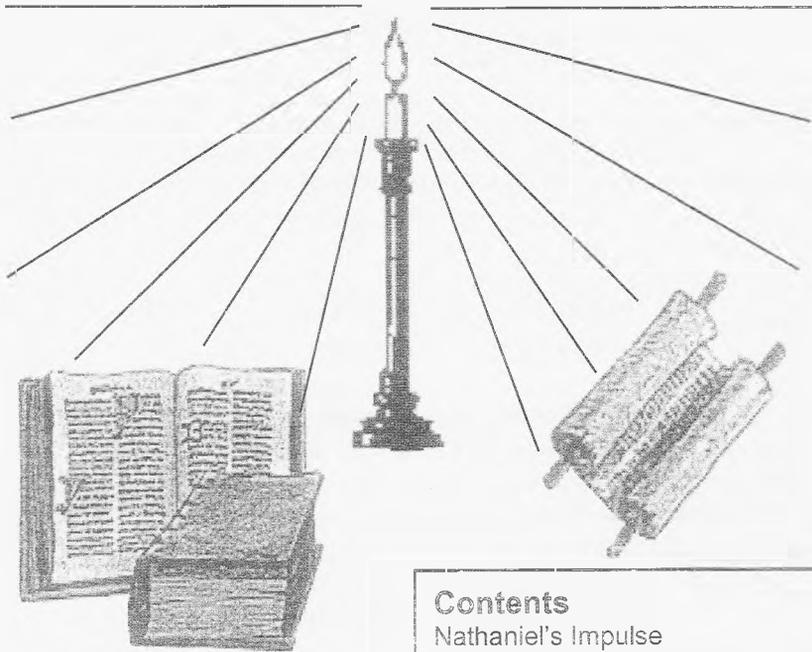


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

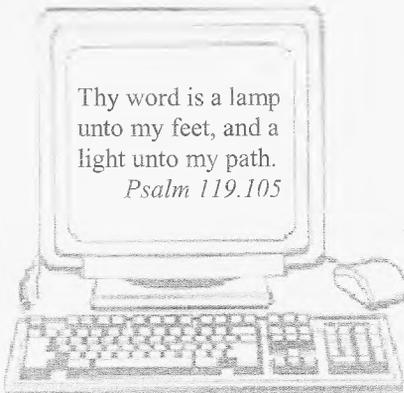
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Thy word is a lamp
unto my feet, and a
light unto my path.

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)

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NATHANIEL'S IMPULSE *the challenge of meeting Christ*

Expectations were running high in Israel, for the appointed times had almost run out. The sixty and nine 'heptads' unto Messiah the Prince (Dan. 9.25) were almost at an end, and *"all men were in expectation"* of the Coming Prince. How would He come? From where would He come? How would they know He had come?

These were points of endless debate in the homes and councils of Israel (See John 7.40-42 and 52). Of course He would come in all his might and majesty, spreading confusion and dismay in the ranks of Rome, throwing proud defiance to its Imperial Majesty! He would be victorious along with them, for does it not stand written in the prophecy *"And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High"*. (Dan.7.27). Were not they the people of the saints of the Most High? To whom if not to them, could that signal honour be given? So absolutely sure was this expectation that its certainty permeated every discussion, as salt did their bread.

What then must have been the consternation in the mind of one pious Israelite when his very own brother – his own mother's kindred son – came to him exultingly, and most persuasively said *"We have found him of whom*

Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth ..." (John 1. 4-5).

Can we wonder at the humorously doubtful nature of the rejoinder? Nazareth – a mere village place, far out of the beaten track; a mere cipher in the history of Israel! *"Jesus of Nazareth! Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Unabashed at his brother's seeming levity, Philip quietly said *"Come and see"*. Suiting the action to the word Philip quietly led his brother along, but not before Nathaniel had stepped aside beneath the shelter of a near-by tree to enquire in prayer. Fortified with inner resources, Nathaniel went along to see for himself this cause of his brother's newly found enthusiasm.

Forestalling all introductory greetings Jesus said, even while Nathaniel still approached, *"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"* An Israelite, true to the name, neither caught nor catching other men with guile! What a commendation for a careful man! *"How do you know me"* asked Nathaniel, surprised. *"When you were under the fig tree, I saw you"* was the ready reply. That was enough. Here he was face to face with One who could read the motives of the heart through an external action.

Unknown to himself those searching eyes had seen him sheltering in his quiet retreat, and understood why he had gone to one side. Willing to be convinced, yet not ready to be duped and led astray, this true son of Israel undoubtedly had lifted up his heart to heaven for guidance and safe keeping at this moment of crisis. If, as Philip said, the Christ had truly come, even though unostentatiously, he wanted with all his heart to welcome him. Yet, if his brother had been deceived, he wished to escape the entangling net himself and break the deception that held his brother.

The deeply moving forces inside him welled up, and found expression in the words *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God. you are the King of Israel!"* These words have the ring of the thinker and the man of strong-convictions! They show the cast and mould of his piety. *"King of Israel"*, yes! that was an easily reached conviction, but *"Son of God"*! That is something more. Yet that conclusion lay latent in the Messiahship, as Jesus later found to his cost. (John 10.31-36).

"He that seeks finds." Nathaniel was a seeker, and he found one to delight him. *"We have found him!"* We too in our throbbing day *"have found him"* thank God! Of course, God has found us too (John 6. 65) but that is not the whole story of the *"finding"*. It is the one who has been drawing us on who has led us to his Son, for *"no man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him"*. (John 6. 44).

In our case too there must be a sincere, pious, hungry desire, seeking something for our soul's deepest welfare before we find Jesus of Nazareth. What do we 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. There is this tie that binds, and if it is one of true affinity, then as the magnet draws the steel so shall He and I be closely drawn together.

"We have found him of whom . . .

TH

YEA, RATHER . . .

A Discourse on Romans 8.34 from the last century

It is not always the biggest words of a text, nor even the centrally positioned ones in a paragraph that will carry most weight in the argument. Sometimes words of two letters, by their comparative values, such as "as" and "so", will open wide the door of argument, or close it shut, leaving no doubt in the reader's mind what the writer's meaning was. For instance, "*As in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor. 15. 22). Whatever may be the full scope of this Scripture its argument turns upon two small words.

The two words of our text also set up a comparison, and throw the emphasis upon the following statement. Paul could have referred to the facts regarding the life and death of Jesus without using these two words. He could have written: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, and it is Christ that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God ..." He would thus have been stating the two great facts of Jesus' life as unassailable, but, stated thus they would be "in parallel" with each other, and of equal value for the purpose of an argument. But that was not his intention here. Apparently he did not desire them to be of equal value in their application to the main point of his discussion. He was not, at this point, basing his claim to freedom from condemnation on a dead Christ — however acceptable that death of Christ may be — but upon a living and exalted Christ, who had passed beyond the reach of death, and was present at God's right hand to represent Paul and all his brethren there.

Already he had shown the vital necessity of the death of Christ as one of the great essential factors in the work of Atonement and Reconciliation (chap. 3.25; 5. 6, 12-19; 8. 32), and here (as always, elsewhere) Paul did not underrate or undervalue the worth of that Redemption Sacrifice. Always in presence of either friend or foe he gloried in the Cross of Christ, and declared it the one foundation upon which all future hope must be based. It had done for men what no other work had ever done. Jesus by his death had done what no man, or men could ever do. Alexander the Great had overrun the world while still little more than a youth – a feat almost without parallel in the annals of time up to Paul's day – yet what had the conquest accomplished for men? Even among Paul's own people there was none to compare with his gracious Lord. Moses had been God's instrument in giving to the fathers the Law. David and Solomon had given of their great wealth to build God a house, and had employed tongue and pen to sing the goodness of the Lord, but while they had given much to benefit those who loved the Holy Name, what had they given that could be compared with that great price which Jesus gave for man's release? Not all the feats of arms; not all the bright gold dug from the earth, nor all the temples erected upon the earth could compare in its effects upon men with the effects of that dark tragedy on Calvary. That, to Paul's persuaded mind, was the one event that transcended every other event throughout the world, throughout all time.

Yet it was only the first chapter of a great story. It was a chapter gloriously true, but it was not the whole story. It was a truth – a pure unadulterated truth – yet not the whole truth – there was something more! Here, in the argument he was now presenting, it was as the wicket-door leading into a larger auditorium. It was a case of passing through that to this, and it was 'this' that really mattered most!

He was writing **of** God's Elect! He was writing **to** God's Elect – of those and to those whom God's Love had won over from the ranks of evil and wickedness. They had forsaken the ways of sin, and Satan, and turned with all their hearts to God, in order to serve him, and live in accord with his great purposes toward men. But they found to their great sorrow that the fallen human nature (which they still shared with other men – other fallen men) was no fitting instrument through which to serve the living God. Try as they would, and even with the best intent, they could not always do the things they would have loved to do, or say the things they would have preferred to say. They found that even their best attempts came short of the perfect standard, and how often they had cause to groan and pour out their sense of unworthiness in sighs and sobs! Would God condemn them for these deficiencies and ineffective attempts?

Would Jesus chide and rebuke them because they so often missed the mark? Would anyone condemn them and point the scornful finger at their vain attempts to measure up to righteousness? Yes, there were some who could scoff and scorn and ridicule and condemn! One "accuser of the brethren" always stood ready to heap condemnation on their heads. Along with him was a whole host of wickedness in exalted position, ready to hinder and oppose, to dishearten and condemn, when frailty and wickedness marred their best endeavours. But (and this is what matters most to Paul and his believing friends) these accusers and opponents had no right of entrance to the Divine Court where all these actions – these efforts to please God—were assessed and judged. That Court of assessment was in heaven, at the very Throne of God. Satan and his hosts had no right of entrance there. They had no standing as "the prosecutor-at-the-bar". They had no power of attorney in that Supreme Court. Therefore, though they might shriek their condemnation above the raging voice of the gale, it had no relevance to the "case" in hand. "*Who is he that condemneth?*" asks Paul. None! – there is no prosecutor in the case.

Would Jesus condemn? Nay, He had died for them! But more than that, He was now living for them, and serving their need more than before. Would God from his Throne condemn? Nay, He had already issued his writ of acquittal! He had already declared the decree of his Court, freely justifying the believer from his sins and weaknesses. The verdict of the Court was favourable to the Advocate and his earthly companions, so that in heaven there was none to condemn. Other accusers mattered not, let them shout their impeachments loud and long! So long, therefore, as their name and credit stood unimpaired in the one place, and at the one "Bar" that really mattered, all was well with them. And that it stood well in that one place was sure beyond all further question because their Advocate was so fully acceptable to the Judge, who alone was qualified to judge and justify, that He was keeping the Advocate at his own right hand—to remain there throughout the Age, till the whole company for whom He had appeared had achieved the object for which they had been justified.

It is no dead Christ that occupies the centre of God's Plan. It is a living Christ—a Christ over whom death has no dominion or power—a Christ, eternal, immortal and all powerful, who ever liveth to help each generation of his struggling followers along and up the heights to heavenly glory. "*I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore*" are the words of assurance sent down from heaven to earth, to stand as guarantee that no struggling follower can ever pass from the sight of his watchful loving Eye.

Some followers of the Lord make their boast in a Christ who died, and carry a crucifix as token of that death. That is something, but it is not enough.

It is not enough that a sacrifice should have been made, or that a Cross and a tomb should be the symbol of Divine Redemption. That alone could not have secured the blotting out of sin. The "Bar-of-all-Authority" was not in session on Calvary's hill, or Gethsemane's tomb, but had its throne in the highest heaven. Divine Justice had instituted its own Court, and thither must the "case" of all believers be carried for adjudication.

We may truly rejoice with any or all who rejoice in the great Sacrifice of the Man of Sorrows, but beware of ending the great story in the opening chapter. With Paul we may announce to heaven and earth that all our glory is in the Cross, but we must complete the great account by proclaiming to all our "Yea rather". "Christ died, *yea rather* . . . was raised from the dead" is the vital energising fact at the heart of God's purpose.

Much is made to-day over the radio of "the historic Christ", and men are asked to make their decisions concerning righteousness on the basis of the teachings of a good man who lived nineteen centuries ago and taught a new way of life. No wonder if the world looks coldly on while only one here and there responds to the Great Voice from the past. It needs more than the historic Christ to energise a cold world into life. The rating of Jesus as "the historic Christ" places him but little in advance of the founders of any other religion or "way of life". Not a "dead Christ", nor yet a "historic" Christ, but a "Living Christ", who has learned compassion for the suffering generations of men, is the one theme, the only theme, that can strike home, arrest and rivet the attention and expectation of the perplexed and doubting hosts of men, bewildered and lost in the mazes of modern thought.

But who shall tell them of that Living Christ? And the answer surely comes, they who can say: "*Yea rather, Christ has risen from the dead.*"

Our two little words contain volumes of sacrificial and dispensational fact, and stand as an expression of conviction that, great and vital as the death of Christ most surely was, his resurrection is more vital still, to those who now follow in his steps. Lives there one child of God to-day, who, knowing and experiencing the care of the great Shepherd of the flock, whose heart will not rise up in gratitude and appreciation before God for the great facts covered by our little text—"yea rather" ?

TH

*My song is love unknown, my saviour's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?*

Samuel Crossman 1624-84

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

His story continues

3 Jacob joins his son— a migration

"God hath made me lord of all Egypt" (45.9). That was the message Joseph charged his brothers to take back to his father. It must have been with a thrill of pride that Joseph uttered those words. It was eminently proper pride, for he acknowledged the hand of God in his exaltation to power. God had made him a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house, a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. The allusion is in the sense of a protector to Pharaoh, inasmuch as Joseph had saved the nation.

In all this the character of Joseph remained unspoiled; he was still the same genuine, artless young man who had won the hearts of his jailors in the prison and later on impressed Pharaoh with his open sincerity and candour. Now that his brothers were before him and in his power, there is no hint of malice or of revenge, not even reproach or recrimination for their dastardly deed of the past. Even that dark happening he attributed to the over-ruling power of God, bringing good out of evil. *"Be not grieved or angry with yourselves that ye sold me thither, for God did send me before you to preserve life"* (45.15). Joseph was large-hearted enough and clear-thinking enough to realise and admit that the consequences of his brethren's jealousy and hate had, under God, resulted in the salvation of a people from starvation and the preservation of his father's family. To what extent Joseph knew of the Divine intention to develop from Jacob's family a great nation whilst in Egypt, we do not know. It was one that has profoundly affected human history ever since, but there is not much doubt that he well knew of God's promise to Abraham respecting the going down of his seed into Egypt and their coming out again, *"in the fourth generation"*. (Gen. 15.16) That Joseph firmly believed this is evidenced by his own dying injunction, one that concludes the Book of Genesis. He reiterated his faith in God's covenant with Abraham and enjoined his fellows to embalm his body that it might be taken to Canaan for burial when the promised return to that land should take place.

An interesting digression in ch.45 tells how Pharaoh himself intervened to assure Joseph of the welcome he was pleased to extend to Jacob and his dependants. *"Take your father and your households, and come unto me; and I will give you the good land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land"* (45.18). That the ruling monarch of Egypt should take such notice of one Canaanite family is noteworthy in itself. Obviously the fact that the family involved was that of his own Chief Minister had something to do with it, but there could also be an element of policy in his attitude. If this Pharaoh

was, as seems likely, one of the Semitic Hyksos rulers, he would clearly be more than amenable to the idea of a family of fellow-countrymen coming to settle in his domains and to that extent assist in the consolidation of Semitic rule over the native Egyptians. The land of Goshen, to which the immigrants were directed, was in the vicinity of Tanis the Hyksos capital. Perhaps Pharaoh prudently saw in this an opportunity of surrounding himself with a few more friends and supporters of his own race.

For the third time the band of brothers made their way back to Canaan, but this time without any overhanging cloud. Benjamin was with them; there was no reluctance to appear before their father on his account. True, there was an explanation to be made regarding Joseph. Although the Genesis record says nothing about it, there is every probability that in the ensuing explanations every bit of the sorry story came out and for the first time Jacob was made aware of what really happened fifteen years earlier in Dothan. At first the old man could not take it all in and at an hundred and thirty years of age that is not surprising. The chronicler says *"Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not"*. The story that his long-lost son, whom he last saw as a raw youth of seventeen, was governor over all the land of Egypt, seemed so utterly incredible that he probably thought his sons were romancing. But outside his tent stood the Egyptian wagons that Pharaoh had sent for his transport. There was no romancing about them; they were real and solid enough. So Jacob was convinced. *"It is enough"* he said *"Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die"*.

It is noteworthy that before setting out on this momentous journey the old man stopped first at Beer-sheba, the place made sacred by Abraham when he instituted a place where God might be worshipped. There he sought by sacrifice and supplication to know whether what he was doing had the approval of God. Jacob had come a long way since first he had fled the land of Canaan for fear of Esau his brother, but he had remained faithful to his vow made those many years ago. He had vowed *"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God"* (Gen.28.20).

God had kept his word and Jacob had kept his. Now at the end of a long and arduous life he refused to leave the promised land of Canaan, promised by covenant to his seed for ever, until he knew that what he did was in line with God's will for him. This was so even though famine stared him in the face and all the food and luxuries of Egypt were his for the taking,. So he came to Beer-sheba and put his case before the Lord. *"Fear not to go down into Egypt"* came the answer (46.3) *"for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also*

surely bring thee up again". Here is reiterated the word of the Lord to Abraham his grandfather nearly two centuries earlier, *"thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, . . . and afterwards shall they come out with great substance . . . and in the fourth generation they shall come hither again"*. (Gen.15. 13). One of the great happenings of history was that descent of a Hebrew tribe into Egypt, and its emergence four centuries later as a nation, a nation which has suffered perhaps more than any other nation in all ages since, a nation which has clung desperately to its promised inheritance and refused to give up hope even when forcibly parted from that land for nearly two thousand years. The rapidity with which the members of the present generation of Jacob's descendants have assimilated themselves to the homeland they have at length recovered, is an evidence of the mystic link which binds that particular people to that particular land. It is a link that because it was forged in the first place by God himself and certified by his covenant, can never be broken though all the nations of the earth be ranged against the people of the promise.

Reassured, Jacob took the journey into Egypt; he and his sons, his sons' wives, his daughters and without doubt their husbands, his grandchildren, and all that he had. That would most certainly include his cattlemen and shepherds, and their families too, and his household servants, in all a larger company than the seventy souls enumerated in Genesis 46, as accompanying him. That account is intended only to preserve the genealogy, to record the names of his sons and his sons' sons for the sake of posterity and to keep alive the constant watch for the Messiah who should come through the line of one of the sons. Jacob had more to say about this when giving his dying blessing to his twelve sons, directed as he then was by the prophetic vision which for the last time illumined his mind and showed him the outline of things to come. He was not at that stage yet; now he was in Egypt and in process of adjusting himself to this new turn of affairs in what must surely have been one of the most varied and colourful lives on record.

Joseph went in his chariot to meet his father, and directed the whole company into the territory they were to occupy, the fertile land of Goshen, between the eastern arm of the Nile delta and the present town of Ismailia. Here, under the immediate surveillance of the friendly Pharaoh in his palace not far away, inhabiting a district adjacent to the frontier with Canaan and therefore with native Egyptians in contact with them only on their southern and western borders, the children of Israel lived and increased and became a nation. Whilst Jacob lived, they constituted nothing more than a Hebrew tribe, a family clan of which the patriarch himself was the titular head but probably long past taking any part in the active direction of affairs. Joseph,

in his official position, could hardly be expected to have very much to do with his brothers. Jacob's eleven sons administered the affairs of the community. His grandsons, something like forty or more, did most of the work, assisted of course by a probably quite numerous contingent of field servants and household servants, with their own womenfolk, who had come down into Egypt with them. This was the true commencement of the nation of Israel even although the people were probably hardly conscious of nationality until Moses led them out into the wilderness and onward into the Promised Land.

One more evidence of the favour with which the ruling Pharaoh regarded these Semitic kinsmen of his valued Chief Minister is offered in ch.47.6. Joseph had presented five of his brothers before Pharaoh. In consequence of that audience Pharaoh reiterated his wish that they should dwell in the coveted land of Goshen, and moreover that any of them whom Joseph considered suitable should be put in positions of responsibility on Pharaoh's own stock farms. Following his sons, Jacob himself came before Pharaoh and invoked the Divine blessing upon him. Thereafter the family of Israel dropped out of official notice so far as the Genesis record is concerned. Most of ch.47 is concerned with the manner in which Joseph administered his public responsibilities during the remainder of the years of famine, five years in all. It was not long before the Egyptians, impoverished because of the continual failure of their crops – for the whole national economy of Egypt in those days was based on agriculture – had spent all their money with Joseph for the purchase of corn. The famine continued, and Joseph took what was left of their cattle; finally they yielded up their land, all they had left, in exchange for the means of life. By the end of the famine all the population were the virtual tenants of Pharaoh. They were given seed for sowing each year and repaid Pharaoh on the scale of twenty per cent of their harvests. Joseph has sometimes been criticised and accused of virtual slave-owning, but the true position is that he set up an organised administration which gave every peasant in the land the help necessary to earn an adequate living and contribute his quota to the establishment of a well governed community. So far as can be discerned, Joseph was the original inventor of the Welfare State, and the inhabitants of Egypt knew greater security and a higher standard of living under his administration than for many years either before or since.

Here the story of Joseph, the Chief Minister of Pharaoh, the First Citizen of the land of Egypt, comes to an end. Nothing more is said of Joseph's official duties or his position after the end of the famine, although he lived another sixty-six years. During that time he served under at least three Pharaohs – the Egyptian records of the period are confused and he

might well have seen the reigns of five successive Hyksos Pharaohs before he died. Apparently he remained an honoured and trusted highly placed Minister of State at least until Jacob's death seventeen years after his coming into Egypt, for the Egyptians themselves conferred great honours upon the funeral cortege of the deceased Jacob. But the Bible gives no details whatever of affairs in Egypt once it has achieved its purpose of relating the circumstances in which the Israel nation obtained its first lodgement in the land. After that, and until the end of the Book of Genesis, the narrative is concerned only with the relation of Joseph to his own father and his own brethren, not with his official position in the court of Pharaoh.

And now the long story is drawing near its close. The chronicler has but to tell of the death, first of Jacob and then, half a century later, his son Joseph.

(To be concluded)

AOH

The Kingdom to Be

*There's a grand new day a-dawning
And the morning is in sight,
For beyond the eastern mountains
Rise the golden shafts of light.
Soon the long, dark night of weeping
And of sorrow will be past;
For the storm clouds are receding
And the Day Star shines at last.
Turn aside from scenes of turmoil,
And your tear dimmed eyes will see.
'Tis the glory of the dawning
Of the Kingdom that shall be.*

*Long by sage and seer predicted,
Promised by the Son of God,
Is the Golden Age, the era
When He'll rule with righteous rod.
Laying Justice to the plummet,
Straight and true will be the line;
Even when the clouds are thickest—*

*Bright His promises do shine.
Now upon receding storm clouds
The great Bow of Hope we see;
'Tis the promise of the dawning
Of the Kingdom that shall be.*

*O my heart leaps up in rapture,
And my spirit thrills with hope,
For upon the wind-torn storm clouds
With which men could never cope
I can see the glorious presence
Of the Son of God—our King
And my soul has found sweet refuge
'Neath the shadow of His wing.
He has come, as He had promised,
And above the hills I see
The bright glory of the dawning
Of the Kingdom that shall be.*

*Never more will sin and evil
Rule the wayward hearts of men.
He has promised that oppression
Shall not come to life again.
He will bring in health and healing;
Pain and poverty will cease;
Every man will love his neighbour
And extend the reign of Peace,
And his knowledge shall be widespread
Over earth to distant sea,
And all men will share the glory
Of the Kingdom that shall be.*

Laura Kathleen Poole.

We can pray....for forgiveness for the past; for Christ's gift of eternal life both now and beyond the grave; and for a willingness to love and serve the Coming King with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. One day, every eye will see him, and every tongue confess that he is the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. In fact, God will 'bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ' (Eph.1.10)

T. & P. Higton I believe in Heaven on Earth

IN MY FATHER'S COURTS"

A note on Luke 2.49

How much did Jesus know and understand when he was 12 years old?

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2. 49).

The only incident of our Lord's boyhood that is recorded, is the occasion when at twelve years of age he accompanied his parents to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. The eight-day ceremony ended, Joseph and Mary with the rest of their party commenced the journey home to Nazareth and at the end of the first day found that Jesus was not with them. Turning back to the city, they searched unavailingly for three days until at length they found him in the outer court of the Temple questioning the 'Teachers of the Law' and showing such aptitude in his understanding that those venerable First Century theologians were "*astonished at his understanding and answers*". To his mother's anxious reproof and apparent intimation that they had been three days searching for him, the response came with evident innocent surprise. Why had she not realised that the one place where He was most likely to be was in the Temple court?

The AV rendering of "business" was supplied by the translators and is agreed now to be incorrect. The Greek reads literally "*do you not know that in the . . . of my Father I must be*". The missing word for which the translators supplied 'business' is an example of what is known as ellipsis, that is, the omission of a word of such a nature that the meaning in the sentence should be obvious. It is generally accepted now that the missing word is "court" and not "business"; that Jesus really referred to the Temple court as the one place in all Jerusalem where He might be expected to be found. "Why did you spend time searching in the city" He asked in effect, "Did you not realise that I must be in my Father's courts?"

There naturally arises from this incident the question as to what degree Jesus, as a child or as a youth, was able to remember anything of his pre-human existence. As a fully grown man, entered upon his mission and possessing the Holy Spirit in the sense in which the Spirit came upon him at Jordan, He was obviously and without doubt fully cognisant of the glory He had formerly shared with the Father (Jn.17.5). Did that knowledge or that recollection come to him as it were, instantaneously, at the moment when the Spirit came upon him when He stood before John in the water and the voice sounded from Heaven "*Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*" (Mk.1.11). Or was it a gradual revelation, slowly filling his mind as childhood gave way to youth?

There is very little data upon the basis of which a conclusion can be formed. Luke, in his record of this incident, says that Jesus "*increased in wisdom and age, and in favour with God and man*" (Luke 2.52). This implies progressive development in knowledge as the years passed, but that need mean no more than it would in the case of any intelligent lad. The expression "*favour with God*" could be a natural comment from onlookers who observed his piety and devotion to the things of God. On the other hand the expression in Matthew's account at his baptism "*the heavens were opened unto Him*" (Matt.3.6) might well be held to indicate a moment when a whole new world of spiritual perception broke in upon his mind. That in a flash He knew himself for who He was, the "*Word made flesh*" (Luke 1.14), and the entire memory of his past was imprinted upon his human consciousness.

The manner in which the Lord from heaven laid aside his otherworldly glory and appeared on earth in the likeness of men is an abiding mystery to men because we have no knowledge of the world from which He came and the nature of life as it exists there. There must be something of vital truth in Paul's words when he declares that our Lord "*emptied*" or 'divested' himself when He took human form (Phil.2.7). "*Kenosis*" means being completely empty or reduced to nothing, and this can only mean that every element of his glory pertaining to the celestial order of things was stripped away and left behind, that when He was born of Mary, He was in every physical respect, man, though sinless. But at the same time He was still and is for ever the Son of God.

Although we cannot comprehend the mystery of the Divine Life, the link that bound the Son to the Father must have remained unbroken throughout. Whether it was by positive knowledge or by some kind of subconscious instinct that He used the expression "*my Father*" at twelve years of age, it was a true prompting. It might be that from the time He was able to think rationally, on the human plane, Jesus knew that He was not the same as other boys were. He might have been conscious of a link with the Eternal that maybe, the purely physical brain, could not define. Yet for all that there might still have been no memory of the past and no power of visualising the scenes and happenings of the celestial world. We do not really know. What is quite certain is that after Jesus came out of the baptismal waters the power of the Divine broke through the physical barrier. From that time onward, Jesus possessed a full mental understanding of all those things which once He had known beyond the veil that separates the terrestrial from the celestial.

AOH

2011— YEAR OF THE BIBLE

So many versions!

2011 marks the 400th anniversary of the ‘King James’ or ‘Authorised’ version of the Bible. In earlier years ‘the Bible’ always meant this version, whether as a massive Family Bible with full page illustrations, maps, notes and a metal clasp— or as an insignificant black book with small print given to Sunday school children— or perhaps a tidy Bible for study with references and concordance, and perhaps the Scofield helps. Today Bibles come in assorted sizes and colours and in many versions. It is said that in the last century a new version of the New Testament came out every year or so. Not only are there many English versions, but also those in many other languages. The word of God is being spread by means of many different translations, and not only the one authorised by King James.

To translate means ‘to express the sense of words or writing in another language’. The early English versions were often the product of a chain of translations in an extreme case, from Hebrew into Greek and then into Latin, then to German and from German into English. Translation became more accurate when scholars began to translate direct from the Hebrew or Greek into English. But to say ‘English’ raises the question, what sort of English? Language changes over the years, and so does the environment in which we use it. One modern translator writes that scripture “invites us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible”. Fine. But in this man’s experience “nobody seemed to care much about the Bible.... Never read it.” He felt that he lived in two ‘language worlds’, the world of the Bible and the world of Today. He wanted to ‘translate’ the language of the Bible that God uses to create and save us, heal and bless us, judge and rule over us, into the common language of Today that we use to ‘gossip and tell stories, give directions and do business, sing songs and talk to our children’. The version that Peterson produced is a paraphrase, for reading, not for study, intended hopefully to bring people into conversation with God as He speaks through His word. What we read becomes what we live.

This is the sort of aim that inspires modern translators. J B Phillips aimed to get into the hearts and minds of the New Testament writers, with a kind of imaginative sympathy. He wanted “to understand as fully and deeply as possible what the New Testament writers had to say and then... to write it down in the language of the people of today”. Nicholas King, the Catholic translator, aimed “to allow the reader to experience what it was like to hear or read the words for the first time” in the days of the apostles Encouraging people to read the New Testament, he wanted us to experience “something of

the raw power that lies beneath the surface of the text". It is to be an "encounter with God who never ceases to address us, and with Jesus whom God sent and raised from the dead."

A translator aims to transmit the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew text accurately and clearly. The committee who produced the 'New Century Version' set out their aim clearly— they did not translate word by word but in sentences. They were aware that the translator is an interpreter, and in bridging the divide between the ancient and the modern cultures, has to beware of explaining with a bias of his own. They were aware of the differences which occur in the ancient copies of the original words which scholars in the past have discovered. Along with accuracy goes clarity, and they used words that ordinary people understand, changing 'cubits' into 'metres' and using modern place names. Doing this has its dangers, and it may be safer to stick closer to each individual word of the original. The New American Standard Bible, for example, "translates into English every translatable word in the original text". This method is different, but the aim is the same— that "every Bible reader can make life-changing discoveries". But word for word translations have implications for the close scholar of scripture. This version seeks to transmit "the authority of the inspired original text".

'Authority' has always been an issue around the translating of scripture. If the Bible is God's Word with control over people's lives, it has seemed important to those in authority, whether in church or state, to control who should read it, and to control what a version says. Translators need to be independent of this pressure. Tyndale (1526 NT) opposed the ignorant priests of his time and said he would "cause the boy who drives the plough to know more of the scriptures" than them. Eventually Tyndale was murdered at the stake because of the political effects of his translation work. He prayed that God would 'open the king of England's eyes' so that he would allow English people to have access to the scriptures. Tyndale's prayer was somewhat answered when Coverdale's English version of the complete Bible (1535) was granted official permission—"let it go abroad among my people". Matthew's Bible, 'Thomas Matthew' being a pseudonym for John Rogers in those dangerous times, was dedicated to the king (1537), but a new monarch, Queen Mary, made Rogers the first martyr of her reign. (Murder for religious reasons is not unheard of in our world today.) So Bible translators fled to Geneva, where the Geneva Bible (1560) was produced. This version, which was popular in some quarters in England for a hundred years, had as its frontispiece a picture of the people of Israel being rescued by God's power from the Pharaoh (king of Egypt).

But the Bishops' Bible (1568), promulgated in the Church of England, featured a picture of crowds shouting 'Long live the King!' Queen Elizabeth must have appreciated this attitude to royalty.

In 1603 King James came to the English throne thinking well of himself—as a theologian, a peacemaker in troubled times, but most of all as a king with a divine right—head of the nation, head of the church. The Hampton Court Conference which he convened he intended to establish his control in matters of religion, and he saw political advantage when it was proposed to prepare a new version of the Bible which he could cause to be read in churches. The proposers may have simply wanted a better, popular translation which all contending parties in the church could agree to use. Whatever the politics of it, the 54 scholars in 6 committees did a splendid job of work, and seven years later the Authorised Version was published. Subsequently, after its use had finally been imposed on the country at the Restoration, no other major version was published for another 200 years.

The second part of the nineteenth century saw the start of an outpouring of new translations. Some were produced by committees... Revised Version 1885... American Standard Bible 1901... Revised Standard Version 1952... Amplified Bible NT 1958... Good News... NIV... NRSV... and more. Others were the work of individuals—Darby, Rotherham, Ferrar Fenton, Weymouth, Moffatt, Phillips, Knox, Barclay, to name but a few. It is difficult today to point to one English version and say that this should be the only proper version of God's Word.

Does it seem that God has let things get out of control? A comment was made a hundred years ago about the AV, that it was 'a miracle of providence and history'. Also, that it was not faultless. Also, that though one should use the various critical helps for serious study, one could 'turn to the AV for communion with God'. Dare we say the same for all the many other Bible versions? They, for all their faults, are a miracle of providence. We can turn to them, in all their variety, as we seek God. He has marvellous and unexpected ways of calling and speaking to His children, whatever kings or scholars may say.

*Lord, thy word abideth
And our footsteps guideth;
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy receiveth.
O that we, discerning
Its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear thee,
Evermore be near thee.*

H.W.Baker (1821-77)

SILAS THE GOOD COMPANION

What we know of Paul's associate

Silas is known chiefly by the incident at Philippi during Paul's second missionary journey, when they were both involved in a riot which led to their incarceration in a prison cell where they sang praises to God and converted the jailer. Silas appears but briefly in the records but from what little is said something of a picture emerges.

He first comes into view as a 'chief man' among the brethren at Jerusalem ten years or so after the Crucifixion. The expression means a leader or overseer and it may therefore be taken that Silas was an elder of the church, and might well have been a believer during the Lord's life upon earth. Now he had been selected, in company with his fellow-elder Judas Barsabas, to accompany the emissaries of the Antioch church—Barnabas and Saul, to Antioch, bearing to that church from the Jerusalem brethren the letter which adjudicated on the questions which had been at issue between them. The whole story appears in Acts 15 and it is in that chapter that we have our first glimpse of Silas.

He was a man who had "*hazarded his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15.26); evidently he had remained in Jerusalem during the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen and been a pillar of strength to the newly-formed Church. Like James, the principal elder of that Church, he must have had a clear understanding of the relative places of Jew and Gentile in the Divine plan and the manner in which the Divine call was now being extended to the Gentiles, to have been chosen as one able to present the judgment of the Jerusalem Church on the matter. This points to a mature man of sound judgment and wide vision, fully consecrated to the Lord. The Apostle Paul's choice of him later on, to accompany him on his second missionary journey, is therefore quite understandable.

The Church at Antioch in Syria was less than ten years old. Originally founded by several missionaries including Barnabas of Cyprus, it had the distinction of being the first Gentile Church, in that both Jews and Gentiles constituted its membership. Antioch itself, more than three hundred miles from Jerusalem, was the third largest city in the world; only Rome and Alexandria exceeded it in size. Its main street, running straight from one side of the city to the other, was four and a half miles long; miles of other streets were paved with marble and adorned with temples, public buildings, market places, fountains and statues, all redolent of Greek civilisation. At night the streets were brilliantly lit and the business and pleasures of the inhabitants went on by night and day as in any modern city.

The Jewish colony there was one of the most prosperous in the ancient world. This was the city to which Paul was brought by Barnabas and in which he commenced his life's work; Silas in those early days was one of his co-labourers.

According to Acts 15 Silas and Judas, after delivering their letter to the brethren of Antioch, *"being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them"*. It would appear that Silas had marked ability as a preacher and the opportunity of ministry during his stay. All of this must have endeared him the more to these believers so that, when Judas returned to Jerusalem, Silas chose to stay at Antioch. (There is a little doubt about this, for Acts 15.34 *"Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still"* is only a late interpolation and does not appear in the older manuscripts; it is thought that it was inserted to account for the fact that soon afterwards he was chosen to accompany Paul). If he did thus stay it can only be because he saw a need for his services or opportunity for greater missionary outreach than was afforded by the community at Jerusalem. The indications are that, like Paul, his mind was reaching out toward the evangelising of the Gentile world and here at Antioch he found himself at the centre of missionary endeavour to that end. Paul, planning his second missionary journey not long afterwards, chose Silas to be his travelling companion and co-worker. So they departed from Antioch, *"being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God"* (Acts 15.41).

Silas was a Roman citizen, like Paul, and this rather unusual honour for a Jew did constitute a definite advantage when travelling in the Roman world. It is not known how he obtained this citizenship, but probably it was, again like Paul, by right of birth. Later on in life he seems to have adopted the Latin form of his name, Silvanus, by which he is mentioned in 1 Thess.1.1; 2 Cor.1.19 and 1 Pet. 5.12, for the same reason that Paul used his Latin name "Paulus" in preference to the Hebrew "Saul" when moving about in the Roman world.

So these two set off, visiting the Christian communities Paul and Barnabas had established a few years earlier in Syria and Cilicia, Phrygia and Galatia, provinces of Roman Asia, in what is now modern Syria and Western Turkey. At Lystra they encountered a young man, Timotheous (Timothy) *"well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium,"* (Acts 16.2). Inspired by his zeal for the work, Timothy accepted the invitation to join them and finally they came to Troas, on the Aegean Sea opposite Macedonia in Greece. Here they met Luke the physician and here, so far as can be discerned, began a friendship between physician and Apostle which was to last the rest of Paul's life and produce the two notable histories, the 'Gospel according to Luke' and 'The Acts of the Apostles', both of which

have been of such inestimable value to Christians in all times. Here, at Troas, Paul had the famous dream in which he saw a Macedonian man beseeching him to *"come over into Macedonia and help us"* (16.9) in consequence of which the four men took ship and crossed the sea to Greece, eventually finding themselves in the Macedonian capital city of Philippi. Silas must have been reflecting by now that the work of the Lord was taking him a long way from his home church of Jerusalem. It is highly probable though that he was conscious of an extreme satisfaction of heart that in a very real sense he was engaged in the duty laid upon all believers by the Lord at the time of His ascension, to be His witnesses *"to the uttermost parts of the earth"*.

Certain business men of Philippi (perhaps they would be better described by the more modern term 'racketeers') however, did not see the matter in this light. They were the owners of a slave-girl, the victim of demon obsession; the public exploitation of her frenzied utterances brought them in a very comfortable income. Paul, pitying the girl, exorcised the demon and restored her distraught mind to normal, thus destroying what had been a very profitable racket. The two evangelists found themselves arraigned before the magistrates, subjected to a merciless scourging, and thrown into the city jail with their feet made fast in the stocks. In what must have been a condition of acute physical pain they spent the night singing praises to God with such verve that the other prisoners in the jail could do naught else but listen. Then came the earthquake which disrupted the prison walls and set them free, the conversion and baptism of the jailer and the morning visit of the magistrates. They were now in a state of sheer panic upon learning that they had unwittingly scourged Roman citizens though not condemned, thus laying themselves open to the severest of penalties. Finally there was the meeting with the brethren of the newly-formed Philippi church in which they exhorted the believers to steadfast endurance, and so departed. It was a crucial and gruelling experience, but one that proved Silas a worthy companion of the stout-hearted Paul and a fitting representative of the One who said *"ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake, but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved"* (Matt. 24.9, 13).

Still the pilgrims plodded on, first to Thessalonica, where they founded the Thessalonian church but not without active opposition from the Jewish community, then to Berea, where they received a welcome and an acceptance of their message which warmed their hearts. Here were some true Bible students, who *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17.11). Paul went on to Athens; Luke had stayed behind at Philippi, but Silas and

Timothy remained for a while at Berea establishing the brethren in the faith. Then came a message from Paul; he had reached Corinth, the most dissolute city in Greece, and here, against all apparent likelihood, there was prospect of a great work for Christ. They were to come to him with all speed.

