbath', which means a cessation, being still, resting. There was a seventh year sabbath in which no work was to be done on the land, and the fields allowed to lie fallow. Similarly a fiftieth year of jubilee subject to the same restriction. All of this was part of the Law Covenant under which Moses pledged Israel to God as a separated and holy nation, and God undertook their support during these "Sabbath" years.

The Law Covenant is not applicable to Christians, for Christ made an end of it, *"nailing it to his cross"* as Paul said to the Colossians, but the ethical principles of the Ten Commandments are certainly binding upon Christians, in even higher degree than Israel of old, as Jesus explained on more than one occasion, but the ceremonial and ritual provisions are not, and the sabbath was part of the ceremonial law. The principle of the sabbath, however, the practice of periodic laying aside the interests and occupations of daily life so that worship and praise might be given to God for his goodness and provision, is obviously as appropriate for Christians as for Jews, the difference being that whereas to Israel under the Law Covenant the observance was a ceremonial matter to be fulfilled according to the letter, to the Christian it is an act of worship offered spontaneously and not of obligation. Any day of the week is appropriate for such an offering and in fact even more than one day in the week if the heart so prompts. It has been truly said that to the Christian every day is a Sabbath.

It is evident that the Apostolic Church recognised this fact and quite naturally adopted the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection, for their weekly gathering together for worship and fellowship. To what extent the social customs of the times permitted this to be a day of rest is not now accurately known. The Greeks and Romans had no weekly day of general cessation of labour as did the Jews, and many of the Gentile Christians were slaves anyway. There is no doubt, however, from the evidence of early Church writers as well as the New Testament that the Christians did gather on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of their Lord, to pray and worship and receive the ministry of the Word and hold their "love feasts".

Only gradually did changing social conditions permit anything like the Jewish "day of rest" to become a feature of the Greek and Roman communities. It was not until the Fourth Century that Constantine the Christian Emperor of Rome legalised the weekly day of rest, on the first day of the week, throughout the Empire, and so Sunday became a day given over to worship and religious exercises unhindered by the claims of daily labour. In this way the Christian Sunday became the equivalent of the Jewish Saturday.

There would seem therefore to be no ground for insisting that Christians must observe the seventh day as the Sabbath merely because that was the day imposed upon Israel by their Law Covenant. Christians are not under that Covenant and they are free to set aside for rest and worship whichever day they feel appropriate. There is nothing to forbid the adoption of Saturday for the purpose if that should seem desirable and proper to some. But the Western nations have grown and developed out of the Roman empire and spread their culture and customs over much of the world during the past thousand years and in consequence Sunday is firmly established as the normal weekly holiday (holy-day); because this institution is of such inestimable value to all Christians in facilitating worship and evangelism we do well to uphold and retain it. There are plenty of forces in the earth today seeking to undermine the day and make it as any other day of the week. That would be bad, not only spiritually, but physically; not only for Christians, but for all men, and we do right to resist those forces with whatever powers we have.

It was on the first day of the week, when the risen Lord left the garden tomb and *"rose in the power of an endless life"* that the Christian faith began and Judaism ended. It is that, above all things, that we celebrate when we come together on the first day of the week.

Is it not true that many times in the individual Christian life we find ourselves thanking God that we are not as other men. Does it not often happen that this wonderful separateness to God which we call consecration degenerates into a mere smug and self-satisfied separateness from the world. And should we not be very circumspect therefore and walk very humbly before our God, realising that by nature we are "children of wrath" even as others?

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The Apostle Peter urges us to "Seek peace and ensue it", or, as Moffat puts it: "Let us make peace our aim." Why need to seek it, if it is a gift? Because it is not a natural element of this passing evil world, neither is it for the indolent and lazy.

THE END OF THE WAY

If Paul and his companions really did set foot on the streets of Porto Dubris (Dover) on a day in early A.D. 64, the Apostle must have been conscious that he had at last reached the farthest end of the known world. This was the "*extremities of the west*", as the Romans called Britain at that time. This had to be the end of his journeying and after this he must retrace his steps to Antioch and home.

In practice, of course, if he came at all, he must have stayed some time, perhaps a year. As a Roman citizen he travelled under the protection of the armed might of Rome, and as he and Luke and Aristarchus passed out of the city gate of Dover and headed along Watling Street to the city of Londinium (London), the capital of Britain, they must have felt as much at home as in their native East. The Romans had made Colchester the political capital but the British Queen Boadicea had put a stop to that four years earlier. The relatively short journey of eighty miles, passing Canterbury and Rochester on the way, would mean nothing to these well seasoned travellers. On the third or perhaps the fourth day, still following the ancient Watling Street, they would cross the last sizeable stream at Crayford and commence the long five-mile ascent to the summit of Shooters Hill where a Roman garrison kept ward over the south eastern approaches to the city.

From this vantage point Paul would have had his first view of London. Below him, four or five miles away, he could see the wide silver loops of the River Tamesis—the Thames—and on its northern bank the city itself, a city of traffickers and merchants. Paul's custom was to concentrate on the commercial centres, and as he traversed the last few miles and crossed the bridge which even then spanned the river where London Bridge now stands he must have been eager to commence his witness, here in this strange land, to the Gospel which was the passion of his life.

If thus he entered London there is nothing improbable in the tradition that he preached on Ludgate Hill, where St. Paul's Cathedral now stands. From time immemorial it has been a sacred spot. In later Roman times a Temple to Diana was built there; in Paul's day it was sacred to the British god Lud—the name London is derived from "Lud's city", and the impulse which led him to stand on Mars Hill in Athens would direct him similarly here. From London he would have travelled the country to Colchester, St. Albans, Leicester, Lincoln, Chester, Worcester, Bath, Lewes, Chichester, Dorchester, Exeter. These were the chief cities of Roman Britain.

Nothing definite or dogmatic can be affirmed except the known fact that Christianity was in Britain before AD 40 and Paul must in that case have found Christians ready for his ministry. His travels through the country would have consisted, in part, of a missionary tour similar to those of his earlier years, setting up little groups of converts from the primitive British paganism and the later Roman idolatry which was beginning to permeate the land, and in part, of sessions with the Celtic Christian communities which had been growing in numbers during the previous few decades, to instruct and confirm them in the faith. He must, too, have had considerable contact with the native British priesthood, the Druids.

He must have had his difficulties. The country was still in a state of war with Rome. Since the invasion some twenty years earlier the Britons had put up a stout resistance and the war went on for many years after Paul himself had finished his course. At this time the Roman commanders Aulus Plautius and Vespasian—future Emperor of Rome—with their troops were finding the conquest of the island a well-nigh hopeless task. Paul's earlier missionary journeys had been undertaken in countries enjoying the benefits of a Roman peace; here it was a case of preaching the Gospel of Christ against a background of continuing war. Perhaps that very fact was one of the causes leading to the rapid spread of the faith in Britain, and, too, the continuing adherence to the original Apostolic faith manifested in later years when the doctrines of the Roman church came to this country with St. Augustine. Be all this as it may, there has been an independence in the British understanding of the Christian faith which was manifested in the Reformation and the subsequent rise of the Protestant faith and endures still.

The missionaries could go no farther, for there was nowhere else to go. They had reached the end of the known world; beyond this land lay nothing but raging seas, intense cold and Stygian darkness in which dwelt monsters and horrors unimaginable. At least that was what the geographers of their day told them. This was the end of the outward journey; it was time to set course for home. At some time in AD 65, it might be, the valiant three were on another vessel heading across the Channel for Gaul. The seed had been sown and watered; they must leave the increase to God.

As they returned through Gaul to Lyon they may have met travellers who told them of dark happenings in Rome and of the great Fire which in the summer just past had virtually destroyed the city. They would hear that the Christians had been blamed, and of the scenes of persecution and martyrdom which were being enacted. There may even have been some of the Roman Christians who had escaped the holocaust, taking refuge with the believers at Lyon. If such there were, the missionaries would learn that the Apostle Peter had proved a tower of strength to the Church in Rome during this time

of trial, John Mark and Silvanus still there with him, as yet unhurt. Perhaps at that point Paul realised that the quiet days were over and the time of testing had begun. Perhaps already the shadow of his own approaching end fell across his mind.

From Lyon the route would take them across Northern Italy and through Dalmatia and Illyricum towards Greece. Here at last Paul could meet with companies of converts he had made on previous journeys and here we begin to find Scriptural clues to his movements. 1 Tim. 1.3 is best understood by supposing that upon leaving the borders of Illyricum he headed across Macedonia to Berea from where he sent a message to Timothy urging him to remain at Ephesus. Perhaps Aristarchus left him here and went home to Thessalonica near by and later went on to Ephesus with the message. From here Paul could get a ship to Crete, where he seems to have found Titus, unless he met Titus at Berea and took him along. After a stay in Crete he returned to the Greek mainland and made his way to Nicopolis on the west coast where he had decided to spend the winter (Titus 3.12). This must have been the winter of AD 65, doubtless spending some time with the churches at Cenchrea and Corinth on the way. At this time the First Epistle to Timothy and that to Titus were written and despatched. With the advent of springtime, this desire of Paul to 'lay up' for the winter, so unlike his old self, is an indication that the weight of years was beginning to tell. He set out for the churches of Macedonia, Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi, thus at last fulfilling his promise in Phil.2.24. Thence he took ship to Troas in Asia and did so probably feeling that he had seen his fellow-believers in Greece for the last time. So far the journey had gone according to plan and within another year he would have revisited all the Asiatic churches and come to rest at last in his home church at Antioch. After meeting with the brethren at Troas he would have had a few days' sea voyage along the coast to Miletus and then a forty-mile journey overland to Ephesus where he would at last meet his beloved Timothy from whom he had been separated the past four years. Next to Antioch.

Paul had more to do with Ephesus than any other centre and it must have been with quickening anticipation that he looked for the reunion in the familiar city. But Paul never went to Ephesus and he never saw Timothy. Troas was the last place where he was to know freedom. Just what happened is obscure. It is fairly clear, that he was apprehended by the authorities either at Troas or at Miletus, a hundred and fifty miles down the coast. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, written from his prison in Rome, he asks for the cloak and books and parchments that he left with Carpus at Troas to be brought to him. It has been inferred that his arrest was so

sudden, he had no time to collect his personal belongings. In the same Epistle, he tells how Trophimus had to be left behind at Miletus, being sick, from which it is plain that although only forty miles from Ephesus he did not visit the city or have any communication with the believers there, and that can only be accounted for by supposing that upon arriving at Miletus he was already in custody. It is probable therefore that he was arrested at Troas and taken to Rome by sea, the vessel calling at Miletus on the way, but that Paul was not allowed to contact any of the Ephesian believers.

A few weeks later he was in prison at Rome awaiting trial. The nature of the charge is unknown but since Paul's last appearance the situation had changed. The Neronian persecution of Christians lasted only six months in AD 64 but its effects were still felt. Christianity was now an illegal religion and any Christian was an object of suspicion. The fact that Paul was an acknowledged leader among them was in itself a factor in ensuring an adverse verdict. In addition, he was a Jew, and Jews also were now anathema at Rome. Judea was in open rebellion against the Empire and at this very time, or at most but a few months later, Rome had been infuriated by a great military catastrophe. The Twelfth Legion under Cestius Gallus with auxiliary forces totalling twenty thousand men, had been defeated by the Jews defending Jerusalem, pursued to Beth-horon (where in times past Joshua defeated the Canaanites), and ruthlessly massacred. Six thousand Romans perished and the rest only escaped by headlong flight. It was one of the greatest disasters Roman arms had ever suffered and Rome was eager to avenge herself. The consequence was the despatch of Vespasian from Britain to Judea and the war that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These happenings would have made matters no easier for the Apostle. The Christian expectation that the Second Advent was at hand and their dire predictions of the imminent fall of Rome before the coming King were taken by the authorities as incitement to rebellion. In all probability the charge against Paul was one of treason, and in the then state of public and official opinion the verdict was an almost foregone conclusion.

Paul arrived in Rome in late A.D. 66 or early 67. He seems to have had two trials, the first one resulting in a remand for a season. Probably the assessors were unable to agree on the evidence and the case was put back. This was the time at which he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy. He told Timothy of the ineffective first trial (4.16) but was under no illusion as to the ultimate outcome. He knew that his time was come and he was ready. His one desire was to see his adopted son once more before he died. *"Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me"* he pleaded, and again *"Do thy diligence to come before winter"*. That must have meant the winter of A.D. 67. Onesiphorus of

Ephesus had visited him in Rome during his imprisonment and he noted this with gratitude; *"he . . . was not ashamed of my chain, but when he was in Rome he sought me out very diligently, and found me"*. The defection of Demas is noted with sadness: Demas who had been with him for so long. *"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica"*. A world of tragedy lies in those regretful words! Perhaps the terrors of the persecution had been too much for Demas and he had slipped quietly away. Titus had been sent to Dalmatia and Crescens to Gaul (not Galatia as in the AV). These two missions tend to support the view of the journey here described; if Paul had recently evangelised Gaul and Dalmatia it is characteristic of him that he should now send two of his helpers to follow up the progress of the faith in those regions. *"Only Luke is with me."* Luke, faithful Luke, remained with the Apostle in his last days and did not leave Rome until it was all over. Tradition says he afterwards preached in Gaul, and finally settled in Bithynia on the shores of the Black Sea, where he died twenty years later. It may be questioned how Luke himself escaped the notice of the authorities in his close association with the accused man; probably the fact that he was a Greek, and a physician apparently in constant professional attendance upon Paul, diverted suspicion. The Roman church was in close fellowship with the Apostle and he sends greetings from Linus the bishop or "elder" of the Church, and from Pudens and Claudia. Claudia was a British princess, daughter of the British king Caracos (Roman name Caractacus), who had been the mainstay of British resistance to Roman domination until he was betrayed into their hands and sent to Rome with his daughter to be kept as hostages. In Rome she married Rufus Pudens, whom she had previously known when he was a military officer serving in Britain. The sister of Caractacus, Gladys, had when in Britain married the Roman commander Aulus Plautius, and was now in Rome also. The whole family, being Christian, were in fellowship with Paul during both his sojourns in Rome.

But the sands were running out, and the busy pen was laid down. With the Second Epistle to Timothy, written some time in the summer of A.D. 67, the written word comes to an end. After that there is nothing but the memory of the Church. The recollections of men like Clement and Linus, who were there at the time and knew what happened, handed down what they knew to succeeding generations of believers, the recollection growing fainter and less definite as the years passed.

Paul appeared before the tribunal. A few months previously, Peter had been put to death in Rome after leading the Church fearlessly through the persecution, and Mark had then returned to Ephesus. Now it was Paul's turn. Whatever the considerations which had given rise to doubts of his guilt at the

first hearing, there was no hesitancy this time. The death sentence was passed. Paul's Roman citizenship saved him from the crucifixion which had been Peter's lot; he was to suffer beheading. Towards the end of A.D. 67 or early in 68 the valiant heart came to rest.

Did Timothy and Mark reach him in time? No one knows. They certainly must have made the attempt. When Timothy received the letter they probably had four or five months in which to reach Rome, long enough for the purpose. Perhaps, at the last, the Apostle's tired eyes did light up at the sight of these whom, with Luke, he probably loved more than any others of his fellow-labourers.

Then it was all over. An old tradition says that he was taken to a place outside the city and there led aside a few paces. The executioner stepped forward; a swift movement, and the man who had never wavered in his steadfastness to the Master he had served since the day of that vision on the Damascus road, came to the end of the way. *"For I am now ready to be offered, And the time of my departure is at hand. I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*.

THE END

AOH

Gone from us: Karen Charcharos

HIGH LEIGH CONFERENCE

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

Monday 16th – Sunday 22nd August 2010

Theme *The Promises of God* **(Past, Present and Future)**

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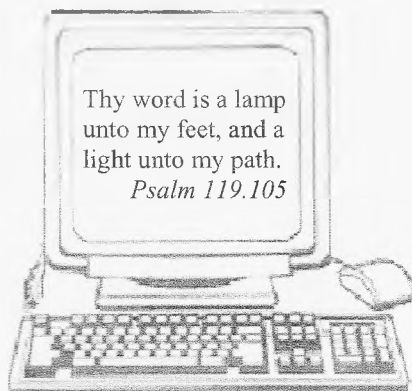
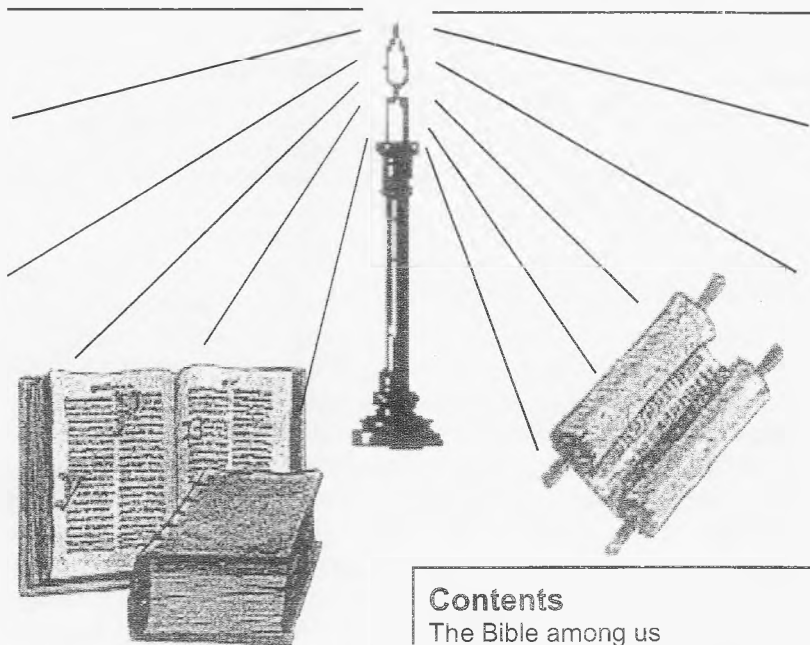
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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)

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The Bible among us as we meet

God's Word is a great joy to us. What would we do without our bibles? I remember at the first meetings I attended in my youth, each of us had a bible. In those days they were black, with leather covers, and had been 'authorised' by King James in 1611. I remember the front sitting room of an old lady's house, with lace curtains hiding the street outside. Each one of us had our bible open at the same place, and the 'study' was something we all contributed to. One or two of us had reference bibles, which were invaluable in showing where to find another scripture on the subject under discussion. One, the most daring, had a 'Moffatt' - which put the text into modern (1920s) English, and sometimes even altered the order of verses because of what scholars had suggested. We were, in a real sense, bible students, and had put aside other books which told us what to think, and we shared the open pages of God's Word.

It was a contrast in later life when I attended a church service at which the bible was used differently. Here, there was only one bible, which was read aloud by a person in robes, as a matter of form. The reading over, the service moved on to a completely different topic, it was as if the scripture reading had never happened. How strange! Was there some magic in God's words being spoken, whether or not we had listened, or understood? Looking around, I wondered how lively was the attention the congregation had paid.

The experience was a shock to my system, but I have since found that not all church services are like that.

A different kind of surprise came to me more recently, though actually it was part of an old tradition. I found myself in the congregation at a beautifully performed act of worship. The prayers were meaningful, the hymns were sung heartily and with understanding, and in spite of a certain unease about vestments and candles, I found I could sincerely take part. Then, of a sudden, the whole group of those leading the service went in procession to the centre of the building. Everybody there had stood to face what was going on. A bible was held up.

"Alleluia... Speak Lord for your servant is listening..."

"You have the words of eternal life." "Alleluia."

"Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Glory to you, O Lord."

A passage from Matthew 13 was read. The group of leaders clustered round, intent on the reading. It might have been like this the first time the scriptures were ever read aloud to a body of believers.

"This is the Gospel of the Lord." "Praise to you, O Christ."

The group returned to their places at the front, and everything came back to normal. There was a sermon. It was a good sermon, based in part on a verse in the reading (it was the passage about bringing out from the storehouse things old and new). The little ritual in the centre of the church had been intended to recognise the honour in which we hold the gospel, and our intention to listen. Perhaps it did help in this.

So, it is a great joy to experience God's Word. By this, I do not mean reading the bible uncritically. There are many different versions nowadays, some with as many errors as the KJV. But what really matters is that God should speak through the printed word to our hearts and minds. He speaks through His Word, and we should be alert to His voice (not forgetting that He is not limited, and can speak in many different ways and in many places). Neither do I mean studying the bible critically, for study brings a reward according to the mind set with which we approach it. The students with whom I grew up finished in two separate groups studying different scriptures in separate houses - and saying hard things about one another. How sad. As we study, we must accept His love in our hearts and informing our minds. When this is the case, it is then that His Word gives us the greatest joy.