Silas laboured with Paul at Corinth for something like two years. It must have been a good training-ground. The Jews of the city were mainly hard-hearted and hostile and in the end there had to be an open rupture between Paul and the orthodox synagogue, although a substantial number of them, including Crispus the presiding minister, took their stand with Paul. The Gentile converts came from all walks of life but in the main from the dregs of society, for Corinth was a city where everything that was corrupt and depraved and immoral tended to congregate, so much so that in those days the expression "Corinthian" denoted the extreme degree of all that was foul and unclean and degenerate. And yet the Lord had said to Paul something that He said of no other place: "*I have much people in this city*" (Acts 18.10). Paul had just come from Athens, the pinnacle of the country's culture and civilisation, where he found but a poor response to his preaching. At Corinth, the haunt of every kind of wickedness known to man, he found "*much people*". The Epistles to the Corinthians show what struggles those believers had to rise out of their native environment to the purity and the holiness of the glory of God.

It was during these two years at Corinth that the two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written and despatched. In both of them Silas, under his Roman name-form Silvanus, joins his greetings with those of Paul and Timothy. He evidently remained with Paul during the whole of the latter's sojourn at Corinth.

Paul went from Corinth to Ephesus, taking with him Aquila and Priscilla. Timothy went too, but there is no mention of Silas or evidence that he accompanied Paul to Ephesus. Several years later, when Paul was again at Ephesus, he wrote the two Epistles to the Corinthians but there were no greetings from Silas as might be expected if he was there too, only one reference (2 Cor. 1.19) to the work of Silas at Corinth in the days of the founding of the church. It is clear he was not with Paul then. Neither did he accompany Paul on his third missionary journey as did Timothy and Luke, at least in part.

Did Silas stay to minister to the church at Corinth? It is not likely, or Paul when writing to the Corinthians later on would almost certainly have sent greetings to his old colleague. It is more probable that there came a call for his services either at the home Church at Antioch or his original one at Jerusalem. With his missionary experience among the Gentiles it is perhaps more to be expected that it was to Antioch he returned. It tends to be forgotten

that these missionary journeys of Paul and his colleagues were inspired and endorsed by the Antioch church, which was the leading centre for missionary outreach in those early days. The prominence of Paul's journeys in our minds is due to the fact that Luke the historian was his constant companion and fellow-traveller. Peter and others had equally full lives and the stories of their travels and achievements would have been just as absorbing and instructive had the Holy Spirit seen fit to appoint historians for them as was done for Paul.

A very slight clue to what might have been the later work of Silas is afforded by the First Epistle of Peter. There is ground for thinking that Peter himself spent some time with the Antioch church and served them as leader round about fifteen years after the Crucifixion. The first "bishop", or leading elder, of Antioch recorded by Eusebius is Evodius, who held office during the period just preceding the Jewish rebellion and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Evodius declares that he assumed office in direct succession from Peter. The next "bishop" was the famous Ignatius, who served for nearly forty years and was martyred at Rome in A.D. 107. Now if Silas did in fact return to Antioch from Corinth round about A.D.52 he might well have found Peter there and worked with him and earned that Apostle's regard. About a decade later we find Peter writing his First Epistle from Rome (the expression "*church that is at Babylon salutes you*" in 1 Pet. 5.13 is almost certainly his guarded reference to Rome at the time of Nero's persecution although some do contend that Peter was writing from Babylon on the Euphrates or even from the Roman garrison of the same name in Egypt) and sending it to the Christians of the Greek provinces, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, by the hand of Silas (1 Pet. 5.12).

At this time Silas was in Rome with Peter (and, incidentally, with John Mark). Paul, following his acquittal, had already left Rome; this would be during the several years' gap between his first and second trials when no one knows where he really went. Spain, Britain, Greece, Asia, all have been suggested. Luke also was absent from Rome. Silas therefore was commissioned to take Peter's Epistle to all the churches of Roman Asia, many of them the ones he and Paul had visited some twenty years earlier. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Silas did undertake at this time a kind of final missionary journey over these lands, perhaps, for all we know, finishing at Antioch and there spending the final years of his life. He would by then be at least in his late sixties and perhaps more.

So, at last, this valiant soldier of the Cross must have come to the end of the way, convinced, like the one who at the first introduced him to missionary service, that he had fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished the

course in glorious confidence that the crown of life was laid up for him "in that day". He was a young man when Jesus moved and talked in Judea and Galilee. He may have seen and heard Him and given his heart and life. In later years that gift was utilised to the full, as this erstwhile "chief man" of the church at Jerusalem travelled the length and breadth of the known world, even at last to Rome itself, fulfilling his mission as a herald of salvation.

AOH

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING GARMENT

Matt. 22. 1-14

Rejecting God's call?

This parable draws a contrast between the Jewish Age and the "present evil world" during which God is preparing his people for the work of world conversion. That is the purpose of the age to come, the "*new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3.13). There is personal instruction for the individual Christian, in the fate of the man who rejected the proffered wedding garment; there is also illumination on the outworking of the Divine purposes in this description of an invitation that was rejected by those to whom it was at first offered, so that the honour passed to others who did accept it.

A certain king negotiated the marriage of his son and invited guests to the marriage feast. That is the basis of the story and what follows shows that the son and his marriage are not the essential part of the parable's teaching; they serve merely to explain the reason of the feast being held. The story really begins when the king's servants went out to call the guests to the feast. They refused to come. Not only so, some of them ill-treated and even slew the servants, wherefore the king sent his army and destroyed their city.

Determined that his feast should be replete with guests he commissioned his servants to go out again, this time to the open streets, and gather in all who would come, without discrimination. So the banquet hall was filled. At this point, conforming to the customs of Jewry in the First Century, each guest was provided with a white festal garment so that inequalities of social status, as evidenced by distinctions of dress, would no longer be apparent and all the guests would mingle on a common level. One

man arrogantly refused to don the garment, whereupon he was expelled from the festivity, the warmth and light of the banqueting hall, and thrust into the "outer darkness" of the cold Syrian night.

That was the story, and its intent and meaning was so obvious to the Pharisees and priests in whose hearing it was spoken that they once again took counsel, how they might limit or destroy Jesus' influence (Matt.22.15).

Once it is realised that God is working to a plan, and that the successive ages of world history are epochs marked out in that plan, the interpretation of this parable is not difficult to find. The first call, to those invited guests who refused to come, was the call of God to his chosen people of old, Israel, selected at Sinai to be a "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Ex.19.6). After Israel's rejection of the call, a rejection made absolute at the First Advent, a second invitation went out, this time to those who by reason of their acceptance of the call became the Christian Church of this present Age. In this framework the first ten verses of the parable fall easily into place.

The king "*sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden . . . and they would not come . . . he sent forth other servants . . . but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise*" (22.3-5). In these few words is enshrined the story of Israel's unbelief and hardhearted response.

Called to be a covenant people, to declare God's glory to all men, recipients of Divine favour, they rejected all out of hand. The scathing words of the Lord to Isaiah when the youthful prophet received his commission of service were true of Israel all through their history. "*The heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted*" (Isa.6.10 LXX). The writer to the Hebrews shows that there is a "rest" awaiting the people of God, but they to whom it was first preached – Israel – entered not in because of unbelief (Heb.4.6).

The parable is exact even to the sending forth of the servants twice to call in the originally invited guests; one very plain feature of Old Testament history is the distinction drawn between Israel before the Babylonian Captivity and Israel afterwards. That seventy years in Babylon marked a climax of the first Israelite Age and a judgment involving the destruction not only of their city and Temple but of their whole national existence. Their restoration in the 6th century BC gave them a fresh start and a new succession of prophets, the 'other servants' of the parable, but the second set of servants fared no better than the first. The post-exilic prophets were given only the same scanty and half-hearted attention that was the lot of the pre-

exilic prophets, and most of them suffered or were put to death in much the same manner. *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"* was the scornful accusation of Stephen at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7.52). The parable of the vinedressers in the previous chapter (Matt.21.33-44) has the same succession of two consecutive sets of servants, in that case followed by the sending of the vineyard owner's son, who was killed by the wicked vinedressers. The application is the same in both cases and it is an obvious one.

So the *"king was. . . wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city"* (22.7). At this point the history of the parable passes into prophecy; these words came terribly true forty years after Jesus' death, when the Roman emperor Titus besieged, captured and destroyed Jerusalem, and scattered the nation to the four corners of the earth.

Simultaneously with the rejection of that people which, though "bidden, were not worthy" (v.8) the next section of the parable came into the picture with the going forth of the king's servants into the highways to call in all who would come. That invitation had its commencement in history when Peter baptised Cornelius, the Roman centurion who is the first recorded Gentile convert to the Divine call in Christ (Acts 10). Not many years afterwards the Apostle Paul, preaching at Athens, gave formal testimony to the fact that God was now calling upon all men everywhere, without distinction of nationality, to repent (Acts 17.30). *"Of a truth I perceive"* Peter had said to Cornelius *"that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10.34-35). Paul in his own ministry declares the same truth. Writing to the Ephesians, he says that the Gentiles *"are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God"* (Eph.2.19). So the servants went out *"witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1.8). For nearly two thousand years those servants have been going forth – and they go forth still.

So the wedding feast was furnished with guests. This is not a feast of the future, beyond the skies. This feast is here, on this earth and in this life. It has been proceeding ever since the first Christians entered into heart communion with their Lord and began to feast at his table. It is the feast which Israel could have enjoyed in their own day, and failed to enter because of unbelief. *"It remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief . . . there remains therefore a rest to the people of God . . . let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"* (Heb.4.6-11). That is the verdict of the writer to the Hebrews on the matter.

Here the dispensational aspect of the parable comes to an end. The remaining teaching is individual. Of the guests who have been gathered one is unworthy. *"When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment"* (22.11). This was the greatest insult a guest could offer a host; the man preferred to display his own finery rather than accept the covering provided by his host. When questioned about his offence, he had nothing to say. *"He was speechless."*

What is the wedding garment? Clearly the free gift of justification by faith, consequent upon our acceptance of Christ, by whose righteousness the gift comes. *"By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."* . . . *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rom.5.1-2.18). This is the common covering which renders us all alike acceptable to God despite our own imperfections and shortcomings, and hides the defects which are impure in God's holy sight. *"All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment"* cries Isaiah (64.6), but *"wash you, make you clean; put away the evils of your doings . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow"* (1.16-18).

We come to God in faith, accepting the finished sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, even though we may not with our limited human minds understand just how his death is efficacious for our redemption. But some there are who come, not having accepted Christ in that sense, trusting more in their own endeavours to maintain a standing before God. They maintain that man needs no personal Saviour to reconcile him to God, that a profession of good works and good intentions is all that is necessary. There are "both bad and good" (ch.22.10) gathered into the feast, but the king's inspection speedily discerns those who have spurned the wedding garment and trust rather in the "filthy rags" of their own righteousness; and He commands his servants to expel all such from the feast.

"Cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (ch.22. 13). This is the class of text that used to be related to the final destiny and punishment of the wicked and on that account this parable used to be considered a word picture of the separation of righteous and wicked, and the final doom of the latter. There is however no justification for identifying "outer darkness" with the ultimate penalty of sin. The expression occurs only three times in the New Testament, all of them in Matthew's Gospel. In none of these cases is the ultimate fate of incorrigible sinners in question. Jesus in Matt.8.11-12 said that many would come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and other men

of faith in the kingdom of God, whilst the "children of the kingdom" would be cast into outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Matt. 25. 30 the unprofitable servant who had wasted his talent suffered the same fate. In all three instances the idea is that of rejection and separation from the purpose of God in this present Age through unworthiness, unfitness. The ultimate fate of the individuals concerned is not in question and is left undecided. What is certain is that they are unfit for inclusion in the band of disciples which God is selecting from both Jew and Gentile during the present and past, that He might use them in his plans for world conversion in the next Age. Separated from the body of believers because of unworthiness now, they are cast into outer darkness in the sense that they have been excluded from the light and joy of that spirit-filled society which ultimately becomes the "light of the nations". Such will eventually realise what high privilege they have missed, hence the typically Eastern hyperbole "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*".

For it is very true, as Jesus said in conclusion of his parable "*Many are called, but few are choice*" (not "chosen" as in the AV). The Greek here is *eklektos*, which means the valuable or choice part of a thing. Jesus did not say that God would call many and then arbitrarily choose only a few of them. What He did say was that of all to whom the Divine call comes in this Age, in whose hearts the Word finds some lodgement, only a few, after the testing of a lifetime, prove worthy, worthwhile, choice. Because God is seeking characters of sterling worth to be his ministers in that day when He sets before mankind the final decision, the choice between good and evil, He is rigorous in excluding the unworthy. They are not necessarily lost. They revert to the mass of unsaved mankind from which they came, to listen afresh in a future day to the appeal of the Gospel, but they have lost for ever the opportunity of sharing with those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Rev.20.4) and who in the course of that reign will labour with their Lord in the conversion of all nations. That is the lesson of this Parable.

AOH

BETHEL

A place where God acted and men failed

We first read of the city of Bethel when Abraham entered the land of Canaan from Mesopotamia.. This town, sometimes known as Luz, has been identified as Tel Beitin according to A.R.Millard. It was a 'high place',

evidently a place of some note even before the days of Patriarchs, where ancient peoples had worshipped. Gen.12.8 notes that Abram's altar was built east of Bethel, and it was 19 km north of Salem (later to be called Jerusalem).

The place was called Luz when Jacob stopped the night there on his way to Haran and he calls the place 'the house of God' – Bethel. This was the occasion of the wonderful dream when he saw angels ascending and descending to and from the throne of God. (Gen.28.10) When Yahweh appeared to Jacob while he and his wives were still lodging on his father-in-law's farm, He identified himself as the 'God of Bethel'. (Gen.31.13)

When Jacob finally entered Canaan he did not go straight to Bethel but made a detour via Shechem. There he became entangled with Hamor's tribe until the violence of Simeon and Levi caused the whole patriarchal family to make a new start, leave and make tracks for Bethel. At Bethel, the family mourned the loss of Deborah who had been Rebekah's 'nurse', although the reader may be left wondering how that elderly lady became part of Jacob's household. (Gen. 35.8) Maybe, after Rebekah's death, Deborah was transferred to Esau's tribe in Edom and when the brothers were reunited at the ford across the Jabbok stream, this faithful servant of the family, once more changed her abode.

In the time of the Judges Bethel was a place where the people sought the Lord, as when dealing with the Benjamites (Jud.20,21). Evidently this was one of the temporary resting places of the ark. As that phase of Israel's history drew to a close Bethel was one of the stopping places on Samuel's circuit where he would help to settle disputes and sort out legal problems among the people of Israel. (1 Sam.7.16, 10.3)

Sadly, this place of wonderful memories became one of the two major shrines of the northern kingdom when Israel was split after Solomon's death. Jeroboam established his rival religion and set up idol worship there. It was in the territory of Benjamin near the border between Judah and Israel and possibly the rival king hoped to attract Israelites from both kingdoms to indulge in cultic practices of false worship and he met with some success.

There is a fascinating story in 1 Kings 13.1,2 concerning a 'man of God' and an old prophet. The man of God testified against the idolatry of Bethel and said that in days to come the altar would be broken down and the human ashes would be turned out. And so it came to pass some 100 years later during the reign of good king Josiah, when reform swept Judah, that the king gave orders for the high places to be broken down and

the idolatrous practices to be stopped. (2 Kings 23.15).

This was not the final end of Bethel. There is mention of the town in the days of the return from Babylon. (Neh.11.31) It was somewhat restored in the period of the Maccabees, but destroyed and then rebuilt during the Roman occupation. But the great days of the patriarchs had gone and no place or people can flout God's law and principles of worship and expect to survive. Bethel had been the scene where their ancestors had met God, but this was long ago. As for Jerusalem, it too, like Bethel, became a city of disobedience and false spiritual pride.

It was at Sychar, a few miles north of Bethel, that Jesus spoke the most wonderful sermon to a congregation of one. He spoke to a woman ... not a high born, wealthy lady of the pure stock of Israel but to a Samaritan woman who had a habit of changing husbands. She came from Shechem – of all places. No self respecting, highly spiritual Pharisee would have given her a second look. Jesus spoke of the Father who is looking for those who worship in spirit and reality, not in a special place or according to some wonderful formula. The Pharisees had the Law of Moses and the holy temple in which to worship but these things did not prevent destruction of Jerusalem or the whole Jewish nation. The lesson applies throughout history until today. No ancient altar, no historic loyalties, no sectarian umbrella or time honoured intellectual dogma can bring salvation. That comes to those who as children of God, seek to emulate the spirit of the Living God. Such have a personal and living experience of the Father.

*O God of Bethel by whose hand Thy people still are fed
Who through this weary pilgrimage hast all our fathers led.*

*Our vows, our prayers we now present before Thy throne of grace
God of our Fathers! Be the God of their succeeding race.*

*Such blessings from Thy gracious hand our humble prayers implore
And Thou shalt be our chosen God and portion evermore.*

- Philip Dodderidge

DN

Moving On

When it is necessary to leave one's church

It sometimes becomes necessary for the Christian to sever his connection with some particular organisation, fellowship group or church, which for a term, maybe of years, has nurtured his spiritual growth. The causes of the severance may be various, disagreement with doctrine or with conduct, or a realisation that the particular organisation can no longer afford that which alone can satisfy. The voice of the bridegroom is heard no more; the light of the candle is not seen. The parting causes pain, and mayhap not a little perplexity. It is sometimes accompanied with hard words from those who have been one's companions in the faith; or there may be much misunderstanding which cannot easily be put right.

None of these things should be taken as though some strange thing happened unto us. This is but another stage in that spiritual development which demands continuous progress until *"that which is perfect is come."* It may be that the Good Shepherd has called his child out of one environment because there is nothing more there for that child to learn; fresh experiences and surroundings are necessary to the onward progress of the soul which is seeking oneness with Christ. Like Abraham, let us go out, not knowing whither we go.

But guard against one thing – that unhealthy watching of the former communion with the object of disparaging whatever it is doing. You have left it – then leave it alone. To their own Master let them stand or fall. Their beliefs, their activities, their declarations, are of moment to you no longer. Your future is bound up with other interests – then go forward, seeing only the guiding cloud which is to lead you onward to the Promised Land, and let your references to your former fellowship be characterised by that courtesy and charity which is the hall-mark of the sincere Christian.

In proportion as we become imbued with the sympathetic, compassionate spirit of Jesus, to that same extent are we impelled to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with the sad-hearted.

STUDIES IN I JOHN

Part 19

Chapter 4, verses 4-6

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." (vs. 4).

There is a tone of quiet confidence in this verse that strikes a note of

triumph. We have overcome them! Even although our earthly pilgrimage is by no means ended and we still have trials and tribulation, struggles and conflict, to endure and survive, we have overcome "them", the antichrists of which John has just been speaking. Because we are of God, and God is in us, we have already overcome all antichrists. John is not speaking here of believers whose conflicts with the world, the flesh and the devil are now all over and who therefore have entered into the final "rest" beyond the veil. He is talking to pilgrim Christians, struggling Christians, suffering Christians, Christians who still experience only too vividly and painfully the weaknesses and stumblings of their fallen human nature, and who oft-times are tempted to wonder if after all they are going to make their calling and election sure. It seems so evident that we in the flesh have by no means yet overcome all the enemies of the spirit; we wonder if John really had us in mind when he penned these words. Or is it that those early Christians of the First Century were already in spiritual stature far above what we can ever hope to be in the flesh? Did they overcome more completely and positively than do we in this Twenty-first Century? Are these words of commendation applicable to them but not applicable to us? Not so. There is no essential difference between Christians of anyone century and any other. All are faced with much the same difficulties and temptations and all react to them in much the same way. Human nature does not change much through the ages, whether the individuals concerned be children of God or children of the Devil. We may be tolerably certain that John's commendation of his own brethren in his own day is more or less equally applicable to his brethren of this our day. We, like them, have overcome the antichrist simply and solely because God is in us and abides in us and dwells in us, and whilst that remains true there can be no other outcome. The issue is already decided. Of course if the time should come when it is no longer true that God dwells in us, if we have banished His gracious presence from our hearts, then it is no longer true that we have overcome. It is not of our own unaided strength that we have overcome; it is because of His indwelling Spirit. We supply the sincerity, the desire; He supplies the strength. We need both to make the overcoming a certainty. If we on our part withdraw our sincerity, our desire to be overcomers, then His strength of itself will no longer effect the victory. We can only be overcomers by means of His strength; we can only be overcomers by means of our own sincerity. We need both.

So it is that because "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", because God is greater than the Devil, we can be sure of our overcoming. God is visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15); He has called those whom He chooses. He has found a

leaning towards Him, and the call has been heeded and answered. He has accepted that person's consecration, and thenceforward overcoming is assured, if they continue in faith and hope. It cannot be repeated too often that once our Father has received us into covenant relationship with Himself, sealed us with the Holy Spirit of adoption and given us the honour of being called "sons of God", He will never be the One to let go first. He abides faithful. But on the other hand we ourselves can let go; and if we of our own volition turn away and walk no more with Him then He has no alternative but to let us go. But John is not now thinking of such possibilities as that. He is writing to men and women who have every intention of living up to their new found faith. He is writing to men and women many of whom were later on to become martyrs for the Cause and the Lord to which and to Whom they had pledged their lives. And he is telling them in advance that the Holy Spirit in them is a power greater by far than anything the antichrists of this world could call to their aid, and because of that fact these simple hearted believers could already be said to have "overcome".

"They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us,' he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (vs. 5-6).

"They are of the world!" The word used here for "world"-*"kosmos"*-means and includes everything that has to do with the ordered life of man on this planet. It covers the political, the ecclesiastical and the social institutions of man and the lands and buildings and temples and everything appertaining thereto. It covers the cities and the factories and the ships and everything that has to do with the life of men. It covers all that men have made and built on the face of the earth and it covers all that they have said and written and painted. It covers their philosophies and their laws and all that is built upon those philosophies and laws. The *kosmos* is the world which men have made, and it is in such a world that we live as aliens -*"in the world but not of the world"*. This is the world to which the antichrists belong, this the world of which and to which they speak, and this the world which gives them ear. It is a world in which God is not honoured and very largely is quite unknown. St. Paul gave it its true name when he called it *"this present evil world"*. Not until it has been swept away and replaced by a new order of things *"wherein dwelleth righteousness"* will men escape from the dominion of evil and the influence of antichrist.

All this has a terrifying implication to-day. The minds and hearts of men are increasingly turning to that full unity with this present *kosmos* that leaves God right out of the picture. There is no room for God in men's ideas

to-day. "*There is no God' is in all their thoughts*"; that expression is more true today than it was when it was coined by the Psalmist three thousand years ago. And the result is that the world is slipping more and more into the grasp of antichrist. In its most modern form—a form not yet fully revealed—that awful power is described symbolically in Revelation 13, where the whole world saving those who have the Father's name in their foreheads will be branded with the mark of the Antichrist—the Beast. In a day yet to come—it may be very near—we shall realise much more intensely than we do now how true it is that the antichrist is "of" the world and the world "heareth" it.

There is another side to the question. All are not deceived by antichrist. Some there are, hidden away in this *kosmos*, who are prepared to listen to the voice that is raised—for God. Says Rotherham in this verse 6 "*He that is getting to understand God hearkeneth unto us; whoso is not of God listeneth not unto us*". That indicates that in the world, in these dark times, there will be, first, those who are Christ's disciples, well-instructed in the truth and determined to defend it at all costs, and secondly, those who would hearken to the voice of God if it should be sounded. Even in the darkest hour of apostasy and the powers of evil there will be some desiring to know God who will listen if a voice is raised to speak for Him. That fact should be a powerful incentive to us. Daniel, giving heed to the angelic visitant's message concerning the latter days, heard him say "*The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many, yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, and by captivity, many days.*" (chap. 11. 32-34). That may well refer to a period earlier in history than our own yet its teaching may be true teaching for the days in which we live. We too may find opportunity to "instruct many" in this dark hour of the world's travail. We too may have to fight all the powers of darkness in order to snatch one brand from the burning. This verse in John's epistle ought at least to remind us that our mission still is to hold aloft the banner of Truth in the sight of all people and exhort them to repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ. We are teachers of all nations, and the more that we see the darkness settling down over the earth the more we should seek to stab its blackness with our torches. We cannot hope to dispel it utterly—that is reserved for the coming Millennial Day—but we can at least make pinpoints of fire in the gloom toward which the seekers can turn and make their way.

"*Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*" says John. Surely so! If we are thus able to stand up against the prevailing antichrist

worship and denounce it for what it is we have this witness that we have the spirit of truth. No other spirit or power can sustain us at the present time. The spirit of truth, which has already led us into all truth, will now be our strength and inspiring influence. Just as Elijah, in the strength of the heaven-sent food and drink, went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the Mount of God, so shall we go in the strength of the spirit's witness the full span of our testing time, and emerge at the end triumphant, because we have known God. So let us continue, determined to witness faithfully for our Lord and Master, in no manner dismayed by our opponents, knowing that of a surety "*greater is he that is for us than all that can be against us*".

‘OUR MASTER’ *A poem about discipleship*

‘Our Master’ is the title of a poem with 38 verses, written in the nineteenth century, parts of which have since been adopted as a hymn. ‘Our Master’ is also, and more importantly, the way we think of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose happy and tragic life on earth inspires us. His disciples, who called Him ‘Master’, had a problem when He left them, although He had been raised from the dead. He told them, “Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matt.28.20). He had promised them that the Holy Spirit would be with them to be their teacher and remind them of all the Father’s words that He had taught them. So they faced the paradox that their master was in some way lost to them; but in another way He would be with them. We have the same Master.

The writer of the poem considers what Jesus being our Master means, against a background of ordinary religious life as lived 1800 years A.D. We are aware that it is possible for Christian life to be merely nominal—perhaps we slip into this ourselves. Is our faith more than just words? Do we go off at a tangent about points that seem vital to us? Can we see something beyond disagreements and disputes? Have we lost the hope of His Coming? Does death seem like a blank end? Does our faith consist only of doctrines, stories and half-forgotten facts? Can the love for God which we profess lead us to hatred and fear of some sections of the human race? Are we too concerned about following the right procedures—how a service or a study should be conducted perhaps— or do we attend certain meetings because it is the expected thing?

The poem touches on all these negatives, but its thrust is that our Master is real to us, now. We share in some way the experience of the first disciples when He was with them. Peter experienced His loving rebuke, John His loving smile. Some were healed, some were comforted. They all looked to Him and trusted Him. In Galilee or on the Mount of Olives they shared their lives with Him. These experiences are not merely stories, or historical facts to be taken note of, but experiences to be replicated—'warm, sweet, tender, even yet' He is a present help. Our prayers continue through life, from childhood to death.

How this can be the case in our twenty-first century world is perhaps difficult to grasp. We are part of so vast a universe. How can Jesus be personal to us? We may look at modern analogies, but they fail. Prayer is more than using a heavenly call centre, for we believe that when we pray we are personally known and instantly heard. Guidance is more than being connected to a heavenly transmitter, to which we must be correctly tuned, and switched on. In Whittier's poem there is a different analogy— he pictures an ocean of love, freely flowing for ever, always full, always shared, never going away like the tide, but changelessly present. And he changes the metaphor, to a wind which blows away the mists of our ignorance, or a light that shines on the true path. Such love meets with a response from the love in us, gives us the joy of inward peace which is intermingled with the pain of becoming aware of our secret sins. It is love that 'clings like air' - as universal as the atmosphere around us.

The thoughts expressed in a poem are of course the writer's personal view, which we may test by scripture. The 38 verses (which we can view on the internet) are not all of equal appeal, and compilers who have made a selection for their hymnbook in the hymn 'Immortal love for ever full' have not always chosen the same few verses. With 38 to choose from, where do you stop? Interestingly, different hymnbooks have a different choice of final verse.

For example, one choice is the thought of disunited Christians finding their unity in obeying one Master:

*O Lord and Master of us all!
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine.* (Mission Praise)

Another choice is to confess the weakness of our understanding, and humbly look to our Master to show us what is the truth:

*We faintly hear, we dimly see,
In differing phrase we pray;
But, dim or clear, we own in Thee
The Light, the Truth, the Way!* (Bible Student Hymnal)

Or should the conclusion be to put aside differences, rules and complications, coming to Him in simple obedience?

Our Friend, our Brother and our Lord,

What may Thy service be?

Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,

But simply following Thee. (Fellowship Hymn Book)

Which would be your choice for a final verse?

Let us resolve to be faithful to our Master.

GC

20 Quiz Questions

Try these at a leisure moment, perhaps with friends or family

Who said?

1. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king the interpretation.
2. How much do you owe my master?
3. In him we live and move and have our being.
4. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory
5. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity

Who ran away?

6. Fled to Midian?
7. Fled to Egypt?
8. Fled in a basket—to Arabia?
9. Would fly to the place prepared for her in the desert?
10. Fled across the Jordan to Mahanaim?

Who heard?

11. A still small voice (gentle whisper)?
12. The sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden?
13. The sound of a great multitude in heaven shouting Hallelujah?
14. Jesus, saying, Neither do I condemn you?
15. A noise, a rattling sound?

Who was the mother of?

16. Samuel?
17. Jacob?
18. James and John?
19. Timothy?
20. Boaz?

Afterward

*"God's ways are equal: storm or calm,
Seasons of peril and of rest,
The hurting dart, the healing balm,
Are all apportioned as is best.
In judgments oft misunderstood,
In ways mysterious and obscure,
He brings from evil lasting good,
And makes the final gladness sure.
While Justice takes its course with strength,
Love bids our faith and hope increase:
He'll give the chastened world at length
His afterward of peace.*

*"When the dread forces of the gale
His sterner purposes perform,
And human skill can naught avail
Against the fury of the storm,
Let loving hearts trust in him still,
Through all the dark and devious way;
For who would thwart his blessed will,
Which leads through night to joyous day?
Be still beneath his tender care;
For He will make the tempest cease,
And bring from out the anguish here,
An afterward of peace.*

*"Look up, O Earth; no storm can last
Beyond the limits God hath set.
When its appointed work is past,
In joy thou shalt thy grief forget.
Where sorrow's ploughshare hath swept through,
Thy fairest flowers of life shall spring,
For God shall grant thee life anew,
And all thy wastes shall laugh and sing.
Hope thou in him: His plan for thee
Shall end in triumph and release.
Fear not, for thou shall surely see
His afterward of peace."*

Master, am I ready?

“I am ready.” That is what consecration means. It is doing what Christ commands. It is going where Christ sends you. It is not a mere devout sentiment- warmth of heart, good feeling, it is being good and doing good. Oh, be earnest. Be faithful. Be true. Be strong. Believe in Christ. Cleave to him. Do your work for him. Lift up your face toward your beloved Master’s face, and say to him, “Master, I am ready. I know not what thou hast for me to do— to work or to suffer, to live or to die— but I am ready. I am ready to speak for thee, to endure persecution for thee, to live for thee. I am ready; I am ready.”

J R Miller In Green Pastures

I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Methodist Covenant Service

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.... That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The Apostle Paul Philippians 3.7-11

Quiz answers

1. Daniel (Dan.2.36)
2. The unjust steward (Luke 16.5)
3. Paul (Acts 17.27)
4. The seraphim (Isaiah 6.3)
5. The Preacher (Ecclesiastes 1.2)
6. Moses (Exodus 2.15)
7. Joseph, Mary and Jesus (Matthew 2.14)
8. Saul (Acts 9.25, Galatians 1.17)
9. The woman who gave birth to a man child (Revelation 12.14)
10. King David (2 Samuel 17.22,24)
11. Elijah (1 Kings 19.12,13)
12. Adam and Eve (Genesis 3.8)
13. John (Revelation 19.1)
14. The woman taken in adultery (John 8.11)
15. Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37.7)
16. Hannah (1 Samuel 1.20)

How do you read?

How do we read? Devotionally — to accept and absorb God's truth, and live by it? Critically — to check and assess whether 'these things are true'? Or for inspiration — so as to move on to the next thing, heartened and empowered?

You might like to consider your reaction as you read the following. It was written at the end of the nineteenth century and was intended to be used each morning as an 'act of faith'.

I believe on the Name of the Son of God.

Therefore I am in Him, having redemption through his blood, and life by his Spirit.

And He is in me, and all fulness is in Him.

To Him I belong, by purchase, conquest, and self-surrender.

To me He belongs, for all my hourly need.

There is no cloud between my Lord and me.

There is no difficulty, inward or outward, which He is not ready to meet in me today.

The Lord is my Keeper. Amen.

H C G Moule

Gone from us: John Cawker (Rugby)
Beatrice Hemingway [nee Mortel] (Yorkshire)
Kathleen Whittaker [nee Quennell] (Warrington)
'Till the day break....'

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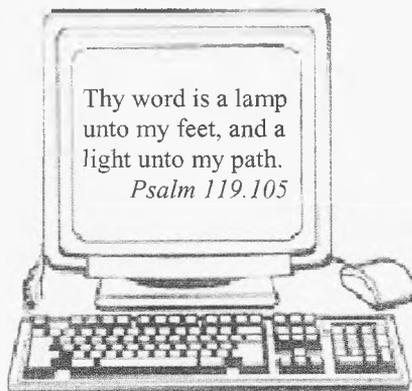
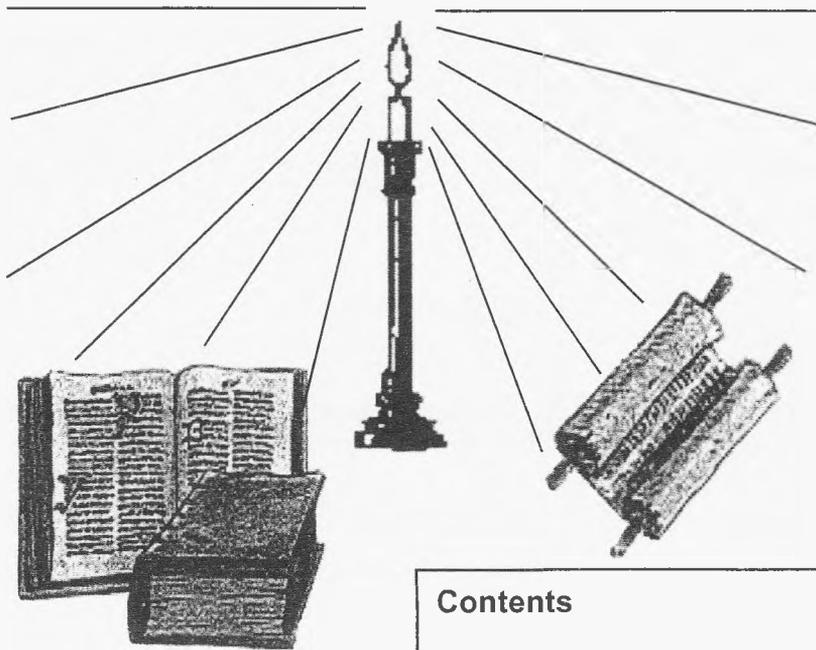
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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"AS HE HAD SAID" *Confidence in our Master*

There is something very helpful when the words of a friend prove true in emergency. When we can look back along the way and can say that events have come to pass just like he said, it deepens and establishes our confidence in our adviser. We feel we have found a friend indeed whose word can well be relied upon.

In these few words "as he had said" the disciples put on record both their amazement and their satisfaction that their Master's words had been so fully verified. Along with him they had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast – a feast which was to remain the most momentous of all their lives. When the day for removing all leaven from their dwellings had come, Jesus selected Peter and John to go on a little in advance, to make ready the place where He purposed to bring his little band, so that, in its quiet seclusion, He and they could commemorate that never-to-be-forgotten night in Egypt. *"Go and make ready for us the Passover, that we may eat,"* said Jesus to the chosen two. *"But where shall we go, Master – who shall we ask, about both the room and the food?"* *"Behold,"* said Jesus, *"when ye have entered into the city, there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house where into he goes. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house. 'Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the*

Passover with my disciples?' And he shall show you a large upper room furnished, there make ready."

To the disciples knowing no better this instruction may have seemed a most haphazard affair – a kind of indefinite goose-chase; a situation which might not happen. Only time would show whether or not they were undertaking a fruitless journey and quest. But they had learned to have some respect for Jesus' word, and obedient to the command the two selected disciples went on their quest. As they entered the city gates, one of the first objects to attract their attention was a man bearing on his head a pitcher of water. The first stage of their instructions was verified. Whether by coincidence or accident, here was a man bearing a pitcher of water as Jesus had said.

Gathering confidence from this first verification of their Master's words, they followed the pitcher-bearer into the house. Explaining this unusual procedure, they told the master of the house that the "*didaskalos*" (master) had sent them to enquire: "Where is the guest-chamber where I can eat the Passover with my disciples?" Instead of meeting with rebuke for their unbidden entry, the goodman immediately led them up a flight of stairs, and showed them a large upper room furnished with couches, tables, ewers, bowls, which needed only to be set into position for the number expected to gather there. Again the Master's prescient words were fully verified, for here was indeed a room placed at their disposal, without restriction or impediment, and there they were able to "*make ready*", as Jesus had instructed them. Evidently also, provision was made for their eating too, for "making ready" implied more than the arrangement of the room.

This sequence of connected events made a deep impression on their minds. Most certainly Peter felt the influence of the dovetailing stages of the event, sufficient to relate in later days the story to the Church as proof of his Master's Messiahship. From his lips, Luke, the writer of the narrative, obtained an unmistakable insight into the reaction on the hearts of Peter and John which the clear fulfilment of Jesus' words had produced. "*They went, and found even as He had said to them.*" "***Even as He had said!***" The words may be Luke's, but the amazement and satisfaction was Peter's.

Something similar had occurred a few days previously, when Jesus and his little band were wending their journey to Jerusalem. "*Go your way into the village over against you, in the which, as ye enter, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon no man ever yet sat, loose him and bring him. And if anyone ask you, 'Why do ye loose him?' thus shall ye say, 'The Lord hath need of him'.*" (Luke 19.29-31). The deputed messengers went over to the village, found the colt there, heard the very question, and were able to make

the actual reply given to them by their Master, ". . . *they that were sent, went away, and found even as He had said unto them*".

Just how Jesus came to possess this foreknowledge it is not our purpose to discuss. It is the fact that events did come to pass even as He said they would that is of vital interest to us, just as it was to those early disciples; his words came true. They were fulfilled accurately and precisely. Men's actions and responses occurred in distant places, in full accord with what He said. It was this amazing fact that came to be noted with great satisfaction by the observant little band.

But there was motive and purpose in all these little episodes of life. Jesus was teaching them to believe on him; to take him at his word. He had said many other arresting things to them relating to future days. He had promised them a share with himself in Kingdom honours, and that, if they proved faithful under trial and test, they should be with him when He returned to restore Israel to their place in God's purposes. He had spoken of things associated with the "regeneration", when the Son of Man should sit on the Throne of his Glory (Matt.19.28), and the blessedness of those who should be accounted worthy to attain that age and the resurrection from the dead. These were tremendous things for them to learn, and they were intended to incite the little band to faithfulness and constancy. But these things lay some way ahead along the stream of time, and, as there was a dark future to intervene, the faith and confidence of even the best of them would be tried to the extreme.

They had great need to learn the lesson of trust and confidence in his spoken word. It was necessary to inspire in them the same kind of confidence concerning the bigger things, which they were showing in the smaller things. "*Lord, increase our faith*" was once their plea, and in these little episodes their Master was making his response to their prayer. He wanted them to accept and believe his words as words of authority and truth; hence, by act and voice he sought to teach them the elements of true faith. Little by little, in this and that experience, he laboured to create in them a deepening certainty that he himself knew fully the truth of those great things of which He spoke.

It was no easy thing to bring forth in these simple hearts the depths of faith commensurate with those eventful days. The nation from which they sprang had failed to appreciate the visit of the Dayspring from on high, and the prevailing unbelief could have been a stumbling block for this chosen few. Events were at hand which would strain their slender faith to the utmost extent. Jesus had said that "*heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not pass away,*" yet within a few days they were to see him pass away, and heaven and earth and all his enemies remain.

To find things taking place "*even as He had said*", therefore, was

valuable tuition as they neared the fateful hour when their Master was to be slain. This tuition may be classed as of elementary type, but it was intended to be introductory to the upper standard stage. *"Go into the city, and ye shall find a room furnished"* may be instruction of a kindergarten kind, but the simple and immediate was intended to lead on to the distant and profound. The same instructive principle was employed when He foretold the "kindly host" and "the waiting ass" as when he spoke of the Kingdom day. *"Ye believe in God; believe also in me,"* He said, in that upper room, even after the shadow of death had fallen across the path. *"Believe in me . . . believe in me, for the works I have done, even if not for the words I have spoken,"* was frequently the theme of his utterances.