GC

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

A brief life of Joseph

1 – Captive in a strange land

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob, born to Rachel eight or nine years before the family left Haran and returned to Canaan. He comes into the story in Gen. 37 at seventeen years of age and already in bad odour with his elder half-brothers, for, it is said, he brought unto his father their "*evil report*" (37.2). To what extent this procedure partook of "tale-bearing" does not appear; it is plain though that several of Jacob's sons were most undesirable characters and Joseph might well have been justified in whatever it was he told his father.

What does stand out is Jacob's avowed predilection for Joseph, clearly on account of his being the first-born son of his beloved Rachel. The 'coat of many colours' which 37.3 declares Jacob had made for his favourite son has been variously explained. There is good reason for supposing that it was what the AV says it was, a variegated garment made of various materials of different colours sewn together in a definite pattern. There is a famous Egyptian tomb painting of the 12th dynasty, which is some time before that of Joseph, showing Asiatic visitors to Egypt clad in just such garments. It would seem that Jacob, perhaps influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit, was already realising something of Joseph's future exaltation.

The brothers' jealousy was intensified when Joseph began to relate his dreams, and they perceived the implication. One dream showed them binding sheaves in the field when Joseph's sheaf stood upright and all the others bowed down to it. Later on he dreamed again and saw the sun and moon and eleven stars making obeisance to him. His father rebuked him at this, for in the strict code of the East the father is supreme until his death and this dream savoured of something like high treason. Yet 37.11 says that his father "*observed the saying*" where 'observe' means to take diligent heed. Perhaps he remembered his own dream something like half a century earlier of the ladder stretched up to heaven and wondered if this was another pointer to the outworking of God's purpose. He must have realised that his elder sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, were all of them men of blood and most unlikely to be chosen to execute the Lord's purposes. But for the present Joseph must take his place as a lad in the family duties and so it came about that he was sent to report on the welfare of the brothers who were guarding Jacob's far-flung interests at the other end of Canaan.

Jacob had established his headquarters somewhere near his father Isaac at Hebron. His flocks however apparently ranged far and wide over Canaan as far north as Shechem, fifty miles away. When Joseph got there he found that

his brothers had moved on to Dothan, twelve miles farther still. Casual allusions like this make it plain that Canaan must have been very thinly populated at that time; it is highly probable that Abraham and his descendants counted for a large part of the inhabitants if their flocks and herds could thus apparently graze unmolested over what was practically the entire length and breadth of present-day Israel.

Betrayed

The rascally brothers saw Joseph coming and hatched a plot. It would be easy to kill him and persuade their father that he had been slain by a wild beast somewhere on the way, and all they were able to recover was the bloodstained garment. Reuben, the eldest, was evidently not in agreement with the proposal but felt himself in a hopeless minority. He therefore proposed that Joseph be cast into one of the water cisterns, cut out of rock, which abounded in the district, deep excavations from which a man could not escape unaided, intending to rescue him later and smuggle him back to his father. Reuben's plan worked up to the point of dropping Joseph into the pit, but while he was away from the others, evidently busy about some duty connected with the flocks, Judah, also somewhat conscience stricken at the projected murder of their brother, proposed that their end could be equally well achieved by selling Joseph as a slave to passing traders and so the guilt of blood need not rest on them. The bargain was struck and the Ishmaelite traders took Joseph in exchange for twenty shekels of silver and carried him into Egypt. Reuben, returning later to the pit, was grief-stricken at the turn events had taken. It would appear that he regarded himself responsible to his father for the younger son's safety. But there was nothing to be done; Joseph was gone from their lives, and all Reuben could do was acquiesce in the brothers' lie to Jacob, a lie which broke the old man's heart. *"All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him but he refused to be comforted, and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning."* (37.35). This particular verse is interesting as showing that in addition to his twelve sons Jacob also had a number of daughters; the only one whose name is recorded is Dinah. A characteristic of the Old Testament, or rather the genealogies which are incorporated in the Old Testament, is that daughters are not mentioned or recorded unless some particular incident is connected with their names.

So Joseph travelled with the caravan of merchants along the highway which connected Canaan with Egypt, a slow two hundred mile journey lying for the most part along the seacoast, until his captors passed the frontier guards. Joseph saw with his own eyes the land his great-

grandfather Abraham had visited nearly two centuries earlier, the land of the Pharaohs. Modern research has established that his entry must have been during the 17th century BC, when the Hyksos, Semitic invaders from Syria, ruled Egypt. The Hyksos capital was Zoan (later called Tanis) in the eastern Nile delta, and this was the district in which lay the land of Goshen later assigned to the people of Israel. An incidental support for the view that it was in the time of the Hyksos that Joseph entered Egypt lies in the fact that according to the narrative he was bought from the Ishmaelites by "*Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh, an Egyptian*". Were the reigning house an Egyptian one there would seem no point in mentioning the fact that the captain of the guard was an Egyptian; the fact would be assumed as a matter of course. If, however, the reigning Pharaoh was of the Semitic race, almost certainly most of his court officials would be Semitic also. The historian would feel some reluctance to have it thought that any such would take a brother Semite as slave, hence the care to point out that in this case the individual concerned was an Egyptian.

Imprisoned

The story of the attempted seduction of Joseph by his master's wife is well known and has formed the subject of many a sermon and homily. The fact that Joseph's master contented himself with putting Joseph in prison instead of to death, which was the usual punishment for the crime, seems to indicate that Potiphar was probably not altogether convinced of the truth of the accusation. But Joseph stayed in prison for anything up to ten years and it was during that time that the incident occurred which became the means of his subsequent exaltation to the highest position in Egypt next to Pharaoh himself.

Two of Pharaoh's officials, his butler and his baker, had offended and been cast into prison and so brought into contact with Joseph. Each had a dream, and with the superstition of the age each wanted to know the interpretation. Joseph pointed out, as Daniel was to do in similar circumstances a thousand years later, that the interpretation belonged to God, and in his confidence of faith indicated that he could reveal to them the meaning of their dreams. For the butler the news was good; for the baker it was bad. One was to be pardoned and the other executed. Within three days the prediction was fulfilled and the butler stood at his accustomed place attending upon Pharaoh. But he forgot the young man who had prophesied his good fortune, and Joseph remained in prison still.

Two years went by, and then it was Pharaoh's turn to dream. Seven fat cows came up out of the Nile and fed in the rank grass growing by the riverside, and behind them seven thin and ill-favoured cows who ate up the

fat ones and yet remained thin and ill-favoured as before. Seven full ears of wheat on one stalk swallowed up by seven withered and thin ears. The magicians and wise men were unable to interpret the dreams and it was then that the butler remembered the young man in the prison who had correctly interpreted his own dream two years before. So it came about that Joseph was hastily brought out of prison, dressed and shaved, and ushered into the presence of Pharaoh.

This Pharaoh was probably Salitis, the first of the Hyksos kings. He was an Arab or Syrian chieftain who invaded Egypt and set up his court at Zoan in the Delta and ruled, with his successors, for something like a hundred years, constituting what are known as the 15th and 16th dynasties. Towards the end of the rule of the Hyksos, or "Shepherd Kings" as they are sometimes called, native Egyptians challenged their grip on the land and for a long time there were Hyksos and native kings exercising sovereignty over different parts of Egypt so that the 17th dynasty overlapped those of the Hyksos. Then at last Aahmes the first king of the 18th dynasty expelled the last of the Hyksos from the country and Egypt was united under a single rulership. This was about twenty years after the death of Joseph and since the Israelites were of the same race, the Semitic, as the hated Hyksos, and moreover had been greatly favoured by them, it is probable that from this time began the oppression of the children of Israel which hardened later on into the slavery which led to the Exodus.

Joseph modestly disclaimed all ability of his own and accredited God with the power to interpret. He told Pharaoh that the dreams portended a seven year period of plenty followed by seven years of famine through all the land. He counselled Pharaoh to appoint a wise and discreet man to supervise the storage of all supplies produced during the seven years of plenty for reserve against the seven years of famine.

Promoted

With impetuous informality Pharaoh immediately appointed Joseph to act in the character suggested. At this point there is another sidelight on the likelihood of Joseph's Pharaoh being one of the Hyksos. Said Pharaoh (41.38-39) *"Can we find such a man as this, in whom the Spirit of God is?"* And then addressing Joseph, *"forasmuch as God has showed you all this..."* Now all the native kings of Egypt acknowledged and served many gods; it is most unlikely that this Pharaoh who thus acknowledge one God, in the singular, was other than one of the Semitic Hyksos. It is well known nowadays that the worship of the "Most High God" was common in Canaan and Syria at that time. Melchisedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem in Abraham's time was one such worshipper and

so was Abimelech king of Gerar. Here is another. It is very likely that this similarity of worship is one reason, perhaps the principal reason, for the welcome which Jacob and his family received when they came into Egypt.

The sudden exaltation of Joseph to the highest position in the land need not be thought improbable or fantastic. There is a story in Egyptian history of one Saneha who came into Egypt a poor man in the reign of Amenemhet I, the first king of the 12th dynasty, married a local nobleman's daughter, acquired great wealth and was finally exalted to high office by the Pharaoh. This is almost a perfect likeness to the story of Joseph, although it must have been more than two centuries before his time.

The expression "Bow the knee" in 41.43 is "*abrech*" in the original and the translators, not knowing its meaning, read it as "*Habrech*" which does mean "Bow the knee". It is now known that "*abrech*" was a popular acclaim meaning literally "rejoice, be happy" but having much the same significance as our expression "God save the Queen". It was a shout of loyalty raised by the people as Joseph passed through the streets.

Gen.41.41 declares that Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to "Zaphnath-paneah" an Egyptianised word meaning "the food of life", in obvious allusion to his mission of preserving Egypt through famine. He also married Joseph to Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of the Sun-god (not to be confused with Potiphar captain of the guard, Joseph's erstwhile owner). It might be queried why Joseph consented to such marriage when the Lord had beforetime laid emphasis in marrying only within the Semitic race. The answer may well be that Potipherah was himself a Semitic immigrant like his royal master so that no objection could stand on this point at all. There is just one hint that this may in fact have been the case. "Potipherah" is an Egyptian term meaning "servant-of-the-Sun-god" and is extremely common in the Egyptian inscriptions. It is really a title rather than a proper name, indicating that the holder was the senior religious official in the land, 'High Priest' so to speak. Potipherah would be a man of immense authority and in the closest counsels of Pharaoh. But the name of his daughter, Asenath, means "dedicated to Anath", and Anath was not an Egyptian deity. Anath was a goddess worshipped by the Semitic Syrians and before them by the Babylonians, who looked upon her as the consort of Anu the god of heaven. It is very unlikely that a native Egyptian High Priest should commit so grave a breach of etiquette as to name his daughter in honour of a goddess of the Semites. On the other hand, if Joseph's father-in-law was a Syrian who came in to Egypt with the first of the Hyksos kings, what more natural thing than to name his daughter after one of his own national deities. This cannot possibly be claimed as proof, but her name does at least give some reason to think that Asenath might have been of the Syrian Semitic race and not native Egyptian,

in which case she could even have been descended from one of Abraham's relatives and have derived ultimately from the parent stock of Terah. There is a sense of fitness in thinking that perhaps, after all, Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim, progenitors of two tribes in Israel, were full blooded Hebrews and not half Semitic and half Hamitic.

The first seven years of Joseph's married life were busy ones, for he was constantly engaged travelling throughout all Egypt supervising the gathering and storage of as much surplus food as possible. In this connection it is not always realised that the Egypt of Joseph was not the whole of the country now known by that name. While the Semitic Hyksos were ruling in the north, native Egyptian Pharaohs were ruling in the south. The Egypt of Joseph stretched from the mouths of the Nile only about two hundred miles up the river and comprised mainly the Nile delta, the capital city of Pharaoh being quite near the frontier with Canaan. It is estimated that the population of Egypt at the time did not exceed one million so that Joseph might have had half a million people to provide for, about the population of a British city like Sheffield.

Then the years of plenty ceased and the years of famine came. Now was the efficacy of Joseph's work to be tested.

AOH

(To be continued)

JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

Tantalising in its brevity is that which the Gospels have to say about Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus. Responsible for the care and nurture of our Lord from birth to manhood, practically nothing concerning him has survived on record. The little that is said is confined to Jesus' infancy and boyhood, and the later life and the death of Joseph are veiled in obscurity. It is almost as if the writers of the four Gospels realised that the human family into which Jesus was born was nothing more than a means to an end, the avenue by which, coming from God, He entered the world of men. That purpose achieved, the affairs of the family were of no relevance to the object of the Gospel story and were allowed to lapse into oblivion.

Just a few brief glimpses of his character are vouchsafed, almost like asides in the narrative, and it is worth while putting these together to form some kind of picture of the man to whose paternal care Jesus must have owed a great deal. He appears as a man of quiet faith and implicit trust in God and there is not much doubt that he was a chosen vessel just as much as was Mary for the great purpose which so soon overspread their young lives.

Popular impression, aided by religious art, usually has it that Joseph was a very old man at the time of his marriage to Mary but this impression is definitely and certainly wrong. It had its origin in certain apocryphal Christian books of the Fourth Century, notably the "*Gospel of pseudo-Matthew*", the "*Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*" and the "*History of Joseph the Carpenter*". These works, examples of the "Christian fiction" of the period, were written to support a growing spirit of asceticism in the Church by which Mary was presented as eternally virgin and unconnected with man. To this end, these and similar legends asserted that Mary had lived in the Temple under the care of the priests until twelve or fourteen years of age, and the priests then secured a Divine indication that this very old man, Joseph, a widower of ninety, should marry and care for Mary and her child Jesus in complete celibacy. The four brothers and two sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels were held to have been the children of Joseph by a former and now deceased wife. These books are of no historical value and it is not difficult when reading them to detect various errors which reveal that the writers were not so accurately informed on the history of the First Century as we are today, and certainly not thoroughly familiar with the Gospels. All that is definitely known about Joseph is drawn from the Gospels.

Mary must have been very young at the time, probably no more than eighteen. This is implied by the fact that she seems to have died at Ephesus in the care of John after A.D.65 or so, by which time she would be between eighty and ninety. Joseph might have been as much as thirty, but hardly any older; his betrothal to Mary seems to have been a perfectly ordinary affair and no reason exists for thinking they were other than a normal young couple pledging themselves and their lives to each other. Despite all that the apocryphal books above-mentioned say to the contrary, the New Testament is quite explicit that, after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had four sons and at least two daughters. This is another evidence that their father was relatively young at marriage, as is also the story of the flight into Egypt. A senile old man would hardly be physically capable of a successful two hundred mile flight from the wrath of King Herod; neither is it feasible that he could still work at his trade as the Gospels make plain he did. That he was a poor man is evident from the fact that when Mary presented herself at the Temple, as required by the ceremonial law, to be pronounced ritually clean after the birth of her first-born, the offering she brought was not the usual lamb, but two young pigeons, the concession made to the poor (Luke 2. 24, Lev. 12. 8).

Despite his poverty, Joseph, like Mary his wife, was of royal lineage, descended from David the famous king of Israel. Their pedigrees both came through Zerubbabel, the representative of the kingly line at the Return from Babylon, but Zerubbabel was the son of a "Levirate marriage" and although legally he was counted as the grandson of Jehoiachin the king, his blood descent was not from the kings of Judah through Solomon, but from Nathan, another son of David. Legally and officially, though, Joseph was of the royal line through Solomon and Jehoiachin on this account and this is the genealogy of Joseph given by Matthew; literally both were of David through Nathan and Neri and this is the genealogy of Mary given by Luke. It would appear that Joseph's line was senior to that of Mary from about the eighth generation below Zerubbabel, (about 400 B.C.), so that the royal rights of Jesus came to him through Joseph. This is why the angel addressed Joseph in Matt. 1.20 as *"thou son of David"*, and Luke calls him *"Joseph, of the house of David"* (Luke 1.27).

The first sidelight on Joseph's character is revealed when he discovers that his affianced wife is to become a mother. Jewish custom of the time required an espousal period of twelve months preceding the actual marriage, but the espousal was an equally binding contract. Matt. 1.18 shows that it was during this period that Joseph made the discovery. His first impulse was to have the contract of marriage annulled on the ground of unfaithfulness, but quietly and privately to avoid public scandal out of consideration for his intended wife. Mary must have told him the truth of the matter as it is related by Luke (Luke 1.26-36), that an angel had visited her and told her that she was to become the mother of the Messiah by an act of God without human aid or intervention. Whether Joseph believed her is another matter. Many Jewish women hoped they would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah but no one ever expected him to be born in any other than the customary manner. The Divine promise that He would be the lawful heir of David's throne demanded that in some valid way He must derive his descent from David. It is stated that Joseph was a righteous man; he was evidently devout and well grounded in the Faith and he was not going to take a decision until he had given the matter careful thought (Matt. 1.20). He might not have been altogether surprised therefore when the angel of the Lord appeared to him also and confirmed Mary's story, telling him to name the coming child Jesus (Saviour or deliverer) *"for he shall save his people from their sins"*. Joseph hesitated no longer; the decisiveness which seems to have been an element of his character came to the top, and apparently without further delay he completed the marriage formalities – which included the wedding feast – and with his newly-married wife settled down to await the coming event.

All this of course pre-supposes the truth of what is called by theologians "the doctrine of the Virgin birth". All kinds of objections to this are raised nowadays, and there is increasing disbelief that Jesus of Nazareth entered this world in any other than the usual manner. The only authority on the subject of Jesus' birth, however, is the New Testament and that is perfectly clear on the matter. And so was Joseph; much more so than many in later times who take leave to know better than those who were there. Joseph is presented in the narrative as knowing that the coming child was not his; he accepted the heavenly assurance that no human father was involved and that here was an instance of the operation of the Holy Spirit. He knew that such things could be so, because God was all-powerful, and he was content as well as believing. It is noteworthy that in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus on only three occasions is Joseph referred to as the father of Jesus, twice by the villagers and once by Mary (Jn.6.42; Luke 4. 22, Luke 2.48). It would be the natural thing to say in the family context— Joseph was head of the family.

Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his father. He used the expression "my Father" in reference to God some hundred times. Mary is described as the mother of Jesus some twenty-three times. The phrase "Joseph and his mother" occurs twice. This quite evident exclusion of Joseph from the intrinsic fatherhood of Jesus is all the more noteworthy when it is realised that Jesus' legal right to the throne of David, a fundamental factor in his Messiahship, came to him through Joseph. Had these narratives been fictional or in any way "dressed up" to prove Jesus as the Messiah the writers would surely have made Joseph his natural father. There was probably very little time for philosophical reflections, however, for Joseph had his living to earn and the responsibilities of married life. Whether he was a carpenter in timber or a metal worker or blacksmith—the Greek *tekton* means any of these although it is most often used for a carpenter in timber—is immaterial; he probably did all such work for the village and his living, although modest, was secure. But within a few weeks of settling down he was uprooted; by reason of a decree of Augustus Caesar, the current Emperor, there was to be a general census of the people, and the effect of this upon Joseph and his wife was that they must appear before the enrolment officials in the recognised family district of their fathers. That district was Bethlehem, the birthplace of David their ancestor and of his fathers back to Boaz and Salmon of the time Israel settled the land. So Joseph and Mary set out on the eighty mile journey and almost immediately upon their arrival Jesus was born.

The details of that event are well known. The first visitors to the child were the shepherds from nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night just as David, his illustrious ancestor, had done a thousand years previously.

Joseph was there but in the background; he is mentioned, but only just mentioned. This was true humility; he, as the surviving member of David's line, could surely expect some acknowledgement of seniority, at least until the child should have attained its majority. But no; Joseph knew that here he was standing face to face with the workings of God, that the child thus placed in his paternal care was not only David's son but also David's Lord (Matt.22.42-46). He was content to play the part allotted to him and discharge the duty assigned to him. In him resided the spirit of true consecration; "*I come . . . to do thy will, O God*".

The shepherds went their way and a month later the child was taken to the Temple and formally dedicated to the service of God. Again Joseph played a passive part. He was there, but that is all we know about it. He, together with Mary, "*wondered*" at the glowing words of Simeon the aged prophet foretelling the future glories to come by means of the child; "*light to lighten the nations, and the glory of thy people Israel*" (Luke 2.32). A great honour for a humble village carpenter, Joseph must have thought, as they made their way out of the Temple courts and home to Nazareth (Luke 2.39). But he was, not even then, to be left in peace to ply his craft. Before long King Herod had heard of the wondrous event and was sending his soldiers to find and slay this one who in his ignorance he feared as a threat to his own position. The child was a year old by now; the family's presence at Bethlehem shows that the time was one of the periodic feasts at which pious folk like Joseph and Mary would "go up to Jerusalem" for the occasion, and since their ancestral home was Bethlehem it is understandable that there they would lodge. Instructed by the angel, Joseph took his wife and child out of the town and made his way two hundred miles to Egypt where they would be beyond the King's jurisdiction; "and was there until the death of Herod" (Matt. 2.15). Herod died early in the following year so the stay in Egypt was less than six months, during which time no doubt Joseph supported the family by his trade. Then the voice of the angel came again, telling of the king's death and instructing him to return to the land of Israel. It seems that his intention was to settle in Bethlehem. He probably felt that the future mission of Jesus would demand close proximity to the capital city Jerusalem and he was prepared to subordinate his own life's plans and wishes to what appeared to be the Divine will. But he found that Herod's son, Archelaus, was now reigning and he was nearly as much a menace as the old king. Again, it seems, he sought Divine guidance, and following the response he sought, went on into Galilee and settled in his old home town of Nazareth, outside Archelaus' jurisdiction. So, for a few years at least, he found peace and quietness in which to nurture his wife's firstborn son.

Only one recorded incident breaks the silence of the next thirty years. Every year Joseph and Mary travelled to Jerusalem – in common with many others – to observe the Feast of the Passover. In Jesus' twelfth year, as they set out to return to Nazareth, somehow they lost him. A day out on the journey they discovered that He was not with the company and they returned to Jerusalem to find him. After three days search He was discovered in the Temple courts, listening to and questioning the venerable Doctors of the Law, the theologians of the day. Said Mary to him, probably reproachfully, *"thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"* but already the active mind of the lad was reaching out towards his life's mission. *"Do you not understand"* He told them gently *"that I must be in my Father's courts?"* But they did not understand; *"they understood not the saying which he spake unto them"* (Luke 2.50). They were already beginning to lose him, as was ordained. He remained a dutiful son; *"he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart"*.

It is not said that Joseph did likewise. It might well be that from this point Joseph became increasingly unable to realise the nature of Jesus' mission and destiny. His mother did. Joseph was called to be a physical protector and provider for the period Jesus needed material protection and provision and when the lad attained man's estate Joseph's work was done. Quietly and unobtrusively he served as he was bidden while the need existed, and when the service was finished and no longer any need he slips silently out of the picture and is seen no more. But in the records of Heaven the consecrated life and selfless devotion of Joseph, the village carpenter of Nazareth, is surely inscribed in letters of gold for ever.

We hear no more of Joseph. We know from the Gospels that he and Mary had four sons—James, Joses, Jude, Simon—and at least two daughters, all younger than Jesus, so that they must have had a reasonably long married life together. His death is not recorded. From the fact that Jesus commended his mother to the care of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, at the Crucifixion, it would appear that he died before that event. The casual remarks of the villagers in Luke 4.22 and Jn. 6.42 *"Is not this Joseph's son?"* and *"Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"* would seem to infer that he was alive at those times, approximately summer of A.D. 30 and spring of A.D. 31 respectively. Matt.13.55 might imply the same conclusion as to the autumn of AD.30. There are some indications that Mary and the family at least made their home in Capernaum during the early part of our Lord's ministry. He himself never went back to Nazareth after the villagers' rejection of him at the beginning—and Jesus did visit Capernaum some ten times during the first two years, but never after the summer of AD 31. Soon after that time comes his first recorded visit to the home of Lazarus,

Martha and Mary at Bethany which seems to have been the nearest approach to a home He possessed towards the end. From all of this it might be inferred that Joseph died, perhaps at Capernaum, about the middle of A.D.31, nearly two years before the Crucifixion, at which time he might well have been sixty years of age, a not uncommon life span in those days. The rest of the family would have been young men and women, some already married, but from Jn.7. 5 it is known that none of them were in sympathy with Jesus. Thus, after Joseph's death, Mary might have attached herself to the other women, her sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary of Magdala, Salome and Joanna, who were disciples of Jesus, instead of making her home with any of her own children. That would explain why Jesus, on the Cross, placed her in John's care although she had children living. Later on, after the Resurrection, James and Jude became converts; possibly one or more of the others did also. At any rate Acts 1.14 makes it clear that at the first complete assembly of believers after the Ascension both Mary and either some or all of his brothers were present. Among the arguments for the truth of the Resurrection that are advanced it is not often remarked that Jesus' brothers, who had formerly disbelieved, became believers in the light of the things that had happened; where they had failed to be convinced by his life they were convinced by his death and resurrection.

Joseph, his life's work done, had passed quietly and silently from the scene. It may seem a hard and somewhat callous way in which to treat a faithful servant of God who had discharged his commission faithfully throughout life but it is not really so, and Joseph was not the only one. Moses, the greatest man in Israel's history, died alone and unseen amid the fastnesses of Mount Nebo "*and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day*". Samuel's wise administration and sterling worth converted an undisciplined rabble of warring tribes into a God-fearing nation, but died an old man, bereft of power and authority, in a country village surrounded only by a few student lads. Elijah, who challenged and overthrew idolatry in Israel, went out alone into the wilderness beyond Jordan and was caught away by a whirlwind and never seen again. Daniel, who for more than seventy years held up the banner of the faith in idolatrous Babylon and kept alive the national hope of eventual deliverance, saw the fulfilment of the promise and the triumphant departure of the people of Judah, but was too old to share in the deliverance himself, and he died unrecorded in Babylon. God attaches no importance to the earthly body and the earthly life once his purpose with the individual is achieved. The body goes to the dust; that which is preserved in the strong hands of God comes forth to a new life in a

new environment, resplendent in a glory which is enhanced by the merit of the former life's work well done.

So, among that noble company of old time stalwarts of faith who are to take a leading part in the conversion of all the world in the Age yet to come, not the least in high honour will be that gentle and courageous man of faith. He had, more than any other man, to do with the nurture and care of the Son of God when he came to earth, and that man was called, in his own village and by his own neighbours, just simply, Joseph the carpenter.

AOH

Euphoria

The noun *euphoria* is not found in the Greek NT, but the related verb *euphoreo* is found in Luke 12.16, where the land of a rich man 'produced abundantly' (NRSV) 'bore good crops' (TEV), 'his estate had done well' (King). This is the parable where Jesus warned about greed - that life does not consist of having 'enough and to spare' - and told that all the rich man's excitement about his prosperity ended in his sudden and unexpected death.

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

Beneath us is a fair meadow, through which the pure River of the Water of Life is winding its way; on either side of it stand the Trees of Life, with twelve manner of fruits and beautiful leaves for the healing of the nations. In the distance, high on the summit of the everlasting hills, the city of God, bathed in light and glory—the New Jerusalem, the city that needs no sun, no moon, "for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

When the heart is quiet and the door shut on the world, we can give thanks to God for sleep, for merriment, for our opportunities to worship with others, but let us not neglect to give thanks for this same quiet hour when the heart communes with God and is still.

EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

Sin self-destructive

There are laws of right doing and equity which cannot be broken without incurring grave consequences. The prospect before men in the life to come is one of constantly widening experience and deepening knowledge of God and his creation, but that life must be conducted in harmony with right principles to be sustained by the Giver of all life. The violation of those principles is called "sin" by the Bible, and the consequence of continued and incorrigible sin, the Bible declares, is cessation of life. A wise man of Old Testament days expressed this vital law in pithy words *"As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death"*; *"In the way of righteousness there is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death"* (Prov.11.19;12.28). Paul said that *"the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life"* (Rom.6.23). This is the basis upon which is built the Scriptural doctrine of the consequences of sin.

The term 'everlasting punishment' appears in the Authorised Version only once, in Matt.25.46. Human ideas of 'punishment', usually involving an element of revenge, reprisal or retaliation, are not what the New Testament means when it deals with the consequences of sin. A preferable term is penalty, or better still, retribution. The underlying principle is laid down by Paul in Gal. 6.7 *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"*. A passage in the Epistle of James puts the case very clearly: *"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death"* (Jas.1.14-15 RSV). The penalty must not be looked upon as a kind of arbitrary Divine retaliation against rebels who displease him. It is rather the logical and inevitable operation of natural law which demands that every disorderly or disruptive element must eventually be eliminated that the purpose of God in creation be realised in the happiness and fulness of life of every living being. The fact that we do not yet see this law bringing forth its final results does not deny its truth; humanity is at this moment still in the early stages of that long experience which is at length to achieve that end. The close of this present life in the death of the body is only an incident in this long process and there is more, much more, to come. Eventually it will be evident that sin bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction and the sinner who will not renounce his rebellion against God signs his own death warrant.

The Bible emphasises that eventually evil and sin will disappear from

creation. In the whole wide realm of Divine government there will be no such thing as evil and no such thing as sin. In 1 Cor.15.24-28 Paul looks forward to a time when the enemies of God have been overthrown, death has become a thing of the past, and in the plenitude of his sovereignty God has become *"all in all"*. Eph.1.9-10 (RSV) stresses that God will, at the end, *"unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth"*. In what is perhaps one of the grandest flights of eloquence in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Philippians speaks of the time to come when *"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil.2.9-10). These and other lines of Scripture argument make clear that evil will eventually cease to be.

All life is the gift of God; no created being can continue to live except by the power of God constantly animating his bodily frame and enlivening his mind. *"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground"* says the Genesis account (Gen. 2.7), *"and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"*. If that flow of life-power ceases, or if God withdraw it, death results, consciousness ends, and the inert body returns to the elements of which it is composed *"ashes to ashes, dust to dust"*. In a vivid passage relating to the animal creation the Psalmist defines the process; *"thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust"* (Psa.104.29). Hope for a man's future life after death rests entirely with God, who can invest that life with a new body adapted to its new environment. This is what is involved in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. Paul in 2 Cor. 5 talks of being *"clothed upon"* with a *"house from heaven"* following the dissolution of *"our earthly house of this dwelling-place"*. The relation between such a resurrection to everlasting life and the contrasting destiny of the obdurately evil is laid down very plainly by our Lord when He said *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"* (Jn.3.36).

Withdrawal of the gift of life

In line with this principle, the Scriptures present the ultimate end of the sinner as withdrawal of the gift of life. If, at the end, sin and evil are to be no more, if all intelligent life in every sphere is to bow the knee to Jesus and give praise and worship to him, then there must come a time when sinners are no more. Says Job *"they that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed"* (Job 4.8-9). *"He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death"* runs Prov.8.36. The two prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel unite in the terse declaration *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"* (Jer.31.30; Ezek.18.4). David adds his word *"The face of the Lord*

is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Ps.34.14) and puts the responsibility squarely where it belongs in the brief maxim "*Evil shall slay the wicked*" in verse 21 of the same Psalm. These are not just a few casual observations having no particular authority behind them; they are expressions of a fundamental truth which these men, and others like them, being men of God profoundly influenced by his Holy Spirit, fully understood and held tenaciously. These writings form the true basis of Christian theology and must be given due heed on that account; they insist that the penalty for sin is withdrawal of life, the ending of conscious existence.

There are two words in the New Testament which have been productive of much misunderstanding. One is damnation and the other is everlasting. The first, damnation, has a meaning today which it did not bear in the seventeenth century when the Authorised Version was produced. At that time it meant, simply and positively, to be condemned; the nature and duration of the condemnation depended upon the circumstances of the case. Thus in Wycliffe's Bible the words of Jesus to the woman taken in adultery are "*Woman, hath no man damned thee?*" Likewise the "*resurrection of damnation*" of Jn.5.29 is literally a "resurrection to judgment" which at least brings the case of "*those who have done evil*" before the Judge for consideration. The Greek is rendered "judgment" and "condemnation" some eighty times and "damnation" only fourteen times, and the Revised Version has abandoned "damnation" altogether. Thus wherever the word "damnation" is found it must not necessarily be assumed that the condemnation is final and irrevocable. It may in some cases be limited in scope, as in Rom.14.23 "*He that doubteth is damned if he eat*" where the meaning is that the person partaking of the Lord's supper "*unworthily*" stands condemned or judged in his action, but not necessarily doomed.

Fire the symbol of destruction

One of the strangest and most misunderstood statements of Jesus is that in Matt.25, where the King in the parable says to the unworthy "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels . . . and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*". "Punishment" here is *kolasis*, a word which means, primarily, to cut off or lop the branches of a tree as in pruning, and in general indicated restraint or correction. From this it became a term for the restraint of offenders or criminals to prevent continuance of their misdeeds, and this is the sense in which it is used here. ("*Fear hath*

torment" in 1 Jn.4.18, where "torment" is *kolasis*, is another example where restraint rather than punishment is the obvious meaning). Penal punishment is *timoria*, a totally different word. Here in Matt. 25 the contrast is between the everlasting life of the worthy, who enter into what elsewhere is called *"the glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Rom.8.21) and the everlasting restraint from sin of the unworthy. This is the same thing as the everlasting fire of the same passage. Another reference to the same judgment is found in Rev.20.11-15 where the King seated on the Great White Throne – the *"throne of his glory"* of the Matt. 25 parable – arrays all people before him to be judged *"and they were judged every man according to their works"*. Here, under a very similar symbol to that employed in Matt.25, the unworthy are *"cast into the lake of fire"*. Earlier in this 20th chapter of Revelation the Devil also has been cast into this lake of fire, a parallel allusion with the fate of the *"devil and his angels"* in Matt 25. In both passages the picture is one of judgment which proceeds throughout the Messianic Age, the "Day of Judgment", and the outcome at its end when the eternal issues, for good or for evil, are decided for every man.

The everlasting fire and the fiery lake are symbols for that destruction which overtakes all evil and every incorrigibly evil being. Isaiah saw the same thing when at the close of the vision of the new heavens and new earth he said of those who have right of entry into that eternal world *"they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring of all flesh"* (Isa.66.24). The worm is undying until there is nothing left upon which it can feed; the fire unquenched until it has consumed all there is burn – just as in Jer.17.27 where a fire was to kindled in Jerusalem that *"shall devour the palace of Jerusalem and it shall not be quenched"*.

Passages which speak of sinners destroyed by everlasting fire are metaphors taken sometimes from the story of the destruction of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven. Sometimes too they are taken from the known use of the Valley Hinnom outside Jerusalem for idolatrous human sacrifice by fire in the days of the Hebrew kings and its later use for continuous burning of the city garbage. *"Gehenna"* – the Greek form of Hinnom – occurs fourteen times in the sayings of Jesus (rendered *"Hell"* in the AV). The idea in each case is that of destruction as complete as by fire Matt.3.12 and Luke 3.17 the chaff that has been separated from the wheat is burnt up with *"unquenchable fire"*. In Matt.9.43-48 it is better to enter into life maimed than being whole to go to the unquenchable fire, the parallel passage in Matt.18.8 calling this the *"everlasting fire"*. In the same passages it is shown that Gehenna and the unquenchable fires relate to one

and the same thing, and in Matt.21.44 the assertion is plainly made that it is possible for God to *"destroy both soul and body"* in Gehenna. This corresponds with declarations such as Psa.92.7 *"when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever"*.

Possibility of self-destruction

Thus understood, the consequence of sin in the face of full light and full opportunity is incurred solely by the individual's own choice and will. It has been suggested that deliberate continuance in evil doing can destroy a man's capacity for repentance and conversion to the good life. Perhaps a man is capable of destroying his own soul. One hundred years ago Dr. Paterson Smyth wrote *"We must believe that through all eternity, if the worst sinner felt touched by the love of God and wanted to turn to him, that man would be saved. What we dread is that the man may not want, and so may have rendered himself incapable of doing so. We dread not God's will, but the man's own will. Character tends to permanence. Free will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. All experience leads towards the belief that a human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good"*. More recently Prof. Alexander Finlay said *"All life depends upon fellowship with God. The possibility must remain that the time may come when a man, no longer being capable of fellowship with God, shall die and become extinct, simply because there is no life left in him, because his soul is dead"*. In a sermon delivered by Dr. Samuel Holmes, a Presbyterian minister of the United States, in 1907, he said *"It is implicit in the teachings of both Jesus and Paul that when a soul, through its persistence in sin, comes to the point where it is morally irrecoverable, it comes also to its final death. A living creature remains alive only so long as it conforms to the conditions of living. Shall we think otherwise of the human soul . . . When a man has continued in sin, has gone on dwarfing his moral and spiritual nature until every appeal of God is in vain, is it not in accordance with the analogies of life that extinction is the certain outcome?"* A noted Churchman of the late nineteenth century, Dr. C.A. Row, Prebendary of St. Pauls Cathedral, summed up his book *"Future Retribution"* in the words *"the disease of moral evil, wilfully persisted in, for aught we know to the contrary, may be capable of destroying man as a conscious being Inasmuch as man is destitute of self-existence the length of the period during which he will continue to exist must be dependent on the good pleasure of him who by his all-powerful energy maintains him in being every moment. . . . Evil beings will cease to exist whenever it pleases the All-merciful to cease to exert that energy which alone maintains in existence the evil and the good"*.

Eloquent in its brevity is the word of the Psalmist (Psa.37.10), a word expressed in literal down-to-earth terms which cannot be misunderstood: *"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be"*.

AOH

The interpretation of prophecy

There are principles which underly serious interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies. All too often there is a tendency to accept the written word as strictly literal - a forecast of destined future events. The words are accepted without any regard to the contemporary background of the writer, or the limitations imposed by his day and age. As often as not he is laying down, in symbol and metaphor, the principles of the event that is to be, and this leaves the generation experiencing that event to perceive the aptness of his analogy in the current signs of the times. The prophetic Scriptures are often written as symbols. There is poetry, metaphor and analogy. Moreover, the Old Testament prophets were not primarily foretellers of future events but expounded the consequences whether the people violated or upheld the Divine law. Such expositions had to be framed in the language and knowledge of the prophet's own day, using symbols drawn from the everyday life with which he was acquainted.

In the foreknowledge of God, the inevitable consequences, at the end of the Age, of the general course of mankind throughout history are accurately foreknown. So the Holy Spirit through the agency of the prophets and within the limits of their language and vision has provided us in the prophetic writings with a delineation of things to come, but in the terms and pictures of long ago. These can be recognised by the serious student as they come upon the stage of world history.

When the prophet says the Lord will turn the earth upside down he does not mean to infer that this planet is to be inverted on its axis; he does mean that the world social order is to be overturned. The sword with which the Heavenly Rider comes to smite the nations is not a material offensive weapon but the Word of God, which is capable of an equally devastating effect against evil things but in a different sphere. Ezekiel's vision of the whole world arrayed against Israel is much more understandable when a glance at the map shows how little of the earth's surface was known, and constituted "all the world", to Ezekiel and his fellows, and how fully the few nations he names represented that world.

It is along these lines that the study of prophecy can be made to yield its most rewarding fruits.

THE WORLD TO COME

Hebrews 2.5

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews introduces three points in which Christ's superangelic dignity is shown. The first is that Christ is assigned a higher name than the angels. The second is that he is clothed with a sublimer honour than the angels, and the third is that Christ is invested with a sublimer office than the angels, they being only ministering spirits, while He is spoken of as a Divine King, whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness. The princely investiture and reign of the Messiah is thus distinctly deduced from the Old Testament, and used by the Apostle as the sublimest demonstration of the Saviour's personal dignity.

And this Messianic dominion he applies particularly to what is hereafter to grow out of the Gospel economy. He tells us that it is peculiarly "the world to come" over which the Messiah's reign is to be exercised.

"For unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak". This proceeds upon the implied assumption that it has been by promise put into subjection to Christ, and that all those allusions to the Saviour as a King have their chief application and ultimate fulfilment in that "world to come". The Messiah's reign and this "world to come" accordingly belong together and coexist in the same period and locality. By determining, then, what is meant by this "world to come", we may form an idea of what is included in the Messianic Kingdom; or, if we already know what the consummated Messianic reign is, and where it is to be, we have it already decided what we are to understand by this "world to come".