Shortly after listening to their Master's caring words the little group fell into deep perplexity and distress. Their Lord and Master **was** put to death. Their hopes were rudely dashed. *"We trusted that He should have redeemed Israel,"* was their downcast reply. *"We trusted!"* That slender trust lay crushed and withered, though not quite dead! But when He came triumphant from the tomb they called to mind what He had said before He died. They remembered that He had said He would rise again from the dead. And then, when they beheld him, even as He had said they would, the good seed He had sown in their simple hearts sprang forth to rich fruitage of confidence and trust. From that time forward they had no further doubts or immature faith. They believed him now and in their hearts that deep deposit of faith was laid which has grown into the unwavering confidence and trust of the Christian Church. From their inspired and inspiring words believers of many generations since, have learned to take the words of the Blessed One *"even as He said"*.

There are many ways today in which we may take these simple words and apply them to our own state. The blessed lips spoke many things of this our day; of things about to come to pass, of wars and sorrows and distress; of signs and tokens marking an old world's death, and telling of a new world's birth. His words may seem to us hard to place and difficult to understand, but He wants his waiting people to believe that all these words will surely be fulfilled, *"even as He had said"*. The important feature of such belief lies in the fact that when He comes again there would be but little true faith in the earth (Luke 18.8). Many hearts, once believing, will have grown cold and apathetic towards the Lord and towards the brethren everywhere (Matt.24.12). Disbelief, not faith, will characterise the day of his return, hence but few will be able to appreciate his words and expect them to be fulfilled even as He said. For some, the non-fulfilment of former expectations will prove a severe test to faith. The lengthening time of tarrying here, when all had expected long ago to

be gathered to the Lord may be a matter difficult to understand. Disappointment over the protracted delay may be a handicap to faith, but through it all, the Overseer of our lives desires us to take it all on trust. He wants us to believe that the sequence of "*Parousia*" events will come to pass even as He said, and that if our expectations have not been in full harmony with what He said, by re-attention to his words He wants us to understand that events will come to pass "*even as He had said*". Such re-scrutiny of his words will result, not in loss of faith, but in its increase. Come to pass they will, and no power on earth can stay their coming for a single day. Some great event, at an appropriate time, will bring the key to unlock the mystery, and as we pass through that event, we shall then stand in holy awe and reverent appreciation of all that He has said. We shall then learn that what He has said was sure and true.

Meantime, to keep our faith alive, and help us wait in patience for the consummation of our desires, our Lord said He would be with his people to the end of the Age. Some have lost faith in this providential presence of their Lord. The chilling influence of dispensational disappointment has dampened the warmth and enthusiasm of many hearts, and with this damping down has gone, in many cases, the quick responsiveness to the shepherd care of the Lord. The disturbed state of mind has led to a disturbed state of heart, which, in its turn, has led to a less reverential and worshipful attitude before the Lord. And thus the many tokens of the loving Shepherd's care are overlooked and become, in time, no longer expected or desired. In this refrigerated state of heart, the little tender endearments of the Lord produce no salutary effect, and joy and happy praise then very quickly decay.

If we had continued to believe that the Christian life would be "*just as He had said*" it would, this sad consequence could not have come about. We begin the sad decline by forgetting what He has said along pastoral lines, concentrating more upon what He said along dispensational lines. Then when our incorrectly drawn conclusions fail to correspond with the drift of dispensational events, the balance in our hearts is gone. Longing for his appearing has out-weighed the longing for his caress, and when the tokens of his "*Parousia*" are slow to materialise, the tokens of his shepherding become less apparent as well.

The ripened faith that can trust under darkening skies is not of mushroom growth. It does not grow, like Jonah's gourd, in a single night. It is a balanced thing – a deep assurance that can feed as well on the shepherd care as on the dispensational event. It accepts as fully all that He has said about the pastoral care as about the "*Parousia*" event. This balanced faith is the most desirable thing in the Christian heart, for when the dispensational fulfilment seems slow to come, it still can feed on the lush grass beside the

gently flowing waters of his Providence. The Shepherd still is near. It is better to walk in the dark with him, than to go alone in the light.

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WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN?

perhaps the most puzzling words Jesus spoke are those embodied in his cry when on the Cross and at the point of death "*My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (Matt.27.46; Mk 15.34). The idea that Jesus should think that He had been abandoned by the Father at his hour of severest trial seems difficult to accept. The celebrated writer H.G.Wells in the early 20th Century referred to it in one of his books as "that eternal enigma to the faithful" and an enigma it has proved to be. What inspired our Lord to utter the words and what was in his mind when He spoke them?

An explanation favoured by commentators is that since Jesus is said to have taken the sinner's place, and sinners by reason of their sin are separated from God, it was necessary that Jesus should, if only for a moment, feel that his Father had turned away from him. Otherwise, it is argued, he could not properly be said to have taken the sinner's place.

It is possible that this argument has not been properly thought out. In the first place it is unthinkable that the Father should actually abandon and turn away from the Son at the culminating point of his life, when from the human standpoint He stood in greatest need of assurance from above. Jesus claimed that He was always and at all times in complete communion and unity with the Father. This oneness with the Father that He declared did subsist. However we understand that oneness, it forbids the idea that there could ever be a rift within the eternal unity and mutual understanding between the Father and the Son. The wonderful words which Jesus spoke only a few hours previously and recorded in Jn.16, 17 can hardly be reconciled with the idea of a break, even a momentary break, in that relationship. "*I came forth from the Father, and go to the Father*"; "*I am not alone, because the Father is with me*"; "*Now, O Father glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*"; "*Now I am no more in the world, and I come to thee*"; "*Thou, Father art in me, and I in thee*". If, a few hours later, Jesus could be conceived as having renounced that confidence to the extent that He thought the Father had deserted him, that could only mean that for a

moment He himself had lost faith, that his death after all was in vain. Such a conclusion is inconceivable – many a Christian martyr in past ages has gone to his death amid excruciating torments without losing faith, and it is impossible for the servant to be greater than his Lord. Whatever the explanation of this on the surface puzzling phrase, it can hardly be that.

Reference back to the Old Testament suggests another and much more rational explanation, one which bears witness to the unswerving faith of Jesus and his sense of unity with the Father throughout his ordeal. These identical words appear in the first verse of Psalm 22.

Now Psalm 22 is a very significant Psalm. Written by David, probably at the time of his flight from Saul, it contains a number of allusions which were definitely not true of David himself. He was never without friends and helpers, contrary to verse 11. Verses 7-8, 17-18 cannot be applied to David, although reminiscent of the experiences of Christ. The conclusion reached by most scholars is that the Psalm is a fore-view of the experiences of Christ, brought to David by the Holy Spirit against the background of his own experiences. Several allusions in the New Testament bear this out. And the remarkable thing about the Psalm is that although it commences on a note of apparent despair at the seeming failure of God to deliver, it closes on the opposite note of certain triumph because God has in fact delivered. Verses 1-19 tell of the anguish of the sufferer, his imminent certain death at the hands of his enemies, with God apparently unheeding. But in verse 19 there is a change of tone, a plea to God to come to his help; *"Be not thou far from me, Lord, Haste thee to help me"* leading on to the cry of certainty in v.22 *"I will declare thy name unto my brethren"* and to verse 24 *"He hath not . . . hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard"*. So to the climactic end in v.31, where all is well, for the kingdom is the Lord's and all men declare his righteousness.

It is said that during the savage persecutions of the Jews by the Greeks and later by the Romans in the immediate centuries before Christ, it was the custom for Jewish warriors, hemmed in by their enemies and knowing they were doomed to certain death, to shout out, as they died, the opening words of this Psalm. It was an indication of their faith that they would rise again and stand before God triumphant at the Last Day. Utterance of the first verse was a symbol of the entire Psalm and implied faith that God had not abandoned them and that triumphant life was to follow apparently hopeless death. Hence the cry did not signify loss of faith or separation from God, it did on the contrary signify faith that all was well and God would certainly deliver.

Was this our Lord's motive when He uttered the same cry? Was it his last message to the bystanders and witnesses at the Cross, that although He was going into death He would surely rise again and all would be well? Did

his hearers interpret his words, not as a personal cry of entreaty to the Father, but a reminder to them of their own Psalm and what it meant?

There are several indications that this may well have been the case. Verse 24 of the Psalm contains the phrase, referring to the Father, "*neither hath He hid his face from him*". That expression alone invalidates the suggestion that the Father did for a space hide his face from the Son and so provoke the cry. And there are considerations arising from a critical examination of the New Testament text itself. The "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" of both Matthew's and Mark's versions are in the Aramaic language and it would seem that Jesus uttered the words in that tongue. (Aramaic was the language evolved from the fusion of Hebrew with other tongues which the Jews developed during the Babylonian captivity. After their return from Babylon Hebrew became a dead language so far as the ordinary people were concerned). Both Matthew and Mark say that "*some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias*" (Elijah). Native Jews standing by would not have made that mistake; they knew the Aramaic word for God. But there were also the Roman soldiers attendant on the Crucifixion, and these, drafted in from other parts of the Empire to serve a spell of duty in Judea, would be familiar only with the common Greek of the day and their own Latin tongue. It seems evident that these are the "some of them that stood by" who offered Jesus the "sponge filled with vinegar" (old wine) and this would certainly have been one of the soldiers who alone had the authority to approach the Cross.

John was the only one of the twelve disciples to have been at the Cross. The others had gone into hiding. John does not record the saying, although he does record the later word "*I thirst*". At least three of the women were there, perhaps more of them. And Mark the son of one of the other Marys, a teenager at the time, was almost certainly there, just as he was probably the "*young man in a linen garment*" present in Gethsemane at the time of Jesus' arrest. Matthew probably got his account from Mark. But there is a significant difference in their respective accounts. Whereas Matthew gives in his translation the literal Greek "why hast thou forsaken me" Mark gives the Greek for "to what hast thou forsaken" (or abandoned) "me". This is the Targum rendering of Psalm 22.1. (The Targum was the Aramaic version of the Old Testament in general use at the time and the one normally read in the synagogues on the Sabbath day.) Mark, most likely unable to read Hebrew, would know the Psalm only in its Aramaic version. Although he heard and recorded the Hebrew word "*lama*" actually used by Jesus, his familiarity with the Targum of Psa. 22 led him to use the Greek equivalent *eis ti* (to what) instead of *hinati* (why) as used by Matthew. The logical inference is that both Matthew and Mark recognised that Jesus was

actually quoting the 22nd Psalm, the one from his knowledge of the original Hebrew, and the other from his familiarity with the Targum.

If this supports the conclusion that both these writers understood the cry to be, not a personal appeal to the Father by Jesus, but Israel's traditional cry of faith and triumph in the face of inevitable death, there is good ground for concluding that Jesus entertained no thought that the Father had forsaken him. He was, on the contrary, telling the observers at the Cross, and all who heard or read of the story afterwards, that in his now certain and imminent death he had in fact triumphed over his enemies and would certainly rise again from the dead "*in the power of an endless life*". As with those valiant warriors of Israel in times of old, that cry and those words betokened faith that the moment of death was the moment of triumph.

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MAKROTHUMIA

Makrothumia is a Greek word often translated in the Authorised Version as 'longsuffering' or 'patient'. In English longsuffering which is tending to fall out of use, but the dictionary definition is 'bearing problems or annoying behaviour patiently'. For patience there is another Greek word, *hupomene*, which is 'the quality which does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial' (Vine) - it can mean remaining under the trial, whatever it might be, possibly hoping for better things. *Makrothumia*, on the other hand, especially relates to reactions to people. It comes from *makran*— far off— and *thumos*— fierceness or indignation. It is the opposite of having a 'short fuse', for the indignant reaction is delayed for a long time, perhaps even permanently. *Makrothumia* is the noun, *makrothumeo* is the verb— to have long patience—, *makrothumos* is the adverb— leniently, patiently.

The word in scripture is applied to people in various situations, for example Hebrews 6.15. Abraham, waiting to receive what has been promised, has good grounds for confidence, and is an example of trusting what God has said, neither blowing up in exasperation nor jettisoning his faith. James (5.7-10) urges us to patience as we await the long delayed coming of the Lord. He takes the example of the farmer who has to wait for the harvest, or of the Old Testament prophets who had to endure evil being done to them while they were speaking in God's name. In this context,

Barclay describes *makrothumia* as the 'steadfast spirit that will never give in'. 'The church must have this *makrothumia* which can endure delay and bear suffering, and never give in.'

Makrothumia appears in several lists of Christian qualities. It is one of the ways in which the Christian spirit is shown. It is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22) It is required of those who are to be worthy of their calling, along with humility and gentleness and love (Ephesians 4.2). It is something that has to be 'put on' (in the sense of wearing clothing you prefer, not of pretending to be something you are not), along with compassion, kindness, humility and gentleness, by those whom God has chosen (Colossians 3.12). It is a characteristic of love (1 Corinthians 13.4). Paul listed it as part of the example he was setting Timothy and others like him (2 Timothy 3.10), and it was a quality formed in him by his sufferings as a messenger of the gospel (2 Corinthians 6.6). He urged showing *makrothumia* towards all as a duty, along with warning the unruly, encouraging the fainthearted and helping the weak (1 Thessalonians 5.14).

And because *makrothumia* is an aspect of love and a fruit of God's Spirit, we are not surprised to notice that it is a divine attribute. Jesus showed *makrothumia* to Paul. Having come into the world to save sinners, He demonstrated his complete *makrothumia* in showing mercy to Paul the persecutor, as an example for anyone who would believe in Him for eternal life (1 Timothy 1.16). Out of the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and *makrothumia* He is leading us to repentance (Romans 2.4). He could, were it not for *makrothumia*, choose like a potter to smash any piece that was faulty (Romans 9.22). Just as his *makrothumia* allowed time for Noah to build his ark (1 Peter 3.20), so his delay in ending the present evil order gives the opportunity for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3.9).

'If God had been a man he would long ago have taken his hand and... wiped out the world, but in his *makrothumia* he bears with the sins, the follies and the disobedience of men. The great obligation which rests upon the Christian is this— he must be as patient with his fellow men as God has been with him.' (Barclay)

References:

Vine— Expository Dictionary *Barclay— New Testament Words*

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O the bliss of the man who longs for total righteousness as a starving man longs for food and a man perishing of thirst longs for water, for that man will be truly satisfied...(Paraphrase of Matthew 5.8, Barclay)

THE LIFTING UP OF JESUS

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."
(John 12. 32).

God is a God of order. He works out his plan in a methodical way, finishing one stage before commencing another. This is seen in that famous passage in Acts, where James says that the first thing God did after the Ransom had been provided, was to visit the Gentiles to take out a people for his Name. Just before his death Jesus said: *"I have finished the work thou gavest me to do"*. On the cross He said, *"It is finished"*. We have no difficulty in recognising that He meant one stage of the Father's Plan committed to him had been successfully brought to a finish, namely, the giving of himself for sin. This would have availed the world little if the Plan of God had stopped at that point. There are further stages to be worked out. The benefit of that redeeming sacrifice must be proclaimed by all men far and near. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"* (Rom. 10.13-14; Acts 4.12). If belief in Jesus is the only way to life, then it clearly follows that everyone, living and dead, must have an opportunity to know the way, else it cannot truly be said that Jesus gave his life a ransom for all.

The New Testament contains two statements of our Lord which are difficult to understand until one recognises the fact that one feature of God's plan must be worked out before another commences. Both are found in John's Gospel, and both of them speak of the lifting up of Jesus. The first is the well-known one when, early in his ministry, Jesus talked with Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler who went to him by night because he was afraid of others knowing of his interest in Jesus. To him Jesus said, referring to himself: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"* (John 3.14). The other passage, spoken to his disciples, occurs in the words of Jesus at the close of his ministry. *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"* (John 12. 32).

The first text indicates that God has provided a means of salvation, but that the onus of obtaining the same is put upon the one who sees himself smitten by sin and under sentence of death. He must do something himself if he is to obtain relief. The other text indicates something different, for it tells of an active work by Jesus which will result in his victory over all the forces which have hindered, and would hinder men from seeing him, and then obtaining those blessings which God has set in him.

These two words of Jesus illustrate the two phases of the programme which God purposed when He sent his Son into the world to be its Saviour.

The two phases are distinct in character. Clearly the first passage tells of an opportunity provided to accept a favour set forth for those who seek it. This is voluntary in character. The second just as clearly indicates that a work is to be done, not primarily by man himself, but which begins outside man and apart from him, a work which shall draw him to Christ, that at least he may know and understand that He is God's appointed Saviour. Whereas the former phase is voluntary in character, this one is in a measure compulsory.

Jesus told Nicodemus why He came into the world. *"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."* For thousands of years the world had been under the rule of sin and death; millions had perished in that they had died without any hope of resurrection, and men would continue thus to perish unless God did something to stop the reign of sin. The illustration Jesus gave to Nicodemus is a graphic one. Nicodemus knew the story well, how in the wilderness shortly before they reached Canaan, their fathers were attacked by fiery serpents whose bite resulted in burning inflammation and speedy death. That difficult people, then nearly at the borders of the Promised Land, had complained of God's provision for them, saying they would rather be in Egypt. The fact was that many of that multitude, who had been sentenced to wandering in the wilderness some thirty-nine years before, had not yet died. Now God brought them into tests which demonstrated that they were still of the same disobedient and unbelieving spirit which they had manifested a generation earlier, and which brought upon them that sentence of death in the wilderness. God had said: *"As truly as I live, your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness . . . doubtless ye shall not come into the land concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb and Joshua"*.

The fiery serpents were means used to bring retribution, but, as the people cried out and expressed repentance, God, on the plea of Moses, instructed him to make a brazen serpent and set it on a pole. In the sunshine it would bear the appearance of fire, and He said that whoever looked on the serpent should live. As they looked upon it they were reminded of their sin. It was only by an acknowledgement of their sin that they could gain freedom from the curse which had come upon them. They looked and lived. *"When he beheld the serpent of brass he lived"* (Num.21.9). It is interesting to note that the word "beheld" has a sense of, not a casual glance, but a purposeful set gaze, a look of expectancy, a look of faith.

It was to this incident that Jesus referred when He said to Nicodemus: *"Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"*. There could be no special point in his referring to the lifting up of the serpent if He meant only the fact of his being put to death on a cross; evidently it was his intention to show that in his lifting up He, too, should be as one bearing sin. It is a graphic picture, but it tells as perhaps no other illustration could, not only of the fact of the ransom price being provided, but that the poison of sin can be eradicated, and the sufferer completely healed. God has provided not only for the forgiveness of the sinner, but also for the breaking of its power in the lives of those who accept the salvation He has offered in his Son. *"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son."* This text tells of the cost to God of his provision for human salvation. The Bible explains quite simply that the love of God was so great for mankind that He gave his Son, for its salvation. The sacrifice was made greater by reason of the shameful death which was necessary, and the cost to the Son was great too, for He gave, that we through his poverty might be rich. He had been loyal to his task and faithful and trustful throughout. *"I do always those things which please him"* was his outspoken conviction. Why, then, should He go out of this life with such a stigma upon him? Branded as a sinner, would it not appear that Satan had won the contest and secured a notable triumph in his death? He had come to show how sin and death could be conquered. Should He, the would-be conqueror, succumb as a victim just as millions of the human race had done before him? So it was to be. Jesus, in the manner of his death, was to be made to appear as if He were a sinner.

After his resurrection the Apostles proclaimed that God had made him a Prince and a Saviour. Since then thousands have heard something of his righteousness, that the power of sin would be broken, and all the forces of evil, which had kept men down, would be restrained. So they would have liberty to serve God and find eternal life. He knew, too, that He would be chosen of the Father to reveal unto men the beauty and grace of his character. There was this difference, that whereas now the spiritual perception of most men was so dulled by the poison of sin that understanding was impossible; then the blinded eyes should see and faculties so long blunted by human frailty would be awakened to full power. Not only a handful of Gentiles would be enquiring for him, but the whole Gentile world would be drawn to him. He would teach them of the love of God for all men, for all the power of the Kingdom would be in his hands. Meanwhile, if it was his Father's will, Jesus was content to declare his message to the few. Now was the opportunity for him who hated his life in this world to secure the life eternal: *"If any man serve me let him follow me, and where I am there shall my servant be"*. While it was his Father's good pleasure that the door of

opportunity should remain open, He must wait until his day should come to be lifted up in power and glory and establish his Kingdom.

Thus it is seen that the two texts considered tell of two ages during which the Gospel is preached. The first occupies the time between the two Advents, when God is drawing a people to himself by the message of his love, and when He causes those who come to him to behold his beloved Son crucified, and tells them of the resurrection and the power of salvation which now is to be realised in him. The second is the time of Christ's reign, spoken of as the Millennial reign, because the Bible says it will last a thousand years. It is when the Kingdom of Jesus is fully established that the turmoil of the present trouble will cease, and there will be a drawing to righteousness which will prove to be the world's real hope and its salvation.

STUDIES IN 1 JOHN

Part 20

Chapter 4, verses 7-8

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love" (vv 7-8).

That last phrase, 'God is love', is rightly esteemed one of the most significant words in the Scriptures. It is certainly one of the best known. It has been the inspiration for countless sermons and it has formed the subject of scornful comment by agnostics and atheists. It has been appealed to by those who would point men to a future hope in consolation for present distress and it has been quoted bitterly by those who cannot reconcile it with their present distress. Yet it has lived on; no man has been able to destroy the simple beauty of those three simple words nor tear them down from the lofty position they occupy in the world. The proclamation that God is love will always be proclaimed while Christianity itself is proclaimed – and that will be forever.

There is an almost equally important word enshrined in this text: *"Love is of God"*. Important, because that statement connects directly with the Divine purpose in creation. If God is love, and love is of God, then it follows that all His creation is inspired and directed by love. It follows that all His creatures will have their lives guided and controlled by love and that in their lives they manifest love. If God is love, then the controlling principle of the universe is love, and whatever exists in antagonism to love

is out of harmony with the spirit of the Universe and will therefore pass away. We are now getting near to some connection between love and righteousness; and between 'lovelessness' and sin, and that is just what John wants for us. He is striving to show that unless we do love in sincerity and truth we are not of God, and that in turn means that we are yet in our sins.

We can well afford to linger for a while over this word "love is of God". It forges a link between the Divine and ourselves. The Scriptures exhort us to be fashioned into copy-likenesses of "God's dear Son". Since He is like His Father, then we, if made "*like Him*", will be like the Father also. That takes us back in thought to the time when God said "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*". Was that expressed intention completely carried out in Eden? Surely not! Man as then made, might well have been in the image and likeness of God in many respects but certainly not in all.

He was not like God in His steadfast hatred of sin; not in His unswerving insistence on righteousness. He was not like God in that far-seeing wisdom, inflexible justice, all-embracing love, that constitute three of the four attributes ascribed to God. And in the fourth of the Divine attributes, that of power, weak, puny man certainly has not yet proved himself to be anywhere near the likeness of God. We have to conclude that God spoke of His ultimate purpose with man and that He intends man to be fully in His own image and likeness at the end of the Millennial Age. What He did in Eden was only the beginning.

Nevertheless what was done in Eden certainly did manifest the fact that "love is of God". Divine love prompted the creation of man and all that went with that creation. It was Mark Twain who once observed that the proof to him that God has a sense of humour is the fact that He created ducks – otherwise He would not have devised such comical creatures. In much the same way we might observe, and perhaps with greater propriety, that the proof to us that our God is a God of love is the fact that He created man. The love of God is revealed in all that He has done for man since the beginning of creation, and in all that He has promised yet to do.

The very existence of this earth with all its possibilities, is evidence of the truth of John's words "Love is of God". The fact that we have brains capable of thinking to the extent that we can think is but further evidence. But all of these considerations pale into insignificance beside the supreme example of Divine love, the one that is always in our minds and forms the background if not the subject of every Christian sermon and discourse. "*God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (John 3.16). That is without doubt the most well-known verse in the Bible and by far the most often quoted. John recalls those words here at this point in his own

fashion. *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (vv.9-10). Is not John teaching true doctrine here when he turns away as it were from the evidences of Divine love in creation and all that has been given to man, and points to the coming of Jesus as *the* evidence of God's love, before all else. Obviously it must be so, for all those other gifts of God to man, the tokens of His love for man, can be enjoyed only if man is righteous, fully in the image and likeness of God. Only by the giving of Jesus His only begotten Son to be our redeemer can any of those other gifts be enjoyed in perpetuity. Without this supreme gift, all the other manifestations of Divine love will have been of no ultimate avail. That shows us one thing very clearly. It shows us that God could never be satisfied with an intelligent human creation the individuals of which were to live only for a limited period and then pass into death. He could not be satisfied with the praise and worship of dying creatures. He has planned for men an endless life, a life in which praise and worship will never come to an end; that fact, more than any other consideration, ought to assure us that God will never relax His efforts to bring each of His wandering children back to Himself until it is abundantly evident that the case is hopeless.

It is no empty phrase that the Apostle uses when he declares that God *"will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"*.(1 Tim.2. 4). We sometimes whittle down the force of that Scripture by suggesting it means only that God will 'save' all men from death in Adam and give them the Millennial opportunity of reformation. It does mean that, but it means much more. It is God's will that all men should be saved eternally and enter into the full realisation of Divine truth that will come to the eternally redeemed. It is possible for a man to defy God's will in this respect. He made men so able to defy Him. In consequence some may refuse thus to be saved. Revelation 20. 9, if taken as a prophetic fore-view of a coming historical event, indicates that there will be some such. But it still remains true that it is *"not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish"* (Matt.18.14).

In these few verses all the emphasis is on Divine love and the achievement of that love. The love of God prompted the sending of His Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins, that we might live through Him. Just how is it that this manifestation of love achieves the great work of reconciling mankind to God? It seems rather remarkable that we in our discussions on the subject of the Atonement put the emphasis on the word

"blood" whereas the Scriptures do lay considerable emphasis on the word "love". Is it after all possible that there is a mystic, a spiritual and yet for all that – perhaps because of that – an overwhelming power in love that, in a fashion we do not yet understand, is a compelling force, leading men to righteousness? We tend to think of the influence of love upon another life as consisting merely in sentiment, force of example, appeal to the other's better nature, and so on. What if, after all, the declaration "God IS Love", "Love is of God" has a reality of which we have never yet dreamed, and that every exhibition or manifestation of selfless love does let loose in the world a force which influences men, even without their knowledge, more powerfully than any power of evil? If that be so, we can, maybe, see more clearly than before, why the Dark Ages theology of the Atonement, that Satan demanded the life of Jesus as a ransom for condemned man, has been abandoned in this our day. The Love of God required the death of Jesus because only by that death could the Love of the Father and of the Son become a mighty reformatory force in the hearts of mankind.

(to be continued)

AOH

A LIVING FAITH

Selected readings for our testing times

It is to Paul chiefly that we owe the thought (which is also found in John's first letter) that Christ Himself lives in men's hearts. No one could read with an open mind the Letters of the New Testament without seeing that people are being, sometimes suddenly and sometimes step by step, transformed. The reason for this, according to Paul, is an open secret. In the past, he says in effect, men have striven to please an external God; now God's great secret is plain. With the coming of the Good News, indeed it is part of the Good News, God is prepared to live within the personalities of those who use their faculty of faith towards Him. In Paul's writings we do not read of Jesus Christ as an Example Who lived and died some years before and Who must be followed and imitated. On the contrary, Paul's letters are ablaze with the idea that, if men will believe it, Christ is alive and powerful, ready to enter and transform the lives of even the most unlikely. This happens, he says, "by faith". But how rarely in present-day Christianity do we meet such a faith! Many Christians do not appear to have grasped this, one of the essentials of the Gospel. It is true that they believe in God, they pray to God,

and they try to follow the example of Christ. But, as far as one can tell, they have not begun to realise that Christ could be living and active at the very centre of their own personalities. And, of course, so long as they do not believe it, it is not true for them. For just as in the days of Christ's human life the divine power was inhibited or limited by the absence of faith, so His activity within the personality is limited where a man does not in his heart of hearts believe in it. If we modern Christians are steadfastly refusing to believe in this inward miracle, it is not surprising that our Christian life becomes a dreary drudge.

[J B Phillips New Testament Christianity]

Within the 'body of Christ' nothing intervenes between the Head and the limb. Each and all, feet, fingers, all, are things that 'hold the Head', each having its own point of direct contact with the Head. The image of the body makes it clear and vivid that I live by the Lord Christ, and for Him, and in deep connexion with all His people. I live by Him directly, spirit with spirit, by the mutual contact of my faith and Him.

So one all-important aspect of Christian growth is growth inward; not in the sense of concentrating on oneself, but as growth out of self into the Lord, the ever more deeply, vividly and continuously realised centre of the plan of life, and source of 'all-sufficiency in all things'. We may be permitted to grow outward, to extensions of activity or influence or success in the work of the Lord. But whether we are led to this, or to be laid aside, narrowed and shrivelled into what seems nothing, let us see to it that we are 'growing into Him'.

[Condensed from H C G Moule Thoughts on Union with Christ]

I ask the Father in his great glory to give you the power to be strong inwardly through his Spirit. I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your lives will be strong in love and be built on love. And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love— how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God. With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, for ever and ever. Amen.

[Ephesians 3.16-21 New Century Version]

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

The end of the story

The Last of the Patriarchs - 4

Established in Egypt, Jacob and his family passed into a state of quietude and prosperity they had never before known. Settled in the land of Goshen in the north eastern corner of Egypt, the threat of famine passed. There was plenty of fertile land for their flocks and herds, they were able to settle in comfort and enjoy their prosperity. From this time the nation that sprang from Jacob's twelve sons began to increase rapidly. It is very probable that their numbers were added to by other Semitic immigrants from Canaan. There would also be some intermarrying with the families of the servants and workers who constituted the households of the eleven sons. In some manner it is certain that the children of Joseph, the twelfth son, became identified with and absorbed into the body of the newly created nation. How this latter was brought about is not told and is not clear. Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, must have shared their father's exalted position in the land as Egypt's Chief Minister. Since it is said that Joseph saw his descendants to the fourth generation it is probable that until his death at least those two sons had more to do with Egyptian official circles than with the Semitic colony in Goshen. Probably after Joseph's death, and particularly after the advent of the new *"king over Egypt who knew not Joseph"*, and the beginning of Israel's disfavour and oppression, the children of Ephraim and Manasseh became completely identified with their Israelite brethren. That could have been as much as seventy years after Jacob's death.

Jacob himself did not enjoy the new regime in Egypt very long. He had suffered many vicissitudes and sorrows in the course of a long life and the rigours of the famine and the final journey into Egypt must have taken their toll. He felt that the end was near and he sent for his son Joseph to secure a promise that after his death his body would not be buried in Egypt. It would be taken back to Canaan and laid to rest beside his father and mother Isaac and Rebecca, his grandfather and grandmother Abraham and Sarah, and his own wife Leah, in the family tomb at Machpelah. Joseph gave the required promise and the old man was content.

Jacob was seventeen years in Egypt in all. It could not have been long after that promise, therefore, that signs of the approaching end became manifest and Joseph realised that he must do something to ensure the acceptance of his own two sons into the family of Israel before it was too late. Born in Egypt, of the daughter of the High Priest of another religion, there could understandably be some prejudice against their acceptance.

Chapter 48 tells how Joseph took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh,

lads of about eighteen or twenty years of age, into his father's presence. The care and dignity with which the ensuing transaction is recorded, in chapter 48, betokens its importance. In point of fact it is the evidence for all future ages of Jacob's formal acceptance of these two lads into his family. Jacob commenced (vv 3-4) by recounting the promise God had made to him at Bethel in the early days of his travels to the effect that He would make of him a multitude of people and give them the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. He then declared that Ephraim and Manasseh were to be his sons in place of Reuben and Simeon who were his actual eldest sons – both rejected as chief heirs because of their crimes in earlier days. In 48.6 he goes on to tell Joseph that his further children, born after Ephraim and Manasseh, were to be his own heirs. There is no record in the Scripture of Joseph and Asenath having any more children but this silence does not necessarily mean that they did not. To what tribe the descendants of such children were accredited would be a matter of conjecture. The effect of the whole episode was that Joseph, as the eldest son of Jacob's favourite wife Rachel, was accounted by Jacob his firstborn and chief heir, his own two sons, each assuming the position as head of a tribe in Israel, probably in recognition of the fact that Joseph's official position at court made it impracticable to assume the headship of a tribe himself. This would then make thirteen tribal heads, but since in after days the descendants of Levi were deprived of tribal status and constituted a body of priests to live among all the tribes and serve them in the things of God, the number of actual tribes possessing definite tribal territory in the land of Canaan remained at twelve; hence for all subsequent time there were twelve tribes in Israel.

A very human note is struck in 47.7-8 where the aged Jacob evidently wanders a little in his thoughts and speech, from the matter in hand to time long past when he lost his beloved wife Rachel at the birth of Benjamin. He is evidently lost in the past at this moment; then, coming back to the present, has obviously momentarily forgotten what he had just been saying regarding the two lads before him and asks Joseph again "Who are these?" Patiently Joseph told his father "These are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place" and Jacob, content, proceeded to confer his patriarchal blessing upon them. Verse 12 indicates that a very ancient ceremonial was enacted here. Jacob had the two lads stand between his outspread knees as he sat, in token that he had accepted them as his own sons. Joseph then brought them away from Jacob and caused them to bow low before Jacob (the singular "he bowed himself ..." in v.12 should really be rendered plural "they bowed themselves") in token that they in turn accepted the obligations devolving upon sons of Jacob. In that position Jacob laid his hands upon

their heads and repeated his blessing upon them. Joseph was not altogether pleased that Jacob's right hand, indicating the chief blessing, was laid upon the head of Ephraim who was the second born but Jacob insisted that he knew what he was about. True to his prophetic instinct, the tribe of Ephraim became predominant relative to that of Manasseh in Israel's later history.

These two having been thus constituted the heads of tribes in Israel, Jacob told Joseph that there was reserved for him one portion above his brethren—a special inheritance in the land, one which Jacob had himself captured from the Amorites. The reference was to Shechem, which was not, strictly speaking, an Amorite city. Although there were several different races settled in various parts of Canaan, the whole land was known generally as Amurru, the land of the Amorites, so that Jacob was probably speaking in accord with the general practice here.

Chapter 49 records Jacob's dying injunctions and warnings to his twelve sons. Here again he spoke to some extent by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "*Gather yourselves together*" he said "*that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days*". In general his words reflect the individual characteristics of the sons, sometimes laudatory and sometimes condemnatory. Reuben, his firstborn, who had been guilty of a serious crime against one of his father's wives, Bilhah (Gen. 35.22) for which reason he was deprived of the birthright by Jacob, was branded "*unstable as water, thou shalt not excel*". There was goodness in his nature, as is shown in the story of Joseph's betrayal, but he was weak and deficient in self-control, no fit person for the headship of the tribes after Jacob's death. Simeon and Levi, the next two in order, were likewise dismissed as men of blood and cruelty. These were the two who treacherously massacred the men of Shechem over the affair of Dinah, and they too were passed over in the choice of the headship. The next eldest was Judah, (all these four were children of Leah, Jacob's first wife) and for this son Jacob had no word of reproof. "*Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise – thy father's children shall bow down before thee*". So Judah became the heir of the birthright, the head of the tribes of Israel, and the one through whom one day the promised "Seed of Abraham", the Messiah, should come. The rights of royalty and kingship were thus confirmed to Judah and his descendants forever. "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come*" (49. 10). This name in the Hebrew is *Sheloh* and means "whose it is". The sense of the expression is more easily grasped by reference to Ezek.21.26-27. There the prophet declares the end of the Jewish Kingdom in Zedekiah's day in the words "*Remove the diadem and take off the crown – I will overturn it and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him*". The Divine intention to hold the throne of Israel vacant

until Messiah comes to take his power and reign is indicated there and the same vision of a coming Messiah to assume headship of Israel was in Jacob's mind when he used the word.

The rest of Jacob's sons received messages which concerned either their personal characteristics or references to the territory their descendants would afterwards inherit. Many efforts have been made to fit these words in vv 13-27 to the subsequent circumstances of the tribes but the details given are really altogether too vague and shadowy to afford a satisfactory basis for any clear presentation. It is much more likely that Jacob as he approached the gates of death in his mind still experienced some flickering of that prophetic insight which was manifested from time to time throughout his life. Now he recounted the fragmentary visions that flashed across his mental horizon, but nothing that was at all detailed

So Jacob yielded up his breath, an old man and full of days. He was the third of the patriarchs who carried the Divine promise and covenant in the line of the promised Seed that shall eventually bless all the families of the earth. With the death of Jacob the pattern of God's purpose began to take more definite shape. He left the nucleus of a nation, a nation that in after days was to be honoured by selection as the chosen people of God, through whom the Divine laws were to be promulgated. They would be a people destined to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. That destiny has not yet been fulfilled and the modern descendants of Jacob are not yet ready, as a people, to accept that destiny; nevertheless the word of God stands sure and what He has promised will surely come to pass.

Conforming to his father's injunction, Joseph arranged for Jacob's body to be embalmed in the Egyptian fashion and taken to Canaan for interment alongside his wife and forefathers. The first fourteen verses of chapter 50 tell of the funeral and the wonder of the native inhabitants of Canaan at the impressive cortege which made its way through their country. It is probable that the route lay across the Sinai peninsula into Edom, the territory of Esau, Jacob's brother, long since dead, and then northward into Moab and across Jordan to Jericho. Before proceeding to Hebron where the tomb was situated they halted near the Jordan for a seven days ceremonial mourning, which so impressed the Canaanites that they named the place Ebel-Mizraim – the mourning of Egypt. Finally they came to the field of Ephron which Abraham had purchased for four hundred silver shekels a century and a half earlier to establish his family sepulchre. It says much for the respect for rights of property in those days that the land and tomb were still the unchallenged property of the family. There they left the illustrious ancestor

of all Israel and returned to Egypt.

It is a fascinating thing to reflect that the mummified body of Jacob may still be there. The remains of Egyptian notabilities of even earlier times are still in existence. The tomb in which Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, were buried is still in existence and is one of the few ancient sites about which there is no doubt. Ironically enough it owes its preservation during the last twelve centuries or so to neither Jew or Christian, but to the Moslems. Throughout Old Testament times the tomb was of course kept inviolate by the Israelites. After the Saracen conquest of Palestine its sanctity was preserved by the followers of Mahomet, to whom Abraham meant as much as he did to Israel. No "infidel" (Jew or Christian) has ever been permitted to enter the cave, which is now surmounted by a mosque, and this prohibition is maintained to this day. The only non-Moslem known to have set foot in the tomb itself was an officer on the staff of General Allenby during the 1914-18 war. During the advance into Palestine and the capture of Hebron, Colonel Meinertzhagen entered the mosque in search of the city headman and finding it deserted penetrated into the cave below, where the patriarchs were buried. Having only matches with him he was unable to see more in the darkness than the outline of a stone coffin, and then, hearing the voices of the returning guards, judged it expedient to leave without delay.

This is the virtual end of the Book of Genesis. It is as if the author felt he had achieved the purpose of his narrative when the death of Jacob had been reached. Although some fifty years were to elapse before Joseph followed his father into the grave the entire period is dismissed in twelve short verses. Nothing is said of the progress of events in Egypt or the welfare of Israel in that period. There is only Joseph's assurance to his brothers, apprehensive that after their father's death Joseph might no longer be friendly towards them, that they had no cause for fear. He bore them no ill-will: he would still be their protector and friend. The families of the sons of Jacob began to increase and Joseph saw his great-grandchildren before he died. There is wonderful dignity in the last recorded words of Joseph. He gathered his brethren about him – it is certain that Levi outlived him by a few years and probably so did some of the others. *"I die" he said "and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob "*. That was his parting injunction; they were never to forget that they were only strangers and sojourners in Egypt. Attractive as the land was to them, they were not to forget that their Divine commission was indissolubly connected with the country from which they had come; one day they must go back. And to stress the sanctity of that obligation he made them swear on oath that they would preserve his

mummified body and take it back with them when the day should come. Joseph intended that his own remains should eventually rest in the hallowed land of Canaan.

He had both his wishes. When at length the Exodus took place, his body in its sarcophagus was taken with the host of Israel. It accompanied them in their forty years' wandering in the desert, was carried across Jordan and eventually interred in Joseph's own tribal territory at Shechem—the special inheritance which Jacob had given him at his death. And Israel never have forgotten that they were sojourners; their passionate attachment to the land which was theirs at the start has become proverbial. "*If I forget thee O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning*" was always the cry of the Jewish exile. In our own time and generation, we have witnessed the tenacity with which the present descendants of Jacob have fought to attain and retain that little strip of land which in the year 1948, out of all the possible names that might have been chosen, was renamed "Israel" It is the name of the man whose sons, thirty five centuries ago, gathered around the death-bed of the brother who, under God, had preserved their lives and made the creation of that nation possible. It was because those Hebrew tribesmen, settled in north-eastern Egypt in the latter years of the Hyksos Pharaohs, with all their faults and unbelief never did really forget that they were not Egyptians, that there is an Israeli nation to-day.. They are the sons of Israel, the Prince of God, custodians of a Divine commission to become a means in God's hand for the eventual blessing of all the families of the earth, And the full implications of that national destiny for the wider world have yet to be seen.