There is no alternative left but to understand this "world to come" as the Millennial World, or the world as it shall be when Christ shall have entered upon his glorious dominion as the Sovereign of the nations and Lord of the whole earth. And to this agrees exactly the original word, *oikoumene*, which means the habitable earth—the domiciliated globe on which we dwell—and not some remote supernal region. The world to come, then, is nothing more nor less than this self-same world of ours in its final or Millennial condition. The earth is not to be annihilated. God never obliterates his own creations. The dissolving fires of which Peter speaks are for "the perdition of ungodly men", and not for the utter depopulation and destruction of the whole world; men and nations will survive them and still continue to live in the flesh. The earth is to be renovated and restored from its present depression and dilapidation, and thus become "the new earth" of which the Bible speaks. It is to pass through a "regeneration" analogous to that through

which a man must pass to see the Kingdom of God; but there will be a continuity of its elements and existence, just as a regenerated man is constitutionally the same being that he was before his renewal. It will not be another earth, but the same earth under another condition of things. It is now labouring under the curse; but then the curse will have been lifted off and all its wounds healed. At present, it is hardly habitable—no one being able to live in it longer than a few brief years; but then men shall dwell in it forever without knowing what death is. It is now the home of rebellion, injustice and guilt; it will then be the home of righteousness. It is now under the domination of Satan; it will then come under the blessed rule of the Prince of Peace. Such, at any rate, is the hope set before us in the Word of God, and this I hold to be "the world to come", of which the text speaks. It cannot be anything else. It cannot be what is commonly called heaven, for the word *oikoumene* cannot apply to heaven. It is everywhere else used exclusively with reference to our world. Neither can it be the present Gospel dispensation, for that began long before this epistle was written and could not, therefore, have been spoken of by Paul as yet "to come". We are consequently compelled to understand it to mean our own habitable world in its Millennial glory. And as the prophecies concerning the Messiah's eternal kingship are here referred to as having their fulfilment in the subjection of the Millennial world to his dominion, we are furnished with another powerful argument of Scripture in favour of the doctrine of Christ's personal reign as a great Prince in this world. Indeed, the Bible is so full of this subject, and its inspired writers are so constantly and enthusiastically alluding to it that I am amazed to find so many pious and Bible-loving people entirely losing sight of it. Ever and anon the Scriptures return to it as the great and animating hope of the Church in all her adversities and depressions, and it does seem to me that we are depriving ourselves of much true Christian comfort by the manner in which we have been neglecting and thrusting aside that glorious doctrine. My present object is to show, from the Scriptures, and by just inferences from them, what sort of a world this "world to come" is, and to describe, as far as I can, what we are to look for when once this earth has been fully subjected to that Divine King whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness.

That "the world to come" is a highly blessed world, and a vast improvement upon the present scene of things, will be inferred on all hands without argument. It could not be a subject of hope if it were not. The Saviour himself exhibited a model of it when in the Mount of Transfiguration—from which, perhaps, we may obtain as deep an insight of its glories as from any other portion of Scripture. That He designed that scene as a miniature model of what his future coming and Kingdom is to be, is obvious. A week before it

occurred he told his disciples that "the Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father, with his angels or messengers with him"; and that there were some standing there when He made the declaration who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of man coming in his Kingdom. This coming in his Kingdom, which some of the disciples were to live and see, is not the final Advent, for the disciples are all dead, and the final Advent is still future. Neither is it the destruction of Jerusalem, for but one of the apostles lived to see that catastrophe, and the Son of man did not then come in his Kingdom. And yet some of the apostles were to have ocular demonstration of the Son of man's coming in his Kingdom before tasting of death. Search through apostolic history as we will we shall find nothing but the Transfiguration, to which the Saviour's words will apply. That, then, was in some sense the coming of the Son of man in his Kingdom. It was not, indeed, the coming itself, but it was an earnest and picture of it. Peter says: *"The power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* are not *"cunningly devised fables"*. He declares that he was certified of their reality by the testimony of his own senses. We were *"eye-witnesses"*, says he, *"when we were with him in the holy mount"*. We thus have clear, inspired testimony that the scene of the Transfiguration was a demonstrative exhibition of the coming of Jesus in his Kingdom. Hence, whatever we find in the descriptions of that scene, we may confidently expect to be realised in that "world to come whereof we speak". As He was then personally present as the Son of man, so He will be personally present in the Millennial Kingdom. And as He was there attended by different classes of persons, so will his glorious Kingdom consist of similar classes.

This comes from Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, well-known Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, U.S.A. in the latter part of 19th century. Editor of "Prophetic Times" and author many books on Biblical matters.

Bunyan was the supreme example of the forceful Christian. Simple, direct, he spoke as he thought, and the positiveness of his expressions bespoke a firm and unyielding conviction of a righteous cause. Hear him on the subject of sectarianism. *"Since you would know by what name I would be distinguished from others, I tell you I would be, and hope I am, a Christian. And for those factious titles of Anabaptist, Presbyterian, Independent, or the like, I conclude that they came neither from Antioch nor from Jerusalem, but from Hell and Babylon, for they tend to divisions; you may know them by their fruits."*

ALL GOOD GIFTS

People study the bible for a variety of reasons. Perhaps to discover what the bible says; perhaps to follow up a line of doctrine; perhaps in hopes of knowing the future; perhaps just to dwell on what God is doing for us, in love and appreciation. This last type of study is not unlike what we do when singing a hymn of praise, and there is many a hymn which can be matched to passages of scripture. Some hymns are written deliberately as paraphrases (such as 'The Lord's my shepherd', 'O God our help in ages past', 'Praise my soul the king of heaven'). Other hymns just develop, and it is only when we have sung them many times that we realise how scriptural they are. For example, take '*Wir pflugen und wir streuen*'....

Its story begins in the eighteenth century with a farmhouse in north Germany, and a group singing peasant songs. Among them is Matthias Claudius, a writer and poet (pen name Asmus). He writes a sketch depicting them all holding their Harvest Festival. Included is a Peasant's Song, 17 verses long, with chorus.

Then a tune is written by J A P Schultz, a court 'kapelmeister'. When he was 48 his health was severely damaged trying to save his music library when the Danish Royal Palace burned down. In 1800 he died, and in the same year the tune 'Wir pflugen' was published, set to the words by Claudius, but only 6 verses.

Some decades later it comes to the attention of Miss Jane Montgomery Campbell, daughter of a London clergyman. She was a teacher in her father's parish school, she wrote verse, compiled 'A Handbook for Singers', and also translated German hymns....

By 1868 the hymn had been included in the first edition of Hymns Ancient and Modern, with just the three verses that we know.

*We plough the fields, and scatter
The good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered
By God's almighty hand.
He sends the snow in winter,
The warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine,
And soft refreshing rain.*

*He only is the Maker
Of all things near and far;*

*He paints the wayside flower;
He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey Him;
By Him the birds are fed;
Much more, to us His children,
He gives our daily bread:*

*We thank Thee then, O Father
For all things bright and good,
The seed-time and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food.
No gifts have we to offer
For all Thy love imparts,
But that which Thou desirest,
Our humble, thankful hearts:*

*All good gifts around us
Are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
For all His love.*

What the hymn says is very similar to what the apostle Paul had to explain when he was at Lystra (Acts 14). He and Barnabas were treated as gods after they had performed a miracle. *"Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good - giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy."* Let us give worship where it is rightly due.

'All good gifts' around us come from God. James 1.17: *"...every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*

That *'winds and waves obey him'* is a straight quotation from Matthew 8.27 in the famous incident of Jesus stilling the storm. But if we look in Psalm 65, that speaks of an awesome and more widespread display of God's power. *"You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the*

evening shout for joy." (vv.7,8) The psalm had begun with an acknowledgment of God's forgiveness to His people, while the end of it is in itself a harvest hymn:

*You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges,
softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.*

Meanwhile, 'daily bread' is a petition in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6.11). In the age of the supermarket we perhaps take our food for granted. And the blessing of the created order extends to the birds (Matthew 6.26).

Our response to all this? 'Humble' hearts might remind us of Psalm 51.17, "*a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*"

There is everything to rejoice about in the ordinary human life God has given us, as part of the marvelous scheme of His creation. The hymn and the psalms speak the language of poetry, the literal painting of flowers or valleys shouting do not really come into it. The bible is emphasising that all we experience is God's gift to us. If we take a scientific view of the intricate chains of cause and effect which govern the natural world, we see it as mind-blowing but impersonal. When we take the religious view that the world is God's creation, it is equally mind-blowing, but personal. The challenge of science is to understand exactly how God has done it, and is doing it. The challenge of faith is to see within the overwhelming universe the hand of our own Father.

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It is in the family alone that the one thing we call affection or love is divided and spread out like a sunbeam into the rainbow's sevenfold hues, there to display itself in all the rich tints of hidden beauty. So it is in the church alone that the love of God is fully seen, not merely in all its intensity but in all its varied riches.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

There is a peculiarly modern ring about this story of the man in high office who cared nothing for morality and right dealing. His responsibility was to dispense justice, to defend the innocent and restrain the evil doer. He had a double responsibility; he was accountable both to God and to man. The laws he administered were based on the Divine principles upon which God had made the world and man upon it; they were accepted and professed by men as the true basis of ordered society. It was his duty to put them into effect and enforce them, with all diligence, showing neither fear nor favour, and he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. There is no suggestion that he was dishonest or hypocritical either with himself or with others. He acknowledged his position quite frankly in verse 8. *"I reverence not God, nor regard man"*. He administered his office in the way that best suited his own convenience without any regard to the merits of the cases he handled or any thought of responsibility to the mandatory power, of God or of men, from which he derived his authority. Like so many in positions of influence and power today, he saw no reason why his administration should be guided by moral principles or the standards of truth and justice. He enjoyed the benefits and privileges of his position, used his power as he pleased, and governed his actions entirely by expediency. He was not particularly immoral; he was just amoral. And far too many men are like that in this present time of declining religious faith and belief.

A good many have asked why this particularly unpleasant individual should be used by Jesus to illustrate our Father's attitude to the prayers of his disciples. Surely, say some, a better simile could have been found. It might be said in reply that the fact that Jesus did use this picture to point the lesson is sufficient basis to expect some very definite truth embedded therein, for which we do well to seek, and having found, to consider. It is clear that, as in certain other parables, Jesus is teaching by contrast. If this admittedly unrighteous judge is found rousing himself at last to do his duty in consequence of the appellant's importunity, then *how much more* will God, who is not unrighteous, be ready to grant deliverance to those who come to him. Unlike this judge, God is actively working to give sin-sick humanity the relief they crave. There is a supplementary question that follows hard on the heels of this answer; if God is indeed so solicitous to save, why is He so long in doing it? That question, and its answer, is also in this parable, but has to be considered in its right place, at the conclusion of the story.

The unjust judge, then, gave no heed to the poor widow's complaint. She may have had justice on her side and might well have been grievously treated by her adversary at law. The judge neither knew nor cared. Her complaints went unheeded; her case was never brought up for trial. The judge, to use a modern expression, "couldn't care less". But after a time he was made to care. This widow would not take no for an answer and she would not go away. She knew that justice was available and she knew that she was entitled to justice, and justice she intended to have. She kept on importuning the judge, and at last, tired of seeing her waiting at his door and irritated at the continual repetition of her plea, he bestirred himself to look into her case, to set the machinery of the law in motion, and award her the judgment she sought. Not because he cared one jot for the rights or wrongs of the case; he was completely honest about that. All he wanted was to be rid of the woman and left in peace.

Now the really important factor in this story is the widow's fixed belief that she must eventually obtain her desire, not because the judge was upright, but because her cause was just. A man so candid as this one about his attitude could not but be well-known to his prospective litigants and no one would expect justice or consideration from him, any more than do men in similar cases today. The widow pursued the course of action she did on the basis of one fixed principle; the law entitled her to relief and the law must eventually be upheld. It was that fixed inward conviction which sustained her as day after day she renewed her apparently unavailing plea. Eventually her faith was justified and she received her desired judicial award.

"Continuing instant in prayer" says the Apostle in Rom.12.12. That expression *"continuing instant"* has the meaning of dogged perseverance, a tenacious grasp of the thing desired which will not be loosed. Strong gives 'steadfast, immovable'. Rotherham translates the first verse of this parable *"as to its being needful for men always to pray and not be faint-hearted"*. The essential nature of prayer is communion with God. We commune with God not because of the things we want of him, but because we want to be one with him; in common-union. We desire oneness with God because we have entered into full heart sympathy with his guiding principles for all creation. We, like God, desire above all things to see righteousness universal and evil eliminated, and our desire is because we have come to realise that condition of things to be the only possible basis of enduring life. Therefore *"Thy Kingdom Come"* is the most fundamental prayer of all and the essence of all prayer. It is because we believe and are persuaded that this ardently desired consummation to the Divine Plan will surely come to pass that we continue in prayer before God. We know in whom we have

believed and are persuaded that he is able. Our constantly reiterated prayers serve to strengthen and crystallise our conviction that these things will surely come to pass, just as with the litigant widow the more she pressed for justice the more sure she became that it would be hers eventually.

This is where the other question has to be answered. Why is God so tardy in replying? We know why the widow had to wait so long, but we cannot give that reason in the case of the reality which the parable illustrates. There is no unrighteousness with God, and he is diligent to oversee the interests of the disciples. *"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry"* (Psa.34.15). Why then the apparent delay? Perhaps Rotherham's comment on verse 7 is enlightening on this aspect of the parable. *"Slow to smite his foes, he seems also slow to save his friends"*. Rotherham's own translation of verse 7 gives a new slant to Jesus' words "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry unto him day and night, though he bear long with them?" where Rotherham has it *"though he bear long with regard to them"*. Here we come up against that longsuffering of God, his patience and forbearance with sinful man so often exemplified in history. He would have spared Sodom if so few as ten righteous men could have been found there (Gen.18.32). He gave the Ninevites every opportunity and spared them when they repented at the eleventh hour. Even though it means prolonging the reign of evil, and of human misery and death, he defers his arising in judgment until in his wisdom He sees that the iniquity of man is come to the full. So he *"bears long"* with regard to the cry of his faithful servants because He is working in his own inscrutable way for the salvation of "whosoever will" among his rebellious creatures. That is why there is apparent delay.

And that is why faith tends to die. Jesus knew that too. Even although God will avenge, and the faith of those who have waited will be abundantly justified, Jesus knew, as He told his disciples later on, *"because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold"* (Matt.24.12). So here, at the close of the parable, He gave voice to the sad question *"Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"* (v.8). We need not deduce from these words that Jesus doubted whether at his return there would be any at all holding still to the faith. The whole tenor of his teaching implies his knowledge that there would be the faithful watching ones ardently waiting for his appearance. They would not be taken by surprise when the event occurred, and ready in every sense of the word to be "changed" in a moment (1 Cor. 15.51-52) and so associated with him to all eternity. What Jesus did

foresee was that in the 'Time of the End' faith in the world at large would be at a very low ebb precisely because of the apparent victory of evil and impotence of righteousness. In the days of the First Advent everybody believed in God, even though in many cases their lives bore little evidence of any real endeavour to walk in his ways. In the days before the First Advent everybody believed in God; and so did nearly all men subsequently until the approach of relatively modern times. Of all ages in world history the last two or three centuries have been by far the most agnostic and atheistic. Faith in God is today rapidly vanishing from the earth and from the human standpoint it would almost seem as if the Christian cause is lost. Materialistic writers already talk of the need of a new religion founded on modern knowledge and devised to suit modern needs, to replace Christianity which in their view is archaic and out-worn. Vast sections of the earth's surface are ruled by political systems that have no use for God and openly say as much. By their actions most of the remaining governing powers, whilst still paying lip service, show that they too have little intention of upholding the principles of Divine rule which God originally instilled in the heart of man. So men conclude that God, if He exists, is either impotent or indifferent.

It is at such a time that God acts. *"I tell you"* said Jesus *"that he will avenge them speedily"*. When the iniquity of the nations has at length come to the full; when the great Clock of the Ages strikes the hour, fore-ordained of God, and the time of his Kingdom has come, the prayers of the faithful will be answered. In that revelation of the Son of Man, in the glory of his power, he will at one and the same time overthrow the powers of evil and introduce all men to the beneficent rule of the Messianic Kingdom. *"Every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (Isa.40.4-5). This is the thing that must be, that shall be, because it is the right thing, and because evil is inherently unstable and must one day consume away by its own corruption. The Christian whose faith holds firm in God because he knows that God exists, and knows that God is good, is the one who will endure unshaken through the dark days in full confidence that at the last, God will avenge him of his adversary.

AOH

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

SELF DENIAL ,CONSECRATION, COMMUNION

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Matt.16.24 RSV)

How vast a field of human experience is covered by the Lord's words, "Let him deny himself!" Let him deny his self-hood – his self-satisfying desire, his self-permitting desires, his self permitting ways! That short statement drives right through the heart of things. It cuts its way to the very core of all self-acquisitiveness, self-possessiveness, it strips a man of all his exaggerated self of self-ownership and proprietorship.

The man who voiced this invitation on God's behalf owned no place where he could lay his head. When he was required to pay the Temple dues, the coin was taken from a fish's mouth. For the one who had been rich in heavenly wealth had denied himself to become extremely poor on earth. How appropriate then, that He should say *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Self-denial! – death to self! – self nailed to a cross to die!

"And follow me!" Not through Israel's pleasant land, but into death, by being baptised into him and into his death. No wonder Jesus could say *"If any man will come after me!"* Not everyone would want to follow where He led. Not everyone would want to end his life upon a cross!

The Apostle Paul sets out the exacting nature of the call to consecration in Romans 6. He describes it as death to sin. The degree of a Christian's death to sin will depend entirely upon the measure of his death to self, for self has always been the citadel of sin. Paul's statement makes most remarkable doctrine. After enlarging upon God's abounding grace (Rom. 5.17-21) he asks the question *"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* and his reply *"By no means"*. Then he continues *"How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein!"*

Dead to sin! He makes a similar statement about our beloved Lord, (5.10) *"For in that he died, he died unto sin once!"* This is not a reference to the great gospel fact that Jesus died on account of human sin. Although that blessed fact is asserted and attested in a score or more places in Scripture, it is not the subject of Paul's discussion here. It is Jesus death **to** sin not **for** sin that is the Apostle's theme.

He links his first question and answer concerning ourselves, 'Shall we sin', with the tremendous fact in the Saviour's own life and experience. *"We who have died unto sin"* have had exactly the same experience that He had when *"He died unto sin once"*. It is for that reason that the faithful

follower of the Lord, in being baptised into Christ, is being baptised into his death. "His death" was death unto sin, therefore all who are baptised into "his death" likewise experience "death unto sin". At the same time that He was dead unto sin, He was intensely alive unto God, and for that reason the Apostle exhorts us *"Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (5.11). This is an amazing point of doctrine, but it is the very doctrine that sets out Christian consecration at its proper value.

In what way did Jesus *"die unto sin"*? Was He not always without sin, *"holy, harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners"*?

It should not be thought because Jesus was sinless and remained sinless throughout all his life, that He was never subjected to temptation. We have only to think of his temptation in the wilderness, and of Satan's subtle challenge to the truth of his sonship. It was a big temptation. Nor was this the only occasion when He was assailed by the forces of evil; prior to the time of His death; and from the very commencement of His ministry, His mind was positively and resolutely set to do only his Father's Will. He had no ear for any other voice; He had no response for any other 'call'.

The same two magnet forces of Holiness and Sin – of God and of Lucifer – which exercised their pull upon all the sons of men, also exerted their pull upon our beloved Lord. But our Lord made no response to the magnet of sin, having no affinity. To sin He was "dead". He had no self-satisfying desires to fulfil. He had not come to 'get' for Himself but to 'give' himself. Thus, the ways and aims of sin found nothing in his heart to stir it into life. But His response was not automatic. Of Him it is written that He loved righteousness and hated iniquity (Heb.1.9) and because of this He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.

The Son's love for righteousness constituted an affinity for righteousness and truth. Of His own free will he chose to be dead to sin as though His body were devoid of life. Again of His own free will, He chose to be alive, intensely alive to the drawing and the leading of His Father's will. Because He was so completely dead to sin throughout all his days, He was able to offer Himself a perfect sacrifice for sin and win redemption for fallen men.

It is amazing when Paul associates us with our beloved Lord in this deadness to the power of sin. Like him, we are desired by God to be also dead to the "drawing" of sin, and alive, increasingly alive, to the drawing power of righteousness and holiness and truth. Is it possible for us to be like him? Can we really live the sinless life? Unfortunately we cannot live free from sin. But God has made full provision for that. By accepting us in the beloved Son, all the excellence of His life is attributed to us, to counter-

balance our demerits, so long as we are striving daily to put to death our contact with the world of sin. We are not so freely attracted to righteousness as was our beloved Lord, and sometimes, if only for a moment, the pull of the sin magnet may draw us in that direction. But if we have learned to love righteousness and holiness we shall not stay with the sin. Our corresponding hatred for sin will interpose, and by the help of God, will break the connection with the sin. We confess our lapse to God, and in that holy atmosphere, our heart will recover its free swing, and go right over to the other "pull" — the drawing power of God.