The death of Joseph ended the Age of the Patriarchs. During that long span of fifteen hundred years, from Noah to Joseph, the Lord worked out the details of his developing Plan through individual men. They were men who were devoted to him and whose lives were given over unreservedly and completely to his service. Other such men there were to be, but no longer serving alone, serving in association with a people, the people of God. For nearly three centuries after the passing of Joseph the Bible story of the outworking Plan of God is a blank; the sons of Jacob, growing into a nation in Egypt, are missing from the records. Then came Moses, and with Moses the emergence of a nation, nation grown from those sons, bound to God in a Covenant at Sinai which made them the people of God for ever, a people destined to become the Lord's instrument on earth for the conversion of the nations. "*It is a light thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give you for a light to the nations, that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth*" (Isa. 49.6). It was the sterling character and faithfulness to God of that

seventeen-year-old lad, sold as a slave into Egypt, which in the wisdom of God became the means to an outcome which in the fulness of time will have so stupendous a sequel.

THE END

AOH

SOME BIBLE QUOTATIONS

The King James Version (1611) in its four hundred years became part of the culture of our 'Christian' country, so that passages of scripture influence the thinking and the expressions used by people who have not studied or even read the Bible as a whole. It seemed a good idea to a publisher to bring a great number of these passages together in a 'Dictionary of Bible Quotations'.

This dictionary gave an idea how we students might test our Bible knowledge. Below are printed several passages, without a scripture reference. Can you say **where they are to be found**, and make a comment about each one? (There is one odd one out.)

1 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

2 This I recall to my mind therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

3 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

4 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

5 But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.

6 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you; A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

8 And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.

The verse references, if you need them, are on page 79.

MIRIAM

Miriam was the older sister of Moses and is chiefly celebrated for the part she played when the daughter of Pharaoh found the infant Moses in the bulrushes. She was at that time a young girl, anxious only for the welfare of her baby brother. In later life she appears in the only two incidents in which she figures as a somewhat passionate and militant woman. Scanty as is the information regarding her, there are a few deductions possible which can be of interest and perhaps profit.

Miriam was born during the period of the Oppression, when the Egyptians, perturbed at the phenomenally rapid increase of the alien people in their midst, enslaved them and "*made their lives bitter with hard bondage*" (Ex.1.14). Thothmes I, the Pharaoh of the Oppression, had issued an edict that all male children born to Israelites were to be thrown into the river; this was an effort to halt the increase in numbers, thought to endanger the native population. Moses' mother had not complied with the command; instead she placed the baby in a boat made of papyrus reeds and consigned him to the providence of God. And it was in that providence that the daughter of Pharaoh, going down to the river to bathe, found him.

The daughter of Thothmes I was the famous Hat-shep-sut, known to history as a vigorous and determined woman who was married successively to Thothmes II and Thothmes III but arrogated their duties as Pharaoh to herself. For some forty years she was the real ruler of Egypt and under her firm and far-sighted administration the country flourished. At the time of Moses' birth, however, her father was still Pharaoh and she herself about twenty-one years of age, married to the weakling future Thothmes II and

already despairing of having any children by him. This fact may explain her action in adopting the infant Moses as her own son.

Miriam was about sixteen or seventeen at the time. The word used to describe her in Exodus 2 is *almah*, which means a young girl of marriageable age. Lingered near by, "to wit what would be done to him", Miriam watched as the Egyptian princess had the child brought to her, saw that, in her own words "*this is one of the Hebrews' children*", and determined to keep it for herself. In so doing she must have known that she was transgressing her father's edict, but this determination on her part is quite consistent with the headstrong and self-willed character of Hat-shep-sut as it is known to history, as is also her adoption of a Hebrew child rather than a native one.

Here was Miriam's opportunity, and the first indication that she was not lacking in qualities of courage and initiative. It probably needed both in good measure for a young girl of the despised slave caste to accost and address the leading lady of the land, the daughter of Pharaoh herself. But Miriam was equal to the occasion; she suggested to the princess that she should secure the services of a Hebrew woman to nurse the child until it was of a suitable age to be introduced into the royal palace. Her offer was accepted and of course Miriam fetched her own mother, who thereby had her son restored to her and his life saved. She probably had him for two or three years and then his adoptive mother took him into her own care and began to groom him for royal honours, and his own mother saw him no more. It does not appear that Hat-shep-sut's husband was consulted about all this, but Thothmes II was a physical weakling completely dominated by his wife and the fact that he was unable to give her a son himself probably supplied her with an unanswerable argument.

At this point Miriam drops out of the story and the next glimpse we have of her is eighty years later, at the deliverance of Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea. Much had happened in the meantime. Moses, grown to manhood, had repudiated his royal status and associated himself with his oppressed kinsfolk, in consequence of which he had spent forty years in exile. Hat-shep-sut had been dead for forty years, Amen-hotep II, another obstinate ruler, was now Pharaoh, and he with his people had just suffered the disasters of the Ten Plagues culminating in the loss of his cavalry in the waters of the Red Sea. The Israelites were safe on the other side. Miriam, who had spent her entire life of some ninety-seven years under conditions of slavery and oppression, now took a timbrel in her hand and led the women of Israel in dancing and song. The song – a fine example of what is called a "taunt song", peculiar to the Old Testament – is given in full in Ex.15. "*Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;*" she sang: "*the horse and*

his rider hath he thrown into the sea." Lest it be thought rather improbable that a woman of ninety-seven should be physically capable of leading the dance, let it be remembered that the normal life-span in the days of Miriam was considerably longer than it is now, anything up to a hundred and forty years. Not only Biblical characters but also Egyptian and Babylonian notables, as demonstrated by ancient records and tomb inscriptions, attest this fact. She was evidently considered the foremost woman in Israel in consequence of the position of Moses her brother as the acknowledged leader of the nation.

At the time of this incident she is referred to as "*Miriam the prophetess*" (Ex.15.20). This must certainly indicate that during the dark days of the Oppression she had been a stalwart defender of the Faith. Whilst little is known of Israel's spiritual condition during those times, it is clear that faith and belief in God was at a low ebb. Of some twenty or so persons of Miriam's time who are named in the histories only about three – Aaron her brother, Hur of Judah and Joshua the son of Nun, figure as men of God. At least seven—Dathan, Abiram, On, Korah, Achan, Nadab and Abihu - appear in some one or other deed of apostasy. It does seem that the family of Amram and Jochebed – Miriam, Aaron and Moses – stand out as rather unique in their zealous faith and it might well be that whilst Moses was in exile in Midian those forty years his sister was a tower of strength to the Hebrew community and kept alive what little faith there was in Israel. There might be a wonderfully inspiring but forever unknown story of militant heroism and stalwart faith hidden away behind those apparently casual words "*Miriam the prophetess*".

Jewish tradition – not supported by the Old Testament – has it that Miriam married Hur, of the tribe of Judah, the man who shared with Aaron the duty of second in rank to Moses in affairs of State (see Ex.24.14). The supposition is not unlikely; they were very possibly of much the same age and the evident fact that Hur was a trusted lieutenant to Moses implies his close personal connection with the family. If these two were indeed husband and wife it would follow as a matter of interest that Miriam was the grandmother both of Bezaleel, the constructor of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and would also be grandmother of Caleb, who with Joshua brought back the true report in the matter of spying out the land, and was specially honoured of God in consequence. In such case the marriage must have taken place while Moses was still a youth, since Caleb was forty years old at the Exodus. One could imagine this trio comprising Aaron, Hur and Miriam closely associated together in working for the welfare of Israel during the whole forty years of Moses' exile in Midian.

All that was now in the past and Israel was delivered. Little more than a year later, not long after the momentous happenings at Sinai, where Moses had been manifestly revealed as the intermediary between God and Israel, another side to Miriam's character was thrown open to view. Jealousy, naked and unashamed, brought her into conflict not only with the brother she had worked with so long a time, but also the God she had served so faithfully since childhood. The story is related in Num. 12. 1-16. *"And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian (Cushite) woman he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said. Hath the Lord indeed spoken only to Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it"* (Num.12.1-2). This is the first indication of a rift in the association between these three. Moses was accustomed to challenges against his authority from others jealous of his position, apprehensive of the unknown terrors of the journey to Canaan and desirous in consequence of returning to Egypt. But now he was faced with challenge from his own brother and sister, themselves highly esteemed in the eyes of the people. The trouble focused on the wife of Moses. Miriam and Aaron professed to object to the fact that she was not a native Israelite. There is something a little odd in the accepted text here. In the AV she is called an Ethiopian woman whereas the earlier history of Exodus tells the full story of Moses' marriage, whilst in exile in Midian. Zipporah was the daughter of Reuel the Midianite tribal chief who sheltered Moses. "Ethiopian" is the Greek equivalent of "Cushite", children of Cush, and there were Cushite tribes in Arabia as well as Africa so that the contradiction may in fact be more apparent than real. At any rate, Moses wife was not of the house of Israel, and although the fact had apparently not aroused any animosity before, it seems to have done so now when the host was well on its way to the Promised Land.

Very possibly it was the old question "Who shall succeed the ruler?" Moses was at the moment the unquestioned leader of the nation. At eighty years of age he was in the full vigour of manhood, a usual thing in those days. But one day he would die and upon whom would the mantle of authority then descend? He had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer but they were only half Israelite; their mother was a Midianite. Aaron, as the next in authority, was married to Elisheba, of the tribe of Judah, and he had four sons. As Jacob was dying he had indicated Judah as the future royal tribe. Surely a man having the blood of Judah and Levi in his veins would be the more appropriate leader of Israel! If in fact Miriam was married to Hur as the legend claims, then here again, since Hur also was of Judah, the sons of Hur, Uri and Jephunneh, could make the same claim. Here, it seems were all the ingredients of a fight over the future leadership and Miriam seems to

have taken the initiative. Her name is mentioned in front of Aaron in this, and only in this instance. Maybe the question of Moses' wife was just the immediate excuse. The militant and probably domineering character of Miriam was no longer content to remain in a subordinate position. She aspired to equality of status with Moses, and Aaron who is revealed in the incident of the Golden Calf as being easily led, was persuaded to go along with her. If the three of them could be accepted as a triumvirate ruling Israel, then when the time came that a successor to Moses' office was necessary, it would be easy to ensure that a scion of the house of Judah would be chosen and the sons of the Midianite woman cast out. That, perhaps, was the reasoning which lay behind this rather unpleasant incident. And, of course, in all this reasoning, Miriam and Aaron quite forgot that it was the Lord who appointed Moses in the first place and would doubtless be equally positive about the appointment of his successor.

They were quickly reminded of that fact when the Lord came on the scene. This is one of the occasions of what is called a theophany, a visible appearance of God. The narrative says that the Lord appeared visibly in human form and talked with them. Whatever may be the truth of that or the reality behind the story, the pair were left in no doubt of the Lord's attitude. "How dare you" He demanded "speak against my servant Moses?" *"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed . . . and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow."*

That instantaneous infliction of the dreaded disease, leprosy, brought about a quick reaction. Miriam must have been numbed with horror. She, the first lady of the nation, esteemed a prophetess of God, now and henceforth condemned to live the rest of her life an outcast, forbidden entry to the camp of Israel or to share in its life, trailing along on the outskirts as the people journeyed and living apart with such other equal unfortunates as there were, dependent for food and livelihood upon the thought and charity of the people! The pride and militancy of her nature must have vanished in a flash and left her crushed and broken. The question of equality with Moses, of authority over Israel, was no longer of any importance; for her, life was finished.

Aaron, equally horror-stricken, was imploring Moses for mercy. "My lord," he said, now freely acknowledging the superior status of his brother which a few minutes ago he had denied, *"we have done foolishly . . . we have sinned"*. He begged that Miriam might be healed, and Moses, doubtless genuinely concerned at his sister's plight, and feeling that the lesson had almost certainly been thoroughly learned, cried unto the Lord *"Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee"*. And the Lord, looking down and

perceiving that the lesson had indeed been learned, assented and healed her – but stipulated that she should be shut out of the camp and isolated as unclean for seven days before resuming normal life, just to impress the point. Miriam was after all a devoted and fervent servant of the God of Israel, It is perhaps reasonable to expect that she came back into the camp a humbled and chastened woman, the old militancy and self-assurance tempered by a new spirit of willing submission to the overruling wisdom of God.

That is all we know of Miriam. Forty years later, on the eve of entry into the land, after enduring with Israel all the hardships and terrors of that long sojourn in the "waste and howling wilderness", she died at Kadesh, on the frontier of the Promised Land, at the ripe old age of about a hundred and thirty-seven. She did make one bad mistake, but after all she was a woman of faith. Without much doubt she is included in the gallery of stalwarts who, to use the language of Heb. 11, "*received a good report through faith*" and will in no wise fail their place in the future purposes of God.

AOH

PORTRAIT OF AN OVERCOMER

...he shall rule them with a rod of iron.... Revelation 2.27

Overcomers come in many shapes and sizes. Saints who are faithful to death are all sorts and conditions of both men and women, both young and old. If we conflate the promises in Revelation 2 and 3, they are all promised the crown of life. They keep Christ's word, and do not deny Him in an evil world. They persevere in doing good, and even if they lose something of their first love, they may repent and make a new start. The rewards described build up into a total picture, and it is not for us to apportion them, for we do not know how God's future will all work out. But imagine, if you will, the thought of the promise to rule the nations with a rod of iron being given to a little old gentle-mannered Welsh lady.

One such lady was Anna Laetitia Waring. She was born in 1820, in South Wales, in a Quaker family. Her father and her uncle were both writers. In her teens she began to write hymns, and when she was thirty she published a little book of hymns and meditations. She had joined the Church of England, and continued to write. Although she was shy of publicity, her

hymns became widely known and used— even in the United States where they were published in Philadelphia by the ‘Association of Friends for the Diffusion of Religious and Useful Knowledge’. She learned Hebrew so as to be able to read the scriptures in the original tongue. She never married. In later life she lived at Bristol, doing work for the Discharged Prisoners’ Aid Society’. She had a gentle and merry spirit, but also knew suffering. She died in Bristol in 1910.

Her hymns were very personal, ‘marked by great simplicity, concentration of thought and elegance of diction’. ‘The ideas of a Christian life which are wrought into the poetry are always both strong and tender, vigorous and gentle, brave and trustful.’ Reading or singing them, we can sense the mind of an overcomer. Here are two examples.

*In heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?*

*Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack:
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.*

*Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o’er me,
Where the dark clouds have been:
My hope I cannot measure,
My path to life is free;
My Saviour has my treasure,
And He will walk with me.*

x x x

*Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me;
The changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see:
I ask Thee for a present mind
Intent on pleasing Thee.*

*I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
To wipe the weeping eyes;
A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise.*

*I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do
Or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.*

*I ask Thee for the daily strength
To none that ask denied;
A mind to blend with outward life,
While keeping at Thy side;
Content to fill a little space,
If Thou be glorified.*

This hymn has several more verses which reveal her life full of humble service. It was not without disappointments and trials, but she was convinced that 'a life of self-renouncing love is one of liberty'. Is that the secret of overcoming?

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.' (Revelation 3.5)

JEWELS FOR THE LORD OF HOSTS

"They shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts in that day that I make up my jewels." (Mal.3.14).

Jewels are unfailing objects of fascination. Their varied colours, their scintillating brightness, their rarity and value arouse in many people an ardent desire for possession. One tiny diamond is dear to its proud owner, while an ornament of genuine gems puts its owner among the elite as he or she may think. Rubies, amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, garnets and beryls, with their dark greens, their rich reds and deep purples, their soft yellows, their flashing facets of crystal beauty, form a rich and enviable treasure trove. The crowns of Kings, the robes of Emperors and the swords of conquerors have had first claim on these treasures from the coffers of the earth. Rich women have adorned themselves in their glittering array, for their brilliance they have bartered their honour and for their worth men have risked their lives.

Between jewels and common clay there is no resemblance, yet they are only forms of the same substances modified and crystallised, fashioned out of the same earth elements by the diversified wisdom and excellency of creative design and workmanship. The gem sparkles, small and infinitely radiant beside the handful of brown earth. There would appear to be no relationship between the two, yet the action of time, chemistry and skill, made one to adorn a high priest's breastplate, and kneaded the other into a crumbling surface that seed time and harvest should produce for millions their daily bread.

The adorable, varied, coveted beauty of the sparkling jewels, shaped, polished and set for the adornment and pomp of kings and courts are, in the eyes of God who gave them, a fitting picture of rare people whom He calls his jewels. As men have searched the earth for diamonds, emeralds and rubies, for every sort of precious stone, so the Almighty has searched among the human race his power produced. He has searched for good women more precious than rubies, and good men, whose incorruptible principles of faith and honesty are more bright and enduring than the many faceted diamond. Jewels for a king's crown, a diadem of beauty, a collection of the earth's choicest human gems, gathered through the centuries, as various and different as the twelve glowing stones which flashed on the breastplate of the High Priest of Israel. Yet each is a stone of the first water. Men and women, born and bred in the earth, made and sustained by her elements, yet transformed by the alchemy of Divine influence into glowing, everlasting beauty.

With the eye of an expert, God, who is no respecter of persons has sought his gems in every clime, in every race, in every age. Like a connoisseur He protects and cares for his treasures, delighting in their beauty, setting the highest possible value upon them, awaiting the day when He can show them to the world. To an astonished and chastened world they will be his best rebuke, for all the generations in their blindness, in their strange obsessions and their perverted preoccupations have both overlooked and often despised and rejected the good who are God's choice.

At that time the world will turn about, reversing its standard of values. With wide open eyes they will see things, events and people from the Divine standpoint. They will look on that beautiful assembly of the saints, sorry for the part they have played in the cutting and grinding of these gems of God's gathering, but delighted that they were found, perfected and chosen from among the sons and daughters of men.

*"Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for his crown."*

AOH

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) Ephesians 2.4,5

X X X

“Some weave a veil of doctrine which screens the Saviour from their eyes. It is emblazoned with creeds, definitions and orthodox statements of truth. It is not Christ, but doctrines about Christ which inspire them. The death of Christ rather than the Christ who died; the resurrection rather than the risen one; the priesthood rather than the Priest. The correctness of our notions about the Saviour may even cause us to miss the Saviour Himself.”

F B Meyer

Book Corner

Students?

What does it mean to study the Bible? There are so many sorts of students. For example, there are scholars - they may be expert in the original languages, or have spent long years scrutinising differing texts or comparing ancient manuscripts. In recent centuries there have been Young or Cruden or Strong of the concordances (a work now made vastly easier by computers), or Vine of the Expository Dictionary or Barclay of the Daily Study Bible, Tischendorf of the ancient manuscripts, Thompson of the chain references, to name those which come to mind. Then there are those not known by name to us whose cross references and notes enable their successors to compare scripture with scripture, and obtain a more complete view of what God has done and said. To all such we owe a great debt.

Not many have such skills or such opportunities. Many students of the Bible are plain people like you and me, interested to follow where others have led, inspired perhaps to burn midnight oil, urgent to discover for ourselves what God is doing and has done. We wish to discover whether what friends or leaders tell us stands up as truth. Is there a Plan as some have spelt it out, or is God's Purpose in fact unfathomable, powerfully moving, but revealed only enough for us to be able to play our own little part in it. Through study we can indeed read what God has said long ago, and now be trained by Him to be good soldiers, loyal children. Sometimes words flash out from the sacred text to enlighten our minds, warm our hearts. Or the example in the lives of our fellow students can bring meaning to the dusty words of men writing long ago.

But there may be some of us who cannot truly be said to study. We read. We listen. We accept what we are told. Perhaps we are dyslexic, or better using our hands, or confused, or just plain tired. Even those most enthusiastically studious will sometimes just come to a stop. This is understandable. Did not the writer in Ecclesiastes say that study is a weariness to the flesh?

At such times I myself am apt to settle down and relax with a good wholesome Christian novel. Not every Christian novel - I am very cautious of combining fiction with interpretations of scripture. But the sort of story where people live out their faith and grow in their faith in the fictional circumstances. A lot of such stories come from years ago, but the gospel underlies the story even when the author is not being openly didactic. George Eliot for example may have lost her early faith, but in 'Adam Bede' she understands and portrays the motivation of an earnest young woman who is a

Methodist preacher. Or Jean Webster's 'Dear Enemy' may be all froth, but the froth covers but does not hide Christian service and the development of character.

Most recently I have been re-reading 'The Dean's Watch' by Elizabeth Goudge. It is a story set in a cathedral city of the 1870's, featuring an elderly clergyman, an atheistic watchmaker, a very elderly spinster, a servant girl and an apprentice, among various others. Looking back after reading it I notice the interplay in the story of scriptural truths. Such as, first and foremost 'God is love' (1 John 4.16); and then, joy in the created world, in every good and perfect gift (James 1.17); and the beauty of developing Christian character (James 3.13), the gentleness of wisdom, (v17) which is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

That is the sort of wisdom we need in our studying. And in our daily lives too.
GC

CONVENTIONS and CONFERENCES 2011

Family Bible Conference

at Purley Chase Conference Centre
Purley Chase Lane, Mancetter, Atherstone, Warks.
from Friday to Monday, April 29 to May 2
Contact David and Sarah Hodges 02476 374486

Midland Group Convention

at Blaby Social Centre, Leicester Road, Blaby, Leicester
on Sunday, May 30
Contact Bill Start 01162 771401

Gainsborough Convention

at Gainsborough House, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset
on Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12
Contact Corrinne Vaughan at Gainsborough House 01963 250684

High Leigh Conference

at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts
from Monday to Sunday, August 15-21
Bookings by June 30: Joan Charcharos, 01442 381550 10 Plaiters
Close, Tring HP23 5TA email nick.charcharos@btinternet.com

References for Bible Quotations

1 Micah 6.8 The Israelites had neglected God. How should they now show their repentance? This answer seems simple enough in a complicated world. If only we could live up to it!

2 Lamentations 3.21-3 These verses are part of an alphabetic poem, like most of Lamentations, and come under the letter *heth*. In the midst of all his sufferings, the writer has to remind himself that God is good. Is this the same as what we do when we sing 'Great is thy faithfulness'?

3 Isaiah 53.9 This comes in the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah (the others are at chapters 42.1, 49.1 and 50.4). It is startling how this chapter is fulfilled in the life of Our Lord.

4 Psalm 110.1 Jesus used this verse to perplex the pharisees (Matthew 22.41-6) If as they believed it referred to the Messiah, how could he be both David's son and his Lord? And what did the answer imply?

5 This is the odd one out. It comes from the Wisdom of Solomon (3.1) This book was part of the Apocrypha, being written in Greek, and would have been known to Jesus. The verse is part of a comparison between the fates of the righteous and of the godless. The whole passage is much quoted. It does not seem to discuss the possibility of degrees of righteousness, nor every person's need for God's grace.

6 Ezekiel 36.25-6 A promise to the Israelites when they were scattered from their land, unworthy of God. For them to be regathered and enjoy national prosperity involves renewing of their hearts and minds by God's doing.

7 Haggai 2.7 This was written in the days of King Darius to encourage those who were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. We can see it as a vision which looks beyond that time.

8 Zechariah 14.8 This comes in Zechariah's prophecy after God has intervened to save Jerusalem from her enemies. It is one of several geographic descriptions. Do we take it literally? Is there a symbolic meaning?

X X X

Have you ever sheltered or slept in a tent while the rain has dripped around you? Or perhaps you've considered Abraham riding a camel between Haran and Bethel... or even Joseph chained and walking to Egypt? If they saw our laptops and navigational aids these worthies of 4000 years ago would certainly think the words of Daniel 12.1 were being fulfilled. Books on the background to the Bible and archaeology are valuable helps, to picture how Bible characters lived, and worked and died.

A personal opinion

Is it right to address or refer to our Heavenly Father by His name? We do not even use the correct name of Yahweh, but a name manufactured by some well meaning scholars. Jesus taught us and referred to God as 'Father'. Anything else seems, well, incorrect. DN

What do our readers feel about this?

CART

The Christian African Relief Trust continues its wonderful work of helping the people of Africa (and India) in the struggle against poverty, ill health and lack of education. A recent report in their Newsletter told of the cost of sending the huge containers to places like Malawi, which is land locked. It described a wonderful visit to Malawi, and also spoke of current needs BFU is collecting Bibles and other educational books for CART to send to our dear Brother Jacob Luther Knight in Liberia. Can you help?

Gone from us: Francis Robinson (Crowborough)
'Till the day break....'

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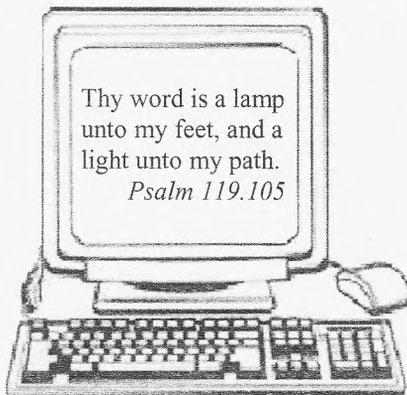
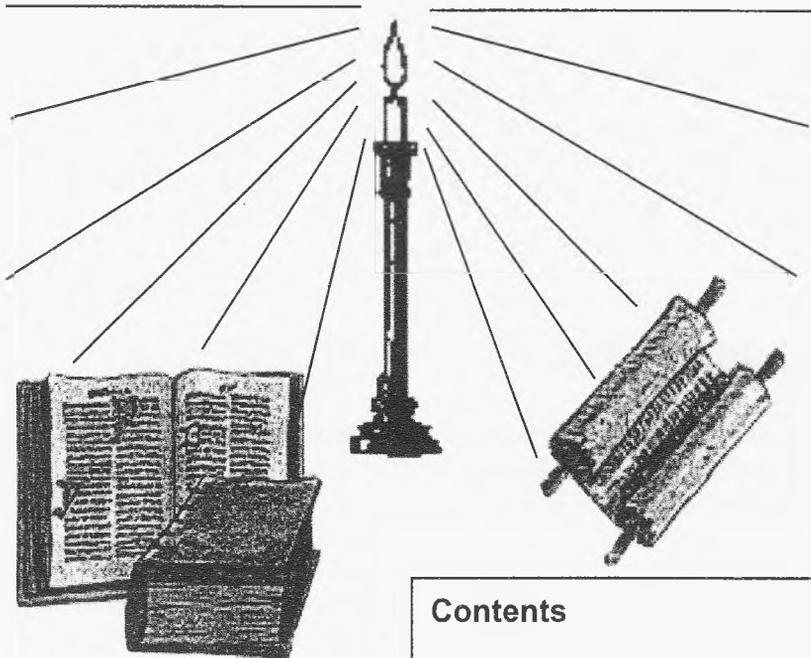
The Bible Study Monthly is for readers of varied ages and backgrounds, taking advantage of modern translations and with a variety of subject matter. Everything we print may not necessarily be the opinion of those responsible for editing, but is considered worthy of thought.

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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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'DOMINION BELONGS TO THE LORD'

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations." Psalm 22.22,23 (RSV)

It is interesting that in this Psalm that so graphically describes the sufferings of the Messiah, and perhaps his people, we have also this great affirmation of God's victory, a victory that was promised to father Abraham long centuries before— "By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gen.12.3).

In the beginning God was sovereign and his power supreme. That has never changed. What did change were the hearts and lives of some of those that he in his love had created. In their stupidity they rejected God and so took themselves outside his loving care. But God remained sovereign Lord over all creation. He alone could plan and prepare for the 'wanderers' to turn back to their true home.

It was in knowing this God that Abraham differed from those around him. This is why it was essential for him to leave his natural family and go to a place where he and his descendants could worship and serve the one true God.

He never went back to ‘father’s house’, nor did Isaac go there. When Jacob did so it soon was evident that his family was contaminated with idolatry. The stories are told in Genesis 31-35, and reveal the dishonesty and violence that went with their failure to retain the pure worship of God. He must reign in the hearts and lives of his people without deviation or rival.

As the family grew into a larger society and later into a nation, it needed laws. One reason for having laws is, that it allows members of the bigger community to anticipate each other’s actions. But for Israel, it meant more— it meant that Israel knew how to serve and please their God.

It meant, basically, that Israel would act by the same principles as Yahweh acted, by love - real unselfish love. Jesus quoted from the Law the two great commandments - *love* God with your whole being - and *love* your fellow men and women as you love yourself. That is where God’s kingdom begins - that is the rule of righteousness.

Love of self readily incubates idolatry, violence and immorality. That has been the story of God’s people through four millennia. Yet it is not the whole story, for God has left for himself a remnant. These have been men and women, boys and girls, who in loving loyalty have served God in purity of heart. They have been the real Kingdom of God on Earth, and have kept alive the promise to Abraham.

That promise must be fulfilled, for it was made sure by God’s covenant. Its fulfilment has been made possible by the events that are described in the early part of Psalm 22.

*“All the families of the nations shall worship before him
For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”*

DN

**“Goodness is stronger than evil
Love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness
Life is stronger than death
Victory is ours through him who loved us”**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

THE ASSURANCE OF THE ASCENSION

So surely as He went away, so surely He comes again

All that is known of the incidents surrounding the Ascension depends on the historical records of Luke. Second only in importance to the story of the Crucifixion, nothing whatever as to its nature and details would have come down to us had it not been for his stories of the event, both in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. From both these narratives it is known that some forty days after his resurrection Jesus took his disciples to a spot on the Mount of Olives and there visibly ascended into the skies in their presence. After that they saw him no more. Thus convinced that He had indeed returned to his Father in heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with joy, and a few days later underwent the profound experience of Pentecost which launched them upon their life's work and resulted in the establishment of the Christian Church.

It is noticeable that the account in Acts is fuller and more detailed than that in Luke's Gospel. It would seem that during the ten years or so which elapsed between the writing of these two books Luke must have obtained more information relative to the event. Had he possessed the full story when writing his Gospel it is unlikely that he would have refrained from including it since this is the natural climax to the Gospel. As it is, Acts virtually overlaps the Gospel insofar as the story of the Ascension is concerned and the combination of the two accounts enables a very full picture to be drawn.

It would seem that Jesus took the entire eleven disciples with him on this last journey. He led them, says the Gospel (Luke 24.50) as far as Bethany, and then lifting up his hands he blessed them.

He was carried away into heaven and they saw him no more. Acts adds the detail that a cloud received him out of their sight. A minor apparent discrepancy arises from the statement in Acts that they returned from Olivet "*which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey*". This distance, the most that an orthodox Jew could travel from his home on the Sabbath, was, according to Josephus, a little under a mile, whereas Bethany is a mile and three-quarters from the city walls. It is not likely though that Jesus made his ascent from the middle of the village in full view of the townsfolk; the story has the atmosphere of a quiet leave-taking in a secluded spot. More probably, Jesus halted his little party whilst still on the slopes of the Mount, with Bethany perhaps coming into sight in the distance, maybe no more than a mile away, so that Luke's earlier account could still be reasonably correct. In fact the western slopes of Olivet are only about half a mile or less from the city.

The last time they had followed Jesus along this road it had been to Gethsemane and death; after that they had believed all was over and there was

no hope. Now they followed him with quiet joy, past the Garden with its tragic memories and out on the open road as it traversed the southern slopes of the Mount where the sun shone brightly down. He was alive, and death could have no more dominion over him; all that the prophets had spoken would now surely come to pass.

So they stood to receive his blessing, and then in wonder watched his form ascend steadily into the blue sky above their heads. It was all so very clear now. During the past forty days He had appeared and disappeared time after time, convincing them that He was truly alive, risen from the dead, and with them still, not yet ascended to his Father. But this was different. They knew, now, that they would see him no more. As they "*looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up*" they realised, as no other situation could make them realise, that He had returned to the Father in heaven as He always said He would. The receding form vanished into a cloud passing across the sky, and that was the end. Thoughtfully they made their way back to the city and their waiting friends, conscious only of a great joy in their hearts.

Now we know that his body of flesh, with its enshrouding garments, did not continue its upward levitation onward from the cloud, through the earth's atmosphere, out into the vastness of space and so to the portals of the celestial land. We know that because we know it to be impossible for flesh and blood to enter the heavenly world and appear in the presence of God. When our risen Lord, to use the language of Hebrews "*appeared in the presence of God for us*" He did so, no longer as man nor manifest in the accoutrements of humanity fitted only for this earthly world, but in the spiritual glory of his Divinity. Now was his dying prayer fulfilled; He returned to his own place invested with the "*glory which He had with the Father before the world was*" (Jn.17.5). We know so little of that mystic relationship which exists eternally between the Father and the Son. All our illustrations and definitions are inadequate to convey to our minds a truth which must lie fundamentally outside the range of human intellect. But it is a grave indignity to the One in whom all things subsist to think of his Person as eternally manifested within the compass and lineaments of a terrestrial human being. Such a tiny creature was designed for and fitted to the physical conditions of a minute speck of matter in the vast creation of which He is Lord and Head.

We know all that, but the disciples did not. Their day and age was by no means ready for such an appreciation of the majesty and mystery of God. So it must have been that as they wended their way back to the city they were conscious only of the simple realisation that their Master had

returned to his Father in heaven and of that they were sure because they had seen him go.

There was another assurance too and one that accounted for the unmixed joy which filled their hearts. One day He would come back to them; they had not lost him for ever. One day He would come back in glory and power to establish the Kingdom He had so often talked to them about, and then they would be in his company for all time. All their hopes and desires would then be satisfied. All that the prophets of old had predicted would be fulfilled. Jesus himself had told them all that, during the life they had shared with him, but not only so, even now, before they left the scene of the event they had just witnessed, two messengers of God, two angels, had appeared to them and repeated the promise, "*Ye men of Galilee*", they had said to them, "*Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1.11).

The full force of the assurance is lost in the English translation. All too commonly it is assumed that the angels indicated that Jesus would return in exactly the same physical state and environment as He went away. That just as He had ascended visibly into the cloud, so He would one day descend visibly from a cloud, in a human body like that of his Ascension. He would be arrayed in clothing like that in which the disciples saw him go, setting foot again upon the Mount of Olives amid a circle of watching and waiting believers. This is not really what the angels meant. The expression "*in like manner*" in this verse has a deeper and, to the disciples, an infinitely more assuring significance. The comparison denoted by the Greek expression behind the translation was not so much that of the similarity of action or condition between the going and the coming but the equivalent certainty of the two factors. "As surely as ye have seen him go, so surely will he return."

This is nowhere better illustrated than by another occurrence of the same expression in Acts. During the narrative of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27 there comes a point where Paul in a dream received Divine assurance of safety and deliverance for the whole of the ship's company with instructions for their action. In recounting all this to his fellows Paul says (v.25) "*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*" "*Even as*" here is the same word, "*hon tropon*", as "*in like manner*" in Acts 1.11. In Paul's words it denotes the certainty of fulfilment; the coming deliverance was as real and assured as the fact that God had spoken to him. Upon Olivet the promised return was as real and certain as the obvious fact that they had seen him go. It was this certainty which sent them back to Jerusalem "*with great joy.*"

For the more studious, the basic idea behind the expression "*hon tropon*" is that of the regular duplication of similar events, of one following

the other in automatic and assured sequence. It is derived from *trope*, a turning around or about, referring primarily to the regular and predictable motion and return of the heavenly bodies in their seasons, as the sun in its course along the ecliptic or the planets in their orbits. In the circuit of the year the sun travels first to the north of the Equator and then to the south, returning at the end to the position from which it started. (Hence our word "tropics", which comes from "*trope*".) So it came to mean an orderly way or succession, the certainty of an expected future event compared with the acknowledged certainty of a known past event of the same class. Whilst the expression "like manner" can express this idea fairly well, the rendering "as – so" is much more forceful and accurate. and this is how "*tropon*" is usually translated in the A.V. Just a few examples from the Greek New Testament and Septuagint Old Testament, and one from the Apocrypha, will suffice to illustrate this. The italicised words are the A.V. renderings of "*hon tropon*" or "*tropon*". Acts 21.25. "I believe God, that it shall be *even as* it was told me". Acts 15.11. "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, *even as* they". 2 Tim.3.8. "Now *as* Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these resist the truth. Gen.26.29. "That thou wilt do us no hurt – *as* we have done unto thee nothing but good". Deut.11-25. "The Lord your God shall lay the fear of you upon all the land *as* he hath said unto you." Exod.14.13. "For *whereas* ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them no more for ever." Obad.16. "*As* ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall the heathen drink continually." Psa.42.1. "*As* the hart pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after thee, O God." 2 Macc.15.39. "*As* wine mingled with water is pleasant even so speech finely framed delights the ears of them that read the story".

It can be argued that if one thing is "even as" another it can be said to be "in like manner", similar in manner, and this is true enough provided the basic meaning behind the expression is kept in mind, that it is the assured recurrence of the relevant events, the fact that they stand together as related matters equally certain of realisation. As *this* is true, so *that* is true. As *this* has happened, so *that* will happen. When "manner" in the ordinary sense of the word, as custom, action, fashion, is concerned the word "*ethos*" is employed, as in Jn.19.40, Acts 15.1 and 25.16, Heb.10.25; sometimes it is "*houtos*", which latter can be roughly rendered 'thus-wise' or 'accordingly'. It is so in Mark 13.39 "*So* ye, in like manner, when ye see these things" and 1 Pet. 3.5 "*For* after this manner in the old time holy women also" or Rev. 11.5 "*He* must in this manner be killed".

Coming back for a moment to Acts 27.25, the expression in the Greek text is identical – except for the verb concerned – as in Acts 1.11.

Here is the comparison. Acts 1.11. "Thus (*houtos*) he will come even as (*hon tropon*) ye are seeing him go-away into the heaven." Acts 27.25. "Thus (*houtos*) it shall be even as (*hon tropon*) it has been told to me."

Small wonder then that with this note of certainty ringing in their ears the predominant feeling in the hearts of the disciples as they returned to Jerusalem was one of "great joy". So much so that this was the salient feature of the story as it was afterwards received by Luke and incorporated in his Gospel. The sad and anxious enquiry "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" was swallowed up and forgotten in the face of this heavenly assurance of the certainty of his return. He had only gone away for a time; He would surely come again. In the meantime they could with good heart execute his commission to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth, firmly persuaded that, even as He had gone away, so surely would He come back.

So it is with us, who two thousand years later wait still for the fulfilment of the angelic assurance. It is of little importance in our Christian lives that we know the time of his coming – and no man knows, or ever can know, the time anyway. It is more important that we have as clear an understanding as we can gain from the Scriptures of the manner of his coming, that we be not deceived either by false Christs or false expectations. It is greatly important that we understand very distinctly the purpose of his coming, for without that knowledge we are as servants who know not what their Lord doeth and are unready to enter into his higher service when He does come. But most important of all is the firm and fixed conviction, which nothing can shake, that He most certainly returns at the pre-ordained appointed time. He sets in motion that chain of events which characterises the Days of the Son of Man, without delay, without failure, unaffected and uninfluenced by whatever of opposition on the part of his enemies or apathy and lack of comprehension on the part of his followers He may find. When the Clock of the Ages points to the hour already set for the Advent, He comes. So surely as He went away, so surely He comes again.

AOH

PARAKLETOS

More than an assistant

Parakletos is the Greek word that was used for someone who was called in to help. Much as in 2011 the Libyan rebels call in their allies - with aeroplanes - to save them from defeat. *Parakletos* was used for a counsellor

called in to give advice. It was used for an advocate called in to speak on one's behalf - like a barrister, perhaps? Or a prisoner's friend, to speak up for someone in trouble. A *parakletos* might be in evidence wherever things got too much for someone and they needed help. In our day we might think of needing a car mechanic, or a plumber, or an electronics engineer who might be a *parakletos* for us. Someone with greater skills or knowledge to supplement our own. More than just another pair of hands.

In versions of the New Testament the word may be translated 'helper', or 'comforter', or 'advocate', or 'someone to stand by you'. It occurs five times, all in John's writings. In 1 John 2.1 it is applied to Jesus Christ and is translated 'advocate'. When we fall into sin we need someone to speak up for us to the Father. Jesus has the right to speak, and in any case has Himself made atonement for our sins (and those of all the world). So He does 'speak for us'. This is something we dare not take lightly.

The other four uses of the word are in John's gospel (14.16, 26; 15.26; 16.7) where Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the Holy Spirit. In these places, if we find the translation 'Comforter' we should think not necessarily of giving easy comfort and sympathy, but of the older sense of comfort, giving strength. It is the sort of comfort 'which keeps a man on his feet when, left to himself, he would collapse' (Barclay).

Jesus, when he lived on earth with his disciples, was in some sense a *parakletos* to them. In all their difficulties, disputes, puzzlements, they called on Him to help. He had stood by them, but this had only been temporary. Now He was leaving them, they needed someone else. What He promised was that the Father would give them "Someone else to stand by you, to be with you always" (John 14.16 Phillips), "Another Comforter" (AV).

Jesus was very specific in telling his disciples what this new Helper would do. The Spirit of truth stays with them and will be *in* them; is sent by the Father in the name of Jesus to remind them of what Jesus has told them; is a witness to Jesus in their minds and hearts; and the Spirit is for them better, in a sense, than having Jesus with them in person. The Spirit convinces men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Spirit guides the disciples into all truth. The Spirit tells them what Jesus has to tell them. Another Helper, in His place.

Our Helper, too?

"Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues."

John Stott

JONAH'S NINEVEH

Repentance comes to a great city

The Prophet

Jonah is chiefly renowned for his encounter with the great fish; his subsequent achievement in the city of Nineveh is not dwelt upon so much, yet that achievement was of greater consequence, and has much more to say concerning the attitude of the Lord to evil-doers. That of itself is important.

The tiny book which bears Jonah's name does not do justice to his position as a prophet in Israel. He lived round about the beginning of the 8th century BC, in the northern kingdom of Jeroboam, King of Israel at about the beginning of the reign of Uzziah of Judah. He therefore came just between Elijah and Elisha before him and Isaiah after him. There is some ground for thinking that he was a man about Court or at least not unknown in royal circles. 2 Kings 14.25, the only other mention of him in the Old Testament, says that he predicted to Jeroboam "*by the word of the Lord*" that Jeroboam would recover Israel's lost territories and enlarge the borders of the nation. Jeroboam reigned forty-one years and did in fact extend his domains more than did any other king of the ten-tribe nation, finally ruling over an area almost as great as King David had done before him. It is possible, therefore, that Jonah stood in much the same relation to Jeroboam II as Elisha before him did to Ahab and Joash, and Isaiah after him did to Uzziah and Hezekiah. He might well have been the King's adviser, as those prophets had been in their times.

Gath-hepher, the home of Jonah, was in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun, and he was probably a member of that tribe. The people had not been long enough in the land for there to be much tribal intermingling. That may account for his prompt going to Joppa to find an ocean-going vessel to take him to the other side of the world away from the presence of God, for the three northernmost tribes, Asher, Zebulun and Issachar, adjacent to the merchant Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon, were familiar with the sea and many of them were themselves seafarers. Jacob, dying, predicted that Zebulun would eventually have a maritime connection (Gen.49.13). At any rate, Jonah was evidently a prophet of the northern kingdom, the "Ten Tribes". And these considerations make it plain that he was definitely a historical character, that he did live at the time indicated, and was remembered by the historian for the fulfilment of his prediction of the king's military successes. That goes far to establish the literal veracity of the book that bears his name.

The incident of the voyage and the great fish was over, and Jonah was back in Gath-hepher, a chastened and a wiser man. He may have learned two great lessons from the experience.

One, that it is impossible to get away from God. He must have forgotten the words of David when he went to Joppa to get a ship to Tarshish, at the end of the then known world, "*whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol (the grave) behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me*" (Psa.139.7-10).

Two, that God is abundantly able to protect and deliver from danger or disaster in even the most unlikely situation, as in his experience of the storm and the great fish. As a prophet and servant of the Lord it was his obligation to obey the Lord's call without question and leave the consequences with him. And so he went back to Gath-hepher and waited for the voice of the Lord.

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee".

The Journey

This time there was no hesitation. He arose and went. It was a long journey. From his village of Gath-hepher he would have to go a few miles to the sea coast, to the trade route which ran from Egypt to Assyria. There he would find a caravan of merchants bound for Nineveh with their goods and would be able to travel with them. Such a caravan, goods loaded on camels or mules and the men riding on mules, could comprise as many as two hundred beasts of burden and perhaps forty men, armed to repel bandits by the way. Lone travellers could join without hindrance. Progress was slow, about fifteen miles a day; at night the convoy would gather round a great fire and sleep in the open air with a few men on watch. The distance was seven hundred miles and Jonah would be about two months on the journey. At first the caravan would make its way over the mountains to Damascus in Syria, where it would stop for a few days' trading. Then something like a hundred and twenty miles across a tree-clad mountainous region, arduous and difficult to traverse, alternately climbing and descending, but at least, to some extent, sheltered from the tropical sun. So they eventually descended the other side of the mountains and arrived at the desert town of Tadmor in the wilderness (now Palmyra) to which Solomon had in past times extended the kingdom of Israel and which he had

either built or considerably extended (I Kings 9.18). Here, another few days' rest before embarking on the hundred and twenty miles of the great Syrian desert, where the sun scorched by day and the frost chilled by night, an endless trail over flat sandy wastes uninhabited by man or beast, where dried-up stream beds led to patches of marsh where alone water and rest could be had, day after weary day, until, at last, the trail led downwards to a valley wherein flowed the great river, the river Euphrates, a river of which Jonah had often heard, but until this day had never seen, a river beyond which lay the goal of his journey, Nineveh, that great city.

So the cortege wound its way into the little riverside settlement of Dura (now Deir-el-Zor) where alone the great river might be crossed, and again the caravan remained a few days before embarking upon the final stage of the journey. Perhaps it was now that Jonah began to think seriously of the message he was so soon to proclaim in the great city; "*yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*". Once across the river he would be inside the territory of the Assyrians, whose capital city was Nineveh. What would be his reception, he might have wondered. The ruthlessness and savagery of that nation was well known to the prophet, even although as yet they had done little more than invade the land of Israel from time to time and exact massive tributes of gold and silver, valuable treasures, flocks and herds, and retire with their booty to their own land. But he was full of fears about their future intentions and under no illusions as to the terrors they would bring his people and that was why at the beginning he had refused to take the call to repentance to Nineveh and tried to run away to Tarshish. If he did not go to Nineveh, he reasoned, the message would not be given. If the message was not given, the Ninevites would not have the opportunity to repent. If they did not repent, God would not deliver. So he had run away, in the opposite direction, and God had brought him back. But now he was here, resolved to obey the Divine call come what may. The issue he must leave with God. So he took his place in the convoy as it entered the waters of the only ford where Euphrates could be crossed.

Now he was in a different environment, a gently undulating terrain with trees and grass and rippling streams, as yet only sparsely inhabited but affording welcome relief to the travellers after the rigours of the earlier part of the journey. As Jonah travelled the way, he did not know that less than a century later this same region was to be the home of many of his own people, taken captive by the Assyrians and brought here from their own land in what has been called the Captivity of the Ten Tribes. They, like him, were to undergo the arduous journey he had just experienced, for although his mission was destined to be successful and the Ninevites repent and be saved, it was not a repentance that lasted and eventually all of Israel was to be taken

captive and led along this road, never to return. Scattered all over this area today there are still low hills, "mounds" seven or eight miles apart, each one covering the ruins of ancient villages, villages built by those captive Israelites in which they and their children lived in their successive generations. Whether Jonah's prophetic instinct enabled him to foresee anything of this it is not possible to say; all that is certain is that he continued his journey with the fixed resolve to carry out his mission and leave the consequences to the Lord.

Entering Nineveh

So, at last, Jonah reached his destination. As the caravan passed over the stone bridge which spanned the wide river Hiddekel (in later times, and now, the Tigris), and through the "Gate of the Plains", giving entrance through the high walls, his heart must have beat faster. He could not have seen such lofty and magnificent buildings before neither was he accustomed to the sight of the many statues to the gods, the winged dragons and other fantastic stone creatures which adorned the streets, the evidences of wealth and luxury so manifest on every hand. To his left, as he entered, on the hill now known as Koyunjik, he looked upon the imposing Temple of Nabu, the messenger of the gods, and behind that the lofty staged temple tower, characteristic of all Assyrian and Sumerian cities, sacred to all the gods. Here, too, stood the Temple of Asshur, the national god of the Assyrians, and a little farther on, the Temple of Ishtai daughter of the Moon-god, a great goddess indeed here in Nineveh, for she, under her other name of Ninua, goddess of the waters, had given her name to Nineveh. Somewhere too, he would have seen a Temple to Dagon, the god with the head of a fish for he was the god of the sea, revered by Phoenecians and Assyrians alike, especially when they ventured out in ships on the great deep. And there crowning the hill, his gaze fell upon the king's palace, a magnificent building five hundred feet long by four hundred wide – today there is nothing left of it but the foundations to show where it once stood. As Jonah looked upon all these evidences of an idolatry which must have been quite unfamiliar to him he must have wondered what hope he had of turning these people from all this to serve the living God.

Somewhere in the midst of this great city was the central market-place and here the caravan of traders with their wares came to rest. It would be here that Jonah parted company from them and went on alone, wondering just how to initiate his work. The account says he went into the city "*a day's journey*" and then commenced. The narrative had already said that Nineveh was "*an exceeding great city of three days' journey*" and different explanations have been given as to the meaning of the phrase. The

probably true explanation is that three days was required to walk all round the city, sprawled along the River Tigris for a distance of some twenty miles from the present ruins of Nineveh in the north to those now known as Nimroud in the south. Nimroud is the "Calah" of Gen.10.10-12 where the historian declares that Asshur the son of Shem built Nineveh, Calah, "Rehoboth-Ir", (the "walls of the streets") and "Resen", (the "fountains of waters"). The entire complex apparently consisted of the two built-up walled centres with what is now called "Garden city suburbs" between and around. Jonah and his caravan had to penetrate some fifteen miles into this complex of gardens, dwellings and so on before reaching the centre of the walled city itself. Says one Anglican clergyman who ministered in the district for the major part of his life during the last years of the 19th century, Rev. E. Wigram, *"we have many a mile to travel before we are really clear of the site of ancient Nineveh, for the space comprised within its walls was only its inner nucleus; and without was a great garden city of mansions and parks and orchards. Greater Nineveh may well have embraced the outlying palaces of Khorsabad and the temples of Nimroud and this would easily account for the "great city of three days' journey", (i.e. of about sixty miles in circumference) of which the prophet speaks."* And this was the great city to whose people Jonah preached repentance. And the people believed!

Repentance

This is the great wonder of the story. The Assyrians were the most ruthless and cruel of all the peoples with which Israel ever had to deal. They inflicted indescribable barbarities on the populations of the countries they invaded and subdued. They were universally hated and feared. Yet one prophet of the despised people of Israel went alone into their capital city and preached God's righteousness and called upon them to repent in the face of imminent judgment, and they believed, and repented. A hundred and twenty thousand people *"believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them"* (Jon.3.5).

What was the underlying cause of this sudden and wholesale conversion? It has been suggested that the story of Jonah's escape from the great fish could have influenced the Ninevites to take notice of this man and his message. They, like the Phoenician sailors who threw him overboard in the first place, were worshippers of Dagon the sea-god. The story of the incident would certainly have preceded him to Nineveh for news travelled fast on the trading routes. The only "great fish" in the Mediterranean is the whale, and since whales only swim at four miles an hour and as he was back in Joppa in three days it is obvious the incident took place before the ship had proceeded very far. And the known fact that Marcus Scaurus, Aedile of

Rome in the year 58 BC, found in a temple at Joppa and took to Rome for exhibition the skeleton of a forty-foot Mediterranean whale, lying there for unknown ages to memorialise some long-forgotten event, does point to some noteworthy happening in previous times connected with a whale. In the case of the modern authenticated case of whaler sailor James Bartley, who was swallowed by a whale in the South Atlantic in 1896, and rescued twenty-four hours later to live another thirty years, his skin was permanently bleached to a ghastly white by the whales's gastric juices. If Jonah appeared in Nineveh in some such state, and it became known that this was the man of the story the inevitable conclusion must have been that Dagon, the god of the sea, had personally interfered to rescue him. He must be a favourite of Dagon and had better be heeded. The doubters who had scoffed at the story would have had to lie low in the face of this evidence, much as modern doubters have had to do on account of the 1896 evidence.

But the narrative does say that the people "*believed God*" and so did the king of Nineveh a little later on, and it is certain that when Jonah used the term he did not mean Dagon. The people of Nineveh knew that whatever part Dagon may have played in the matter, Jonah's God was supreme over all gods and so they prostrated themselves before him and craved mercy. Behind all this is the fact that never, through all the history of idolatry, has the true God been entirely forgotten. Their gods were admittedly subordinate deities; behind them all, supreme above all, was Anu, the Most High God, ruler of all things, worshipped by their ancestors back in the days long before Abraham when there were no subordinate deities, only the Most High whom all men honoured and served, as had Noah and his sons when they came out of the Ark.

So the city went into mourning and word came to the king in his magnificent palace on the hill. The king of Assyria at the time of Jonah's visit was probably Shamsi-Adad V, a mild-mannered man not addicted to warfare as were most of Assyria's kings. Between his grandfather, the warlike Ashur-nasir-pal, sixty years earlier, and the equally war-like Tiglath-Pileser III in the days of Isaiah eighty years later, the Assyrian kings were a fairly peaceable lot, and Jonah's position in time with respect to his own king Jeroboam II rather points to this Shamsi-Adad V as the king concerned. He seems to have acted quickly and resolutely. He published a decree confirming the spontaneous action his people had already taken and commanded a national period of repentance. "*Cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every man from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*" (Jonah 4.7-9). Considering that Israel,

in alliance with all the other nations of the west, had for years been forming military coalitions to resist by armed force the invasions of the Assyrians – and dismally failed each time – this national embracing of the arts of peace consequent upon a few days preaching by one unarmed man is a signal example of the power of God when He does see fit to intervene in human affairs.

And the Lord relented. That is the most amazing part of the entire story. The indescribable atrocities inflicted upon all the adjacent nations by the Assyrians would seem to justify their condemnation as a people unfit to live. But they repented and God reprieved them. *"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not"*. What political power, what nation, in such circumstances and having the ability to pass judgment – and exact penalty, would act thus? The most important lesson which the Book of Jonah has for the Christian is declared by Ezekiel. *"As I live, saith 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; for why will ye die?"* (Ezek. 33.11). Objection is sometimes raised to what in some quarters is called the "gospel of the second chance". God gave the Ninevites a second chance.

(The sequel to Jonah's achievement will be narrated in the next issue.)

AOH

GOD OF OUR FATHERS

*For the might of Your arm we bless You,
our God, our fathers' God.
You have kept Your pilgrim people
by the strength of Your staff and rod.
You have called us to the journey
that faithless feet ne'er trod,
For the might of Your arm we bless You
O God, our fathers' God.*

We belong to His family and it is the family of faith. Faith looks forward to the kingdom of God on earth, and it looks forward to our

personal future safe in His care. Faith looks backward to all the way that God has led us in our lives; and it also looks backward to the generations through whom we have inherited our faith.

Our God is the God of our ancestors. Looking back, we think of our parents, or our pastors, or those who have been elders in our community. They themselves looked back, perhaps to the Reformation and the rediscovery of scripture. The Reformers looked back to the apostles and the first Christians. The Jews looked back to Moses. Moses looked back to Abraham.

The expression has always been 'God of our fathers'. It was 'the God of our fathers' who raised up His son Jesus (Acts 5.30). It was 'the God of our fathers' who chose Saul - Paul - to be His messenger (Acts 22.14). The phrase marks the continuity between what God has been doing in the past and what He is doing now. "I am the God of Abraham...", not I *was* the God of Abraham. His work goes on.

And our faith too is a continuation. Perhaps we have learned more than our ancestors, and see some things differently. Jesus, indeed, had to correct the traditional beliefs and Jewish prejudices of his day. Perhaps with us doctrines have fallen out of fashion - or been rediscovered; 'new light' has been shed upon the Word, but the 'new light' may turn out to be an exaggeration or a misunderstanding. However, faith and trust in our heavenly Father continues even when our understanding is faulty.

It may be that the phrase 'God of our fathers' leads some to think that women are excluded. Certainly in human history men have nearly always taken the leading role. Yet Anna was there as well as Simeon when Jesus was presented at the temple (Luke 2.25,36). And Timothy inherited his faith through the female line - Lois and Eunice, grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1.5). So it may be wise to understand 'our fathers' in a gender-blind sense, meaning ancestors generally, much as it had no particular reference to gender when we used to speak of 'mankind'.

If we are thinking of mothers, they too are part of the inheritance of faith through the generations. Someone had the thought of writing a hymn to celebrate their faith, alongside the fathers whom we respect and honour. Here it is.

*For the strength of your love we bless you,
that is ours through good or ill.
You have kept us ever faithful,
with a love that holds us still.
In every generation
you help us to obey.
For the strength of your love we bless you,
our mothers' God today.*

*From mother on to daughter
your faithful love is shown;
In following generations
we make your love our own.
O keep the faith fire burning
to cheer us on your way.
For the strength of your love we bless you
our mothers' God today.*

*Through pain and disappointments,
through joy and family love,
Through birth and life and dying
you call us on, above.
We trust our homes to you, Lord,
be with us as we pray;
For the strength of your love we bless you,
our mothers' God today.*

GC

Four hundred years on..... “The Authorised Version is becoming unable to fulfil the function it was created to serve, because the language in which it is written is not the language our people speak, or readily understand today.... Many words and phrases that were current coin in 1611 have fallen out of circulation; many words have changed their meanings, some have appreciated in value, others have depreciated.....”

*From a statement by the Church of Scotland, quoted in Luther A Weigle's book *The English New Testament* (Nelson, 1949)*

THE WELLSPRING OF LIFE

The mysteries of the creation of human life

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1.4).

Life is a mystery even though it pervades the whole of the world we know. On the land, in the sea, in the air, below the surface of the earth, live myriads of varied creatures animated by this mysterious power we call life. The land and the sea alike are replete with an almost infinite variety of vegetation which displays the same phenomenon. The structure of all these creatures and all these plants is composed of the materials which also form the planet on which they live but the possession of life puts them in a class apart. In the case of man the quality of intelligence adds a further unknown factor. What is life and where does it come from?

The Christian answer is that the source of life is in God, that He bestows life and withdraws it according to his Will. This is the Bible viewpoint and every writer whose words appear in the Bible takes his stand upon this principle; in the New Testament there is an enlargement of thought in that although life has its origin in the Father, it comes to man only through the Son. The whole explanation of the Divine creation and purpose and man's relation thereto which the Bible offers is built upon this thesis. Without God there cannot be life.

A good many in this modern age think otherwise. Failure either to believe in the existence of a supreme Creator or to comprehend the essential relation that must exist between the Creator and his creatures leads them to enquire elsewhere for the origin of life. A goodly number of biologists and other research workers are trying very hard to find the answer. Unfortunately, for them, they have not much to go upon, for all that is available for study is the finished article. The only book that so much as claims to furnish the information they seek has to be rejected by them on principle. So the biologists have been very busy, especially in quite recent years, separating bodies into cells and cells into molecules and molecules into atoms to find out, if they can, at what point life can be said to start. Not surprisingly, they have come up with some remarkable discoveries. Thus in 1953 it was found that by exposing a mixture of water, ammonia and methane to ultra-violet light some of the basic constituents of the cells comprising animal bodies were produced. There has been much construction of theories, aimed at explaining how such basic constituents could have come together in the form of living organisms able to grow and reproduce themselves. When all is said and done it remains that the investigators have only discovered or produced the material structure in

which life is manifested; how life got into it or how life originated or what it is, no man knows. There is a fundamental difference between tracing out the origin of living creatures and the origin of life. So there is considerable discussion now going on as to whether life began as a chemical reaction between non-living matter and the surrounding environment, the sunlight, the air, the water and so on, or is the result of "seeds" or "spores" of life reaching the earth from outer space and entering into combination with elementary substances and so producing the first living things. In either case the origin of life remains unknown.

Against this admitted uncertainty and inadequate understanding, the Bible presentation speaks out with conviction and authority. The Apostle Paul declared that in God *"we live, and move, and have our being"*; that He *"gives to all, life, and breath, and all things"* (Acts 17.25-28). *"The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life"* says Elihu in Job 33.4. Even more to the point are the words of the Psalmist *"With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light"* (Psa.36.9). All is summed up in the statement that the Most High alone possesses immortality – inherent life (1 Tim. 6.16). It is impossible for us to comprehend God. The infinite Intelligence which created all things and sustains all things is forever beyond our understanding but we must accept the fact that in him is the source of life and the only means of continuation of life.

The New Testament presents the person of Jesus Christ as the means by which God is manifest to man, and the means by which He imparts life to man. The writer to the Hebrews describes Christ as the effulgence of God's glory and the delineation of his being (Heb. 1.3). We finite creatures, with our limitations, can see the Father only when we look at the Son; *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14.9). It follows then that what we receive from the Father comes to us through the Son. That is why Jesus taught that life, vital life, eternal life, can only come through him and be attained by acceptance of him. There is no other way and no other channel. The Gospel of John stresses this in a variety of incidents and sayings all the way from chapter 3 to chapter 6. The first Epistle of John continues in the same strain. *"He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life"* (1 John 5.12). *"The gift of God"* says St. Paul *"is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 6.23).

The patriarchs of Old Testament times had a simpler and more material idea of God and of course the person of Christ was not revealed to them, but they, many of them, had grasped this fundamental principle, that life is of God. The Old Testament presentation of God giving life to man by breathing his Spirit into man's frame is literally accurate even if intended metaphorically. In the story of man's creation, God *"breathed into his nostrils*

the breath of life and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2. 7). The necessity of the continual sustaining of that life by the power of the Almighty is recognised. "*The dust*" says the Preacher "*shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*" (Eccl. 12.7). That principle obtains with the lower creation also. "*You take away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. You send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth*" (Psa.104.29-50).

The New Testament recognises these two aspects of life—life as it can be when lived eternally in union with God and life as it is manifested temporarily in an earthly body – by its choice of descriptive words. Two Greek terms are used consistently throughout the New Testament. Life that is associated with an animal or terrestrial being, life in a fleshly body, is *psuche*. This word occurs some hundred times and is rendered sometimes "life" and sometimes "soul". The life which terminates when the body dies is *psuche*, a life that comes from God but is dependent upon the terrestrial organism to be conscious of itself and to find expression in its environment. That is why it is so often explained that the "soul" is the combination of the spirit of life with the earthly body; that is clear from the very beginning of things when "*man became a living soul*". Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor.15 when contrasting the two states of life of which we know, the terrestrial and the celestial. He says "*there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body*" where *psuche* is the word rendered "natural". But the life of man as we know it is only a shadow of the real thing. The life that comes to one who has entered into union with God through Christ, the vital force which so often in the Scriptures is called "eternal life", is *Zoe*. This is the life of the everlasting future which awaits all who eventually find their place in the Divine purposes, life in all its fulness and with all its possibilities. *Zoe* occurs about a hundred and thirty times and in only about seven instances can it be made to apply to the earthly life animating the terrestrial body. All those Scriptures that speak of life as inherent in Christ, as coming to the believer through him, as awaiting the faithful at the end of their pilgrimage, all these employ *Zoe*. In perhaps no clearer fashion could the Scriptures indicate the profound difference that exists between life as it now is to mortal man and life as it can be. Thus it will be when man has entered into the fulness of his destiny, and yet preserves intact the fact that the origin of all life is in God.

So, all unknowingly, the advocates of what is called panspermia, the scientific theory that there are eternal seeds of life winging their way throughout the vast distances of space ultimately to fuse with non-living matter on earth and so give rise to living creatures, are not so very far from

the mark once it is accepted that the power behind that continually pulsating life is God. The Greek philosopher Anaxogorus first suggested this theory in the 5th century B.C. and it has been revived in modern times now that men are bringing all their recently acquired knowledge to bear on the problem of life. But the Bible had the truth of the matter long before Anaxogorus, a truth which, if accepted, solves all the problems of the biologists, problems which those of them who are honest freely admit do exist. As, for instance, does Prof. J. D. Bernal in his book (*"The Origin of Life"* 1967) wherein, speaking as a convinced believer in evolution, he says *"the problem remains as to how did the first organism know how to make itself?"* and poses the question *"how, from a set of fairly simple chemical substances, can the whole of the complete reproductory metabolic mechanism be evolved without the benefit of any preformed structure?"* by which he means how could a complete living creature with all its wonderful powers evolve itself from the basic dead elements when there was no existing pattern to point the way. To which question he returns his own answer; *"this is the major unsolved question of the origin of life"*.

Perhaps the glowing words of David in Psa.139.14-16 form the best commentary upon that rather despondent remark. It is not likely that David the shepherd-boy knew much about the origin of life but not much doubt that he was used as an agent of the Holy Spirit to express things which he himself would understand only in part. *"I will thank thee therefore that I am so fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are thy works and that thou knowest right well. My being was not concealed from thee when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. My undeveloped substance did thy eyes see, and in thy book were all of these written; the days that were formed for me when as yet there were none of them."*

It is fairly evident that David was speaking representatively for man in general in this passage; this is a description of the forming of man, the handiwork of God. There is an atmosphere of gradual development as the words run their course; one might easily understand an evolutionist seeing in them a picture of the slow development of the human frame from more elementary forms of life. At the same time it could also quite reasonably be said that here is an expanded version of the story told briefly in one sentence in Genesis: *"the Lord God made man of the dust of the ground"*. The important thing to notice here is that man is the workmanship of God; this terrestrial body of which nearly ninety-nine per cent consists of three elements only, carbon, oxygen and hydrogen, was put together by the incomprehensible power of the Holy Spirit to become the vehicle of Divinely bestowed life in a world specifically designed to meet its needs and aspirations. And the pre-

existence of a Divine pattern for man before any action was taken to execute the work is implicit in the passage. *"My being was not concealed from thee when I was being made"*; God saw the finished product before one step in the process had begun. *"My undeveloped substance did thy eyes see"* – the Hebrew word *golem* which appears only here in all the O .T. means, according to Gesenius, "rude or unformed matter, not yet wrought, as of parts not yet unfolded or developed". There is something here that runs parallel with the condition described in Genesis 1 when the earth itself was unformed and empty, darkness and chaos, and the Spirit of God came pulsing over the face of that chaos and brought an orderly earth out of those disorganised elements. So was it here with man. *"The days that were formed for me when as yet there were none of them."* A future for the creature of his making; days to which God looked forward knowing that man would eventually be worthy of the planned destiny although in that primal day none of them had as yet dawned.

This then is the only answer. God made man and gave him life. How the material body took shape, how the earth itself came into being, as expressed in scientific terms, is of minor importance against that tremendous fact. God made man, made him for a purpose, a purpose that is steadily becoming more obvious to us as our knowledge, not only of our relationship to God, but of the possibilities inherent in his creation, increases and expands. *"For with thee is the fountain of life, in thy light shall we see light."*

AOH

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

Has there ever been a time when people were not calling out for God to do something about the state of the world? "How long, O Lord?" As we write, the Middle East is in a state of confusion and unrest, as the 'Arab Spring' takes its course. It would be foolish to state what is going to happen next, for by the time you read this the situation may have changed. Amid it all, we wonder how Israel may be affected, surrounded as it is by hostile neighbours in the interplay of power politics.

It is not an entirely new situation, for the situation that existed 2700 years ago has been described in similar terms. "The tiny countries of Israel and Judah were surrounded by quarrelsome neighbours and crushed between

world empires. This was the period of Assyria's great expansion and culture.... and it was the military exploits of this great empire which form the backcloth to the prophets' words. Her power to crush was seen as the instrument of divine anger, and this period saw terrible examples of its use. Egypt, continually denounced by these prophets as a 'broken reed', untrustworthy, was no decadent power. It was the century of Assyria's might and Egypt's culture" (E H Robinson in *Four Prophets*). The prophets referred to are Isaiah and Amos, Hosea and Micah, all prophesying at about the same time, telling the people of Israel that if they considered themselves God's special people living under His protection, then they should live in His way, obedient to His laws. Which they were not doing. Which explained the troubles they were going through at that time.

However, each of these prophets looked beyond their present troubles to the 'last days' - a time when the people would obey God and trust Him, and He would take control. Hosea states, "*the time will come when the sons of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and in the end they will come in awe to the Lord and his goodness*" (2.5) Amos says, "*The days are coming, the Lord declares, when the ploughman will overtake the reaper, and he who treads the grapes will overtake the sower, when the mountains are wet with new wine, and the hills grow soft with it. That will be when I bring back the exiles of my people Israel, to rebuild deserted cities and live in them, to plant vineyards and drink their wine, to make gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them in their own land. Never again shall they be uprooted from the land which I gave to them. The Lord, your God, has spoken.*" (9.13-15).

Isaiah, right at the beginning of his prophecies, tells what he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: "*In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains, raised above the hills, and all nations will stream into it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths'. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations, settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.*" (2.1-4) This was a vision for his own nation, of what would be the situation when God acted and God's people behaved like God's people. The vision was of all the families of earth being blessed. The response which Isaiah urged upon the people was "*Come O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord*" - a contrast to the way they were behaving. He had a burning vision of what God would eventually do - but did it depend on their

obedient response?

Micah includes this identical vision in his prophecy (4.1-4), almost word for word. It would be interesting to know how many of the people at that time were familiar with these words. Micah goes on to add a further verse: *“Every man shall sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid for the Lord Almighty has spoken.”* (How topical for the needs of the twenty-first century, in Libya this year, or the Ivory Coast!) Micah hereshows that God’s rule is not just the politics of who is in authority, but results in simple blessings for ordinary people. His response is different from Isaiah’s, not “Let us walk”, an exhortation, but “We will walk”, a promise. *“All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.”* In a world of many nations and many religions, it is a pledge of loyalty to the Lord *our* God.

Seven hundred years later this prophecy had not been fulfilled. Even our Lord did not bring world peace under divine rule, just like that. He began a peaceful work in men’s hearts. We can see the results today - the yeast of the kingdom is still working secretly. So how should the prophecy be understood? As one looks at commentaries on the ancient prophecy, two lines of interpretation are apparent (even within the same commentary!) One line is to apply the Isaiah prophecy to the Christian church - following Peter’s thought (1 Peter 2.9,10) that Christians are heirs to the Old Testament people of God - a select race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s possession, who are now the people of God. So one comment reads, “that the Lord is in her... is the only glory of the church. Her role is to draw men, not dragoon them; but their need is of God’s uncompromising truth and rule, the firm centre to any perfect circle... the vision issues in appeal not to dream of a world movement one day, but to respond in the present and on the spot.”

The other comment has the heading ‘The ultimate triumph of God’s grace towards Israel’. “Mount Zion symbolizes the uniquely authoritative revelation of God through the scriptures.... Gentiles... will come not merely as individual proselytes but like a flowing river in order to be taught by Yahweh concerning his saving truth so that they may lead God-pleasing God-serving lives..... This points beyond this present age to a future era when Christ will have complete control here on earth... and the uninterrupted peace and harmony of the millennium will prevail over all the world.” [Extract from commentary on Isaiah, Micah, in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* 1970.]

So these prophecies have been studied for a further two thousand years. When the Scots of the eighteenth century were engaged in writing

their paraphrases of scripture in verse (such as, 'The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want') they also made a paraphrase of this prophecy. Their version is still sung. "*Behold the mountain of the Lord In latter days shall rise On mountain tops above the hills And draw the wondering eyes.*" As with the two versions of the prophecy in scripture, there were varying versions of the paraphrase. 1745 - "*In latter days the Mount of God, His sacred house shall rise*" 1795 - "*On mountain tops the mount of God In latter days shall rise.*" (The version best known is attributed to Michael Bruce, a young student and poet, who died of tuberculosis aged 21. The son of a weaver, he was a delicate child, contemplative, devotional and humorous, the pet of his family and friends. With help from a legacy he was able to go to Edinburgh University, but his life ended in disease and poverty. It was John Logan, a fellow student, who adapted the hymn and published it in a collection in 1781.)

Comparing these metrical versions is of interest, each writer working to reproduce the scripture in memorable verse. Groups of faithful people were still finding in God's kingdom a source of hope. But the little variations in the text reflect how there were and are variations of viewpoint, even today. For an example, take the last verse.

Bruce's version reads '*Come then, O house of Jacob, come To worship at his shrine; And, walking in the light of God, With holy beauties shine*'. This is a straight metrical version of Isaiah's original. When it was sung by a churchful of Scottish Presbyterians, it was taken to heart by a group who found no difficulty of thinking of themselves as the 'house of Jacob' who saw themselves in the line of succession as God's special people and took all the Old Testament promises to themselves. In the version which appeared in the BBC Hymnal of 1951 a slight alteration had been made, to '*Come then, O God's own people, come*'. The Old Testament phraseology had been discarded, but the thought was similar, and surely we truly are God's own people in this generation and need the exhortation to worship and holy living. On the other hand, in the version found in Hymns and Psalms (Methodist, 1983) the thoughts are shuffled around a little, referring in this last verse to the river of people who would climb Mount Zion, '*Come then, O come from every land To worship at his shrine*' This is an invitation to anyone from any nation who may become a Christian in this age of the gospel, not a reminder to a special people. The mountain of the Lord is large enough for all. Eventually all the world will come and worship in the kingdom, and for those who are willing, the door to it is already open.

STUDIES IN 1 JOHN

Part 21

I John 4. 11—16

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." (vv 11-12.)

We cannot repay God for His love, there is no recompense we can make that will in any way match His infinite goodness and mercy extended toward us. The only thing we can do to express our gratitude and appreciation is to love others of our fellow men in the manner He has loved us. No man has ever seen God, has stood in His presence in the flesh, that he might there declare his love for God and his appreciation of all His benefits. His gratitude must therefore be expressed in deeds directed towards the benefit of fellow men rather than in words directed toward God.

Perhaps there is a Divine purpose in that. How easy it would have been if, immediately following our conversion, justification and consecration to God, we had been taken up into the Divine presence, away from all the vicissitudes and hardships of this workaday world. How pleasant then to stand before the heavenly throne and praise God for His great love manifested toward us in taking us away from the world of sin and death, with all its ugliness and all its misery and all its dangers, and setting us down in the light and peace of the heavenly realm. How useless we would then be so far as any future work for mankind is concerned or, indeed, any work of any kind for God.

No man has seen God, that he might express his love for him in person, at any time. There is a deep and vital truth in that brief statement. God does not want any of us round His throne until we have proved ourselves on the field of battle. There is no place for smooth-tongued sycophants in the heavenly courts. Those who can glibly say " Lord, Lord " but have no works of faith or life of endurance wherewith to support their words will never find entrance. It is in the manner that we demonstrate the sincerity of our love by our behaviour toward our fellows that we find the pathway to the golden door. Those who are ultimately received "*into the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*" will have been so received because the tenor of their lives here below has already demonstrated their loyalty and love in the council of heaven far more effectively than any spoken word can do.

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent

the Son to be the Saviour of the world." (vs. 13-14. Here is a reminiscence of Pentecost. Why was John so sure that he was dwelling in God and God in him? "*Behold*" cried Solomon at the dedication of the Temple "*heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built.*" Yet John tells us with perfect assurance that God dwells in each one of us and we each may have that assurance, and in earnest thereof we have the witness of the Spirit. Writing to the Christians at Rome nearly a quarter of a century earlier, Paul had said "*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*" Both Paul and John were merely voicing what was at that time and had always, since Pentecost, been the fixed conviction of the Church, that God, by His Holy Spirit, was indwelling each one of His children. "Your life" says Paul again "is hid with Christ in God." Can there be any closer expression of that intimacy with the Most High into which we enter when we come unto Him through the appointed way? It may be true, and it is true, that no man hath seen God with the natural sight at any time but we have entered into His presence, and stand in that presence, in a spiritual sense that is of far greater moment and means much more to us than any kind of visual appearance can do. There is all the difference in the world between being before the Throne and being in the Throne; between standing before God and dwelling in God. It is that to which John is leading up.

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (v.15.)

In these few verses we have the true relationship – the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. We dwell in the Father, we confess the Son, and we receive the Holy Spirit. We have the love of the Father because we dwell in Him, the grace – favour – of the Son because we confess Him, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit because that Spirit is indwelling with us. The familiar benediction is an expression of the truth – but all these things are true only because in the first place we have loved God and He has loved us.

This confessing of Jesus Christ is a matter of the heart as much as of the lips. "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead*" says Paul in Rom.10.9 "*thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" We are very apt in our enthusiasm to give honour and credit to the one who is fluent in tongue and can readily give voice to his belief in Christ. Such an one, it is often thought, is the most effective missionary. It does not follow. Many a time the sermon of a quiet and consistent Christian life has reached into a heart that has never been moved by the spoken or the printed message. We can confess the Lord Jesus very effectively by

believing in our hearts and letting that belief work out its fruits in our daily lives. When Jesus said "*Whoso shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father and his holy angels*", He was surely not thinking only of verbal confession. He was almost certainly particularly thinking of those whose lives give evidence that they walk "*as He walked*", those of whom men take note that they have been with Jesus and learned of Him. The Apostle Paul tells us in one place that we are a spectacle – a theatre – to angels. We are no less a spectacle to men. And what they see of us now is going to have quite an influence on the manner in which they will react to the earthly Kingdom and its laws when that Kingdom is established and those laws are put before them.

"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (v.16). John has said all this before, several times. He writes in the spirit of the off-quoted modern saying "expression deepens impression". Our own lives' experiences testify to the need for constant repetition of these exhortations to love. We forget them so easily. Jesus impressed His disciples, before leaving them, with the truth that no more important thing could feature in their lives than the being made perfect in love. Paul declared unequivocally that without love he was as nothing despite all his other attainments and accomplishments. Love is the greatest thing, greater because more enduring than either faith or hope. Love is the end and aim of our moral progress, and is therefore clearly much more vital than doctrine, which is only a means to that end. Doctrine, like faith and hope, will vanish away when "*that which is perfect is come*" but love will never fail. We have appreciated and accepted the fruits of God's love to us; that is one part of John's thought in this verse. Now we who have thus accepted the Divine gift find that by that acceptance we have been brought into tune with the Divine. God dwells in us; we dwell in God. We have already been over this ground but it is characteristic of John in his Epistle that he continually works round as it were in circles, bringing us back to thoughts previously expressed, but approaching from the opposite direction. But from whatever angle John comes to his subject the centre of his thought is always the same. God is love. That great truth enshrines the philosophy of the entire Plan of salvation and the assurance that it will be carried out. We who know of this love, who are persuaded of its reality and have seen evidence of its power, know that it will accomplish all that is promised. In that confidence we rest content.

(To be continued)

AOH

DAY OF REST

A series on Sabbath and Sunday Part 1 The Sabbath in Antiquity

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy". How many, reading those words, realise just how far back in history we must go to find when men began to keep one day in seven a day of rest? Some think of Sunday as a somewhat tiresome and awkward kind of day. Others frankly have never thought of it as anything else but a day to be given over to the pursuit of amusement. Still others use it for the advancement of self-interest – continuing to conduct their business affairs or perhaps labour at their craft for the sake of the double pay usually associated with Sunday work. Many unfortunate ones are compelled to serve their employment on Sunday as well as on weekdays because modern society demands that it shall be so. Probably very few have ever paused to enquire how it was that Sunday came to be instituted at all.

Professing Christians often associate the day with recollections of the Law given to Israel at Sinai. They are conscious of a prohibition against engaging in any kind of labour, and of an obligation to devote the day to worship and religious observance. Religious observance in the days of our immediate forefathers had a tendency to be gloomy and morbid. So it may not be altogether surprising that few could find it in their hearts to say with the Psalmist: *"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* Perhaps it was for the same reason that men did not enquire particularly into the reasons underlying the giving of the Fourth Commandment, and so failed to realise that it is a fundamental necessity for all men to enjoy a periodic day of cessation from labour.

The custom of observing this weekly rest from the normal occupations of life did not begin with the giving of the Fourth Commandment. That law only stated in formal terms what men had known and practised from much earlier times. Long before Israel existed as a nation the peoples of Sumer and Akkad, the lands which afterwards became Babylonia and Assyria, had incorporated Sabbath observance into their national life. The earliest record of its observance now extant dates back to the days of Sargon of Agade, a ruler whose kingdom extended over the lands bordering the Tigris and Euphrates five or six hundred years before Abraham. In a calendar of the period the word *"Sabbattu"*, as the day was called, is explained as meaning "completion of work, a day of rest for the soul," and this day was to be observed five times in each month, viz., the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st and 28th days. On these days it was unlawful to transact

business, labour for gain, cook food, or conduct civil, political and military functions. The whole life of the community came to a stop, just as did that of Israel in the wilderness many centuries later.

There are in existence inscribed tablets dating from the time of Abraham which give a Babylonian version of the work of creation. The fifth of these tablets describes the establishment of the heavenly bodies and the ordering of the calendar, and accredits the institution of the Sabbath to God in this wise: *"every month without fail he (God) made holy assembly days . . . On the seventh day he appointed a holy day, and to cease from all business he commanded."*

Shem, Terah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must all have been familiar with the keeping of the Sabbath, even although no direct mention of the fact is made in the early books of the Old Testament. That the months were divided into weeks we know from Gen. 29. 27-28, and can infer also from Job 2.13 and Gen. 7.10. Since the people of whom Abraham came were regular Sabbath keepers, he himself must also have observed this ordinance, which he must have known was hallowed by God at the time of creation.