Paul goes on to exhort his brethren not to yield their hearts to sin and unrighteousness, but to surrender themselves to God and righteousness which will lead on to holiness (Rom.13.22).

This whole experience corresponds with the life of consecration. As individuals and as a whole, the Church of Christ has itself up to the will of God. Human lives have pledged themselves to do the will of God at any cost. Then their humanity, which has been devoted to the Lord, is given back — as a sacred stewardship, as a charge from the Lord, to be used only to His praise. In every act of life, in every thought and word, the offering should be "waved" before the Lord. The interference of the power of sin should grow weaker every day; the response to the holy power of God should become stronger every hour, and our *yielding* to our God should be more intensive and extensive with each succeeding act and thought. Thus will life become one continued and unbroken chain of consecrated experience — the yielding of each member — head, heart, hands and feet — fuller, deeper and readier every day.

Is there any wonder then, when the theme on which the Apostle was engaged reaches its noble climax, that he should put all the hallowed fire of his own consecrated heart into that searching moving appeal of Rom.12.1,2 . *"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God . . . your reasonable service"*.

Consecration, therefore, means *"a living sacrifice"*, a daily sacrifice, a complete unreserved sacrifice of all that in us, even what is noblest and best. But there is a side of the consecrated life that tells of satisfaction too, of satisfaction too deep for words.

The life of Old Testament priests was not all sacrificing; there was more to it than that. Into that mysterious dark abode in the tabernacle the white-robed priest went betimes, with his *"two hands full"* to stand at that Altar adorned with gold, and there raise fragrant odours in the air. For whom were those precious spices burned? Who saw and noted the deep

reverence of that ministering priest, as the perfumed spiral rose aloft? Who watched the holy fire eat up the crumbled incense, as the *"two hands full"* were given to the flames? One eye alone saw all this service – the eye of that mysterious Light which hung between the Cherubim, just beyond that separating Vail.

What meant this lonely service before the Lord? Why were those odours released by burning flame? This was communion sweet—soul-changing, transforming, sanctifying communion, at the place where the Holy One in Israel had promised to meet his chosen ones (Ex.25.22). But there was even more than that. *"Consecrate . . . and sanctify them that they may minister unto me in the priest's office"* said the Lord God concerning Aaron and his sons. (Ex.28.41). *"... they shall minister unto Me!"* That was the purpose of that fragrant ministry. It was no ornate ritual, nor was it waste of consecrated time to minister unto the Lord. The holy incense was not lost because it was eaten by the fire. The heart of the Eternal had been made glad. The ministry brought satisfaction to the Holy One of Israel. He it was who saw, accepted and appreciated that holy ministration. Thus the white-robed priest was consecrated to perform sacrifice before the Lord, and also to hold "communion with the Lord". Consecrated to sacrifice! Consecrated to commune!! Consecrated to minister to the Lord! What a blessed privilege it was to be chosen of the Lord for this threefold end!

The substance is far better than this shadow, more satisfying to the "inward man" than all the glories of the Old Testament type. Those who follow Jesus in the way of death walk also in his steps along the way of life. It is not all renunciation in the consecrated life. Though 'self' must go, sin must cease to charm, the *"New Creature"* in Christ Jesus must yield his members as servants of God and righteousness, day by day, and act by act; but yet there is another side.

There are depths of experience from which well-springs of satisfaction flow. *"The spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit"* (Rom.8.16). From the Shekinah Throne of grace comes that surging flow of holy power which floods our souls with joy and transforms the drabness of our earthly life into sweet communion. Each consecrated child of God can retire away from the busy throng of life into a 'secret place' apart, and there enjoy a privilege such as Aaron did not know. The incense of his heart (Ps.141.2) may rise morning, noon and night, as fragrance richer far than myrrh, or cassia, cinnamon, or calamus. The Holy One of Israel will see and hear and appreciate the sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13.15) which thus will rise from the Altar of his heart – an Altar more precious than gold.

Each follower of the Son has been called and justified that he might offer himself in sacrifice. To that end he is set apart. But his consecration

vows bring opportunities more than this. He too, as Aaron was, but on higher ground, is consecrated "to commune" – consecrated to enter the chambers of his God, and minister unto him who dwells therein. There, in that secret place, he feels within his heart the soul-transforming power that will attune him to his God, and to his universal purposes.

TH

TRUE PIETY

2 - Among the Prophets

Just as those two great prophets, Abraham and Moses had set the pattern of true worship, so the great men that followed them proclaimed that 'knowing God' and obedience to His will was the real goal in life. To walk with God and reflect his character were what really mattered to God's people.

So it was with Samuel who faithfully led Israel as a 'judge'. He was 'straight as a die' and transparently sincere. Two incidents perhaps illustrate this most effectively in his life. He told King Saul that he was to completely wipe out the Amalekites. Saul failed to do so; saving some of the best animals for sacrificing to God and possibly keeping many more for the people themselves. He spared King Agag's life, for Saul was now a member of the 'Kings' Club. Selfishness lay behind both of these wrong actions. However difficult it is to explain the violent behaviour in the Old Testament, this incident teaches a lesson in obedience. It is better to obey God than to enact formal worship. A sequel to this incident was God's intention of choosing a king for his people who was 'after his own heart'. So Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint a son of Jesse. When Samuel observed the older sons in the family he felt these must be the type of men who would make good monarchs. He discovered however, that God does not judge a person by their outward appearance but by their heart. God judges by a person's very makeup – what are they really like. This is not about emotions or physical appearance or intellectual abilities. That can be cosmetic. This is what Jesus called the 'heart' out of which the mouth speaks.

The 'man after God's own heart' repeatedly refers to this relationship with God in his Psalms and clearly knew the shepherd in Psalm 23. Many of the early psalms reveal how much David walked with God and lived his

life conscious that God was with him. Out of the dark moments of his life, as when he stole Uriah's wife and then had him murdered, came the wonderful psalm of contrition, Psalm 51. This is not the repentance of a new convert from a totally sinful life but the need for obedient repentance when the man or woman of God has sinned and is in need of God's forgiveness. The relationship with God cannot be maintained without that contrition of heart and it is an attitude of mind which all who love the Lord must retain. Nearer the end of his life David played the numbers game, and demanded his 'high command' to take a census of the people, God spoke directly to him and David cast himself upon the Lord – because he knew God. His knowledge, and skill, his power and the people of Israel's loyalty were of secondary importance compared to his complete dependence on God who could save him and his people. When David passed on his throne and his Temple building plans to Solomon, he said *"You my son, Solomon know the God of your father and serve him with single mind and willing heart, for the Lord searches every mind and understands every plan and thought."* (1 Chron.28.9).

Elijah the prophet had an exciting life, doing wonderful things in recognition of God's law, He had all Israel returning to Yahweh on Mount Carmel and saw the demonstration of God's power in the forces of nature; but he learned that God is to be found in the quiet moments of personal fellowship. There is a curious parallel between Elisha and Elijah. A godly woman showed hospitality to Elisha and in return the prophet compassionately raised her son from death. Elijah raised a Phoenician widow's son who had shared her all during the drought. Elisha showed kindness in healing the leprosy of a foreign general. Jesus referred to these incidents in his comments in the Nazareth synagogue recorded in Luke 4. Yet Jews of the first century had not learned what many today have also failed to understand – God is not confined to one nation, one church or one group. There is such a danger that what the Lord said to Israel in the first century, he will say again in the twenty-first century - "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruit of the kingdom." (Matt.21.40)

Jeremiah had a wonderful career and an extraordinary understanding of God's ways. He suffered much from his own family for supporting the Josiah reform and rejoiced in the cleansing from idolatry. God was able to reveal through him those astonishing words in Jer.7.21-23 about formal sacrifice and his desire for obedience as their God and they as his people. They are the formulated words of the Covenant. Later in the prophecy Jeremiah warns Israel of what God really wants – not to boast in wisdom, power or wealth but to know Him, to know what he is really like and what he desires us to be (Jer.9.23,24). So important was this statement it was quoted by Paul in his

first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor.1.31). But how many have learned the lesson. Are not power and knowledge and wealth still the goal of so many in the world – and in the Church? Further on still, in Jer.22.15,16 the prophet reminds the reigning monarch of his father Josiah whom he had served, Josiah had known God by his concern for the needy, and our thoughts are taken back to the last two verses in the first chapter of James' letter, 'to care for widows and orphans in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world'.

Daniel, greatly beloved, obediently served God from his youth, refusing to accept the idolatry and base practices of the heathen land in which he not only lived, but spent much of his life in the royal courts. He was not only a man entrusted with God's secrets, but he was a man of prayer. He is known for his persistence in keeping his times with God in spite of royal proclamations to the contrary, but amid his dreams and visions is the wonderful prayer of contrition for his people in chapter 9. There he identifies himself with the sins of Israel and repents of the disobedience and false worship which they have practised.

Hosea has so much to teach us concerning learning to love, but that is another story. The reality of pleasing God is all about love, as described in the letters of John. Our God does not want theoreticians, but men and women who reflect his character to those around them. To do this they will be truly following the Master and coming to know God. There is no other way to be ready for his kingdom and be fitted to reign with Christ.

DN

Eternal God, make me willing to ignore slights and abuse meted out to me by those who take your name in vain. Fill me with your spirit so that instead of being influenced by them, I may be a witness to your love.

* * *

Heavenly Father, forgive me when I become impatient with what seems to me to be the slow revealing of your will. Make me content to rest in you, knowing that in the fullness of time you will bring all to fruition.

* * *

When love is strong, faults are few. When love rides forth to conquer, all barriers must fall. Love will not be robbed of its final victory. (BSM 1942)

* * *

*Father, Thy will be done in me as it is done above,
Cheerfully, always from the heart, so may I prove my love. (BSM 1944)*

Book Corner

A little book with a long title

We were thinking of dusting our bookshelves - there are a lot of books there which we have inherited and have not read. We came upon a little book with a long title. It was **"The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Body: The Witness of the New Testament"** by Oscar Cullman, published by the Epworth Press in 1958. It is a translation into English of a study in which Professor Cullman disentangled beliefs about the state of the Christian dead, and in so doing had apparently managed to upset a lot of people.

One belief he describes is that of Greek philosophers who lived before Christ, whose views affected Christian teaching. Our body, they say, is only an outer garment, and this prevents our soul from living freely, as it should. So death is a friend which releases our immortal soul, so that it can 'live in conformity with its proper eternal essence'.

Cullman contrasts this with the belief of the first Christians that death is the last enemy, and not a friend. Dead Christians are in an intermediate state, described as 'sleep', and at the resurrection will be given new bodies. This thought distresses those who believe that we go straight to heaven. Cullman surmises that the 'sleep' of death may be like a happy dream, from which we wake in the resurrection to full genuine life.

Because the Holy Spirit dwells in our inner man, we are certain of victory - and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Ever.

It was interesting to find this scholar's thoughts, of which the above is only a sample. His sixty pages contain a clear interpretation of scriptures relating to the dead in Christ. It is now available online! Oscar Cullmann worked at Strasbourg, Basel and Paris, was notable for work in the ecumenical movement, and died aged 96.

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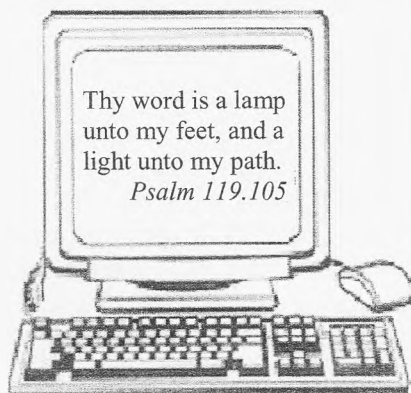
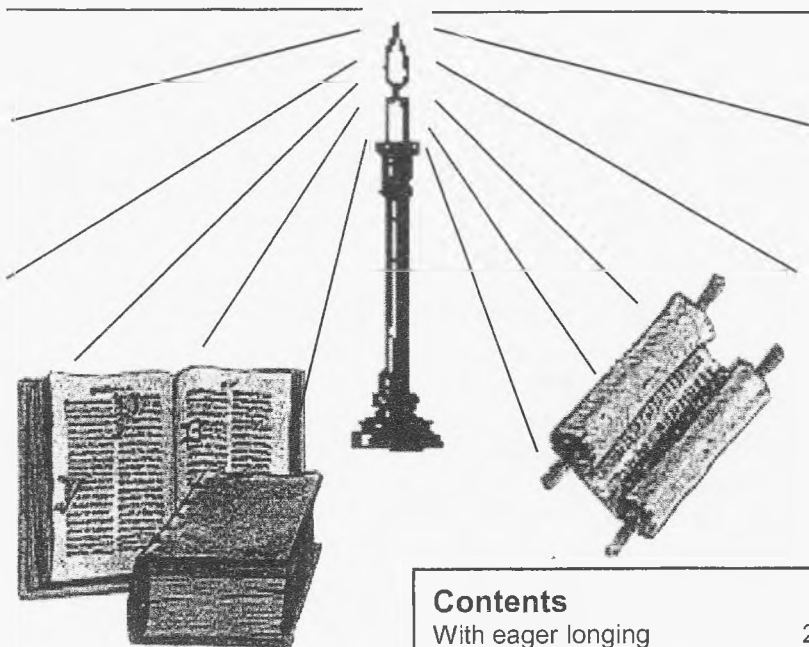
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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)

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WITH EAGER LONGING

"The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom.8.14)

This statement can only be understood when it is accepted that God is actively working in history to bring about His desired consummation, which is yet future. There is nothing static about this statement; it does not define a condition of life or society which can be expected to remain the same generation after generation into infinity.

It is a plain indication of *"that far-off Divine event, to which the whole creation moves"*. Humankind, says Paul in this noteworthy passage in Romans, is at present subject to futility. There can be no disagreement or dispute as to that. One day still future, he also says, men will be set free from this bondage and obtain liberty. The verse quoted equates that desirable end with the "revealing of the sons of God".

To anyone acquainted with Scripture terminology this can only refer to the manifestation of the Christian church to all mankind "in glory" at the consummation of the Age (the "end of the world" in common parlance) - in association with the Lord Christ at his Second Advent, at which time He puts into operation the second stage of the Divine Plan for human development—the rule of righteousness.

This teaching and expectation finds no favour with some serious

Christians who have felt more impressed with the expectation of an orderly evolution of human society toward the Christian ideal.— not the intervention of God Most High to save men from their own folly This doctrine is a true one nevertheless. The fact must be faced, now in this Twenty-first Century, that man, after thousands of years on the planet and possessed of marvellous powers of perception and invention, is creating problems of survival far faster than he is solving them, and the end can only be disaster— unless God intervenes. It remains now for the Church of today to rise to its destiny and be worthy of being thus "revealed" when the time comes.

OUR CALLING

On several recorded occasions Jesus described Himself as - and He was— "the light of the world". John, very early in his gospel (1.4) said "In him was life and the life was the light of men." And in verse 9; "That was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world". Towards the end of His ministry (John 8.12) Jesus said publicly that: "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life". Then, in chapter 12 verse 46 John tells us that our Lord said: "I have come as light into the world, that whosoever believes in me may not remain in darkness"

Such words angered the Pharisees and religious leaders of the Jews because they looked upon themselves as the only source of enlightenment concerning the Word of God. Yet their teachings offered no solutions to the problems that worried ordinary people. The teachers and lawyers were more interested in disputes about words; abstract ideas that were only remotely connected with a true understanding of God and His purpose. Consequently the authoritative statements of Jesus and the stories that He used to illustrate His point, came as a great flood of light on the experiences and difficulties which men and women encountered in their daily routine.

Through the ages God had sent prophets who were each permitted to reveal a little more of the purpose of God. They lit lamps that burned through the centuries, lighting the path of men and women. They were beacons guiding men to the glory of God that could be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. His light uncovered the hidden mysteries of men's own sinful hearts. His light revealed the love in the heart of the Creator. It has shone down the ages pointing men to a day when the glory of God would cover the earth as waters cover the sea.

Just as Jesus was the reflection of His Father so His disciples have reflected Him. They too become "the light of the world" being shed to all men.

Writing in his first letter to the Corinthian Church, (1.26-28) Paul tells us that it is the divine purpose that no-one may glory in God's sight. He has chosen to call: "Not many wise men according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and God has chosen the base things of the world, and things which are despised, and things which are not, in order to bring to nothing things that are; so that no flesh should glory in His presence."

When we consider this statement about God's calling we should keep in mind that no-one stands in more need of remembering these words than those who regard themselves as being called out ones.

It doesn't matter if, to the world, we appear to be unwise, to be weak, base or even if we're despised. But it does matter, very much, if, amongst the ranks of those claiming to be called into His glorious light, someone dares to count as base and despised someone who is dear to the heart of God. In fact in Luke 17 verse 2 we're told that Jesus said that: *"It would be better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."*

The one who is truly humble is dead to pomp and foolish show: safe from the damage of pride because of honours the world bestows and which are but fading laurels. The humble Christian isn't concerned about rivals or competitors and he bears no malice. His Christian attitude to these things results in his saying *"None of these things move me."* It's the Spiritual life of the next world that he's looking for, not the fading glories that might come in this one.

As Paul told the Corinthians in his second letter (5.17& 18): *"If anyone is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation."* In these verses the apostle mentions two things that are necessary if we're to be in Christ.

First, we must be reconciled to God, which is both an unquestionable privilege granted to us by our heavenly Father and an undoubted duty on our part. Reconciliation supposes that a quarrel or breach of friendship has occurred; and it's sin that has caused the breach to be made. It has broken the friendship between God and man, turning the heart of man away from God. So, if we're to be new creatures in Christ we must turn back to our Heavenly Father, and be reconciled to Him.

Then we're to be regenerated which means that old thoughts, old principles, and old practices, are passed away; and all these things must become new, so that these new creatures have new aims, new objects in life, new hopes. To them earthly things have no importance, the only usefulness they may have is if they can be used to glorify the Lord and serve Him. While earthly learning, reputations, honours and titles are valuable only as far as they can be employed in some way to further glorify God.

When we truly come to have knowledge of the Lord and His teachings, we will gradually become more humble and the change will knock the self-conceit out of us. The feverish ambition to be "somebody", to outdo other people and to strut across our little stage, posing in all sorts of pretentious ways so that we might incite admiration for ourselves, or receive the applause of others, will be gone. Instead we will devote our lives to the one in whose honourable service we've been enrolled and accepted, not for what we can get out of it but for love of Him who died for us. All our undertakings, whether they're sacred or secular: in our work or our private lives: in our public and private speech, in fact everything in which we have the choice or over which we may have some control or direction, must be such that our Lord will approve. They must be conditioned by the Spirit of God. Even in such things as eating, drinking, clothing and home comforts this rule still holds good: we should only do those things of which we genuinely believe Christ would approve and which we would not be ashamed of His seeing. This rule may seem to be strict, and in following it we may well make a poor showing, but if we wish to be a part of His Kingdom of Priests it's the rule we must follow. However, we will find that the more we come to love Him the easier it will be to follow His leading.

The development of these things in us is all a part of our Christian Growth from the condition where we were "babes in Christ," to that of full Christian maturity, and in Ephesians 4.1-3 Paul exhorts us to: *"Walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* And he makes it clear that "walking worthily" means endeavoring by every means to keep the unity of the Spirit and to help us in our efforts to keep this unity he reminds us, in verses 4-6 that: *"There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all "*. In all these we share as brethren in Christ, and we all have the same foundation on which we stand. Our individual capabilities

may well differ, in fact they almost certainly are different, and so is our ability to understand the deep things of God's Word. This will, in turn, affect our understanding of doctrine and modify our viewpoint. However in verse 7 Paul tells us that: "Every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Our Lord has proportioned the gifts he has given us according to our capacity for receiving and making use of them. Then, as we are increasingly able to make use of these gifts because of our growth and development, He gives us more.

In verses 11 to 13 He goes on to say that although we were "babes" He has, to help us in our growth, given: "Some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." So that we will, as we become more mature Christians: "All come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.."