These Babylonian records are probably greatly distorted versions of the same historical facts which are set down with such accuracy in the early chapters of Genesis. The extract given above is reasonably harmonious with Gen. 2. 2-3: *"... he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work ..."* In these few words in Genesis we have the earliest written reference to the institution of the Sabbath. They teach that the first to "keep Sabbath" was the Most High himself – surely the supreme example! The meaning of the term "Sabbath" – Hebrew *"Sha-bath"* – is that of ceasing or resting from activity or labour, to observe as a day of rest. It is used in the Bible not only in respect of men, but also of beasts and the land. The ground itself, which is made to bring forth food for man, must have its periodic times of rest, during which it may recover strength and fertility. This is the basic principle behind the observance of one day in seven as a day of rest and worship. Man, no less than the land from which he draws life, needs a periodic cessation from the daily round, that his physical and mental vitality may be recuperated. Without this recuperation he cannot continue to function at normal efficiency, and this fact is well known to medical men and to industrial leaders. A seven-day working week has been proven impracticable, and eventually leads to breakdown.

In the Divine arrangement this necessary break from daily routine has been made the opportunity for greater attention than would otherwise

be possible to the chief need of human nature – communion with God. The dependence of men upon their Creator is not often acknowledged nowadays, but the need is there, and spiritual separation from God is a potent factor in the progressive degeneration of the human race. Our Lord Jesus derived his strength by continual communion with his Father, and men will eventually learn to do the same. The Sabbath day of rest, because of its freedom from everyday cares and interests, becomes the natural day for communion and worship in ways which are not so practicable on the other days of the week.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the children of Israel were already Sabbath-keepers when they left Egypt. The evidence for this conclusion is to be found in Ex.16.22-30, in which it is recorded that after crossing the Red Sea and entering the wilderness of Sin (so called after Sin, the Babylonian Moon-god), they commenced to gather manna. Upon each day they gathered enough for that day only, speedily finding that it would not keep overnight (v.20). But on the "sixth day" (v.22) it appears that they gathered two days' supply, quite spontaneously and without being so bidden, and the rulers of the assembly came to Moses in some concern over this action.

Why did they gather two days' supply on the sixth day, when they already knew that the manna would not keep overnight? Surely it was that they were already in the habit of observing a sabbath of rest, and their faith told them that they must gather two days' supply on the sixth day and trust God to preserve it that night. In the following verse, v.23, Moses confirmed the correctness of their action, and laid down the rule that on every sixth day they should gather sufficient for two days.

It appears that some of the Israelites did go out on the Sabbath to gather, and found none (v.27) and in consequence the Lord's words came to Israel through Moses: "*How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?*" This, be it noted, was before the Law was given at Sinai. It seems clear, therefore, that Israel already regarded the Sabbath as a Divine institution, and the Law at Sinai merely confirmed the rule.

Perhaps the great feature of the Fourth Commandment given at Sinai was the revelation of a relationship between the Sabbath ordinance and God's own work in creation. Ex.20.8-10 bade the people of God to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. It also told them that "*in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*" This connection of the two themes is important, for at any rate it shows that man is bidden to do that which God himself has already done. It is even more striking to observe that when, upon a later occasion, God repeated this injunction to Moses, He told him that "in six days the Lord made heaven and

earth, and on the seventh day He rested, *and was refreshed*" (Ex.31.17). Does this mean that even the Almighty Himself must "cease" from his creative activity for a time, in order to concentrate his great power for some other creation at some future time? We are quite unable to enquire sufficiently closely into the attributes of Divinity to say, although there is no doubt at all about the meaning of the expression. It is used in Ex.23.12, where the servants and domestic animals were to be "refreshed" by the keeping of sabbath, and in 2 Sam. 16.14, where David and those with him, weary with their journey, came to a place at which they "refreshed" themselves. (The word is "*naphash*," meaning primarily to take breath, as when fatigued by heavy labour; to breathe or pant strongly; being, in fact, the root from which "*nephesh*"—breath—is derived). We can content ourselves with the reflection that after six days of incessant creative activity, culminating in the emergence of man, the Most High "ceased" from creating, not for ever, but for a span of time, and from a human standpoint He "rested, and was refreshed." After his seventh day of rest, God surely commences to labour again, although of that labour the Scripture tells us nothing.

(To be continued)

AOH

SAYINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Bible phrases we use in daily speech

It has been said about the King James Version of 1611 that it had a great influence in forming the English language. Those who have been brought up in a Christian culture will slip into a biblical turn of phrase without particularly thinking that they are quoting scripture. These expressions may also be used by non-believers who live their lives without any conscious Christian input.

As a matter of interest we quote below a selection of phrases which have a biblical origin. You are invited to consider whether you think they get used in modern English. Your opinion. Do you ever hear them said, or read them anywhere.?

Secondly, you have the opportunity to test yourself. Do you know what section of scripture they come from? Can you find the place? Or even, without looking it up, quote chapter and verse?

1. A 'doubting Thomas' A sceptical person, one who refuses to believe something until he has actually seen complete proof or evidence for it.
2. A 'good Samaritan' Someone who helps others who are in need.
3. The 'writing on the wall' The existence of signs that warn of imminent failure or ruin.
4. 'The leopard cannot change his spots' The basic nature or character of a person or institution cannot be changed.
5. 'The straight and narrow' The upright, moral and correct way to behave.
6. 'Pride goes before a fall' When a person behaves in an over-confident and vain manner he is soon likely to suffer misfortune.
7. 'Money is the root of all evil' Everything bad has the desire for money underlying it.
8. 'All things to all men' People who try to please everyone, modifying their behaviour to adapt to those whom they are with.
9. 'A fly in the ointment' A person or thing that spoils a situation that is perfect in every other way.
10. 'Not suffer fools gladly' When a person is impatient and unsympathetic towards foolish people.
11. 'The powers that be' The controlling authority, the governing body, the establishment.
12. To 'wash one's hands of' To say or show that one no longer wants to be responsible or involved in an action.

Answers on page 118

THE GRANDSON OF MOSES

The story of the first apostasy

The name of Moses stands out in Israel's history as that of the man who welded twelve unorganised tribes into a nation, brought that nation into covenant relationship with God, and throughout a long life stood firmly in his allegiance to the God of Israel and carried the nation with him in that allegiance. Israel never forgot him. Fourteen hundred years later, in the

days of Christ, the words and commands of Moses were still regarded as law. No greater man had ever lived or would ever live, said every pious man of Israel. *"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"* (Deut. 34. 10) commented the ancient chronicler who closed the story of Moses' life. He was a mighty man and a stalwart for the righteousness of God. *"Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day"* was his final exhortation to the nation just before his death *"which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life; and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land"* (Deut. 32. 46-47). All the greater tragedy, therefore, that Moses' own grandson and his descendants for six centuries were apostates from the worship of God, serving an idol altar throughout the entire time of Israel's occupancy of the land.

Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, both born to him before the Exodus, during the period of his exile in Midian. One son at least was still a child at the time of the Exodus and they both entered the Promised Land. Neither of them appear to have inherited the outstanding characteristics of their celebrated father and they seem to have been undistinguished members of the Levites, an office theirs by right of descent from Moses, and they probably served as such in some community in Israel. They are not mentioned in the historical narratives and it is evident that no particular honour was paid them in respect of their relationship to the great deliverer of the nation. In the early days we read of stalwart men who rose up to defend and lead the people struggling to consolidate their hold on the land—Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, Ehud, but not Gershom or Eliezer. The mantle of Moses did not fall on his sons; it passed to others.

Four centuries later, in the days of David, there is a brief reminder of these two. David, forbidden by God to build the Temple, was nevertheless commanded to erect an altar to the Lord in Jerusalem and this he did on the summit of Mount Moriah where Solomon's Temple afterwards stood. (1 Chron.22.18-26). To this "house of the Lord" as David termed it, he gathered all the sacred treasures, spoils of war dedicated to the Lord and so on, and placed them under the supervision of Shebuel, descendant of Gershom, and Shelomith, descendant of Eliezer. A few scattered allusions in 1 Chron.23.14-17; 24.20; 26.24-25 tell us this much and preserve a few names and that is all. These two were evidently men of God and honoured with a share in the sacred duties.

The darker side of the picture is displayed in the story of one other member of the family, Jonathan the son of Gershom and therefore grandson

of Moses. This Jonathan, born in the land in the very early days of the settlement, occupied a very minor office as a Levite attached to the tribe of Judah in Bethlehem (Judges 18). Apparently discontented with his lot, he made his way northward into the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, seeking to better himself, as we might say. There he encountered an Ephraimite named Micah, who, himself infected with the prevalent idolatry of Canaan, had made himself idols graven images, and set them up in his house. He invited Jonathan to enter his service as a kind of domestic priest, to attend upon idols and conduct religious observances on behalf of the family. The terms: board and lodging, necessary officiating robes, and ten silver shekels per year, which since ordinary labourer's wages at the time ranged between thirty and fifty shekels a year was not a very princely sum for a grandson of Moses the conqueror. But he accepted it and entered upon his duties as apostate priest to an idolater. The depths of ignorance into which Israelites like Micah had fallen is well illustrated by his comment upon the situation. *"Now I know that the LORD will prosper me because I have a Levite as priest"* (Judges 17.13 ESV)

His complacency was rudely disturbed. A roving party of men from the tribe of Dan, migrating northward to seek more suitable territory for themselves, came upon Micah's house and found the idol installation complete with priest. Heedless of any rights Micah may have had in the matter, they took forcible possession of the idols and made a proposition to Jonathan. *"Is it better for thee"* they suggested *"to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?"* Jonathan saw the point and accepted the offer with alacrity; he journeyed with them to the north, where they found a fertile country, inhabited only by a peaceful and defenceless people whom they unceremoniously slaughtered and established themselves in their place. So it was that Jonathan the grandson of Moses became the first High Priest of the first organised system of idolatry to be established in Israel. There in the town of Dan centre of the northern territory of the tribe of Dan, most northerly point of the land of Israel and not far from modern Damascus, he administered the ceremonies of a pagan faith, he and his sons after him, seven hundred years until the Assyrians came and took Israel away into captivity. During all that time these sons of Moses stood for all that their illustrious forebear had so consistently and sternly condemned.

The story is told in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Judges. It must have taken place during the first century in the land. At the same time that Jonathan was leaving Bethlehem for a life of infamy in the north, Ruth the Moabitess was coming into Bethlehem to yield her life in devotion to Israel's God, joining in association with Boaz the God-

fearing Israelite to forge another link in the line that led to Christ, the 'greater prophet' of whom Moses spoke. The line of Jonathan ended in captivity and ruin and is now lost in obscurity; that of Ruth and Boaz is immortalised by the event which happened later at Bethlehem when the angels sang "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men*".

The story was set down faithfully in the Book of Judges but in later manuscripts the transcribers, reluctant to perpetuate the association of their great Lawgiver's name with that of his apostate grandson, added the letter 'n' to the name in Judges 18. 30 thus making it Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, instead of Moses. This is the A V rendering; in the Hebrew text the 'n' is above the line, indicating that the original reading is Moses. Most modern translations, including RSV and NEB, render it Moses.

Four centuries later Jeroboam, the first king of the Ten Tribes, installed two golden calves as objects of worship, one at Bethel and the other at Dan (1 Kings 12.25-33). At Bethel he created an order of non-Levite priests; of Dan nothing is said and it is obvious on the strength of Judges 18.30-31 that the sons of Jonathan continued to serve that sanctuary with the golden calf added to the original idols. Jehu, another two centuries on, destroyed Baal worship out of Israel but left the golden calves and their worship untouched (2 Kings 10.29) and this for a definite reason. These golden calves, like their prototype at the time of Sinai, were visible emblems of the God of Israel. Oft-times in the O.T. God was likened to the wild ox on account of its strength and irresistible power. Heedless of the commandment against making graven images of God and bowing down and worshipping such images, these golden calves, which were likenesses of the wild ox, were set up in the sight of Israel so that they could worship God in the same way as other nations worshipped their gods, before a visible object made according to their own ideas. Hence Jehu, whose object was to destroy idol worship and preserve the worship of Jehovah, in his ignorance left the golden calves intact, and the result was that Bethel and Dan remained centres of idolatry throughout the whole of Israel's national existence, ending only with the great Captivities which cured Israel of that particular sin for all time. In much of their idolatry the Israelites believed they were worshipping the true God, the one whom Moses had revealed to them, when all the time they were worshipping false conceptions of God.

In the final analysis all idolatry comes down to that. Christians, Jews and Moslems worship and serve the same God, but under so widely differing views of his character and attributes that there can be little or no reconciliation. Christians, in their various outlooks, see God sometimes like Moloch, demanding human sacrifice by fire for his appeasement, sometimes like Baal, the impersonal force of Nature to which man is subject, sometimes

like Ashtaroth, permitting every self indulgence and gratification of animal passions without thought of higher things, sometimes like the Hebrew wild ox, merciless to his enemies and a fierce partisan to his own people. All these false gods are found amongst us today, even within communities of Christians; so many have failed to realise the depths of meaning in Jesus' words to the woman at the well "*they that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth*". Not for nothing was Israel forbidden to make graven images of God; we in our own minds are apt to set up such graven images and, like Jonathan the grandson of Moses, worship them under the impression that we are worshipping the God of our fathers when in reality we are doing nothing of the sort. The Apostle John was aware of that when he said "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 3.21). Only in constant heed to the words of Jesus and realisation of our union through him with the Father, he tells us, can we really know God. "*We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true. This is the true God, and eternal life.*"

AOH

SAYINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Answers

1. The account of Thomas who at first did not believe in Jesus' resurrection is found in John's Gospel, chapter 20 and around verse 24.
2. The story Jesus told about the Samaritan who went to the traveller's rescue when other more likely people did not is found in Luke 10, verses 30 to 37. Being a neighbour crosses theological and racial divides.
3. The writing on the wall appeared to King Belshazzar, who was 'weighed in the balance and found wanting'. Daniel 5.5
4. This was quoted by the prophet Jeremiah (13.23) to the city of Jerusalem who could not change and do good because they were accustomed to doing evil.
5. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7.13,14) warns that the way to life leads through the small gate along the narrow path. It is not 'straight' but 'strait' - restricted, difficult to get through.
6. Proverbs 16.18 has it that 'Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall' (KJV)
7. 1 Timothy 6.10 more accurately reads that the *love* of money is the root of *all kinds of evil*.
8. The apostle Paul was willing to be completely versatile to fit in with different groups of people in an attempt to bring about their salvation. He restricted his own freedom so as not to offend them, but this does not mean he would join them in anything wrong or false. (1 Corinthians 9.22)

9. As dead flies give even sweet-smelling perfume a bad odour, so a little foolishness can spoil wisdom (Ecclesiastes 10.1)
10. Paul is speaking ironically to the christians at Corinth, who, he says, thought themselves to be wise, but in fact were submitting themselves naively to false teachers. (2 Corinthians 11.19)
11. This phrase comes from Romans 13.1, where Paul is urging obedience to the existing authorities because it is God's will that authorities should exist.
12. Matthew 27.44. Pontius Pilate washed his hands publicly to show that he did not accept responsibility for the death of Jesus. Was it in fact possible to avoid the responsibility?

With thanks for ideas to the Wordsworth Dictionary of Bible Quotations.

Craftsman's Corner

GOD'S TOOLS

The Carpenter's tools had a conference. Brother Hammer was in the chair. The meeting had informed him that he must leave, because he was too noisy. "But," he said, "If I am to leave this Carpenter Shop, Brother Gimlet must go too, for he is so insignificant that he makes very little impression."

Little Brother Gimlet arose and said, "All right, but Brother Screw must go along also; you have to turn him around again and again to get him anywhere."

Brother Screw then said, "If you wish I will go, but Brother Plane must leave also. All his work is on the surface, there is no depth to it."

To this Brother Plane replied, "Well, Brother Rule will have to withdraw if I do, for he is always measuring other folks as though he were the only one who is right."

Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper and said, "I just do not care for him, as he is rougher than he ought to be. He is always rubbing people the wrong way."

Brother Chisel had risen to give a cutting remark, when - in the midst of this discussion, The Carpenter of Nazareth walked into His tool room, for He had come to perform His day's work.

The article that He was completing was a New Creation. He employed the hammer, the gimlet, the screw, the plane, the ruler, the sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work was over and His article completed in perfection, Brother Saw arose and said, "Brethren, I perceive that all of us are labourers together with God."

How many of us as Christians are just like these tools, fussing at others

because they do not do things just the way we think they should. There was not one accusation against any of the tools that was not absolutely true; yet the Carpenter of Nazareth used every one of them: and He used each in a place that another would not do at all.

Let us be good tools in the hands of God.

Written by Sr. Burdet, and sent in by a reader.

Notices

Midland Group Convention

a day for renewing old friendships

At Blaby Social Centre, Leicester Road

On Sunday, May 30 Contact Bill Start 01162 771401

Gainsborough Convention

An intimate gathering held in the chapel of the group of 8 old people's flats run by the Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust

At Gainsborough House, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset

On Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12 Contact Corrinne Vaughan 01963 250684

High Leigh Conference

High Leigh, set in its own parklands, was once the residence of the Barclay family. Now much enlarged, it is host to numerous Christian conferences. Brethren have held their conference there for many years.

At High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts

From Monday to Sunday, August 15-21

Bookings by June 30 to Joan Charcharos 01442 381550 10 Plaiters Close, Tring HP23 5TA email: nick.charcharos@btinternet.com

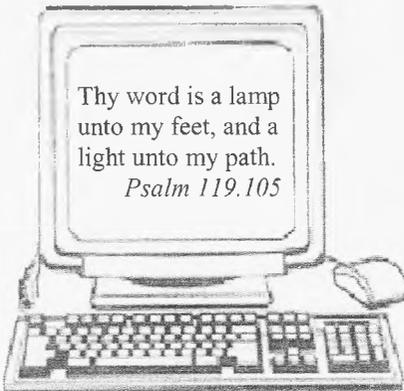
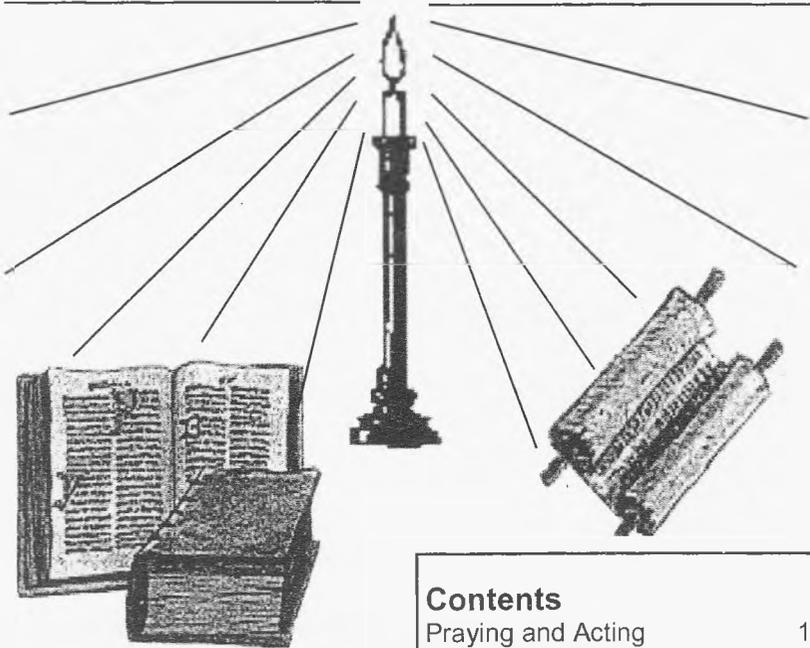
Correspondence

We apologise in advance for any delay in correspondence with Barnstone which readers may experience from June onwards, as health matters are to be dealt with.

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

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

PRAYING AND ACTING

The prayer that follows was found on the internet.

"God of the poor and oppressed, we look around us and see that the world is not as it should be. There is war and conflict, families are torn apart, people are uprooted from their homes, children play among the rubble, farmland lies in ruins, trees are cut down and rivers are polluted.

And we cry out to you.

How long? When will there be peace? When will things be shared fairly? When will children play?"

It is not new, prayers like this have been spoken in every generation. History is full of wars, crimes, genocide, stupid destruction, foolish so-called development. The Old Testament is full of stories how Israel had to survive amid hostile tribes and in the presence of the superpowers— for example, the Assyrians who 'came down like a wolf on the fold'. The age of the Gospel, too, has been punctuated by assaults of supposedly Christian nations upon each other, and the visits of destroying invaders - at one time the Goths, Visigoths and Vandals. And today we have 'vandalism', small scale but no less destructive. The world situation now may or may not be worse than the past but at least through the media we know more about it.

By contrast, whoever wrote this prayer was looking to see the effect of God's love working in the world. That has not always been immediately obvious through the centuries. Jesus in his parable compared the kingdom of God to yeast working secretly. The results are to be seen in due course. The process is hidden. Jesus also spoke of bad seed being sown among the good. We are very aware of the harvest of evil, and long for Him to come and gather out the 'weeds'. 'Thy kingdom come' is always our prayer.

So we wait for God to act. There is a comfort in knowing that the future is in His care - that our lives are in His care - that we can come to Him with our cares and problems. There was one occasion when Jesus' disciples came to him with a problem. The crowds whom He had been teaching and healing in a lonely place became tired and hungry as the day wore on. They needed food, the disciples told Jesus he must stop the session and send them away to buy food. His reply was surprising — "You give them something to eat". As we know, they thought this was impossible, but with His help they did it.

We need a balance in our life of prayer. We are not expected to save the world, just like that. Faced with global difficulties, faced even with our own difficulties which seem great to us, we place into the Father's hand the things that we can't do. Yet although we do not have to save the world on our own, we are part of His great plan, and each one of us has a tiny part to play. While we watch the yeast of the kingdom working in unexpected ways; while we wait for the final Harvest when evil is sorted out and dealt with; all the while we need to balance coming to Jesus with the problem, and obeying his instructions. "You feed them."

"As we wait for your answer we see a tiny candle flame lit, we see someone buying fairly traded oil, we see someone offering a welcome and hospitality, we feel excitement growing inside us as we realise that we must begin to be the answer to our prayers."

Look not sorrowfully into the past. It comes not back again.

Wisely improve the present. It is thine.

Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear,
and with a courageous heart.

JONAH'S PETULANCE

This is the sequel to Jonah's mission to Nineveh, narrated in the last issue.

* * *

"So the people of Nineveh repented, and God saw that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." (Jonah 4.1).

Jonah is the only one of the prophets and great men of the Bible of whom it is said that he dared to be angry with God. Moses expostulated with God when the Lord proposed to disown rebellious Israel and make a great nation of Moses' family instead, reminding the Lord of the effect such action would have upon Israel's enemies, who would conclude that God found himself unable to fulfil his intention of bringing Israel into the land of promise and so had cut the knot by slaying them in the wilderness. Abraham pleaded with God to avert the threatened destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, if so few as ten righteous men could be found there, desisting only when even ten could not be found. Elijah, despondent at the apparent failure of his life's work, besought the Lord to gather him to his fathers. The Lord instead sent him back to perform yet other great deeds for his Cause. Of no other man is it said that he presumed to be angry with God. He must have felt very bitterly that the Almighty had, as we would say today, let him down.

Reluctantly, and against his will, he had come to Nineveh in obedience to the Divine mandate, to announce the onset of Divine judgment for their misdeeds. He did not want them to repent; he hoped they would not repent; he did not expect them to repent. Because of the threat they posed to his own people he would rather they reaped the penalty of their evil ways and be removed from this earthly scene and Israel be secure. They should get what they deserved and that would be the end. And now, most unexpectedly, they had responded to his preaching and come before the Lord in sackcloth and ashes, beseeching the Lord for forgiveness; and the Lord had answered the plea and lifted the judgment. If later on the Ninevites relapsed into their old ways the threat to Israel would remain, and even so the unrighteous would escape the penalty of their sins because of the leniency of God, and Jonah was exceedingly angry.

So "he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before thee unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; it is better for me to die than to live".

What marvellous testimony is this to the love and forbearance of God! Gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, ready to forgive and restore where there is repentance, irrespective of the past! How many Christians in modern as well as in ancient times fail after this same fashion! More solicitous for the condemnation and punishment of sinners than for their reformation and reclamation! Much more inclined to dwell with gusto upon the vision of Paul *"the Lord himself shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God"* than the lovely words of John *"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."* Some, in all sincerity, endeavour to gain converts by preaching the terrors of Hell for the unregenerate, failing to realise that the Lord will never, on any account, accept the allegiance of one who comes to him only because of fear of the consequences if he does not. The only ones who will ever win acceptance with him and enter the shining portals of eternity are those who have heard and answered the call *"My son, give me thine heart"*.

And the Lord looked down upon his loyal but at the moment definitely disgruntled servant with (who can doubt it?) very understanding sympathy. After all, he knows the hearts of all men and he knew that a little object lesson which he now proposed to give Jonah would put the matter right. *"Doest thou well to be angry?"* He asked the wrathful prophet. The AV rendering does not give the true inflection of the question. What the Lord really said was *"Art thou greatly angry?"* As much as to say, as one would express it in twentieth century vernacular, "Poor old chap, are you really so upset about it all?" The Lord always understands, *"He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust"*, and he takes note, not of the words we say, but of the sincerity of our hearts.

But Jonah was in no mood for parleying, nor, apparently, for further conversation with the Lord on the matter, for the next verse (v.5) tells us that he *"went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he would see what might become of the city"*. It looks very much that he was cherishing a secret hope that the Lord might yet reflect that He could have been a little too generous in accepting this admittedly tardy repentance of the Ninevites and decide after all to impose the threatened judgment, and the least Jonah could do was to wait a little to see what was going to happen. How long the evangelistic campaign lasted is not indicated. It is possible that there were still twenty or thirty days of the forty days time limit yet to expire so that Jonah was probably endeavouring to make himself reasonably

comfortable in his sylvan retreat until he could see which way things were going to turn out.

It is here that we come across one of the many evidences of the historical accuracy of the Scriptures which the critics so often miss. Jonah "*sat on the east side of the city*" and there sat "*until he would see what might become of the city*". Since the city, with all its suburbs, is known to have covered an area of about twenty miles along the river and more than ten miles across, an observer having this intention must needs occupy a position fairly high in altitude and a suitable number of miles away in order to have the entire city in his field of vision. Now the ruins of Nineveh – which was situated on the eastern side of the River Tigris opposite the present Iraqi city of Mossul – are in the middle of an extensive flat plain with no high hills nearer than the Kurdish mountains some fifty miles away. In the whole of this plain there are only two eminences, minor mountains. One of these heights, known today as Jebel Satra, some two thousand feet high and about a mile across, lies exactly due east of Nineveh at a distance of sixteen miles. The view from the summit of this eminence would see the horizon at fifty-eight miles away, with the entire city plainly in view below. Without any doubt it was to this locality that Jonah made his way, and built his little booth of tree branches and foliage at a height on its slopes from which he could view the city spread out, as it were, almost at his feet. Here, safe from interference, he could await the outcome. Who, but someone who was actually there and experienced this incident, could have described so accurately what the topography of the countryside reveals to have been the position?

It was while sitting here and waiting that Jonah became conscious of the shade afforded by a quick-growing shrub which began to offer a welcome palliative to the noonday heat. The AV calls it a 'gourd', which is incorrect, and adds that the Lord 'prepared' it. This word actually means 'appointed', and the implication is that the Lord had arranged for this all along. Probably Jonah was led to erect his little booth just at the point where the shrub was already growing. There has been a lot of discussion as to the nature of Jonah's 'gourd'. The Hebrew word is *kikayon*, occurring only here, and is generally agreed to refer to the castor oil tree, which has large flat leaves and according to a more modern resident of Kurdish Iraq is still employed as a wind-break. It is renowned for its rapidity of growth and equally rapid withering when cut. According to the story, the Lord had arranged this "*to be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd*". Apparently the booth was his shelter for the night and he sat outside during the day with the city in full view, hoping against hope that the threatened judgment might yet be inflicted upon the

sinful though now repentant city, and this increasing mantle of shady leaves became a welcome protection from the midday sun. Considering Jonah's present attitude, the Lord was being exceedingly understanding.

But Jonah's contentment was short-lived. *"The Lord appointed a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered"*. The word used, *talaath*, denotes the type of insect that lives on the ground and feeds on decaying vegetable matter. Apparently a horde of these insects attacked the young tree – it would still be relatively immature and succulent – and before long it succumbed and withered, leaving the prophet without shelter, angry and resentful. And then, as the sun began to beat down upon his head, there arose *"a vehement east wind"* – the word means hot or sultry – and Jonah just gave up. *"I wish I could die; it is better for me to die than to live"*. Came that soft voice from Heaven, impinging itself upon his consciousness, *"Art thou greatly angry because of the shrub?"* And in his frustration and resentment he made answer in a tone no other prophet ever dared to use to the Almighty. *"I am greatly angry, deadly angry"*. The shrub had sprung forth according to the dictates of Nature and was quietly pursuing its appointed course, fulfilling its useful function in affording shade to the prophet and withal contributing something to the beauty of the environment. It could have had a useful future, Jonah may have thought crossly, but now the Lord had callously cut its life short and ended all hope for its future, and he himself had lost his shelter from the noonday sun into the bargain. He was deadly angry, and in his mind justifiably so, and now he wanted nothing more to do with this mission to Nineveh or with the whole matter of Nineveh's future. He just wanted to die and be out of it all and what the Lord would eventually do with the Ninevites he neither cared nor wanted to know. It had been a very fine shrub and it had served a very acceptable purpose so far as he himself had been concerned and now the Lord had quite arbitrarily and unnecessarily destroyed it and he was bitterly resentful. Which is where the Lord came back to him.

"Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on that shrub, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Paraphrasing: You are concerned about the well-being of a shrub which is destined to grow quickly in its season and to perish as quickly (Heb. idiom "A son of the night it was, and as a son of the night it died") of which you were not the creator nor have you done anything towards its creation or growth. Why then should I not be equally concerned about

Nineveh, a great city of a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants who are so ignorant of moral values that they cannot discern between good and evil – not to speak of much cattle who have just as much right to life as your shrub?"

That is where the Book of Jonah ends. Jonah's reply, if in fact he made any reply to the Lord at all, is not recorded. Perhaps he did not reply. What could he have said? The God he served is a God of love and mercy, and Jonah had not displayed much of either towards the Ninevites. He was in fact not so very different from a good many modern Christians, devoted to the service of the Lord they love, but more zealous for the punishment of sinners than for their reclamation. *"The wages of sin is death"* looms rather more prominently in their theology than does *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"*. With God, the act of repentance cancels the judgment, and the opportunity for repentance is always open. He will only leave the sinner to the error of his way in face of full and final refusal to accept the Divine laws of righteousness as the rule of life, and that, too, only after there is full light and understanding of the Divine standards. And not many men have had that light. The men of Sodom had not, for although they rejected the message of the one righteous man among them, and the Lord therefore took them away, it was even so for their ultimate good. *"I took them away as I saw good"* He said, and through the prophet Ezekiel (ch.16) He reveals his intention to extend the opportunity of grace to them once again – when they *"return to their former estate"* in conjunction with their neighbour Israel. That involves a resurrection from the dead, in the days of the Messianic kingdom – and Jesus did say once that if the men of Sodom had seen the mighty works He did in the First Advent in Israel then Sodom would have remained to that day. He also said that the men of Nineveh would rise in the judgment with his own generation, and condemn it, and that must indicate an element of contrition and repentance for their own past and it is that which God will work upon if perchance they can be fully and finally recovered for his salvation. So the reprieving of Nineveh in the days of Jonah was an illustration of the overriding wisdom and love of God, who *"desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his evil ways, and live"*.

Did Jonah realise his error, and make peace with the Lord, and serve him still in further fields of service? Nobody knows. His life after this is a blank. Whether he ever went back to Israel or remained in Nineveh is unknown. Perhaps, after all, the rather abrupt ending to the book, in which Jonah makes no rejoinder and God has the last word, was by design. Did Jonah indicate, by his silence, the justice and the intrinsic wisdom of the

Lord's way? And is it not true, as in this case of the Book of Jonah, that God always does have the last word?

An indication that he did in fact return to Israel is the fact of the existence of the Book which bears his name and its place in the Old Testament canon. He must have been the writer; much of the contents could not have been written by anybody else. Jesus in his references to Jonah shows that He viewed the Book and the prophet as strictly historical. There is an interesting reference to Jonah in the apocryphal "*Book of Tobit*", thought to have been written by a Median Jew about four centuries before Christ and therefore four centuries after Jonah, and very possibly an example of the quasi-historical "religious fiction" of the day based upon past Biblical history – unless, of course, Tobit really did live, which is possible. Tobit is depicted as an Israelite of the tribe of Naphtali, taken captive at the fall of Samaria, when the "Ten Tribes" were carried into captivity, a century after Jonah! Talking to his son, Tobit says (Tobit 14.4) "*Behold, I am aged, and am ready to depart out of this life. Go into Media, my son, for I surely believe those things which the prophet Jonah spake of Nineveh, that it shall be overthrown, and that for a time peace shall rather be in Media*". This 400 BC literary work does at least verify that the Book of Jonah was known at that time and believed to antedate the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. And, of course, Nineveh was eventually overthrown by the Medes; and Babylonians in 612 BC, two centuries after Jonah's prediction, by which time the Ninevites had long since returned to their bad old ways, and this time without repentance.

But it still holds good that the Lord did say "*Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city of people who have not yet learned to distinguish between good and evil?*" At least until they have so learned and made their choice.

AOH

Let us guard against the negative form of evil-speaking, generally the most thoughtless. Absalom was an example of this. Who could quote any actual evil-speaking against his royal father? Who could charge him with speaking evil of dignities? And yet by insinuations, by his way of putting things, by his very manner, he wrought a thousand-fold more cruel harm than any amount of evil-speaking out could have possibly done. Oh to be watchful as to such omissions to speak well, as amount to speaking evil? Watchful as to the eloquence of even hesitation, watchful as to the forcible language of feature and eye.

JESUS CALLS US

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day His voice is sounding,
Saying, 'Christian, follow me.'*

Peter said, "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you." "Come," answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. Matthew 14.28-32

*As of old, apostles heard it
By the Galilean lake,
Turned from toil, and home, and kindred,
Leaving all for His dear sake.*

As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers who were fishermen, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew, catching fish in the lake with a net. Jesus said to them, "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch men." At once they left their nets and went with him. He went on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in the boat with their father Zebedee, getting their nets ready. Jesus called them, and at once they left the boat and their father, and went with him. Matthew 4.18-22

*Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
saying, 'Christian, love Me more.'*

Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me cannot be my disciple unless he loves me more than he loves his father and his mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and his sisters, and himself as well. Whoever does not

carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14.25-27

“No one can be a slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Matthew 6.24

*In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
'Christian, love Me more than these.'*

Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants..... The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit. Matthew 13.7,22

“If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.” Matthew 19.21

*Jesus calls us! By Thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.*

“I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.” John 15.5

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind..... Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Matthew 22.37,39

‘Jesus calls us’, like all the hymns that Mrs Alexander wrote (and she wrote 400 of them) is written very simply, in a way that a child could understand. She also wrote ‘Once in royal David’s city’, ‘There is a green hill far away’ and ‘All things bright and beautiful’, and her collection ‘Hymns for Little Children’ was published 69 times in the nineteenth century. Living in Ireland, she married a clergyman who became a bishop, and the profits from her book were given to an Institute for the Deaf and Dumb [no national health in that century].

But, simply as it is written, this particular hymn is profoundly challenging. We wonder if she had experiences of her own in mind when

she writes of 'life's wild restless sea'. Certainly, what we know of her life is in keeping with serving and loving Jesus best of all. The hymn echoes the words of Jesus, who was uncompromising in His call to his followers. It was a special time, and He had a special work for them.

We, in turn, need to discern what His call means for us, which varies with the individual. While He called the apostles to follow him, there was the case of the cured madman who was sent back home (Mark 5.18-20). The calling varies with the time and the circumstances - Philip, who went preaching the good news in every town (Acts 8.5,26,40) is later on settled in Caesarea with his family of four girls (Acts 21.8,9). The calling varies with the gift we are given— while as an apostle, prophet or evangelist one might be called to travel, pastors and teachers might serve in their own place (Ephesians 4.11), while encouragement, sharing, showing kindness (Romans 12.8) can be done always and everywhere. What is important is that we should hear His call to us, each one, whatever it means: and love and obey Him best of all.

GC

*I may perform no deed of great renown
No glorious acts to millions manifest;
Yet in my little labours up and down,
I'll do my best.*

*I may not paint a perfect masterpiece,
Nor carve a statue by the world confessed
A miracle of art, yet will not cease
To do my best.*

*My name is not upon the rolls of fame,
'Tis on the page of common life impressed;
But I'll keep marking, marking just the same,
And do my very best.*

*Mine may not be the beautiful and grand,
But I must try to be so careful, lest
It fails to be what's put into my hand -
My very best.*

Poems of Dawn

SPLAGCHNITHESTHAI

A long Greek word is not necessarily of any spiritual value, so let it be said at once that *splagchna* refers to the heart, lungs, liver and intestines, which in Bible times were believed to be the seat of the deepest emotions. We speak in our day of being warm-hearted, or an experience being gut-wrenching. So *splagchnithesthai* refers to being moved to the depths of your being with the deepest feelings, in particular with compassion.

In scripture the word is found only in the synoptic gospels. Jesus used it (if he spoke on this occasion in Greek) in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18.21-35) about a king who had discovered that a servant owed him life-crippling debts which would result in his family being destroyed. "Give me time!" the man cried. The king had compassion on him, and the result was forgiveness. In Luke 15.20 Jesus described the impulsive warm compassionate love of the father when his ne'er-do-well son showed up - the result was again forgiveness, and restoration. Luke 10.33 tells of the deep pity a stranger felt for a man who had been mugged and left for dead by the roadside - the result was again the most practical help and effective care when the Samaritan gave the victim all his support.

Was Jesus an emotional man? His life was ruled by more than emotion, but he felt very strongly. Faced with the grief of Lazarus' family and friends, Jesus wept. And raised Lazarus back to life. Our Greek word, translated 'moved with pity', is used of him on several occasions. The crowds who followed him drew his sympathy, they were as worried and helpless as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9.36). He taught them. He healed them. Whether there were five thousand of them or four thousand, his reaction was the same (Matthew 14.14; 15.32).

Individuals and their requests brought out his deep emotions. The person with leprosy who came to kneel in front of him, "If you want to, you can make me clean" (Mark 1.41) He healed him. Noisy Bartimeus and his friend, "What do you want?" "Sir, we want you to give us our sight." Their eyes were opened (Matthew 20.34). At Nain, the dead son, only support of his widowed mother, being taken to burial by a grieving crowd, "Do not weep." The young man sat up and began to talk, Jesus gave him back to his mother (Luke 7.13). The frustrating request for his compassion from the father of the epileptic lad, "... if you *can* do something, your disciples couldn't". The lad was cured (Mark 9.22).

It has been remarked that this description of Jesus as feeling compassion ('touched with the feeling of our infirmities' Hebrews 4.15) is in stark contrast to the way the heathen gods of his time were imagined. Someone who is affected by any hard case that comes along, is to that extent not in control. The pagans thought of their gods as being without feelings, to have feelings is a weakness. But we believe in the Son of God 'who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2.20).

Although the word *splagchnizesthai* does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, the first part of it, *splagchna* does, 'bowels' as the AV has it. Or, as we might understand, deep feelings. At the individual level there are recorded the feelings of Paul for Onesimus (Philemon 12), of Titus for the Christians at Corinth (2 Corinthians 7.15), Paul's yearning for his friends in the church at Philippi (Philippians 1.8). Paul begs the Corinthians not to close their hearts to him (2 Corinthians 6.12). In fact, says John, if you close your heart to your brother in poverty, how can you say you love God? (1 John 3.17)

Splagchna is mentioned in the highest company of Christian virtues. In Philippians 2.1 Paul appeals to their love, sharing of the Holy Spirit, kindness and *splagchna*. And to the Colossians he writes, in that marvellous third chapter.... "Christ is all. Christ is in all. You are the people of God. He loved you and chose you for his own. So then you must clothe yourself with *compassion*.... Also kindness, humility, gentleness and patience....

"We think it a commonplace that God is love, that the Christian life is love. We would do well to remember that we would never have known that without the revelation of Jesus Christ, of whom it is so often and so amazingly said, that he was moved with compassion." (Barclay)

Reference W.Barclay New Testament Words

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GC

God is a God of life and love. Nothing in him is barren. He's with us all day. He's with us every day. Nearer than hands or feet. Let's pray for more of his Spirit of life and love, particularly love because love covers everything.

SPC

MICAHIAH THE TRUTHFUL PROPHET

1 Kings 22

Ahab, King of Israel, is at war with Syria. Benhadad, a luxurious and insolent braggart, had demanded the unconditional surrender and plunder of Samaria, and Ahab has refused (1 Kings 20). A prophet of God assured him of successful resistance. It would seem that Jezebel's influence has temporarily waned, for we find prophetic authority being exercised and a large school of the prophets in existence. Apparently Baal worship has declined and the worship of Jehovah in a very imperfect way has been restored.

The Syrians were defeated twice with great slaughter and the King, Benhadad, captured. Some of the leading Syrians came in abject humility to Ahab to plead for the best terms possible. Ahab showed an unexpected clemency, made a treaty with Benhadad and, after extracting a promise from the Syrian King to restore certain cities to Israel, let him go free.

Three years later come the events of 1 Kings 22, the story of Micahiah the son of Imlah. During these years there had been reigning in the neighbouring kingdom of Judah a man of a distinctly different type, Jehoshaphat. He was a good king, walking in the righteous way of David his ancestor. The Lord prospered his reign and he became rich and powerful, but during this rise to prosperity he had thought it wise to cement a friendship with his powerful ally Ahab by marrying his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah. Now, eight years after that event, Jehoshaphat goes down to Samaria on a friendly visit. Ahab receives him with royal hospitality, kills sheep and oxen in abundance. This is part of a deliberate plan for obtaining Jehoshaphat's co-operation in the projected campaign against the Syrians. Ramoth Gilead, an Israelite town, was still in the hands of the Syrians, who, according to the unfortunate treaty made with Benhadad, had agreed to restore it but had not done so.

Ahab asks Jehoshaphat if he will join with him in the expedition and Jehoshaphat consents but would like to have prophetic advice. Ahab probably thought this a foolish weakness of his ally but strove to humour him, so four hundred prophets are summoned. These would not be Baal prophets or those of Ashtaroth such as Elijah had contended with. They spoke in the name of the Lord, as verse 12 indicates, but Jehoshaphat was not satisfied. Perplexed by the din, it is clear that they were not in his view true prophets of Jehovah. He was accustomed to enquiring of the Lord through the person of one man, the High Priest at the temple. They had used the word *Adonai*, which might mean the Supreme God of any religion, and

Jehoshaphat, struck with their shrinking from the distinctive name Jehovah, asks, "*Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah; One who is not ashamed or afraid to speak in his awful name?*"

Ahab read at once Jehoshaphat's secret dissatisfaction. He knew where to find such a prophet, but he had had some bitter experience with that man, Micaiah. He recalled the day when he had sent Benhadad away in peace and had been suddenly confronted by a prophet. How often the words had recurred to him since "*thy life shall go for his life*". No wonder with a burst of anger Ahab says, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me but evil". Jehoshaphat's courteous disclaimer is an irresistible demand for his presence, so Micaiah is summoned, probably from prison. An officer is sent to fetch him.

Elijah's trial at Carmel was in some respects easier than Micaiah's now. In that case it had been the servant of Jehovah against the sham gods, Baal and Ashtaroth. Elijah had stood single handed against four hundred and fifty prophets, the King and his court, and triumphed. Micaiah's test was far subtler of approach and so far more difficult, for these men professed themselves prophets of the Lord. In the name of Jehovah they had uttered their predictions (v.12). Probably to many, if not to all of them, there had been a time when the true voice visited them; but the gift, like all God's gifts, could be turned by the receiver to evil use. He might trifle with it, dumb its utterance through fear of man, pervert it for gifts and rewards, like Balaam, and as he thus trifled with the great power he drove away its presence and an evil spirit came and dwelt there. He became a false prophet, a prophet of lies. We read not so much of the false prophets prophesying consciously a lie as of their seeing lying visions and so uttering deceits. Micah portrays this condition of things in Micah 3. 5-7.

While the officer has gone to fetch Micaiah, verse 11 tells of one of these false prophets, Zedekiah. As the name means "Righteousness of Jehovah", it is quite possible that he was once a true prophet of God but had lost the true vision by a desire to curry royal favour. Anyway he joins in the unanimous voice of the other prophets and declares that the expedition against the Syrians will be successful. Their united reiteration of the cry, evidently with increasing excitement, reminds us of the repeated, "O Baal, hear us" of Mount Carmel and stands in similar contrast with the calm stern utterance of the true prophet.

In v.13 the man who has gone to summon Micaiah appears to give the prisoner friendly advice. He acquaints him with what is going on, tells him of the united advice of the prophets and advises him for his own safety and possible release from prison to agree with the popular voice. There is in the whole incident, especially in the words of this officer, evidence of the strange

confusion of ideas so common in superstition at all times, which in some sense believes in the inspiration of the prophets as coming from God, yet fancies that they can direct it as they will and that accordingly they can be bribed or beguiled or coerced to speak smooth things. The extreme form of this infatuation is exemplified in the case of Simon Magus, who believed the Apostles were the medium for conferring the highest spiritual gifts from God and yet madly persuaded himself that this power could be bought for money (Acts 8.18). The delusion in this case is silenced by the stern reply of Micaiah, *"As the Lord liveth, what Jehovah saith unto me, that will I speak."*

Micaiah is brought out of the darkness of his prison into the full glare of a Syrian noonday sun. It is a significant scene. There are two Kings resplendent in their robes of silk and purple and gold, surrounded by all the glint of pomp and ceremonial display. Courtiers, magnificent in their dress and overbearing in their pride are numerous, and at a respectful distance are the prophets keeping up their repeated adjurations to the Kings to go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper. All around are the people and probably the troops.

Amidst this crowd the single prophet stands. To him the dull stillness of the dungeon has been suddenly exchanged for the eager interrogation of the King, the angry taunts of the prophets and the deep expectant hum of the people. All around, there is an eager sea of faces.

A weaker heart might have fainted under the heaviness of the burden laid upon him. Not so Micaiah; he was strong in the power of Jehovah and felt no fear. The King puts the formal question and Micaiah repeats the refrain of the prophets with their exact words, *"Go, and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the King"*. Micaiah is a true disciple of Elijah in the defiant irony of the tone in which he takes up and mocks the utterance of the false prophets so bitterly as at once to show Ahab his scorn of them and him.

In verse 17 Micaiah drops the bantering tone and prophesies the defeat of the army which has become leaderless, and the King's worst fears are confirmed. Micaiah has as usual prophesied evil. But Micaiah is not finished; he has more to say from the Lord (vv 19-23). *"Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee."*

Zedekiah shows his contempt by striking Micaiah on the cheek. He professes indignation in words of blasphemy against God and of contempt for his prophets and sarcastically enquires how Micaiah came to know the secret dealings and counsels of God, with the idea of turning Micaiah's words into ridicule, but Micaiah ignores his words and merely declares the

shame and terror with which Zedekiah shall find out, hereafter, the truth of his words.

Ahab's affection of disbelief, which his subsequent conduct shows to be but affectation, simply draws down a plainer and sterner prediction accompanied by an appeal to the whole assembly to bear witness of it. *"If you return at all in peace, Jehovah hath not spoken by me. Harken O people, everyone of you."* What courage, what bravery! He was resolute in face of danger.

A few hours later all is accomplished. The session is ended, the royal train rolls proudly back to the ivory palace of Ahab, the company of the prophets whose voice of counsel has prevailed sweeps triumphantly away and the crowd melts and disperses. The one man with whom was Jehovah's presence is led back, dishonoured, smitten and reviled, to eat prison bread and drink its water.

A few days later, a King, dying on Gilead's mountains, and an army slaughtered, scattered and fugitive, attested the truth of Micaiah's words *"If thou return at all in peace the Lord hath not spoken by me"*.

AOH

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

I John 4. 17—21

"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." (v.17)

This is not the great Day of Judgment, the Millennial Age, here in John's epistle. The aged Apostle was not thinking about that far-off event. He was thinking about something much closer and more directly affecting the lives of his brethren. In every Christian life there comes a day of judgment, a time of testing when the faith structure that has been erected over perhaps many years of quiet and uneventful living, must be proved and tried. It was the destiny of many of those early Christians to endure that day of judgment in the guise of persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the civil power of the day. But whether the testing time be a physically crucial one such as that, or the slower but perhaps more penetrating one of hopes unfulfilled and expectations disappointed, disillusionment and apathy such as is by no means an uncommon thing today, it still remains that the day of judgment comes to each one of us in the course of our consecrated life. Jesus

illustrated it in His story of the two men who built themselves houses, one on the rock and the other on the sand, whilst Paul used the metaphor of workers building alternatively with gold, silver and precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble. In both cases the testing time came and in both cases the handiwork of the one who had built well stood the strain and emerged triumphantly, whilst that of the other suffered loss and destruction. Now the completion of our growth in love, the "*making perfect*" of that love, ensures that we will be able to stand in that day. It was because Jesus Himself was the supreme example of selfless love – love for His Father, love for His brethren, love for the world – that He was able to go to die on the cross and rise again triumphant on the third day. It was because He was the supreme example of selfless love that He went about during his lifetime doing good to all men, pouring out His life unto death. The incense of His offering ascended up to God a "*sweet-smelling savour*" and it was all love. Now, says John "*as he is, so are we in this world*". Just as He was made perfect in love and in that perfection was completely acceptable to the Father and altogether triumphant over all that He suffered, so must we be if we are truly to "*follow in his steps*". We too are pouring out our lives unto death, we too are buried with Him by baptism into His death and are risen to walk with Him in newness of life that in due time we might triumphantly share in the glory of the First Resurrection. His love was made perfect and he had boldness in his day of judgment. We, if we would be like him, must follow the same path.

v.18 "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*"

‘Torment’ here is *kolasin*, to restrain, check, cut off, cut short. Are we not all witnesses to the truth of this word? Fear does have a restraining effect; so many have refrained from entering the race for the prize of the High Calling on account of their fear of its implications, and they have been restrained thereby from ever entering in. The children of Israel in the wilderness feared the gigantic inhabitants of the land and their high-walled cities, and that fear caused them to forget or to ignore the promise of God that He would go before them and drive out their enemies. Their fear had torment; it restrained them from going forward and entering into the land of promise.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Rom. 8 that those who "*walk after the Spirit*" have been delivered from the spirit of bondage, which is fear, and have received instead the spirit of adoption which makes us aware of our sonship to God. We can cry to Him "*Father*" and know that it is no

empty cry; we are indeed His sons. That consciousness of Divine sonship must therefore be synonymous with our being made perfect in love, for we are told here by John that he that feareth is not being made perfect in love. There is no room for fear in the Christian character; we can and must face all things in life with quiet confidence and absolute assurance that He who has called us and guided us hitherto will be our Leader and Guardian all the way until the end. "*I am persuaded*" cries Paul triumphantly "*that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.*" No room for fear there! In these latter days when affairs in the world have come to a pass that strikes fear into the hearts of men, "*men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking to the things that are coming upon the earth*", it is good to realise that we who are being made perfect in love are thereby being freed from fear. We can with perfect confidence pursue our appointed way in life knowing that God is good and God is great, and that all things are working together for good to us, we who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Once more, as we thus ponder John's words, we are impressed with the fact that he perceives a veritable power in love. Love is no matter of sentiment to John, more than a comfortable and easy virtue whose only use is to act as a lubricant in human relations, smoothing and making easy the rough places of our contact with fellow-men. It is not just a pious adjunct to our worship, preparing for us our approach to God. Love is a dynamic that is capable of overthrowing every evil thing.

"Perfect love casteth out fear".

The word for 'casteth out' is *exo balli*; and that latter word gave its name in those early days to what was, in military circles, the then equivalent to our modern heavy artillery. The "*ballista*" was an engine of war designed something like a giant catapult, capable of hurling heavy stones and boulders long distances against enemy fortifications and city walls. (The 'engines' mentioned in 2. Chron. 26.15 as set by Uzziah on the wall of Jerusalem were *ballista*.) Just as those *ballista* cast heavy rocks many hundreds of yards in a wide trajectory through the air to a great distance away, so, says John, does perfect love cast out fear, not removing it gently as it were to just one side, where its presence might still harass and obtrude, but far away whence it can never return. It is just at this point, where another facet of the many-sided jewel we are examining has been fully displayed to our gaze, that John, as is his wont, abruptly returns to the centre of his subject. "*We love him*" he remarks, "*because he first loved us.*" (v.19). Each time that he has concluded one of his exhortations and one little section of Christian instruction

he reminds us that all we have and the whole position in which we stand is in consequence of the love of God. We are naught of ourselves; we owe all to Him. "*He first loved us.*"! Let us never forget that sublime truth. It explains everything. It explains the entire plan of salvation, the mystery of the coming and death of Christ, the interval between that coming when He died, and the advent of the Kingdom to ensure, an interval devoted to our own calling and perfection, and it explains the Kingdom itself.

"*He first loved us!*" Those four words stand as irrefutable evidence that God is working and will work to bring fallen man back to Himself, and will not cease working until the time has come that further effort is manifestly useless.

"*If a man say 'I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.'*" (vv.20-21.)

This is the end of John's dissertation on love. In chapter 5 he is going to talk about faith – the faith that saves. In this chapter he has talked about the love that saves, love that commenced in God and is continued in us. In the perfecting of this love we are truly made in the image and likeness of God and as such can be received, at the end, into the very presence of God. But this very thought of being made in His image and likeness instantly brings to mind another question, intimately associated; what of our fellows, also destined to be perfected in that same image and likeness. Do we love them?

If not, says John in effect, we are doing despite to the expressed purpose and intention of God and demonstrating that we have not as yet entered into an understanding of Divine love. If we claim to have this true, deep love for God and yet do not ourselves manifest the same feeling toward our brethren we are not speaking the truth; we are liars. It is quite impossible to hold and cherish true love for God without at the same time possessing and realising love for all that God has made. That does not involve any kind of sympathy with sin or endorsement of evil-doing, even as God's own love for man does not imply that. It does involve the same yearning desire that fills God's own heart for the reconciliation of all mankind and the perfecting of this earth to be their home. And it does also involve co-operation with God and willing service for Him to the extent He indicates is His will, in the work He is doing towards this end.

So the whole argument ends on this lofty note, a law which defines and limits the principles which should regulate our entire outward Christian life and activity. "*That he who loveth God love his brother also.*" There is

hardly need to elaborate that briefly eloquent word. *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* Each one of us is able to interpret those instructions in our individual cases and according to our individual circumstances. The manner in which they will be put into practice will of necessity differ with each one of us, but the underlying principle will always be the same. We shall be doing God's work in the world at this present time and we shall be progressing by sure stages to that mark of perfect love which will render us fitted in every respect for the still greater work of God in the coming Age.

(To be continued)

AOH

A PERSONAL MESSAGE

Dear

When life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.

If you suffer because of Christ, count yourself fortunate. It's the Spirit of God and his glory in you that brought you to the notice of others.

So be content with who you are, and don't put on airs. God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you.

Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world. So keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last for ever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ - eternal and glorious plans they are - will have you put together and on your feet for good.

He gets the last word; yes, he does.

This letter was put together from the words of scripture. If you think carefully, you may be able to find where it has been taken from. A clue - look in the last two chapters of 1 Peter. The version used is a popular modern paraphrase.

DAY OF REST

Part 2 The Lord's day in the Gospel Age

First Day of the Week

The first Jewish converts to Christianity – the Apostolic Church – were scrupulous Sabbath keepers. The New Testament shows that if they erred at all it was on the side of extremism in this respect, and several times they are counselled not to regard the keeping of new moons and Sabbaths as ends in themselves, but only as means of grace. To this observance of the seventh day, however, the early Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, speedily added the special observance of another – the first day.

It was on the first day of the week that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. So great an impression was made upon the minds of the first believers by that great happening, the event that changed their lives, that from the beginning they developed the custom of setting aside the first day of the week for assembly together. It was a day for the breaking of bread or the sharing of a common meal, preaching, prayer and worship. This was quite a different thing from the Jewish Sabbath, and was not intended to supplant that institution. It was additional, to commemorate something of an entirely different nature. Traces of this custom are to be found in Acts 20.7, telling of Paul's visit to Troas, where the first day of the week was evidently the usual meeting day, and also in 1 Cor.16.2. For the first three centuries both days were kept by the Christian church, the seventh as a Sabbath rest, and the first for assembly and worship. Doubtless, those Christians whose lives were spent in agricultural pursuits and in the country found the ideal more easy of attainment than those who laboured in the cities in one or another aspect of the then industrial system; but the consistent stand made by these early believers for their "first day" of assembly and worship had its reward when the Emperor Constantine by an Imperial Edict in A.D. 321 made the observance of Sunday, and the cessation of business and trade on that day, an obligation upon all dwellers in cities and towns. We literally owe our Sunday to Constantine!

Shortly afterwards, A.D. 366, the Council of Laodicea formally released all Christians from any obligation to observe the Jewish Sabbath – the seventh day. Quite naturally, therefore, the first day of the week became the day of rest and cessation from work, the day of prayer and worship, and of assembling together with those *"of like precious faith."*

Who can doubt that the secret of much of the power inherent in the early Church, enabling them to 'go forth conquering, and to conquer', resided in this sincere and faithful allegiance to the principles underlying the

Fourth Commandment? That day spent in communion with God and with each other; that simple ritual of sharing with one's fellows; that pouring out of the heart and soul in an ecstasy of praise and worship before the Throne of the Most High, must surely have inspired them with new courage and fresh strength, and enabled them to withstand with serene confidence the raging of the pagan power using its cruellest artifices to force from them a denial of their faith. As with Israel, so with the Christian Church, her best days and her happiest days were those during which the Sabbath was observed, and when the blessed day fell into disuse and disrepute the virtue went out of communal spiritual life.

The Catholic Church during the Middle Ages maintained this early insistence upon the cessation of business and labour upon Sunday, exhorting to worship and religious devotion, and holding the day as set apart, in addition, to rest and recreation. This latter aspect was not prominent before, but a little reflection will show that innocent recreation is but the logical extension of rest and relaxation. It has been a great tragedy that the original recreation endorsed by the Church has developed into organised amusement, which is quite a different thing, leading to the evils of what is called the "Continental Sunday". It was probably at least partly in reaction to this that the Puritans during the time of Cromwell (sixteenth century) forced the observance of Sunday into the narrow grooves for which it has become proverbial. Every form of recreation was forbidden: Sunday was made to be a day of religious devotion without exception, and severe penalties were laid upon those who contravened the law. This bigoted intolerance was repeated a century or so later in America where the first colonists, seeking to escape from the religious tyranny of the Mother Country, became just as intolerant themselves. In both lands Sunday observance was quite as circumscribed with ritual and ordinance as was the sabbath in Judea at the time of the First Advent.

Reaction against Sabbatarianism

The history of this Age, then, depicts three phases in the keeping of the Sabbath. The early Church maintained the Divine principle of rest and worship inviolate, gradually transferring the seventh day rest to the first day, until by the end of the fourth century Sunday was firmly established. For the next twelve hundred years the Catholic Church insisted upon the weekly day of rest and recreation, this being followed in the English-speaking countries – not elsewhere – by a Puritan phase in which all the evils of Rabbinic sabbath legislation were repeated. A reaction was bound to come, and the Industrial Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the consequent growth of big towns and cities, and, later, the increase in travel

and amusement facilities gave that reaction its chance. Men and women, herded together in factories and workshops, oftentimes compelled by the new commercialism to spend long days on monotonous or irksome tasks, hailed the weekly break as a means of indulging in diversions denied them during the week. Declining religious faith – and, within the nineteenth century, the spread of Darwinism and Rationalism – coupled with the virtual end of the "hell-fire" bogey, cast down the last barriers, and people who had never been given any conception of Sunday other than that of a rather gloomy period of religious devotion turned right about and made it their weekly day of amusement and entertainment.

Commercial interests were quick to exploit this reaction. Each year witnessed an increase in the number of men and women who must labour on Sunday to provide their fellows, not with necessities, but with luxuries and entertainment. Church congregations dwindled whilst cinema queues lengthened. Not a little of the nervous strain of modern times, and the evils attendant thereon, must be attributed to the frantic rush for amusement and diversion, the excessive travel and holiday-making, so characteristic of our Sundays today. Men do not realise that in their failure to observe the Divine rule of a periodic slowing down of the tempo of daily life, a short breathing space wherein the physical frame can recover its vitality and the mind be refreshed by its dwelling on things higher than of this earth, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction.

So the desecration of the Sabbath goes on. Gone, in the towns; fast going in the countryside, are those quiet, peaceful days when the factories and mills were silent, the shops closed, and the people *"walked to the House of God in company"*. The present generation is largely oblivious to any special significance attached to the day. They know nothing of its past history; they know only that it is the day when they may cast aside the responsibilities and obligations of the week and expend their energy in every form of diversion the day can be made to hold. The sign of Noah is fulfilled in the land. *"They knew not, until the Flood came, and took them all away."*

A Positive View

One aspect of the Christian witness to-day, therefore, is to demonstrate, by example and precept, the Divine Will regarding the observance of the day. At a time when the gospel of humanism is preached in active opposition to the gospel of Christ there is need for practical demonstration that the ways of God, which were made for the benefit of man, are eminently practicable, and in the long run the only ways which will ensure to man the full and free development of the wondrous possibilities latent in his nature.

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord, honourable, and shall honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words – I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth." (Isa.58.13-14). Profound truth is enshrined in those words of Isaiah! Conscientious and reverent observance of Nature's weekly rest day results in physical and mental wellbeing of an order which cannot be attained in any other way. The believer who spends his Sunday in this way will find that he takes up his normal routine on Monday morning feeling, as the common saying has it, "on top of the world". This modern expression is the literal counterpart of the Hebrew idiom which is translated "*to ride on the high places of the earth*", and the thought which Isaiah tried to express was precisely that which is conveyed by our everyday allusion.

It may be fitting, therefore, to suggest a few of the considerations that determine happy and satisfactory Sabbath-keeping.

Rest, service and worship

There are three foundation principles which may be taken into consideration. Sunday is, firstly, a day of *rest*; secondly, a day of *service*, and thirdly, a day of *worship*. Rest, service, worship; these are the essential characteristics of the day which God has ordained for human wellbeing.

It will be noticed how aptly this compares with the Divine commission originally given to man. That also could be summed up in three words—Labour, Service, Worship. *Labour*, to make use of the earth's resources and products for the sustenance and enrichment of human life; *service* in the brotherhood of man, a state of society in which every man is his brother's keeper: *worship*, expressed in the whole-hearted allegiance of every man to God the Father of all, who has created us to have dominion over this material creation. That ideal will be fully realised when the Divine Plan is complete and evil has been driven from the hearts of men. In that fair land which Isaiah saw in vision, when sorrow and sighing will have fled away, the threefold commission will be fully observed. Men will labour, serve and worship God six days in the week, and on the seventh they will hold holy convocation to him in Sabbaths more glorious than anything the world has ever, as yet, experienced.

The Sunday rest enjoined upon Christians is not merely an arbitrary cessation of labour, an enforced inactivity in a world which was made for activity. The essential characteristic about Sunday is, rather, that there should be a cessation of the daily routine involved in gaining a living. In Israel's day the gathering of manna was suspended during the seventh day.

The equivalent of that today is the abandonment of the daily struggle to live, and a resting upon that which has been gained during the six days. It is often argued that such a course is not practicable under conditions of life today. Public services must be maintained; water, electricity, transport, must be provided. Such arguments are often put forward by those who have personal interests militating against the observance of Sunday as a day of rest. There can be no doubt that in a Christian state of society a much higher degree of cessation could be obtained than does exist. The cancellation of unnecessary activities, including those forms of daily labour not essential to the life of the community, such as closing of shops and places of amusement, would effect a vast change in the amount of labour which 'must be done' on Sunday.

Many years ago Lord Macaulay told the British Parliament "*We are not poorer in England, but richer, because we have, through many ages, rested from our labour one day in seven. That day is not lost; while industry is suspended, while the plough lies in the furrows, while the Exchange is silent, while no smoke ascends from the factory, a process is going on quite as important to the wealth of nations as any process which is performed on more busy days. Man, the machine of machinery, the machine compared with which all the contrivances of the Watts and Arkwrights are worthless, is repairing and winding up, so that he returns to his labour on the Monday with clearer intellect, with livelier spirits, with renewed corporal vigour*". Unhappily the picture drawn by the noble lord is not true of England to-day.

Now how should this time, if thus redeemed from the workaday world, be utilised? Not in sloth and inactivity, for that is quite out of accord with the Divine way. True, the haste and stress of weekdays can be absent and all actions performed with a leisureliness that is rarely possible on any other day, yet activity of some sort there ought to be. Such activity divides itself naturally into three aspects.

First comes that recuperation which is a necessary component of the weekly rest. As a general principle it may be concluded that any form of activity which is so dissimilar from the normal weekday occupation of the particular individual concerned as to constitute mental and physical relaxation, and to be recuperative in its effect, can be legitimately regarded as a factor making for 'Sabbath rest'. William Wilberforce, the man who did more than any other to abolish slavery, once declared that man's power of mental endurance could only be conserved by this proper treatment of the Sabbath. He had seen men of mighty intellect whose keen minds had failed them prematurely and he was satisfied that in every such

case the cause was neglect of this Divine law. It is good, surely, to give serious thought to this aspect of the subject, and with clear knowledge of all its implications, to include in every Sunday as it comes, that variety of rest, relaxation, recuperation – physical or mental, or both – which is necessary and desirable in the particular case. In this, as in so many things, the needs of individuals will vary, and no man may judge his brother. Sufficient is it if we use our sanctified judgment to do what seems to us to be the acceptable will of God.

The second aspect of "restful activity" is well summed up in the term 'good works'. Our Lord performed works of healing on the Sabbath as on any day; the care with which it is pointed out in several instances that the day concerned was the Sabbath seems to indicate that especial attention was desired to be directed to this fact. We can manifest the same desire to assist suffering humanity and carry out such works of mercy as are within our powers. Thus Sunday becomes peculiarly a day in which we may find time to render services to those in need or in distress, to visit the sick, to set hands to works of kindness. In ways which will present themselves in their variety to the sincere Christian it is possible to devote part of the day of rest to the service of one's fellows, freely giving even as we have freely received.

Last, but by no means least, comes the supreme purpose of the day – corporate worship. It is true that those whose lives are completely and utterly devoted to the Divine service endeavour to maintain the attitude of personal worship and communion with their Heavenly Father throughout all hours of every day. Nevertheless this privileged condition is largely individual; there is a virtue, a power in corporate worship, the joining together with one's fellows in audible praise and united prayer, that is very helpful to the full development of Christian character. Whenever the possibility exists, therefore, there should be an "*assembling of yourselves together*" and an ascending before God of praise, prayer and thought in company together.

The radio or television service is no substitute for corporate worship. For the aged, infirm and isolated unable to reach a place of worship, it is a boon; but no Christian who has the opportunity meet and worship with others of like faith is justified in choosing the comfort of the home and armchair instead. Perhaps those who indulge themselves in this manner do not stop to reflect that it is a sign of disrespect to the Almighty and betokens a lack of reverence for Him.

Rest—Service—Worship. Let these be the ideals we set before us in our endeavour to discern our Father's will, and then in our doing we will be richly blessed. By these things shall we derive week by week spiritual

strength to serve in good stead when the dark and evil days come down.

AOH This article was written over fifty years ago.

STILL STANDING, STILL STRIVING

"Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel." (Phil.1.27 NRSV)

When Paul arrived in any city he visited the synagogue of his Jewish brethren, and reasoned with them out of their Scriptures (Acts 17.2). There is no record of a synagogue at Philippi and, if that was so, he would be forcibly reminded that he was in Gentile land and his special mission to Gentiles had begun in earnest. No doubt if we today arrived in a strange city we would seek fellowship with those of our own faith, or failing that, join with our countrymen. We might hear of some gathering *"where prayer was wont to be made"*, where we would find an ear for the truth. If, after a few days, we heard of such a meeting down by the riverside, our feet would soon take us there. This is just what Paul did, and it was to the women there that Paul spoke with joy. Could it have been that no men had arranged a service of worship and that the believing women had made their own arrangements? Had there been a synagogue, the men would have been in charge. However that may be, it must be noted that it was women who first responded to the message of truth in Europe.

The woman specially referred to in the narrative was Lydia of Thyatira. Thyatira was in Asia, the very region where Paul had recently served the faith. Perhaps she had heard of Paul's work there; perhaps she had told the women at the riverside; perhaps it was due to them and in answer to their prayers that the vision was given to Paul *"to come over and help us"*. No doubt the Apostle was glad at their response. In that response was there the answer why he had been hindered from going into Asia to preach?

So began Paul's European service and from that small riverside prayer meeting grew the Church which Paul loved so much. Later, when writing to them, he would affectionately speak of the fellowship in the

Gospel he had had with them "*from the first day until now*"—the first day he came to the riverside (Phil.1.5). Later in the epistle his regard and love for them prompts him to refer to them as "*my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown*" (4.1).

Paul went from Philippi to other cities, returning on occasion, but eventually went back to Jerusalem where he was arrested and, after tedious waiting, was sent to Rome for trial. In Rome at last, with his liberty somewhat restricted, but living in his own hired house (Acts 28.30), he would recall his brethren in other lands and decide to write to them, exhort them, and hope to hear in return of their steadfastness. To encourage them, he told them how he himself had fared in the faith and how he still served. His example added point to his words when, in our text, he urged them to stand and serve. Though hindered from travelling to other cities and lands as previously, he had found willing ears right in Caesar's Praetorium (1.12-13).

The following verses in his letter speak of his bonds and tell of his life devoted to the Gospel even to the point of death, which he does not fear. Yet while he personally longs for the return of Christ and the consummation of the Church's hope, he knows that for him to remain in the flesh and continue in service is necessary for the Philippian and other churches. He could not be sure that he would ever see them again. Verses 25, 26 express the hope that he would do so, and some say that when he was acquitted in his first trial he revisited this and other churches. But whether he sees them or not, he hopes to hear two things of them. This brings us to the words in our opening text.

Verse 27 in the AV urges that our conversation be worthy of the Gospel of Christ. The word rendered "conversation" is better thought of as "living as a citizen", but we may linger with the AV translation to gain a lesson. By a man's speech we learn what country or district he hails from, and by his conversation we know what his interests are. Conversation includes fellowship and discussion. If men hear us converse on Scriptural themes, at least they will judge that we belong to no earthly country. It is but a short step from conversation to living as a citizen. When in the Apostle Peter's writings we read "conversation" the thought behind the word is "behaviour"—another characteristic that reveals citizenship. Our citizenship is in heaven; our conversation reveals this; and so does our behaviour. Our citizenship is in heaven because we are "*risen with Christ and seek those things which are above*" (Col.3.1-3) and having found them, "*set our affections*" on them, for "*where our treasure is there will our heart be also*".

Citizenship carries privileges which we may humbly claim. The Apostle Paul himself gives us a good example of this during his last visit to

Jerusalem. Asian Jews had stirred up the people, saying that Paul had polluted the temple, and the Captain of the guard intervened to stop the Jews who were beating Paul, and he took him under guard to the castle. Upon Paul asking permission to speak, the Captain replied, "*Canst thou speak Greek? Art thou not that Egyptian, ... ?*" Paul replied that he was a Jew of Tarsus, a citizen of no mean city; and receiving permission to speak to the people, he spoke in the Hebrew tongue. This temporarily silenced the mob (Acts 22.2) and Paul gave a spirited defence of his life and Christian mission until the uproar began again. Then the Chief Captain ordered Paul to be examined by scourging, whereupon Paul immediately claimed that he was a Roman citizen. When he heard this, the Captain feared to hurt him, and set him loose, commanding the council to give Paul a hearing. In this way Paul used his Hebrew speech, his Tarsus citizenship, and also his Roman, to obtain freedom to defend himself.

Paul began his defence before the council by saying, "*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*". The word translated "lived" is the same as that in Phil. 1.27 - living as a citizen before God. Citizenship, behaviour, and way of life are all in this word. Who better than Paul could write on this subject?

Citizenship carries responsibilities as well as privileges - among them, the responsibility to uphold the dignity of the country we claim. If the citizen of another country living among us claims special privileges and dignity, we may find that he is also an ambassador. He represents the king and country from which he came, and if ever questioned on his actions would claim his rights and the protection of his own country. Another visiting citizen claiming special rights might be the king's son. Surely we may claim all of these; so that we may find in Phil.1.27 the thoughts of conversation, behaviour, citizenship, ambassadorship, and sonship.

The Apostle hopes to find that the conduct of the Philippian brethren (whether he comes and sees them or hears about them) is worthy of the Gospel, and that they stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. These two injunctions to stand and to strive are complementary, for one speaks of holding on while the other tells of activity. One assumes work done; the other, work still to be done. The first belongs to the internal life of the Church, the latter to the Church's outside activities. The first assumes the Philippian Church to be convinced and confident, the other that they defend what they believe. These two phases of Christian life assist each other, for he who stands fast is well suited to actively defend the faith, and he who works to defend the faith will increase his own steadfastness.

The standing fast, for them and for us, is in one spirit. There are other exhortations in Paul's writings to stand fast — "*stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*"; "*stand fast and hold the traditions ye have been taught*"; "*stand fast in the Lord*"; and above all, "*having done all, to stand*".

What is the significance of 'in one spirit'? The Greek word (*pneuma*) is used with various meanings, and in Vine it is said to refer in this verse to purpose or aim — to intention. Psalm 78.8 refers to rebellious Israelites whose *spirit* was not faithful to God. Ezra 1.5 speaks of those whose *spirit* God had stirred up to go and rebuild the temple. In our text the one spirit is a common purpose in standing for the Gospel.

Other translations of this verse take 'spirit' as meaning God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sign of life in the body of Christ, for by one spirit are we all baptised into one body. The Holy Spirit makes us sons of God, and is personal proof to us that this is what we are. So we may read Paul's words as "stand fast in the Holy Spirit" - which has made us New Creatures and Sons of God.

The second injunction is that they should be "*with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel*", just as Paul himself was doing at that very time. The Greek word for mind is "*psuche*" (thus we have the two Greek words associated with life, "*pneuma*" and "*psuche*" in one verse) and is used of *active* life, whereas "*pneuma*" is used of the life *within*. "*Psuche*" is used here as though we are alive, active, with one soul, one being, one corporate body standing shoulder to shoulder defending the faith. This "*psuche*" life is that which others will see by our striving; the "*pneuma*" life is that internal and eternal life which proves to ourselves how and where we stand.

In our text Paul has been saying – let your citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that you are firm in your sonship and active in your service. We are sons and yet servants. We serve because we are sons. The advice is repeated in Phil.2.15,16, "*That ye may be blameless and harmless (good citizens, in fact), sons of God, not meriting rebuke, in the midst of a crooked nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*" (in other words striving for the faith of the Gospel).

When Paul heard of the Philippian being steadfast in these respects, he would know that he had not laboured in vain. His call to Macedonia would once more be confirmed. He again would say, "*We live if ye stand fast in the Lord*" (1 Thess.3.8).

BJD, revised

UNHEEDED WITNESS

"... and they told him all things, whatsoever they had done and whatsoever they had taught" (Mark 6. 30).

Jesus himself had been round about the villages teaching. (Mark 6.6). He had returned "into his own country" (v.1) after visiting the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, and with the twelve in attendance upon him, began to teach and preach in their synagogue. But the ministry fell on callous hearts and unheeding ears. They claimed to know him, who He was and where He came from. They found cause of offence in him (v.3) and set his words at naught. Because of that "he could do there no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them" (v.5).

It was into an atmosphere charged thus with contempt and scorn that Jesus sent his followers, two by two, to preach. To assist them in their ministry He had equipped them with powers – power to cast out the unclean spirits which afflicted the populace. "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." (v.13). Witness work in Israel was no gala-day experience. Even He who spake as never man spake found the atmosphere of unbelief too frigid for success. The flow of healing power was checked and hindered in the midst of such frozen apathy. Could the disciples hope to have success where the Master failed? Could they thaw the frozen hearts with words of warmth greater than the Master spoke? It had been an almost invaluable experience for them, for nothing can test the fibre of the witness-bearing soul like an atmosphere of indifference and apathy. When the words rebound they can have one of two effects. Either they can daunt and stifle the warm enthusiasm of the witness-bearer himself or they can react and feed the flames of that enthusiasm to whiter heat by awaking sympathy for deluded men.

With Jesus that indifferent response led to a deepening of his sympathy towards his unresponsive audience. When men to whom He spoke of God's benevolence and love could not heed and accept what He had to say He knew there were sometimes factors other than human choice at work, and for these men his compassion began to flow. Cold callous indifference aroused and intensified in his heart that quality which could bear gently with ignorant and erring men, and made him more resolutely determined to see his mission through.

As Jesus sat and listened to the stories of these twelve, we can be sure He knew how to turn this experience to good effect so that they should not be too elated with their meagre success. "Rejoice not because demons are subject unto you but rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

While they had some small success there was another better side. They, along with him, were Heaven's evangelists – God had sent him – He had sent them, and success or no success, they were linked with God in a witness-bearing to a demon-ridden world. It is that that counts.

We also find ourselves sharing the like experience. The testimony of the Most High has never yet been withdrawn – nor can it be till sin has been eliminated from the earth. But in this callous world God has not promised us much success. The product of this entire Age is but a "little flock". It is the reaction back into our own heart that counts. When after great rebuff we can say with compassionate sympathy "*poor deluded suffering world, your day has yet to come*" the value of our witness is not lost, it has returned to us with added interest. There has been gain to us, even if to no one else.

But there is something more we can do to bring these desirable effects home to our souls. It is to do as the disciples did. Review the day's experience for the Master's ear in the quiet eventide. Tell him humbly what we have tried to say and do in his Name – it is there that the temperature of heart and soul will reveal itself. You will tell him only what you have sincerely sought to do and say, and as you speak, if only in the deeper chambers of the heart, the fires of devotion to his cause will glow and send out their heat and warmth and you will find your sense of serving him intensified.

If then, this day your voice has rebounded as from the bastion rock; if that little conversation did not end as you desired; if that little tract was later found mud-stained upon the road, never mind. Go and tell Jesus about it all. The witness is not irretrievably lost: it will re-appear in the after years, sometime, somewhere, when an enlightened consciousness counts up the opportunities lost. Seeming defeat with God today can never fail; it is a sure contribution to the final overthrow of the wrong and the untrue.

TH

THE ANGEL OF THE PRESENCE

"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." (Ex.33.14).

These lovely words, so full of encouragement and promise, were spoken to Moses whilst he was bringing the children of God through the "terrible wilderness" of temptation and trial, to the Promised Land. They also, surely,

apply to all who today are seeking the "secret place" of the Lord's overshadowing wings in this present "wilderness" of doubt and confusion which is bringing us to the crossing of Jordan, and the Land of Canaan.

How well Moses understood the promise is clear to see by the fact that he looked to the Lord continually on every occasion of strife, difficulty or doubt. That the Lord's Presence was known to be with him was likewise clear by the Lord's response to his appeals in the sight of the people. In the words with which Moses answered the Lord, there is a wonderful view of the at-one-ness of Moses with God. Ponder carefully these revealing words in these days of darkness and doubt. *"Wherein shall it be known that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the earth."* (v.16).

It is by the Lord's Presence with us, then, that we know that we have found grace in his sight. Jesus made the same promise to his disciples, saying to them *"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"* (or age). John, in his epistles, shows how we know that the Presence of God is with us; *"And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."* (1 John 3.24). If we have the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Comforter, we are safely led through all doubt and confusion and conflicting voices, by the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ, and we are enabled to discern the true mouthpieces of God, those who speak by his Spirit, and those who do not: *"for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God"*.

Another gracious promise is given to those who are guided by the Spirit of God, for John says: *"the anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you"*. How difficult some find this promise to accept and to make their own, and to rely upon the guidance of the Spirit which abides in us. Yet He is faithful who promised that *"he will guide you into all truth"* and also that *"he will shew you things to come"*. (John 16.13). *"Where Thou art Guide, no ill can come."* As we come to realise more and more the Presence of the Indwelling Spirit, we become more and more sure of guidance. We learn to trust the still small voice of the Spirit; like Elijah on Mount Horeb, we feel we must "wrap our face in our mantle"—a sign of deep humility, for our Mantle is the Robe of Christ's righteousness, by which alone we can stand before the Lord, and in which alone we are "accepted in the Beloved". *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit"* (Titus 3. 5). Again John says *"Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit"* (1 John 4.13.)