This unity of the faith is NOT everyone assenting to various set points of doctrine—or a sheep-like following of one person's opinions. Although, it must be said that a proper understanding of the great Bible doctrines about sin and death, redemption and life, the High Calling and mankind's destiny, is a necessary step towards attaining that unity. It's our fellowship with one another and our belief in Jesus and His word that brings unity, while the unity of the faith, talked about in verse 13, is our fellowship with our heavenly Father, our knowledge of Him and His laws.

Then the Apostle emphasises why we must develop this unity: "So that we no longer may be infants, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, in the dishonesty of men, in cunning craftiness, to the wiles of deceit. But that you, speaking the truth in love, may in all things grow up to Him who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitted together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of each part, producing the growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love."

Which is saying that as long as we continue to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine we'll remain "babes" and be unable to mature. If we have no fixed views and hold to no doctrines that are settled in our minds by careful and patient examination, the consequence will be that we will yield to every new opinion, and submit to the guidance of every new teacher. What Paul is stressing here is that we should come to settled opinions about what we find from our Bible studies: that we should carefully examine what is truth, and having found it, should adhere to it, and not change because of the opinion of a new teacher. Of course we shouldn't close our minds against other opinions and we should be willing to discuss different points of view,

and be ready to follow "the truth" wherever it will lead us.

This state of mind is not incompatible with having settled opinions, and with being firm in holding them until we are convinced that we are wrong. It merely means that we aren't being stubbornly dogmatic about the views that we've formed, but are ready, should someone come up with a new thought, to thoroughly, and impartially, examine what they say and then modify our views IF we find it to be necessary.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 6 verses 9 -11 Paul warns them that: *Surely you know that the wicked will not possess God's Kingdom. Do not fool yourselves; people who are immoral or who worship idols or are adulterers or homosexual perverts or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are thieves—none of these will possess God's Kingdom.* Then he reminds them of the many great faults, to which they had been formerly addicted by saying: *Some of you were like that. But you have been purified from sin; you have been dedicated to God., you have been put right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

We have all had many large faults to overcome as we started our spiritual walk and in the main these were comparatively easy to eliminate. It's the little faults, the seemingly harmless faults that are hardest to eradicate. Faults that corrode the life of the new creature in Christ, slowing their spiritual growth and eventually slowing our production of the Fruit of the Spirit, so affecting the lives of those around us.

One of the very early writers said, "Be very careful about those sins, which you call little, they may seem to be small and insignificant in themselves, but add them all up and you'll be astounded by their total." Its these little sins—little faults and failings - that Jesus hates so much because they can so ravage our lives that they stop us from having proper fellowship with Him.

At the beginning of the third chapter of his letter to the Colossians Paul tells us that: *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.* So if we're truly risen with Christ—if we're really New creatures in Him a transforming work should be going on in our hearts and minds: we should be eradicating these small failings, just as, hopefully, we've disposed of the large ones, because if we don't they'll hold us back and prevent us from going on to Higher Things.

Then to make sure that we're not showing pride because we've disposed of the large faults that we once had, and are looking down on those who haven't yet got rid of theirs, he reminds us in verse seven that

undeserved kindness

we used to be like them. We should perhaps remember that it's only by the grace of God that we've no longer got them.

Genuine humility in ourselves is not something we can talk about because when we claim to be humble we immediately forfeit that characteristic. Humility is something that belongs to our private walk with God: as soon as we make it public it turns into boasting or pride. It has been said that the heart is like a well and that the mouth and the eyes are like buckets that draw the water from the well. If humility is not in the heart the eyes and the mouth will show it. Speaking of this Luke, in the sixth chapter of his gospel, verse 45, reports that our Lord said: *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth the good. And an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth the evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. For of God we are fellow-workers, a field of God, and you are a building of God.* (1 Cor 3. 9)

If we're part of a building of God then let Him fashion us according to His divine ideal of beauty, at whatever cost to our selfishness, or pride. Christ is working in us and on us, and we should be working with Him and for Him: this is the process that produces the structures that He will present before His Father.

In some of the great houses of Europe may be seen pictures not painted with the brush, but mosaics, which are made up of small pieces of stone, glass, or other material. The artist takes these little pieces, and, polishing and arranging them, he forms them into beautiful pictures. Each individual part of a picture may be a little worthless piece of glass or marble or shell: but, with each in its place, the whole constitutes a masterpiece of art. This is a picture of man in the hands of the great Artist. God is picking up the little worthless pieces of stone and brass that might be trodden under foot unnoticed, and is arranging them into His great masterpiece.

RJH

GOD'S GREATEST PROMISE?

A Conference Address

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". [KJV]

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life". [GNB].

John 3:16 is a verse we all know and love. Martin Luther called it "*the Gospel in miniature*" and it was among the last words he spoke on his deathbed. Is John 3:16 God's greatest promise? With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will investigate what wonderful promises this verse contains. Our discussion will be set out under 6 points, similar to the manner in which our Lord spoke to Nicodemus during that night-time teaching session He gave:

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|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. Benefactor | 2. Motive | 3. Vastness |
| 4. Gave | 5. Beneficiary | 6. Objective |

1. Benefactor: Who is the benefactor – Who is the giver? - God. "*God gave*". ... we are told by John. He is the same God who created the world at the very beginning. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God sustains the world at the present time. He is in sole control. He made the World and only He can save it. This will be done in His due time. The reality of God is always greater than our human minds can understand or express. The Psalmist puts it like this: "*People of Israel ... I chose you so that you would know me and believe in me and understand that I am the only God. Besides me there is no other God; there never was and never will be.*" [Isa 43.10 NIV].

2. The motive: What was it that moved our Heavenly Father to do what He did? It was love, pure perfect love. ... "*For God so loved ..*", "*Loved the world so much*" is the GNB rendering. The entire Gospel seems to come into focus in this verse. The gift is offered to the world. What is important with a gift is the motive of the giver. A beautiful gift, if given in doubtful circumstances is difficult to appreciate, so we ponder what was in the mind of the giver – and we might even come to the wrong conclusion if we analyse it deeply. The motive of the giver makes the gift. In this promise, our Heavenly Father gives, without doubt, the most precious gift the world has ever experienced. Paul's well-known writings on love, familiar to us all, are in his letter to the Corinthians: "*Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up and its faith, hope and patience never fail; Love is eternal*". [1 Cor 13:4 – 8. GNB]. Our heavenly Father's love is even greater than this - if that is possible for us to imagine!

3. The vastness / size / magnitude. Just imagine the enormity of the gift God made of His Son! He gave His ONLY Son! Not one from many but only Son! God gave this special Son to come down to this earth, to live as a man with human emotions (we remember the Bible's shortest verse: "*Jesus wept*") to suffer and die a cruel painful death on a cross. Jesus is everything to his Father and everything to us. We study the accounts of His travels in

the Holy Land, learn of His encounters with others and marvel at the miracles He performed. Thus, Jesus means so much to us as individuals. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour at baptism, we also accept our loving heavenly Father. Do we need more?

When we accept Jesus Christ, we have everything, because Jesus is all in all. Paul writes this to the Colossians: *"In this way you will know God's secret, which is Christ himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge"*. [Col 2:2b – 3]. And to the Corinthian Church, Paul writes similarly: *"Actually everything belongs to you, this world, life and death, the present and the future—all these are yours, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God"*. [1 Cor 3:21 – 23. GNB].

These scriptures describe some of God's many gifts and promises. But to what can we compare the magnitude of the gift of Jesus Christ? Our measuring stick is earth bound. Can money, possessions, success even begin to compare with this gift? Is it not sad that that we place so much value on earthly things? Things which thieves can break in and steal and moth and rust cause to perish. Why do we concern ourselves as to what we eat, or what we wear or how we will live? These things are already among God's gifts to us. We have - the Holy Spirit - the Comforter, grace, wisdom, repentance, faith, food and raiment, rain and fruitful seasons, peace. *"Our Heavenly Father who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, graciously give us all things?"* [Rom 8:32 NIV]. It is our responsibility to use them all wisely!

4. He gave. Consider the little word "gave". *"God gave His only Son"* At Christmas, we are reminded of Isaiah's words: *".... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is GIVEN"*. That was the promise to be completed 700 years or so later. The child **was** born – the gift **was** given! Today, salaries are paid, goods purchased, houses bought, but gifts are still **GIVEN!** There is no requirement – no necessity – no obligation – **just given**. God gave us His only Son, because this is what love does. Love gives freely. It is given by grace alone.

There is another fact that we must put in here. God gave us the Bible. It is also firm evidence and illustration of His great love for us. Without it we would know nothing of His love. Just imagine ourselves without our Bible! Impossible to contemplate isn't it? The term *"revelation"* means that God communicated to man what He is like and how we can have a right relationship with Him. These are things that we could not have known had God not divinely revealed them to us in the Bible. Although God's

revelation of Himself was given over approximately 1500 years, it does contain everything we need to know about God and His Son Jesus Christ.

5. Beneficiary. Next the beneficiary – the receiver or recipient. How do we analyse this? Who benefits? Who receives the gift? To whom does God give this most precious gift? "God so loved the WORLD that He gave". ... The World takes some understanding in this application. I remember our Geography master at school – (he also took us for assembly on Thursdays when 500 of us boys sang "Guide me O thou great Redeemer" with great gusto. It is one of my best memories of school). It was his opinion that the world was so important it should be written with a capital **W**. Who is included? In our text the World **is** important. It is the beneficiary of this great gift.

That Christ shed his blood for **all** is in accordance with Scripture. For example, 1 John 2:2 [NIV] states: "Jesus Christ ... He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world". Paul writes similarly in 2 Cor. 5:15: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again".

He did not die only for some, or even many, but for all. Paul also says quite clearly who God wants saved and to whom he sent his Son. In 1 Tim 2:4-6 [KJV] "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time".

Jesus is the ransom for all. How? By shedding his blood for all. **We believe all means all**, but this is not the belief of many we meet today. They consider our Bible teaches that the present day is the crucial time of salvation and that any who do not accept Jesus Christ in this life have missed the possibility of everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. This is not our view of the scriptures so let us look into this a little further.

Paul, defending himself before Felix stated: "I have the same hope in God ... that all people, both the good and the bad, will rise from death" [Acts 24:15]. This scripture indicates there will be two distinct groups: the good and the bad - the just and the unjust and therefore, there must be two corresponding resurrections. The first will be that of life - also called the resurrection of the just in Luke and Acts. [Lk 14:1 Acts 2:15].

The just are those who have been justified by faith. They are members of the Church; they believe and are thus associated with Jesus Christ in all eternity. This starts with the first resurrection, detailed for us in those wonderful verses in 1 Thess 4:16 – 17 [NIV] "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise"

first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever". (This is the prospect for all who respond to the call of Jesus Christ in this life.

The resurrection that must follow must be that of the "bad" or "unjust", and will include the remainder of those who have died. They will rise to what the Bible terms "*Judgement Day*". They will not be given a second chance – God will give them their first chance where they will have the opportunity to learn the truth and be able to walk in it. The judge before whom they will appear will be the Lord Jesus Christ himself, being appointed especially for this purpose - the details are given in the latter part of our reading – verses 25 – 28. The whole world will thus have the opportunity for everlasting life as the beneficiaries of this great gift.

6. Objective or purpose

We have seen how God's great love gave us his Son and analysed to whom it will be available. Finally, we look at the objective or purpose. It is quite a simple expression but has great significance and meaning. ... "*...to have everlasting life*".

Naturally, we look first to scripture for a definition of eternal life and find it in John 17:3. Jesus is praying, probably within earshot of the Disciples and before leaving the upper room for the Garden of Gethsemane, acknowledged to His Father "*... eternal life means knowing you, the only true God and knowing Jesus Christ whom you sent*". "*Knowing you and knowing Jesus*".

In essence – everlasting fellowship with God.

Eternal life, accepted by believing, is a gift of God and brings with it the fullest blessings God can bestow. It does not only refer to a length of time but also to a quality of life. We do not earn eternal life. As we have seen, it is a free gift received when we admit to sin, repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone.

Everlasting life is a deepening and growing experience. It can never be exhausted in any span of time we can imagine and is a firm promise of God fulfilled, without doubt and not to be compared with any we might encounter here on earth. Our earthly promises can be broken, and because we are sinners, are broken frequently. **But the promises of God are trustworthy, unfailing and everlasting.**

So, is John 3:16 the greatest promise? All our Bible promises are great and it is therefore difficult to be specific! Personally we love this one, not only because Martin Luther liked it but because it contains so much when the individual words are analysed.

We leave you to decide.

DS

A Parable in Date Stones

The city of Babylon was once the metropolis of the world—its merchandise was renowned among all nations. But the proud city was a city of sin, and Divine condemnation came upon it. The fiery words of the prophets regarding Babylon are familiar to all of us, and in fulfilment of those words, the site of Babylon has now, for thousands of years, lain deserted and derelict. The proud buildings were levelled with the ground, the wonderful gardens and parklands dry and sterile, and wild beasts the only signs of life.

In more recent years there was a change, date-palms springing up everywhere over the ground that is ruined Babylon. During the archaeological excavations in the early part of the twentieth century, dates formed the staple food of the native labourers, and the stones, thrown down haphazardly, took root and began to clothe the desert with living green. The date palm was the most valuable product of ancient Babylonia, providing food, several kinds of drink made from the juice of the fruit, timber for building, and fibre for many other uses. This is the tree that is depicted as the "tree of life" in Babylonian and Assyrian legend and sculpture. How appropriate then that upon the very site of the city which above all cities stands for the reign of evil, there should spring up "trees of life", as a result of the work of men who have been busy there proving the Bible true.

During this Age the earnest consecrated followers of Jesus have been sowing seed—the seed of the Kingdom. Soon it will be springing into life in the very soil of the reign of evil, the hearts of fallen men, called at last to rise up from the ruins of this "present evil world", and see it transformed into a "world wherein dwelleth righteousness". The seed sown today will become trees of life in the Millennial Age just as those date-stones dropped in the ground of ruined Babylon are clothing the waste place with living green. *"The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."*

(Selected)

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Although there must be trying experiences, there is also possible to us a great joy as we realise how we may have partnership with our Lord's sufferings—broken with him—with the knowledge and anticipation of being raised with him to cooperate in his future work of blessing.

TRUE PIETY

as shown in the New Testament

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Luke 2.25 (ESV)

It would be interesting to know precisely how Simeon was alerted that he would have the privilege of seeing God's Messiah. The important thing was that because of his devout way of life God was able to use this elderly man to give one of the first public signals that the Christ was born. The word used in the Greek for our English word 'devout' is 'threskia' – the outward evidence of this man's religious beliefs came from an inward condition of heart which enabled God to communicate with him. The same must have applied to Anna, the widow who also came at the time of Jesus' presentation in the Temple, and those to whom she spoke (Luke 2.36-38)

Cornelius, the prayerful and generous centurion at Caesarea, whom Peter visited after having a vision demonstrating that God shows no partiality, was *"a devout man who feared God with all his household."* (Acts 10.1-8) He received the power of the Spirit and was baptised into Christ because his heart was right toward God.

Ananias of Damascus was described by Paul before the crowd in Jerusalem, as *"a devout men according to the law"* (Acts 22.12,13). This man was able to place his hands upon Saul of Tarsus and say "Brother Saul" knowing that this Pharisee was visiting his city with the express intention of throwing him into prison. Ananias conversed with the Lord about the matter and was able to restore Saul's sight because conversations with the Lord were part of daily life.

It is noteworthy that Jesus' example in his devout way of life was always to address God as 'Father' and his teaching reinforced this example. In the Sermon on the Mount he referred always to 'your Heavenly Father'. Is any other form of address in prayer suitable? Even singing to 'Jehovah' as in one or two of our hymns, would seem to be out of place, if we really regard the Most High as 'our Father'.

In teaching Jesus told wonderful stories that really had one forceful lesson, yet frequently complex interpretations are woven around those parables, that Jesus never intended. The thrust of his teaching was for uprightness in heart, not devious theories that many Christians find difficult to follow. That was the problem with the teaching of the Pharisees. They made it difficult and boring to the 'unlearned'.

✓ So Jesus was able to speak to a woman of Samaria. That he should talk to a member of that hated race – the Samaritans – and that he should converse publicly with a woman who was a stranger with not very high morals was extraordinary. Beyond all that, he spoke of worshipping the Father “in spirit and truth”. We might have spoken about ‘casting pearls before swine’ but Jesus read the woman’s heart and knew that she was just the person to be a missionary to her own people.

The Pharisees expressed their devotion to God in terms of keeping the Sabbath and severely criticised the disciples for gleaning on the Sabbath and Jesus for healing on that day. The pious Jews were more concerned about unwashed hands and pots before a meal than about the cleanliness of their own hearts. Jesus saw the hypocrisy of their outward piety and warned them of their evil thoughts.

Writing to the Galatians (4.9) Paul contrasts their old way of life with “now you have come to know God and be known of him.” This was said to the Christian Church that wanted to embrace the Judaism of outward piety, and Paul pointed to the meaning of inward piety.

More forcefully the Apostle could write to the Philippians that he had now forgotten the past life of outward ‘religion’ and wanted to forsake everything that he might come to know Christ and be found in him (Phil.3).

X The barriers that divide Christians, the sectarian discords, the emphasis upon pet theories, all destroy true piety. Piety is a heart condition expressed in every act of daily life. We deceive ourselves if we imagine that anything can replace our fellowship with our Lord. And that fellowship with Him is only real if it is the expression of every act and word and thought in daily life – “*whom to know is life eternal*.”

DN

Anchored

There is a palm, called the Comb Spine palm, which grows in the midst of dense forests. It has a crown of leaves so heavy that the slender trunk is wholly unequal to the task of supporting it. Yet by a beautiful provision the tree is enabled to stand erect and grow upwards. A stem, or continuation of the trunk, rises to a considerable height through the leafy plume that generally terminates the growth of other palm-trees. This stem is furnished at the end with hooks or grappels, by which it lays hold upon the giant branches of some overshadowing tree, and is thus supported and

rendered stable. This anchor thrown on high entering within the leafy curtain of the growth above, keeps the palm from falling or being blown away.

Behold an image of the Christian's hope! He, too, has a crown, "an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory," which his own feeble powers are not able to sustain. But just such a means of support as we have described has been given him. When heart and flesh fail, and his spirit sinks within him, he may reach the arm of confident hope far above, and thus lay hold on the immutable promise of God. "Hope of salvation," "hope in Christ," "a good hope through grace," this steadies and strengthens the soul. A happy, steadfast expectation of eternal life proves to the child of God, an unfailing stay. Anchors are generally cast below, but that of the Christian is thrown on high. Thus the Apostle says of those who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them, *"we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf."* (Heb.6.18-19)

(Selected)

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Gen. 42-45

2. Lord of Egypt

One of the classics of Bible history is the magnanimity of Joseph towards his brothers who had sold him into slavery. It is a noteworthy story, whereby Joseph both brought home to his brethren the enormity of their crime and satisfied himself that their repentance was real and sincere. Behind the intertwining movements of the characters in the story lies the larger issue of the Divine purpose, moving smoothly into action and using these elements to fulfil the Divine intention. Here in Egypt, safe from hunger, danger and all adversity, the children of Jacob would grow into that nation which God had declared was to be His special instrument for the preservation of His truth in the earth until its supreme revelation came in the person of Jesus Christ. In a very real sense the moving of Jacob's family into Egypt, and the famine which provoked that move, were pointers to the coming of Messiah.

The famine itself was nothing unusual. Egypt had known such times before and knew them again. This one was of somewhat unusual duration. Most commentators speak of a "succession of years when the Nile remained low" but in Genesis 41.57 it is made plain that Egypt was not the only land affected. *"The famine was sore in all lands."* Jacob and his family were not the only ones to come into Egypt for the purpose of buying food; and prob-

ably not the only ones to settle in that land, at least temporarily. There is some evidence (as in Brooks' *"Climate through the ages"*) that for several centuries terminating about 1600 B.C. the world as a whole passed through a dry and arid phase, followed after that date by a much more rainy era which of itself induced considerably improved fertility. If Joseph did indeed enter Egypt in the early years of the Hyksos regime then the commencement of the twelve tribes' growth in Egypt would more or less coincide with this change; this could have been one factor in the phenomenal increase of the Israelites, and of other nations too. It has to be remembered that although Canaan in the days of Isaac and Jacob was evidently very thinly peopled, when the Israelites after the Exodus only a few centuries later returned thereto they found it well populated with numerous tribes and cities *"with walls reaching up to heaven"*. Explorations in the ruins of Babylon have shown that city to have increased in size many times over at about the same period. It would seem that the population of the Mesopotamian plains showed just the same acceleration of increase as did Israel and Canaan and this fact goes far to confirm the veracity of the Genesis story. The famine of Joseph's time, too, was probably merely the last of a series of such calamities extending over several centuries previously; Egyptian history relates several such occasions reaching back to the time of Abraham. It is likely that the wanderings of Abraham and Isaac recorded in Genesis were largely dictated by necessity due to the impoverishment of the land by dry weather; the various recorded conflicts between their servants and the people of the land over the possession of water holes and wells would tend to support the same conclusion.

The despatch of Jacob's ten sons to Egypt for the purpose of buying food as related in Gen. 42 was therefore a perfectly natural thing and one that was paralleled by many other families. Gen.41.57 makes that plain. *"All countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy food"*, and so does 42.5 *"and the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came"*. Chapter 42 tells the story of the first expedition, one in which Jacob would not allow his youngest son Benjamin to participate. The popular image is all too often that of a little lad perhaps ten or twelve years old whom Jacob would fain shelter from the risks and rigours of the journey; in actual fact Benjamin was at the time a grown man thirty-two years of age, and probably already the father of a goodly proportion of the ten sons he ultimately had. The word "lad" used by Judah in 43.8 to denote Benjamin is probably partially responsible for this very general impression. However 'lad' here as in so many places in the Old Testament is the Hebrew *"naar"* which can denote a boy or young man and is so translated in numerous instances. King

Solomon at his accession is described as a "*naar*". At a time when men habitually lived to 120 or more Benjamin in his thirties would be accounted as a stripling anyway. Jacob's motive in keeping him at home was undoubtedly on account of the fact that, Joseph being lost to him, Benjamin was his only remaining link with his beloved Rachel. The other sons, headed by Reuben, the eldest at sixty-four years of age, took their way to Egypt, travelling almost certainly by the high road skirting the sea shore and passing the frontier guards at the wall called the "Shur" which Egypt had built somewhere near the present Suez Canal. So at last they came into the presence of this high Egyptian official whom they utterly failed to recognise as their brother Joseph.

That is by no means surprising. There must have been a tremendous physical difference between the seventeen year old country shepherd lad whom they had sold into slavery and this calm, dignified Egyptian, whose very mien conveyed authority and self-assurance. They were already awed and subdued by the magnificent buildings and all the other trappings of a civilisation these rough countrymen had never before seen. So they were not likely to perceive in the countenance of this clean-shaven, well-dressed man in whose presence they stood as suppliants, any resemblance to their own bearded and roughly apparelled fellows. They answered his questions respectfully, hopefully, and quite unsuspectingly. Joseph, of course, knew them at once. He had probably been expecting them. He must have realised that his father's family back in Canaan would be as hardly hit as anyone else by the famine, and when parties of Canaanites began to appear in Egypt buying corn he knew it would not be long before his own brothers would appear. He had the advantage of knowing for whom to look; although it was twenty-two years since he had last seen them they would not have changed as he had done. So he was ready with a plan, a plan devised, we may be sure, at least in part by the over-ruling of the Holy Spirit. Joseph would be the means of a much greater deliverance to his father's house than could be achieved by selling them a few sacks of corn to tide them over until they could resume life in Canaan again. It would be a deliverance that was to have as its most far-reaching consequence, the creation of a nation. This has profoundly affected all human history and is destined to survive still, and fulfil its Divine commission to "*blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit*" (Isa.27.6). So in pursuance of his plan Joseph at first pretended to disbelieve their story and accused them of being spies. To their indignant denials he responded with the demand that they prove their story by bringing before him the younger brother whose existence they had inadvertently made known to him. He commanded that one of their number be held prisoner as hostage against their return and the production of their youngest brother.

Joseph made it clear that there was to be no alternative. Simeon was summarily bound before their eyes and hustled away to jail. They were given the corn for which they had made the journey and nothing remained but to return to Jacob without Simeon and bear the heavy news that another of his sons was lost to him.

The brothers' anguished conversation between themselves recorded in Gen.42.21.22 is significant. They had immediately jumped to the conclusion that this disastrous sequel to their mission was a Divine judgment upon them for their treatment of Joseph. *"We are verily guilty concerning our brother . . . therefore is this distress come upon us. . . therefore also his blood is required"*. It would seem that these men's consciences must have smitten them before this day; it might well be that they had long ago bitterly repented their hasty action in getting rid of Joseph. The effect of the tragedy upon their father Jacob was always before them, and believing as they did that Joseph was irretrievably lost to them they did not expect ever to be able to right the wrong. For them so quickly to associate this experience in Egypt with that event of twenty-two years earlier can only mean that the evil deed was always in their minds and that to some extent at any rate they regretted their action and would have put it right if they could. So they talked together, agitatedly, in their own tongue, not realising that the Egyptian standing before them understood every word they spoke, for, according to verse 23, Joseph had pretended unfamiliarity with the Hebrew language and had talked with them through an interpreter. For a moment he was overcome. *"He turned himself about from them, and wept"*; partly, it is almost certain, with emotion at finding his brothers were at least conscious of the sin they had committed and to a degree repentant. So he sent them away, and they set out on the journey back to Canaan.

Jacob's reaction was only to be expected. He flatly refused to let Benjamin go with them into Egypt. Simeon he now accounted as irretrievably lost as Joseph. Bitterly did he reproach his sons for involving him in this new sorrow. The 42nd chapter closes on a note of unrelieved despair, and with no overt move in prospect to rescue Simeon from his servitude.

"And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn ..." It had to come, a decision regarding this problem before the house of Jacob. The famine persisted, and they needed more food. This time Judah had to speak plainly to his father. No Benjamin; no journey. That was the position. The Governor of Egypt had made it plain that they would not so much as be granted an audience unless Benjamin was with them. In a splendidly

impassioned plea Judah took upon himself responsibility for Benjamin's safety. *"I will be surety for him. Of my hand shall thou require him. If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever"*. It was Judah who had suggested selling Joseph into slavery and so deprived Jacob of his firstborn by Rachel. The wheel had turned full circle and now it was Judah upon whom lay the responsibility for presenting to his father Rachel's second born son.

Jacob capitulated. *"If it must be so . . ."* He was old and weary; he could resist no more. Pathetically, he tried to make arrangements to placate the grim Egyptian potentate who threatened his life's last consolation, *"Carry down the man a present, a little balm, a little honey ..."* There was not much they could take; the famine had seen to that; but Jacob desperately strove to make the best he could of a bad business in the hope that his meagre offering might please the man in whose hands lay Benjamin's fate. Having done all he could, he committed the whole thing to God who had led him through so long a troubled life. *"God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin."*

So they came into Egypt the second time. The confidence they had in having Benjamin with them tinged with a certain amount of misgiving over the matter of the money in their sacks. During the journey back to Canaan the first time they had found that the purchase money they had paid for the corn had mysteriously found its way into the tops of their sacks and the circumstance worried them not a little. (Incidentally the reference in 42.27 to the 'inn' where they first discovered this does not mean that there were regular hostleries in the desert where travellers could put up for the night. The word only means a lodging place for the night, of whatever description, and in this instance was probably a convenient well or oasis where they could settle down for the night and water their beasts). Joseph's steward speedily put their minds at rest on this score. He had of course been instructed by Joseph to return the money originally but the brothers did not know this. The restoration of Simeon from prison into their midst was another indication that circumstances were improving. When Joseph at length appeared they bowed themselves before him without the slightest realisation that they were fulfilling Joseph's boyhood dream when he saw the eleven stars making obeisance to him, and the eleven sheaves making obeisance to his sheaf. These were the dreams that became the immediate cause of his brothers' enmity and his being sold into slavery. But they were not now thinking of the past; relief at the apparent friendliness of their reception and the prospect now of getting safely home with both Benjamin and Simeon, and the corn they needed, chased away all other thoughts. It was a happy party of men which sat down to the feast Joseph had prepared. True, when they found they

had been set at table strictly in order of age they marvelled somewhat, wondering how this Egyptian could have guessed their order of birth so accurately; it is evident that as yet they had not the slightest inkling of the truth. The feast proceeded and they were merry.

For the second time the brothers set out for Canaan, this time in very much happier frame of mind. All had gone well, they would soon be home and Jacob's fears allayed, Judah's responsibility discharged and evidently no barrier now to obtaining further supplies from Egypt so long as the famine should last. Nothing more is said about judgment for their misdeed of two decades previously. Adversity had gone, prosperity had come, and all was well with the world. That was their happy frame of mind, until Joseph's steward caught up with them.

Of course the accusation was preposterous. The suspicion was completely unfounded. Not one man among them would dream of stealing Joseph's silver divining cup, or anything else out of the land of Egypt. Indignantly they pointed out that the fact they had brought back to the steward the money they had found in the tops of their sacks should be sufficient proof of their honesty. With the boldness of outraged innocence they declared straight away that if the cup was found with any one of them, that man should die and the rest of them be slaves in Egypt forever. They challenged the steward to take up their offer.

So be it, said Joseph's steward, except that my master will not exact penalties from the innocent. The man with whom the cup is found shall go into slavery; the rest may go home free. *"Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground and opened every man his sack."* As the steward proceeded from one to another, taking the eldest first, expressions of righteous indignation began to appear on their faces and with ill-disguised smirks of complacency they began to fasten up their sacks again. And then with a grunt of satisfaction the steward produced the missing cup from Benjamin's sack!

The brothers gave up. They knew there had been some double-dealing going on somewhere. None of them believed that Benjamin was a thief. Somehow the cup had been introduced into his sack unknowingly. We do not know to what extent the steward was in Joseph's confidence in all this. He was a servant and he was merely carrying out orders and those orders now required merely that he take Benjamin back to Joseph. The others could go their way. But there was no hesitation on the part of the brothers now. They did not intend to return to Jacob without Benjamin. They turned their caravan about and accompanied Benjamin and the steward back to the city, and stood waiting to hear their doom.

This matter of Joseph using a divining cup has disturbed some godly people. The character of Joseph seems so flawless, he seems so ideal a man of God, that the association of his name with something that looks suspiciously like witchcraft comes as a shock. It was not like that. As can be gathered from references in ancient writers the general idea was to fill the cup with some liquid or other – usually water – fix the gaze intently upon one spot on the untroubled surface and empty the mind of all pre-occupying thoughts. It was believed that in this condition of mind messages from the powers of heaven could be expected and that the recipient was then in the most favourable attitude for receiving them. Thus seen, there is really little difference between this "divining" and many modern systems of quiet thinking and meditation, as for example in the Quiet Time. It might well be that Joseph conformed to the custom of his day in using this divining cup as the outward symbol of his communion with God. In this quietness of mind did he receive that instruction from the Holy Spirit which enabled him to carry out the commission with which God had entrusted him.

Now Joseph applied the final test. Knowing full well the brothers' consciousness of innocence, he decreed that Benjamin, in whose sack the cup had been found, should remain in Egypt to be his slave for ever. The rest of them were free to return to their father. Now would he see if the history of twenty-two years ago would be repeated. Would they leave their younger brother in Egypt to save themselves, or would they risk their own lives to save their brother?

It was Judah who resolved the crisis – Judah, who had been the one to suggest the selling of Joseph into slavery. This time it was his own self he wanted to sacrifice. In a marvellously impassioned and eloquent speech he pleaded with Joseph to accept his own self a slave forever as substitute for Benjamin, so that the latter might be able to return to Canaan and his father Jacob be not utterly heart-broken in his old age. *"For how shall I go up to my father and the lad be not with me?"* Rather than have that happen, Judah was prepared to renounce his home and family forever, ending his days in slavery in a strange land. From the expression in Gen.44.16 it is evident that Judah at least, and probably his brothers as well, had by now become persuaded that this terrible position in which they found themselves, innocent of the charge though they were, was of God's own appointing. It had come upon them in judgment for the crime they had committed against their innocent brother those many years back. Judah was ready now to expiate in his own person the guilt for which all his brothers shared the responsibility.

That broke Joseph down. Evidence of the emotional strain under which he had been labouring ever since his brothers first came to Egypt crops up from time to time as the story unfolds. Now, his purpose achieved,

satisfied that his brothers had truly experienced a change of heart, he broke down completely and revealed to the amazed group his true identity. At first they were terrified, as well they might be. But Joseph allayed their fears and with true magnanimity asserted that the whole sequence of events had been overruled by God as a means of getting Jacob and his family into Egypt to save their lives, in this time of famine. That does not mean that God was responsible for the evil thing that the brothers had done; it does mean that God can take hold of the position that has been created by evil and make of it a means contributing to the accomplishment of his own eternal purpose.

AOH

(To be continued)

Wesley on Christian Unity

"Although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these small differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and good works I dare not presume to impose my mode of worship on any other. I believe it is truly primitive and apostolic. But my belief is no rule for another. I ask not therefore of him with whom I would unite in love, Are you of my Church? Of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of church government, and allow the same church officers with me? Do you join in the same form of prayer wherein I worship God? I inquire not, Do you receive the supper of the Lord, in the same manner and posture as I do? Nor, whether in the administration of baptism, you agree with me in admitting sureties for the baptised, in the manner of administering it, or the age of those to whom it should be administered. Nay, I ask not of you (as clear as I am in my own mind) whether you allow baptism or the Lord's supper at all. Let all these things stand by: we will talk of them if need be, at a more convenient season. My only question at present is, Is thy heart right as my heart is with thy heart? If it be, give me thy hand. I do not mean, Be of my opinion. You need not. I do not expect or desire it. Neither do I mean, I will be of your opinion. I cannot. It does not depend on my choice: I can no more think than I can see or hear as I will. Keep you your opinion and I mine: and that as steadily as ever. You need not even endeavour to come over to me, or bring me over to you. I do not desire to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them. Let all opinions alone on one side and on the other. Only give me thy hand."

(John Wesley (1703-1791) from a sermon)

THE CASTING OUT OF FEAR

"Stop the world; I want to get off!" The sentiment is understandable when one considers the nightmarish course of this "present evil world". Since Adam left Eden for the valley of the shadow, man has had to cope with trouble in many forms. Truly he has been *"born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"*. But by the outworking of evil, man's need of God and his righteousness is made very clear. Against the peace and balance of Eden, the fretful perversity of disobedience under the Usurper is made manifest as unprofitable, evil and vain. Truly God knew the end from the beginning; his love and wisdom is behind it all. He did not place Adam in a perfect world but only in a perfect garden, and when Adam left the garden God said *"Cursed is the ground for thy sake"*. At this end of the Age we see wickedness coming to the full; we also see people turning to the Gospel, seeking to *"wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb"*, and looking for the coming of Christ. God be praised!

Those who have believed in God through the Word, and are *"looking unto Jesus"*, must still cope with fears in the flesh. There is no truce. On the contrary, by acknowledging the Prince of Peace the special attention of the Prince of Darkness is invoked. He is the opposer of the brethren of Christ. As sons of God, citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we are in enemy territory. Comfortingly, a very much beloved Brother reminds us that *"our minds may be troubled. . . our hearts, never"*. *"The Father Himself loveth you!"* We are provided for, as God provided for the Israelites, of which provision not the least marvellous was the "just sufficient" provision of manna, given day by day, whatever their position or condition, for forty years in the desert. Our inner man is renewed day by day just as surely.

When the first exciting contact with their Messiah had been made and the disciples were all gathered, there began for them a period of very intensive training. They were with the Lord, and saw wonderful demonstrations of his heavenly power. They lived, and sang, and prayed with him, and doubtless they thought the solution of all things was near to come. There were times when the draught blew in, the cold wind of opposing forces, as when Jesus visited his home country and could do *"few miracles there, because of their unbelief"*. The time, after the disciples had been empowered to heal, that they failed to cast out the deaf and dumb demon, must have been a shaking experience for them, full of doubts and arguments (Mark 9.14-15).

There were those fearful journeys across the Sea of Galilee, when the breakers loomed larger than the knowledge of the keeping power of God, even though his Son was with them. There were the much deeper feelings of

uneasiness that came to them before their Lord left them for the last time. That last journey to Jerusalem was full of foreboding. With Jesus they could do all things, but where would they be if He left them? To see him so sorrowful was a dreadful experience. No wonder *"they followed, afraid"* (Mark 10. 32).

By the disciples' experiences we may see the magnitude of God's tremendous work in creating his sons from mortal men. Twelve different men, an apprenticeship with the Master of only three years; how intensive that period! They got much more than they could digest or retain. Afterwards they needed the Holy Spirit of truth to bring all things to their remembrance. We can imagine the first joyful realisation *"We have found the Messiah!"* and then, how they must have striven to bring their own souls into alignment with him. We have the story of Peter to illustrate the watch care of our Lord over them in this personal aspect. He was a good shepherd. Apart from his wonderful public ministry, He maintained a special attitude of mind towards the Father, a pattern of prayer, thanksgiving and praise, a faith supreme and confident. So He weaned them away from superficial traditional worship, from all worldly ways of thought, to KNOW God as Father, speaking to him, trusting him as such, in sincerity and truth. *"The Father himself loveth you"* He said, *"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart—and you will find your souls refreshed"*. This is a principle in the lives of all God's people. *"Prayer brings victory."* *"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul."* *"In everything, by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus."* *"What time I am afraid, I will trust in God."* *"Always to pray—and not to faint."*

Fear is a part of the present world. In the Kingdom, with life and health and peace assured for men of goodwill, the only fear will be that of not gaining God's full approval. We are working towards being approved of God now, as his sons, his firstfruits in Jesus, to be all with him. But the element of mortal fear is with us, as one of the weaknesses of our "earthen vessels", and one of the weapons of Satan. If faith and the heavenly armour in themselves were sufficient for our safety, then there would be no need to "watch and fight and pray". We must exercise and build up our *"most holy faith"*, keep our heavenly armour on, and fight *"not as beating the air"*. Many times in the Word fear is recognised as part of the fight. Patriarchs, prophets, apostles, angels and our Lord himself found it necessary to give reassurance. Paul admits to *"fears in my own mind"* and as his never untroubled life unwound, it is plain that with each painful or tormenting experience came a greater measure of confidence, a deeper involvement with the Lord, an

increasing sense of joy in victory—a rest in the outcome. God's purpose cannot fail, nor his watchcare and support for those upon whom it rests. This is made manifest for us in the Way as we go on, trusting more in his strength. We are on the winning side, against evil and for our God of Love; we each have a "comforter" with us, a personal messenger of the Holy Spirit, and God has not given us a cowardly spirit again to fear, but in truth, as will be proved—one of power, and love, and of a sound mind. Each trial, bringing firmer joy and confidence in victory through Christ, must needs increase our gratitude and love for God. "*... and the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and faith unfeigned.*" Indeed, Paul manifests the truth of this by his last letter to Timothy, writing "*I have maintained the good contest, I have finished the race, I have guarded the faith. It remains that there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day ... and to all ... who have loved his appearing*". May we all go on, ever growing in grace and knowledge, and in the power of using that life-force that is within us, which is greater than "*that which is in the world*". So shall we cast out fear, again and again and again, and find ourselves ever strong in him who strengthens us, coming to the end of the race with the same tested-and-proved confidence of Paul. "*Now to him who is able to guard you from falling, and to place you blameless in the presence of his glory with great joy, to God alone our Saviour through Christ Jesus our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, both now and throughout the ages. Amen.*"

STUDIES IN 1 JOHN

Part 18 1 John 4.2-3

Then there were those who admitted that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah but denied that He was anything more than man. They denied that He came from above or existed before He appeared on earth. That is a modern as well as an ancient belief but it takes away from Jesus all redemptive power. Psalm 49.7 tells us that "*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him*". The real truth concerning the manner in which Jesus Christ came "*in the flesh* ~ best expressed in Scriptural language, combining the angel Gabriel's words to Mary in Luke 1.35 with Paul's in Philippians 2. 8: "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore that Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*" ... "who

being in God's form. *...divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men.*" John, searching for words in which correctly to express this great truth when writing his Gospel, pointed to the prevailing belief in the Logos, the Word of God, all-powerful and ever active in carrying out the Divine purposes, the method of Divine communication with man, yet never seen by men. John, with rare inspiration, cried *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father"* (Jn.1.14). There are two important words in 1 John 4. 2; one is "Flesh" and the other is "come" and both must be accepted and understood.

It was Jesus Who came from above, the One coming from above Who was made flesh. Here was no mystic union between a Divine being and a mortal man, no use of the empty shell of a living physical frame as a temporary abiding place whereby he was visible to other men. The Word, Who had been coexistent with the Father for untold ages before the world was, now laid aside that glory and became flesh by being born a babe of Mary. In the fulness of time the Word, no longer flesh, took again the glory He had with the *"Father before the world was"* - and, too, added glory. (John 17.5 and Phil. 2.9-11).

Every doctrine, therefore, that is built upon this understanding of the coming of Jesus in the flesh is given by the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is upon this basis that the doctrine of the "Ransom for All" is founded and all that makes our hope what it is, Times of Refreshing, the High Calling, the ultimate destruction of sin and death and everlasting life for "whosoever will" after full and fair opportunity. All springs from, and is dependent upon Jesus Christ coming in the flesh and giving His humanity as a corresponding price for Adam.

In verse 3 the expression "Christ is come in the flesh" does not rest upon good authority. It is not to be found in either the Sinaitic, Alexandrian or Vatican manuscripts. It is also absent from many other versions. Thus amended, the verse reads *"Every spirit which confesses not Jesus"* is not of God. It may be a strange thought to us, that any claiming to be Christians should totally deny Jesus, but the expression seems to imply as much. In John's day it was not so strange. Extremists there were who denied the "supernatural" element in Christianity and insisted that Jesus was a great ethical and philosophical leader and teacher and nothing more.

John had one word for all such—*antichrist*—and would admit of no compromise. This is antichrist, against which they had already been warned. Now, thus early in the age, it had appeared. John's words are significant. *"Ye have heard that it should come"* as though there had been

the prediction, "and even now it is in the world" as though the prediction had now begun to be fulfilled.

Paul also had something to say about Antichrist, but he declared that it was not yet to be revealed because of a "hindering one". *"He that now letteth (hinders) will let, until he be taken out of the way, and then shall that Wicked One be revealed. .."* (2 Thess.2.7-8). Even then the full revelation of the Antichrist is to come apparently only toward the end of the Age, that he might be consumed and destroyed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and the radiance of His presence (v.8), which betokens an extension of the manifestation of Antichrist into the days of the Second Advent.

It has been customary among Protestant commentators to refer the description in 2 Thess. 2 to the Papacy of the Dark Ages, on the ground of that system having usurped God's place in the "Temple", "*shewing himself that he is God*". We do well, however, to take careful heed to John's definition of Antichrist, one who denies Christ altogether. If John and Paul, both by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are speaking of the same thing, we have to apply the epithet of "antichrist" to that which both denies Christ and usurps His place. In this modern Age there is much in the organised social framework of the world that meets that requirement, and it may well be that "antichrist" is not an ecclesiastical power after all. It may combine within itself some of the secular things that are also arrayed against Christ and His Kingdom.

Whatever it is, and whoever it is, that seeks to usurp the place of Jesus Christ and His teachings in the hearts and minds of men, and in the affairs of daily life, by this definition is antichrist. Perhaps Jesus had something of the same thing in mind when in Matt.24 He referred to the "abomination of desolation standing in the holy place". In these last generations Christ has been denied, and His place usurped, as never before. The fact that in many cases this denial and usurpation has been done in ignorance, or under complete misapprehension of Jesus' message and life, does not alter the fact that this is antichrist, that should come into the world. The antichrist is that whole power that is set against Christ and His righteousness to oppose the incoming of the kingdom. It stands for the rule of this world as against the rule of the next; for the self-government of man by man without God, as against the self-government of man by man with God. It usurps the place of the powers of Heaven in the affairs of men and it justifies its usurpation by denying that there are any powers of Heaven. That is why the spirit of the Lord must be brought near to consume it and the radiance His presence to complete its destruction. These things will convince men of the reality of the unseen world and the concern of God for their welfare and happiness, and when these things are thus seen, the power of antichrist will vanish forever.

Some Christian groups look for the emergence in the Middle East, at the end of the Age, of some one man, mighty in power and of extreme wickedness, who will rapidly become a kind of world Dictator. He will ruthlessly persecute all Jews and Christians, so fulfilling the prophecies of Antichrist. Many expect him to make his capital in the ancient city of Babylon, which, they think, is to be rebuilt to more than its former magnificence. There is no Scriptural warrant for such an interpretation of the two Apostles' teachings respecting Antichrist. It is not that the idea of a World Dictator is unreasonable or impossible. Recent events have shown that much more unlikely things could happen nowadays on the stage of world politics. It is rather that the New Testament teaching regarding Antichrist demands something much bigger than the figure of one man astride the few short years of one human life can possibly meet. It demands an Age for its development, maturity and decline, and the whole sum of every system of evil that the Age has known, properly to fulfil all that is said of it. *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed."* (Ps.2.2). It is that determined coalition of every evil force, set in relentless array against the Rider on the White Horse, that constitutes Antichrist, and it is that same coalition which will be utterly broken at the end.

John probably had a more personal thought in mind also. The next few verses speak as though he knew his readers to have challenged this incipient antichrist even in their own day, and overcome it because God was with them. It is not likely that he was thinking entirely of a doctrinal battle or the victory of "Truth" over Judaic or Greek errors. It is much more likely that John knew what we ought to know, that it is easy, so fatally easy, to deny Christ ourselves in our own hearts and lives even whilst we take His name on our lips. And if we do that, then on the authority of verse 3 of this chapter, we too are partaking of the spirit of antichrist. For we can deny Christ far more effectually in our actions or by our conduct than ever we can by our words.

(To be continued)

X X X

Napoleon's army on one occasion was demoralised, and the general ordered the drummer boy to sound the retreat. The little fellow straightened up with pride and said, "Sir, I don't know how to sound a retreat - I never learned -- but I can sound a charge." He sounded the charge. The army rallied and was victorious.

The White Stone

"To him that overcomes will I give . . . a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receives it." (Rev. 2. 17).

In ancient times the Greeks and the Romans had a custom of noting and perpetuating friendship by means of a white stone. This stone was divided into halves, and each person inscribed his name on the flat surface, after which the parts of the stone were exchanged. The production of either half was sufficient to ensure friendly aid, even from the descendants of those who first divided the stone. A similar custom was sometimes observed by a king, who would break a white stone into two parts, one of which he would retain and the other part give to a special ambassador. That part could be sent to the king at any time and would ensure aid. Thus the divided stone became a mark of identification.

Rev. 2.17 seems to refer to this ancient custom. The white stone signifies a token of the Lord's love, and the new name written in the stone suggests the Bridegroom's name. The statement indicates a special acquaintance with the great King of kings, secret between himself and the individual. Each overcomer is to be recognised as having the personal favour of the Lord. Of this no one will know save himself and the King. There is an individual and personal relationship between the Lord and those who overcome, who may be said to receive the mark of identification – the white stone – now, in this life.

This mark is the sealing of the Holy Spirit by which the Lord identifies the 'overcomers'. While this is said to be a part of the final reward of the Church, yet from the very beginning of our experience we have this personal acquaintance with the Lord. The full seal of the Holy Spirit will be given in the Resurrection, when we receive the new body. Then we shall have the complete knowledge of the name by which we shall be known to the Lord and He to us forever.

o o o

The Apostle says "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations". He does not say "Feel it all joy..." You cannot always rejoice in your circumstances, but you can rejoice in the Lord always. God may not change your circumstances, but He will change you, and give you victory in those circumstances.

"AND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM"

Comment on Acts 16. 25

What an artlessly simple statement Luke makes in these few words, and yet how full of significance. Of course, all the prisoners would know what had happened earlier in the day, when the two special prisoners in the inner ward had been brought into custody. Every one of them would know that when the Roman lictors had done their work the two prisoners' backs would be a complete mass of bleeding wounds and discoloured bruises. And if any articulate sounds did pass the sufferers' lips, they would expect only groans and curses. Most men the world over, when every moment caused pain, would give vent to their resentment with such groans, even if it did not constrain them to call down imprecations of woe upon their torturers. Added to the physical injuries, and swollen sores, they were thrust into the stocks, so that little or no movement of the extremities was possible to them. At the very best, their position was as undesirable as could well be. Added to this physical distress would be the dankness and the darkness of their cell. Scarce a breath of air and not one single ray of light would tend to lighten the damp musty odour of the cell. When the two prisoners' position is summarised thus, it would seem that this wicked old earth had only one penalty more severe it could inflict. Short of depriving them of life, the passions and inhumanity of man had heaped upon them an avalanche of sorrows and woes. To the spite of foes had been added the injury of an unjust trial, against which most men would have severely chafed. Thus, to the physical distress must be added the possible sufferings of the mind.

What a conquest of mind over matter, of the spirit over the body, of faith over actual reality occurred in that inner prison cell that night! Like others of the same little band, they counted it a privilege to suffer for the Name of the Lord, for they knew that in this suffering they were "filling up the measure" of suffering allotted to the Christ of God. There is indeed the "filling" of a cup, as there is also the "drinking" of a cup; and in the Way of God they who drink from the one, contribute a little quota to the filling of the other. Hence, there was no room for vain regrets or groans or maledictions in that little cell. *"Paul and Silas prayed"*, then, when the voice of prayer came to an end, the accents of praise to God swept through the confines of the cell, and out into the larger outer ward. *"And the prisoners heard them."* What would they think of such men? Perhaps first feelings would be of annoyance if the singing had roused them from their slumbers, but soon they had reason enough to listen and hear.

The prison itself began to shake; the doors were flung widely ajar,

and even their own chains fell off! What a night that was, as Heaven answered both prayer and praise! The fortitude of two stout hearts, rising up above dismal circumstances, set in motion the wheels of Providence, and great things ensued.

From this episode sprang the nucleus of the Philippian Church – perhaps the dearest church of all to one of our prisoners in the stocks! Truly it was a mysterious way in which Divine Providence that night performed its wonderful work. It planted its footsteps in the quaking earth, and rode upon the repentant attitudes of men, because two valiant followers of the Lamb had risen up superior to their woeful circumstances.

What lesson can we learn from this episode?

First, let us be reminded that the God of Paul and Silas is our God too. He knew full well, even though midnight darkness lay around, where his faithful children were confined. No darkness could hide them from his sight. In our nights of sorrow or alarm, that is a great thought to take to heart. No curtain of night can intrude and hide God's child from God's watchful eye. The darkness is as the light to him, and cannot intercept his view of those on whom he has set his love. When terror stalks the night sky or dangers multiply, it would be far more to the glory of God if the neighbours hear of our peace of heart and our trust in God, than if we moan and grumble and lament. The difference between the two sets of prisoners that night lay in this: Paul and Silas knew the way of God, the others did not! That knowledge was a strong controlling power which conquered human fear and fancy, and helped to transmute suffering into Christ-like fortitude. It helped the followers of the Lord to take the episode in the curriculum of the school of Christ, and to make the members of the body the servant of the new mind. This is the fibre that martyrs are made of, when it has been sublimated by fire and ordeal. And it is in the little hole-in-the-corner episodes of life where it is done – in the darkness of our prison cells.

The best commentary upon the power of God in the heart is a calm, cool deportment in face of danger, which rises from the assurance that God is our Father, and that we are his children and that we are being kept in the hollow of his hand. We may not all be able to sing praises in the dead of night, but we can all pray, and let the knowledge thus go forth that we have been with Jesus and learned of him. Other prisoners will then also hear.

TH

A sincere, pious, hungry soul seeks something for his soul's deepest welfare. Then he finds Jesus of Nazareth.

What do we ourselves find in him, as day by day we tread the narrow way?

THY KINGDOM COME, O GOD

One of the most heartfelt hymns that we sometimes share is 'Thy kingdom come, O God'.

*Thy kingdom come, O God,
Thy rule, O Christ, begin;
Break with Thine iron rod
The tyrannies of sin.*

I remember it being sung at a Bible study fifty years ago, the altos and bass blending in the harmony provided by a little harmonium. Hymns do not create biblical understanding, but they can bring things into focus when we are tempted into doctrinal bypaths or enmeshed in technical prophetic discussions. This is such a hymn. It is straight down the line. It comes from the heart. It is based on scripture without being complicated or divisive. Think what well loved and important scriptures it brings to mind.....

Jesus was praying in a certain place... and one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come....." (Luke 11.1-2)

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15.22-26)

*When is thy reign of peace,
And purity, and love?
When shall all hatred cease,
As in the realms above?*

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2.4)

*When comes the promised time
That war shall be no more,
And lust, oppression, crime
Shall flee Thy Face before?*

One like a son of man.... his face was like the sun shining in full strength (Revelation 1.13,16)

We pray Thee, Lord, arise,

*And come in Thy great might;
Revive our longing eyes,
Which languish for Thy sight.*

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40.10,11)

*Men scorn thy sacred Name
And wolves devour thy fold;
By many deeds of shame
We learn that love grows cold.*

I know that... fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20.29,30)

*O'er heathen lands afar
Thick darkness broodeth yet:
Arise, O morning Star,
Arise and never set.*

I, Jesus... am the bright morning star (Revelation 22.16)

And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1.19)

It is always interesting to learn who wrote a hymn. This one was first published in 1867 - when the horrors of the Crimean war were only recently past, when General Gordon was fighting in China, when the writings of Charles Dickens told of convicts and con men, when the great philanthropists discovered wretchedness in the city streets. The writer was Lewis Hensley, who after doing well at Cambridge University had become curate at Upton-with-Chalvey and then vicar at Ippolyts-with-Great Wymondly. He needed new hymns for his congregation to sing on the 'minor Sundays between Advent and Whitsuntide', and wrote this hymn, among others. Whatever led to its writing, it must have come from his heart. Sadly, the situation it describes is much the same 150 years later. (The tune, incidentally, St Cecilia, was composed by an Oxford educated C of E clergyman, Leighton George Hayne. He was connected with Eton College, succeeded his father as rector of Mistley, Essex, and was well known as a builder of church organs.)

It is fascinating to know a little about these men who created this well loved hymn which appeared in many hymn books for 100 years, and was not much altered by the different compilers. The most significant change to be made has been in the last verse. The confident Victorians had seen the 'thick darkness' as brooding over 'heathen lands afar'. Nowadays we confess that darkness is not confined to distant lands but can be found closer to home. The line has been rewritten 'O'er nations near and far thick darkness broodeth yet'.

So with our hearts we pray, 'Thy Kingdom come O God..... arise O morning Star!'

GC

Where is that verse?

An exercise for a winter evening

A concordance is a wonderful thing when we need to know where a particular verse or phrase is in the Bible. There may be some of us who do not need to use a concordance, because we know exactly where a scripture is to be found.

Here are a selection of quite well known texts— see if you know where to find them. Give yourself one point if you know roughly where to look; three points if you can find the text within a minute; and five points if without looking it up you can correctly give the reference, book, chapter, verse. What is your score out of a hundred? The quotations are all from the AV. Answers on page 239.

- 1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
- 2 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.
- 3 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.
- 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- 5 The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.
- 6 Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation.
- 7 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us.
- 8 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more

- excellent way.
- 9 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.
 - 10 Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
 - 11 A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.
 - 12 And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.
 - 13 They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
 - 14 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.
 - 15 Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
 - 16 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.
 - 17 The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.
 - 18 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.
 - 19 For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.
 - 20 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

Book Corner

The Manhood of the Master

It's a slim volume, neatly bound in black. This particular copy was printed in 1927, and there may have been 116,000 copies printed before that. It must have been a birthday present from my aunt to my uncle, given at about the time they got married.

The book was written by Harry Emerson Fosdick, and this is the English edition. It is not "a life of the Master nor a study of His teaching. It is an endeavour to understand and appreciate the quality of His character". It is not particularly about His teachings, nor is it theology—rather an attempt to see "the Man Christ Jesus Himself as He lives in the pages of the gospels".

It contains daily readings for twelve weeks, with a longer comment at the end of each week. Here is a flavour of it:

"Matt.9.10-15 *And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why*

eateth your Master with the publicans and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.

“Have you thought of the Master largely in terms of sorrowful self-sacrifice? Then note carefully today’s picture of Him, as He sits at dinner. He is plainly happy. He is with His friends and is helping people who need help, and He so rejoices in His work that He compares His disciples and Himself to a bridal party on a honeymoon. Even when we turn from such a scene as this to think of the days of Jesus’ persecution, we find the note of joy unquenched. “Rejoice in *that* day,” He says, “and leap for joy.” The fruits of the Spirit, according to Paul, are “love, joy, peace.” Is your life by its radiation of real good-cheer and goodwill bearing testimony to your friendship with the Master? “

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

He came to us; and He need not have come. He had the whole creation of angelic realms in which to find satisfaction if He wished, countless multitudes of sinless angelic beings to do him homage and with whom He could have fellowship; but He left them behind. This earth was a dark place, dark with sin and wretchedness, its inhabitants violent, lustful, cruel; and they hated him. Yet He came.

*"His Father's house of light,
His glory-circled throne,
He left, for earthly night,
For wanderings sad and lone.
He left it all for me —
Have I left aught for Thee?"*

That was why He came. He came for me that I might be delivered from this dark abyss of sin, and rejoice in the glorious liberty of the children of God. He came for my fellows, too, that they might be rescued in like fashion.

He came to establish the Father's Kingdom here on earth, that Kingdom which is already supreme in every other sphere of the Father's creation. He came to afford all men a full, fair, free opportunity of eternal life.

*"He breaks the power of reigning sin
And sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood avails for me."*

He came because He was the only one who could possibly come. He is the greatest in all creation and only the greatest can make the greatest sacrifice. And his sacrifice was the greatest. No creature in all heaven and all earth will ever be able to make so great a sacrifice. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.

*"Man of sorrows! What a name
For the son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah!
What a Saviour!"*

He came to tell men of his plans for their future happiness, how that even their killing of him will not frustrate his hold over them. For He comes again to bring them all to himself, as many as have not utterly extinguished their own capacity for repentance. And as assurance of that restoration, He has left his followers behind to go on telling men of the glorious Kingdom which will follow earth's dark night of sin, a Kingdom in which men will be drawn by every artifice in God's armoury to repentance and reconciliation with him, walking along the way of holiness to full acceptance of salvation in Christ. For unto him will every knee on earth bow, as now does every knee in heaven.

*"One offer of salvation
To all the world make known.
'Tis Jesus Christ, the First and Last;
He saves, and He alone."*

He came, and He comes again. Not now as a babe in a manger, but a glorious heavenly Lord, armed with all power in heaven and in earth. He comes to gather his Church to be with him, and only those who are watching for his appearing will share in that gathering. He comes revealed in the consuming fire of Divine judgment for the destruction of all those institutions of men which stand in the way of his incoming Kingdom. He comes in resplendent glory so that all men know that He has come, and at once begins to speak peace to the nations.

*"Down the minster aisles of splendour, from betwixt the cherubim,
Through the wondering throng, with motion strong and fleet
Sounds his victor tread approaching, with a music far and dim,
The music of the coming of his feet."*

*He is coming, O my spirit, with his everlasting peace,
With his blessedness, immortal and complete.
He is coming, O my spirit, and his coming brings release.
I listen for the coming of his feet.*

The angels are singing in the distance; there are just a few who can hear their song to-day. Later on all men will hear them and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, obtaining joy and gladness while sorrow and sighing flee away.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

RENEWAL TIME

As you know, the Bible Study Monthly is gladly sent free of charge to any who are genuinely interested. We do ask you to let us know each year that you still wish to receive it. Please use the centre pull-out form, and send to the editor at 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, UK

Tel 01949 860 416 Email editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Thanks once again We wish to thank the 'servant of the Lord', a beloved brother in the Lord, for the anonymous \$100 received several times in the last few months.

Reprinting a booklet

For some time we have been out of stock of the booklet 'God of all Space'. We are reluctant to print it without it being read and commented on by someone who has an up to date knowledge of astronomy and the relevant areas of science. We believe one or two readers may have such knowledge, and we would be grateful to hear from them if they are willing to read through it and bring to our attention any necessary amendments.

Gone from us	Mollie Walton	Huntingdon
	Mary Crawford	N.Ireland

"Till the day dawn...."

Answers

1. Psalm 46.1 2. Isaiah 40.31 3. Psalm 19.1 4. Isaiah 53.4 5. Job 1.21
6. Mark 14.38 7. Daniel 3.17 8. 1 Corinthians 12.31 9. Proverbs 21.2
10. Luke 16.13 11. John 13.34 12. Ezekiel 36.28 13. Isaiah 35.10
14. Ephesians 6.13 15. Mark 8.34 16. Hebrews 12.2 17. Numbers 6.25
18. Galatians 2.20 19. 2 Corinthians 4.18 20. Psalm 73.26

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