What a wondrous gift is this. His "free gift" to all, bringing with it all that we need for enlightenment, and spiritual progress; the Spirit of help and support, of strength in times of weakness, of upholding power, of protection from the clamouring voices without which distract from the pathway, of encouragement, comfort and cheer when cast down by faults and failures. With Elijah, when he cast himself under the juniper tree we feel inclined to say "Lord it is enough, I can go no further, I have failed utterly, and cannot go on". Then the Angel of the Presence – the still voice of the Spirit – comes to bring refreshment and strength, and food for the journey, until, as Elijah did, we can go in the strength of that food to Horeb – the Mount of God.

All this, and much more, is ours in the gift of the Holy Spirit, until we come to rejoice in the Indwelling Presence and say, morning, noon and night *"Praise be to thee for thine unspeakable gift"*.

Here, then, in this "free gift" of the Holy Spirit, is the fulfilment of the promise made to Moses, *"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared"*. The Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is the Indwelling Spirit of which Paul says:—*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you"* (1 Cor.3.16). Pray, therefore, that the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit may be imparted and increase more and more.

John, in his wonderful vision, sees the Spirit of God dwelling in the hearts of all men, transforming their lives, and gradually winning the world to Christ until—

"All nations shall adore him, His praise all people sing"
"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21.3).

Until we have found the Kingdom of God within our own hearts, being "born again of water and of the Spirit", we cannot be effectual in bringing the Kingdom of God into the lives of others. The salt will have lost its savour if we have not the Holy Spirit indwelling, changing, moulding, and conforming to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Above all things will the Holy Spirit teach us to 'love one another'. *"If we love one another God dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us"* (1 John 4. 12).

As, therefore, we are taught by the Holy Spirit to covet the best gifts, so shall we be taught to develop and increase them. Charity, Paul describes as *"the bond of perfectness"*, saying *"Above all, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness"* (Col.3.14). The fruits of the Spirit, he says are *"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith"*. May we, therefore, seek to realise the Presence of the Indwelling Spirit of God

ever more and more, and thus come to trust his sure guidance, to develop his sevenfold gifts, and to claim the promises of God to those who dwell in him, and who have learnt to "*Make our hearts thy dwelling-place And worthier thee*" As we learn to trust in the Angel of the Presence, we shall indeed find that "He will give you rest".

*As through the wilderness the people went,
Leaving reluctantly the world behind,
Lest they should falter, God his Angel sent
And fed the flame of hope in their dull mind.
A fire by night his gracious Presence burned,
A Cloud by day He moved before their eyes;
None from the path of safety need have turned,
None have come short in his great enterprise.
Just to have known themselves to be but men,
Just to have let him lead them by his Hand,
Just to have had a little faith, and then
All had come safely to the Promised Land!
And yet they failed. O, by their failure teach
Those that come after, in the same distress,
More faithfully to follow till they reach
The land that lies beyond the wilderness.*

HOW WELL DO WE KNOW OUR BIBLE?

Bible knowledge means many different things, and one form of knowledge is to know and remember familiar texts.

Here are a selection of texts, taken from the AV, but with the ending omitted. Your task is to quote the missing words.

You may need to look them up (the references are given).

If you have time, you might like to read the verses around each text. Then this exercise will not be just a test of memory, but the opportunity for a quiet meditation.

1. But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth
Habakkuk 2.20
2. The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests
Matthew 8.20

3. For we know that the whole creation.....
Romans 8.22
4. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former.....
Isaiah 65.17
5. For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that.....
Job 19.25
6. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them,
and..... *Revelation 7.17*
7. Then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written.....
1 Corinthians 15.54
8. For a thousand years is in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past,
and..... *Psalms 90.4*
9. I am the Almighty God: walk before me and.....
Genesis 17.1
10. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto
him..... *Luke 10.37*

FROM THE BOOKSHOP

2011 being the quatercentenary of the King James Version, in our bookshop we came upon two very different books about the Bible which are of topical interest. In writing about them it is not that we endorse them, or recommend them, just that we were interested to see them. It is not a bad thing for those whose joy it is to read and study the Bible to be aware of what is being published.

The first book was entitled **Celebrating the King James Version**. Seeing the title we thought it might have pictures, or quotations from famous passages, or the glowing opinions of celebrities. But it hasn't, there are no pictures, no celebrity opinions, and while it does quote some well-known passages of scripture, you have to look for them. It is in fact a book of devotional readings. Perhaps the best way to celebrate the Bible (in whatever version) is to read it thoughtfully, and take God's words to heart. Here is a sample of a part of one day's reading and comment:

The tide can turn

Psalms 40.1-3

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet

upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.....

“Here is a song of hope and thankfulness for God’s mercies, followed by a lament. Usually in the Psalms, the order is the other way round: grief is followed by praise of the Lord, who has saved the speaker, even if all the pain isn’t over yet. Here, however, the hope is first.... ‘I waited patiently’... might better be translated ‘I hope intensely for Yahweh’. Indeed, all other hopes were exhausted... The hope was against all the evidence in the conviction that Yahweh could work a genuine newness. The hope was not disappointed. This is the kind of conviction that perhaps we hardly ever allow ourselves to risk, but which can be vindicated. Sometimes the international situation looks bleak, but the tide can turn, as it has done in various situations throughout history, such as in South Africa at the end of the apartheid era.”

Prayer: God our Father, guide me into your hope, even when I am surrounded by trouble.

The book is a collection of 120 readings from the KJV. It has sections which tell the history of the version, and assess its value. It has the perspective of appreciating the version, not of criticising its faults. Probably a reader could get as great a blessing if the passages quoted had been taken from a modern version. The intention is to pick up on people who are attracted by the publicity about the quatercentenary of the KJV, and to encourage them in the habit of daily Bible reading.

Celebrating the King James Version Rachel Boulding Bible Reading Fellowship

*The other book is one which older readers may enjoy very much, or perhaps be put off by. It is full of information about the Bible, and full of comments and opinions. If you don’t mind the opinions (or you agree with them!) you could really appreciate this history of the Bible. As a general introduction to the story of the Bible it is good, written in a lively modern manner. Experts will probably think how much more could have been said in any given chapter, but you can’t say absolutely everything in 300 pages. There is a good up to date bibliography for any who want to follow up the study. The book deals with such questions as ‘Where did we get the Bible from? Who decided what books were included? How did ancient words in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek change our world for ever?’ **‘From tablets of stone to papyrus scrolls, from illuminated manuscripts to the Internet, this book explores not only how the Bibles on our shelves came to be made, but the many ways in which the Bible has changed and challenged those who encountered it.’***

God’s Dangerous Book Nick Page

Authentic

COUNTRY YOKELS ?

A thought on Genesis 46.33-4

This is one of the intriguing passages which we find in the Old Testament, particularly in the lives of the patriarchs. Dating from over three thousand years ago, the full meaning is bound to be obscure. Customs, attitudes and the whole way of life now are so different from then, that it is difficult to imagine what it was really like.

These verses tell of an incident in the life of Joseph. He welcomed his aged father, brothers and their families to Egypt. Then to the leaders among them he gave strict instructions to tell Pharaoh and his court that they had been herdsmen looking after cows, and not shepherds, who were 'an abomination to the Egyptians'. Why was this the case?

It used to be believed that Joseph said this because the Hebrew Hyksos shepherd kings who had once ruled Egypt had been expelled. In fact it now seems almost certain that the Hyksos dynasty was in power in Egypt during the life of Joseph and the patriarchal family. Pharaoh of dream fame who made Joseph his 'second in command' is believed to have been one of the Hyksos.

The explanation that is now given concerns the urban based Egyptian citizens who looked down in horror at the nomadic peoples of Canaan. They would not be the last proud townfolk to look down on 'country yokels'. Sheep thrived on the Judean hills, cattle were more adapted to the lowlands around the River Nile. It was cows and corn that Pharaoh had seen in his dreams. But lambs were the significant animal in the salvation of Israel.

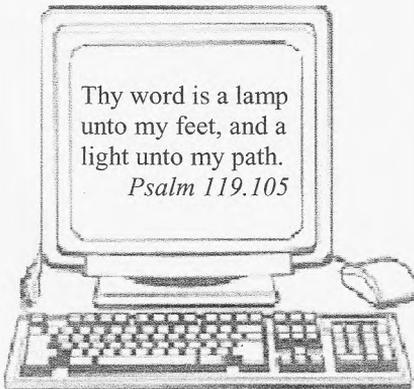
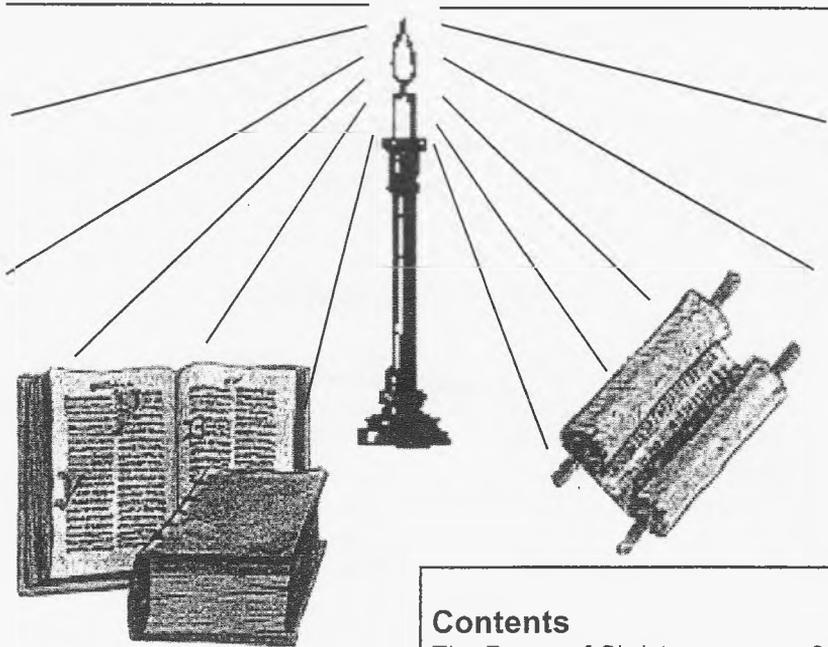
Joseph's brothers were welcomed to Goshen in the Nile delta, and Pharaoh held out the hand of peace by inviting Joseph to recommend good stockmen to his royal farmlands.

DN

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

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

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col.1.20)

The scope of Paul's words here defies the imagination – "All things in earth and in heaven". So what is 'peace' and where was it lost? The Oxford Dictionary defines peace as "quiet tranquility – mental calm – serenity – freedom from or cessation from war". But the word 'peace' in the Bible means much more, as does the eastern greeting of 'shalom'.

Peace was shattered on this planet when our first parents decided to disobey their Creator. That became demonstrable a little later when a brother killed his brother. After the flood there is archeological evidence to suggest that for a considerable period there was a peace among tribes and communities. But slowly the human race again lapsed into violence – a condition of human society from which it seems impossible to escape – violence begets violence. God gave mankind stewardship of Creation but human abuse of the planet continues to increase every day mainly because of selfishness. Until the human race is reconciled to its Creator the rest of Creation will remain in chaos. In spite of that, God's original purpose of a beautiful planet with peace and plenty is clearly seen and we can but stand in awe of the regenerative properties of God's handiwork.

But how is the restoration to be achieved? It begins in each of our hearts as it began in the heart of Abraham 4000 years ago. He believed that God could be trusted when he was told to leave his ancestral home and migrate to Canaan. His obedient trust gave him peace with God which was sealed by a covenant. Where once there had been rebellion there was reconciliation. But tribal warfare continued and grew into warfare between nations. Pruning hooks became spears and ploughshares became swords. Every man's hand was against his brother as in the beginning. How could it be reversed?

Israel did not enter into 'rest' as they should have done when they entered the 'Promised Land'. When twelve men reconnoitered the land the people of Israel lacked the faith of old father Abraham – they chose rather to fight the inhabitants of the land, and then to adopt their 'religions'. It's a story of 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' which need never have been. Sadly, there is a similar story even after the Prince of Peace had come and hung on a cross. He showed a new and living way of peace, of reconciliation, of love. But some who claimed to be reconciled to God had not learned the way of love, and there came bitter strife and much persecution. Rockets and bombs do not demonstrate the love of God any more than swords and spears. But first there must be true reconciliation and peace with God. For Jesus the conquest of the cross was not in 'twelve legions of angels', but in total submission to God's will. That is the lesson which warring nations must learn – and every child of God must learn it too.

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." (2 Cor.5.17-19) An important principle here is that it is God who is reconciling the world, and Jesus showed that his father and ours is not a vengeful God needing to be appeased but a loving God who longs for his erring Creation to be reconciled to himself. This is the lesson in Jesus' story of a prodigal son. God decided that the only way that this could be done was for a demonstration of love to be shown to the world on a cross. The only way it can be shown today is in the submission and forgiving spirit of his people. All those who have the spirit of revenge in their eyes cannot possibly have come to know the living God and his wonderful son. Knowing them is the only way that the power of the Holy Spirit can transform our lives into their likeness. This requires obedient repentance daily. (1 John 1.9) This is not the laying again the foundation,

repentance from dead works as rebuked in Hebrew 6.1. This is leaving the past behind and remaining in a 'broken and contrite' condition, with no sense of personal rights or retaliation. If we truly love and want God's will, then our own will must be broken. To quote Roy Hession in 'Calvary Road' "This simply means that the hard unyielding self which justifies itself, wants its own way, stands up for its rights and seeks its own glory, at last bows its head to God's will, admits its wrong, gives up its own way to Jesus."

After long millennia the Prince of Peace finally came to Earth. How did the angel message about "Peace on Earth, goodwill to men" work out in practice? What is the New Testament teaching about 'peace'? Jesus saw the religious activity of Jewish people gave them no peace. Yet the angels had told Israel that there would be peace on Earth with the birth of their Messiah. On one occasion at least Jesus called to the ordinary folk struggling in vain to keep 'the Law', "*Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" (Matt.11.28-30). Therein lies the secret of 'rest' and 'peace' for which Israel had sought so long – 'meek and lowly'. In his great 'sermon' he told the people that God's children were peace makers. When there was strife among the disciples about who was the greatest he admonished them to be at peace among themselves.

There was an occasion when Jesus said the most surprising thing. He said do not think that I have come to bring peace but a sword. He knew that there would inevitably be enmity between those who preached his message and those who would not receive it. If this occurred within a family then there would be conflict within that family. Sadly, misinterpretation of the Gospel has brought about civil strife within nations and war between nations, fighting mistakenly under the banner of Christ, from Constantine to this present day.

When Jesus was arrested, the only person who was at peace was Jesus himself. Through the dreadful hours of the trials and his agony on the cross he alone remained calm, until at last his work was done. Through his suffering our peace with God was possible for he brought reconciliation and new life.

In Ephesians, chapters 2, 3 and 4 Paul explained how this is possible for Gentiles. The privileged position of natural Israel which they inherited in God's promises to the patriarchs, has now been extended to us – we have been brought within the covenant relationship and so there is "*unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace*". There is no place for strife within the Christian church. In Phil.4.7 Paul writes that "*the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" Peace is described here as a fortress. Nothing this world, nothing that religious people can do or say, should disturb the calm serenity of peace in Jesus. In the work

place, the family circle, among our friends and least of all within the Church can there be any loss of that peace guarding our hearts and minds. That is the ideal, the goal, and when it is really experienced there is joy and strength to face the outward turmoil and crises. Then Paul's words to the brethren at Colossae find fulfilment in our lives, and peace becomes an 'umpire' – "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

DN

WHO WROTE THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS?

Occasionally, we notice that magazines carry articles in which a writer assumes that Paul wrote the Letter to the Hebrews. It is an assumption because our Bibles do not provide any note of who wrote that book.

Firstly, as with all books of the Bible, its inclusion in the canon of scripture must stand on its own internal evidence. Hebrews bears the marks of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and its message accords with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scholars of the last two centuries, both conservative and liberal, including Andrew Murray and Marvin Vincent, have agreed that this is not Paul's letter. They tell us that its language is not of the same style as that of Paul's letters, and this is fairly clear to the layman.

Yet it is also true that the writer must have been familiar with Paul's teachings. But the thrust of Paul's teaching concerned the salvation of Gentiles, and this book is not concerned with that. The style bears the marks of a Jewish writer of much the same educational standard as Paul. In the second century the eastern Church accepted Hebrews as one of Paul's letters, but it was not until the fifth century that it was regarded as Paul's work by the western Church.

Two leaders of the early Church fill the requirements of authorship—Barnabas and Apollos. Barnabas was one of the most well known figures in the early Church, and companion of Paul in his early years. Apollos was a scholar of Alexandria whose work paralleled Paul's among the young churches. Both of these probably had the academic skills to put such a treatise together. Is such knowledge important? Yes it is, when we realise that God's Spirit takes hold of the natural gifts of a

destruction. 'Ichabod' has been written over the portals and the glory has departed.

What would have been the thoughts of those men who hewed the timbers for the Temple, had they known that in generations to come their work would become the prey of the invader, suffering total destruction at the hands of God's enemies? 1 Kings 5 tells of King Solomon writing to his friend Hiram, King of Tyre, who had jurisdiction over the forests of Lebanon, *"Command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon . . . So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to his desire and Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand in the mountains . . . so they prepared timber and stones to build the house"*. What a mighty work this must have been, this felling and transporting of cedars and firs of Lebanon to Jerusalem that the House of God might be built!

1 Kings 6 tells of the building and how these precious timbers were utilised. *"He built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling; and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir... and the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers; there was no stone seen....and within the oracle (inner sanctuary) he made two cherubim of olive tree, each ten cubits (about fifteen feet) high ...and he overlaid the cherubims with gold; and he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without....And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive treeand he carved upon them carvings of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers; and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work"* (vv 15-35).

This was the carved work which these later despoilers attacked with their axes and hammers. Caring nothing for the labours of those who in times gone by had given their lives' best endeavours to creating these beautiful things for the glory of God, they wantonly destroyed that which they had neither capacity to create nor ability to appreciate, and the world was the poorer for their action.

Here is a parable suited to our own day. This is a time of frustration and disappointment so far as the honour and worship of God in our society is concerned, and the ready acceptance of the principles of the Gospel in the world's daily life. Those who are old enough to have known better and more rewarding times of Christian activity and fellowship tend to lament the bygone days when men were famous according as they had lifted up axes upon the thick trees – the foundation principles of the Faith and of the Word of God. Entering for a moment into the world of metaphor, we

writer and uses them for our benefit, and this is so throughout the Bible. The Christian Scriptures were to be read and studied more than any other book. When God has a job to do, he uses the most suitable 'human tool'.

The Book of Hebrews has puzzled some Christians so that they have given up trying to understand it. That is a tremendous pity because it has a great deal to offer those who are not 'Hebrews'. Apart from anything else, it has much to say about Jesus that is spiritually instructive. It can also help us who have not been brought up in the Jewish faith to understand the Old Testament and its place in our thinking. The function and meaning of the tabernacle became much clearer to me after just one reading of 'Hebrews'. It is a book worth studying individually, and in a group.

We do not know the answer to our question who wrote it, so we must content ourselves with waiting till we meet that person in God's kingdom. But the 'Epistle to the Hebrews' does tell us valuable things to be found nowhere else in Scripture. It tells us about our Master so that we may become like him—and there is nothing else more important in the whole world.

DN

DESTROYERS OF THE SANCTUARY

"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees; but now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers." (Psa. 74. 5-6 AV).*

This sublime lament may well have been composed in Babylon at the time of the captivity. It seems clearly to refer to the destruction of Solomon's Temple. There is no event in Israel's earlier history which the words can fit. The Psalmist laments the destruction of the Divine Sanctuary by fire, its profanation by pagan symbols, and concludes on the despairing note, *"we see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knows how long"*. Looking around him at the ruined house of prayer and calling to mind its former glories, he breaks out into the bitter reflection just quoted. In the days when this Temple was built men achieved honour and glory by virtue of their labours upon the great cedars and stately olives which were cut down and shaped to their uses in this house; but now fame and reward is to him who leads his comrades in the work of

remember how they brought them unto Zion with songs and rejoicing, and shaped them into walls and floors and ceilings for the house of prayer that was being built. We recall with a tightening of the heart strings how the carved work was put into place and an edifice of worship, of fellowship and of service prepared, into which many who could not find soul satisfaction in the formalism and traditions of past ages could enter, and rejoice in a new and wider vision of the Divine purpose for mankind. More than one Christian leader with insight deeper than his fellows has acted as did Solomon and taken the initiative in pointing the way to a more intense consecration of heart and life to God under the impetus of such increasing light of the Plan of God and the evangelistic work which went with it. The simple gladness and fervent zeal of those earlier days is traditional among many who now, toward the end of their earthly course, remember those former glories.

One thinks of the floor of fir, a symbol of everlasting life because of its evergreen nature. Here is the ground on which we stand. As we enter this temple we enter upon eternal life. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."* *"Whosoever believeth on me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* Upon every side are the enclosing walls of cedar, a wood which according to Lev.14 was one of the constituents in the ceremonial cleansing of leprosy, and leprosy is a symbol of sin. So, in our temple, there is that all around which cleanses from sin. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."* The doors into the sanctuary, made of olive wood, suggest thoughts of the 'way in' to God's purposes and to communion with him – access by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared... but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit."* So do the olive wood doors swing open, revealing to us somewhat of the glories which lie beyond.

What now of the carved cherubim, mystic figures which so often have been pointed to as symbols of the four attributes of God, his Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power standing revealed in all their beauty and magnificence? Here they remain, alternating with the carved palm trees, speaking of the righteous man who shall flourish like a palm tree (Psa. 92.12-14) in his growth to the full stature of a man in Christ (Eph. 4. 11-13). Between the cherubim and the palm trees, above and around, wrought into a score of graceful patterns, the open flowers—probably lilies and pomegranates – fit symbols of the many precious promises of the Word; all flowers, all 'open' for our enjoyment, means of the bringing forth of "much fruit". It is a picture of our coming to know God in the cherubim; of our growth in grace and Christ-likeness in the palm-trees; and our reception of the precious promises

and the bringing forth of much fruit in the open flowers. And this is the "carved work" which unthinking ones in our own day set out to break down with axes and with hammers!

Make no mistake about it. The picture is very exact. In their heedless zeal many have done grave harm to the cause they espouse and disservice to the Lord they love. Some have set out to shatter the faith of others in fondly-held beliefs – often in matters of little or no importance, on the plea of "*walking in the light*" and in the endeavour to substitute other and allegedly better conclusions. All too often the new belief is no nearer to ultimate truth; sometimes a good deal farther away from it, and some devoted disciple's joy and faith in their belief has been taken away to no purpose. Let us consider carefully what we are about before we apply our own little hammer to the carved work of the Temple!

To adorn and extend the Temple is not the same thing as breaking down the structure already erected by men of faith in times gone by. It is always our privilege and responsibility to bring forth out of the storehouse "*things new and old*" for the household of faith according to our ability. Every generation between Solomon and the Captivity did something to increase the beauty and majesty of the Temple at Jerusalem. Rich and poor, young and old, made their contribution according to their means, and the building which was eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers was at that time in every respect as impressive and glorious as King Solomon's ceremony of dedication. So must we ever be zealous to add to the edifice of the truth which we have inherited, but always with remembrance of the purpose for which truth is given to us, "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Eph.4.12). We need to add our contribution with care, that it may be helpful, encouraging, spiritually uplifting, to those to whom we minister and not on the contrary deprive them of the confidence and faith which formerly they enjoyed.

"But surely", says the iconoclast (which means "destroyer of idols"), "if a belief is error, it is better to expose it, whatever the consequence. Error never sanctifies; truth alone sanctifies". How often is that old tag repeated! and none of us has ever yet attained the full truth. Like Paul we know only in part, and cannot hope to know fully until we are beyond the Veil. Whatever truth we hold, it must be to some extent tinged with "error" – to some extent an inaccurate definition of that truth. Our aim and object should be constantly to advance to an increasingly accurate understanding of the truth. "Well, that is what I mean", says the iconoclast. Unfortunately, that is not what he really means. If he was honest with himself he would admit that what he really means is something like this: "I am convinced that this

particular view of this particular subject is truth. Therefore, any other view must be error. Therefore, anyone holding a different view from mine must be in error. Therefore, since error does not sanctify, I must first destroy their faith in their belief, and then, if possible, get them to accept my own." So saying, he picks up his axe and hammer and goes out to destroy some carved work.

Many years ago a man of deep insight penned these words:

*"A bending staff I would not break,
A feeble faith I would not shake,
Nor even rudely pluck away
The error which some truth may stay,
Whose sudden loss might leave without
A shield against the shafts of doubt."*

How plain it is that the whole purpose of our insight into Scriptural doctrine and prophecy is that we might encourage and build up one another therewith. Unless it fulfils this function it is useless. Unless our knowledge is used to edification we are better off without the knowledge.

Yet it is very, very true that *"Where there is no vision, the people perish"* and *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Prov.29.18. Hos.4.6). We do well, therefore, to hold in grateful remembrance the labours of those who in past time lifted up axes upon the thick trees, and treasure the carved work they set up in the sanctuary. Even if some of it is becoming a little antique, not in accord with the best modern taste, it is good to recognise that it still gives joy to some, a joy that is taken away if we unceremoniously destroy it with our axes and hammers. We shall find at least one chapel in the sanctuary where we can make our own contribution to the carved work and add to the total store of the treasures wherewith God is honoured.

Christians are the inheritors of a rich tradition. Other men have laboured, and we have entered in to their labours. In the spirit of One Who made us members of himself, members who do not all have the same office, let us seek not our own, but each other's good. Let us be careful and reverent in the use of the revelation which our God has given to us. So shall we be his disciples.

AOH

* Modern translations of this verse read quite differently, but this does not take away from the main point of this article.

THE MASTER'S JOY

A word of encouragement

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

God's Word throughout his whole life was the joy and rejoicing of the Master's heart. By that Word He repelled the Tempter at the commencement of his ministry and by it He caused the hearts of the disciples to burn within them immediately after his resurrection, at its close.

To the Lord Jesus, God was unimaginably good. In the joy of his knowledge of God's love He sketched for us the picture of the prodigal son and the love of an earthly father, saying in effect, 'if you then, being evil, are like that, *how much more is God!*' He experienced constantly the joy of boundless hope in a God so wonderfully and unimaginably good. Satan *was* the god of this world, evil *was* rampant, those who would do God's Will *must* endure persecution, He was confronted by the thought of a cruel death, but the Master's gaze was habitually directed beyond these things. He lived in constant view of those conditions that will prevail when God's Will is done upon earth as now it is done in heaven.

The Lord Jesus continued in communion with the Father, not merely One to be enjoyed, but also one to be served, and this opportunity of loving devotion was in itself to Jesus another constant source of delight. The *Will* of God; this was placed centrally in the Master's life, and to carry it out was his meat and drink. His natural love for his own home, for his mother and for his family circle, was intense, and yet before all these He placed those who did the Will of God. "*Whosoever shall do the Will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" (Matt. 12. 50). From this delight in doing the service of God

there arose another source of joy, that of a constant sense of the Divine approval on his life. "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" was the testimony given from heaven to John the Baptist on the banks of the River Jordan, a testimony that was repeated to the three disciples upon the Mount of Transfiguration and attested by numerous evidences of the Father's favour during our Lord's earthly ministry. Those declarations were made that "*men might know. . . Jesus Christ*" whom God had sent, for Jesus himself needed no such outward assurances. Within himself, all the time, like sweetest music in his soul, vibrated the thought "*I do always those things that please Him*".

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

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

TH

IRENÆUS

Leading the Church in the Second Century

The first century of the gospel age had gone, and with it had gone such men as Peter, Paul and John. A new generation was serving the Christian community, and it is fascinating to read of their concerns and experiences.

Irenaeus was born in Asia, of Greek parents. In his early days he was a pupil of Polycarp, presbyter of Antioch, and owed much to instruction he then received, both in private and in public. He also derived much help from intercourse with Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, a man of great sanctity, but of moderate intellectual capacity. Both of his instructors had been pupils of St John the Apostle, therefore we have good reason for believing that he would be taught the Gospel in all its fulness and simplicity. The memories of those early days clung to him, and he loved to recall and fondly linger over the scenes of his student days. In a letter to one Florinus, whom he had known in youth, but who had evidently disappointed his hopes with reference to religion, he says: "I saw thee, when I was a boy, in Lower Asia with Polycarp, distinguishing thyself in the royal court, and endeavouring to gain his approbation. For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events; so that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse—his going out, too, and his coming in—his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord. And I can bear witness before God that if that blessed and apostolic presbyter had heard any such things, he would have cried out and stopped his ears, exclaiming as he was wont to do: 'O good God, for what times hast Thou reserved me that I should endure these things.' And he would have fled from the very spot where, sitting or standing, he had heard such words."

In his riper years Irenaeus went to France, where he was ordained presbyter by Pothinus, Bishop of Lyons. About this period a controversy agitated the Church relative to the keeping of Easter Day. Victor, Bishop of Rome, took high ground, and would have excommunicated the Eastern Church as schismatics, for refusing to agree with him on the point in question. Irenaeus, with other brethren of the French Church, were deeply distressed to see such contentions among the followers of Christ on such a trifling question; they met together in council, and, by common consent, wrote letters to Victor stating that, though they agreed with him on the matter of Easter, yet the matter was not of sufficient importance to cause him to have recourse to such extreme measures.

After the martyrdom of Pothinus, Irenaeus was made Bishop of Lyons, the chief city of Celtic Gaul, situated at the confluence of the Rhone and the Saone—a city famous then, as it has been ever since, for its trade and manufactures. The position that our hero was called to occupy was no sinecure or bed of roses; the enemy was on the warpath, dealing out fire

and sword to all who dared to go contrary the the will of the Emperor and his crafty agents; and no sooner did persecution cease than the Church was confronted with a still more subtle enemy, in the form of heresy on the line of Gnosticism, which sought to attack and pervert every vital doctrine of the Christian religion. But Irenaeus was a faithful watchman on the walls of Zion, and sought at once to encounter and to defeat the foe. He first called the bishops together for counsel and action, and afterwards began the great work of his life, to write a permanent defence against the attacks of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, which he calls— “A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge falsely so called”; but is usually designated by its shorter title, “Against Heresies”. This is a work of great ability, when the age in which it was written and the subjects of discussion are considered; it is full of original statement, striking illustration, lofty sentiment, powerful reasoning, and clothed in choice and expressive diction. He says:- “Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should be at once detected; but it is craftily decked out in an attractive form. One far superior to me has well said (probably Polycarp) in reference to this point: ‘A clever imitation in glass casts contempt, as it were, on that precious jewel the emerald, unless it come under the eye of one able to test and expose the counterfeit.’”

This writer also gives some interesting statements bearing upon the Holy Scriptures, where he says:- “Matthew produced his writing of the Gospel among the Hebrews, and in their own language, while Peter and Paul were still preaching in Rome and founding the Church. And after they had gone away (i.e. died), Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter, having himself written in a book those things which were preached by Peter, handed them down to us. And Luke, the follower of Paul, laid up in a book the Gospel preached by him. Then John, the disciple of the Lord who also leaned upon His bosom, he too gave forth the Gospel while he was sojourning at Ephesus in Asia.” Here we are supplied with direct and remarkable evidence respecting the four Gospels, that each one is traceable to a distinct and independent writer; written by different men, at different times, and in different countries, and while they approach truth from different standpoints, and present facts, circumstances, and persons in great variety, they never contradict each other; but when placed together they all gather round one common centre, and blend into one perfect harmony.

We have no authentic account of the death of Irenaeus, but it is generally believed that he suffered martyrdom in the reign of Severus at Lyons— where the blood of the saints ran down the streets. Tradition says that Irenaeus, with many of his flock, were driven between two hills, where was a Cross on the one hand and an idol on the other; where they were to

choose which they would have: the Cross with suffering and death, or the idol and they should live. They counted not their lives dear unto them, and without fear or hesitation gave themselves up to martyrdom.

*So they took the last grand step, beyond the stars of God,
Into the splendour, shadowless and broad,
Into the everlasting joy and light;
The zenith of the earthly life was come.*

Selected

DAY OF REST

Part 3 The Sabbath in the Old Testament

The institution of the Sabbath lies back in the mists of pre-history. We do not know when it originated. It may have been with Adam in Eden. If its observance is a fundamental requirement of human nature it probably did originate in Eden, and was observed more or less sincerely in the centuries following. The earliest knowledge we have of its national observance dates back several centuries before Abraham, and even then its institution is accredited to God. The Israelites were sabbath-keepers when they came out of Egypt, and had doubtless inherited the ordinance from their ancestors. At Sinai, the rule was elaborated into a code with minute details of its application to the affairs of Israel's national life.

Briefly stated, the Mosaic laws provided for:-

- (a) A weekly sabbath observance for man and beast (Ex. 23. 12-13; 31. 12-17; 35. 2-3).
- (b) Special additional Sabbaths on the occasion of the great feasts (Lev. 23. 23-32; 24. 15-21; 16. 30-31).
- (c) A seven-yearly sabbath for the land (Ex. 23. 10-11; Lev. 25.1-7).
- (d) A special Sabbath for man, for beast and for the land on the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25.6-12).

In all these observances the close connection between rest and worship is noticeable. The "feast" Sabbaths were "holy convocations" to the Lord, when all the people forsook their tents and their occupations and gathered in companies for praise and worship. These feasts were closely connected with the first fruits and the harvest (see Ex.34), and were designed to lead the minds of men to reflect upon the vital relation between the labours of their own hands and the beneficence of God, who had made those labours both possible and productive. The promise of God was that

their observance of the Sabbath would enrich and not impoverish their lives. The ground would bring forth enough in the sixth year to last them through the seventh; and enough in the forty-eighth year to last them through the sabbath year and the Jubilee year as well. So sweeping in its scope was this promise of God that it even assured them there would be a surplus of old provisions to be cast forth when the fruits of the next "first" year became available (Lev. 26.10). There is no possible danger of lack if the Divine law is observed!

So the Sabbath became firmly established. Its observance was still a long way from the Divine ideal; still far short of what the Sabbath can be and will be when restored humanity has fully accepted the Kingdom of God upon earth, and the nations are walking in the light of the New Jerusalem. From those days in the desert when Israel cried: "*All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient,*" men had, and still have, a long way to travel. But the story of the sabbath has unrolled a little more since then, and shown us a fair vision of what will be, when not only the Church of Christ, but all men, have fully entered into the "*rest that remaineth for the people of God.*"

There is remarkably little said about the Sabbath in Israel's early years. Apart from a few casual allusions the word is not so much as mentioned until the times of the later Kings. This very silence is eloquent; it seems to indicate that as an institution the sabbath system was a normal custom calling for no special mention for quite a few centuries after the entrance to Canaan. We read in Num. 15.32-36 of the man who was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, and of his fate; but that was in the wilderness. Thence forward throughout the time of the Judges and until the days of David there is no intimation whatever of the manner in which the sabbath was observed. After this, however, there are one or two allusions that go to show that it was regarded as a settled institution.

1 Chron. 23. 31 mentions the Sabbaths in connection with David's ordering of the priestly courses, whilst 2 Chron.2.4 and 8.13 give evidence of the same in Solomon's time. The exquisite picture of the Shunamite woman in 2 Kings 4. 23-26 reveals a sincere sabbath keeping, the woman's husband puzzled at his wife's sudden decision to go to the man of God, seeing that it was "neither new moon, nor sabbath." Evidently the Shunamite was a faithful adherent to the law of Moses, and probably many in Israel shared her faithfulness. At much the same time the sabbath was a sufficiently marked day to become the occasion for periodical changing of the Temple guard (2 Kings 11.4-11 and 2 Chron.23.4-11).

During this period, a span of about six hundred years from the Exodus, there is no mention of violation of the Sabbath. Israel until the days of Solomon was an agricultural and pastoral people. Industry and trade, and the

consequent intercourse with other peoples, had not touched them. It almost seems as if the simple pastoral life is especially conducive to the keeping of God's sabbath rest. Even in England in the twentieth century Sunday was observed more faithfully and sincerely in country districts and among agricultural populations than in the cities and towns and industrial areas. In harmony with this, it is worthy of notice that it was only after Israel began to lose its pastoral simplicity, and entered into intercourse with other nations, joining in their trade and industry, that the prophets found it necessary to denounce their sabbath faithlessness.

The earliest of such denunciations in the Old Testament is that of Isaiah, who commenced to prophesy in the reign of Uzziah, about six hundred and fifty years after the Exodus. By this time Solomon had been dead for many years, but the taste for luxury, ease and other fruits of commercialism, introduced by him, had remained, and Israel was well on the way to becoming the nation of traders it has been ever since. Isaiah shows (1. 13) that in his days the Sabbaths had become a mere formality; they were an abomination in the sight of God, and He would no longer accept them. Later on in Isaiah's life (56. 2 and 58.13-14), in greater maturity, he called Israel to come back to their original sincerity and zeal in sabbath-keeping. *"If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight..."* etc. At a later time Jeremiah exhorted the people to cease from desecrating the Sabbath (Jer.17.19-27). Ezekiel felt the same burden, as recorded in the 20th, 22nd and 23rd chapters of his prophecy, whilst Amos, contemporary with Isaiah's early days, has preserved for us a vivid picture of the Israelites chafing under the sabbath law, and mentions the very thing which led to their rejection of the sabbath, their greed for gain. *"When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit"* (Amos 8.4-7), It seems clear that in the days of Amos and Isaiah, when King Uzziah was reigning, the sabbath was still observed, but in a perfunctory, formal manner. Men were impatient for its passing that they might turn again to the buying and selling which was rapidly creating in their midst an economic system of the same kind that has produced such evil results in the world today.

Such evidence as the Old Testament affords, therefore, seems to indicate that Israel observed the sabbath system until the time of the Kings, and that with the entrance of trade and industry and consequent partial abandonment of pastoral pursuits they abandoned the sabbath also. For a few centuries more the nation blundered on from disaster to disaster. All

the great invasions and captivities fall within this period of sabbath rejection - until at last there came the greatest catastrophe of all. Nebuchadnezzar's armies razed the Temple and the Holy City to the ground, taking away to Babylon all but a few of the poorest, left to be vine-dressers and husbandmen. Even these fled into Egypt a few months later, for fear of the Chaldeans. The desolation was complete, to remain so *"until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths"*.

Thus it was realised, the dread prediction given to Moses eight hundred years before the exile. It was a declaration that if the sabbath arrangements were violated and ignored by Israel, the nation would eventually be driven into captivity and the land lie desolate in compensation for the Sabbatical years in which it had not been allowed to rest. *"If you will not . . . hearken unto me . . . I will scatter you among the heathen (nations), and will draw out a sword after you, and your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, and you be in your enemies' land . . . because it did not rest in your Sabbaths, when you dwelt upon it"* (Lev.26.27-43).

After the Babylonian captivity there was a great change. Strong influences were at work to maintain an increasingly rigid observance of the sabbath. When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem he found alien traders in the habit of selling their wares in Jerusalem, and Jews conducting all manner of business, on the sacred day, and he sternly forbade such practices (Neh.13.15-22). This zeal for the day developed into an extreme fanaticism during the four centuries which elapsed before the First Advent. The records of the Maccabees, those stalwart patriots of that intervening time, show that many Jews even refused to fight their enemies on the Sabbath, choosing to be slain rather than violate the day by lifting weapons. By the time of our Lord the simple commands of Moses had been overlaid by a vast mass of detailed prohibitions equalled only by those governing the English Sunday in the days of the Puritans. To practise as a physician and accomplish works of healing on the sabbath was forbidden; hence our Lord was accused of breaking the sabbath because some of his works of healing were done on that day (Luke 6.6-11,13; 11-17;14. 1-6, and John 5.1-16). In like manner it was declared that his disciples, rubbing corn between their hands on the Sabbath (Matt.12.1-8) were technically guilty of threshing wheat. One wonders to what extent our Lord's injunction, *"Pray ye that your flight be not . . . on the sabbath day"* (Matt. 24.20) is not an allusion to the restraining power of "orthodoxy" on those who are *"watching for his appearing"*, remembering that the Rabbis forbade any man to travel more than two thousand paces - about one mile - outside the city on the sabbath!

So was the sabbath desecrated by God's professed people – at first by indifference and hostility, then, secondly, by fanaticism and intolerance. In both cases the results were disastrous, not only for themselves, but for generations yet unborn.

AOH

THE MESSENGER

Four hundred and fifty years before Jesus came on earth, the people of Israel were a special case. [Perhaps Israel always has been a special case?] They were God's special people - He would be their God, and they would be His people. But there were blips in the relationship.

Some hundred and fifty years before this point, their temple and their city had been destroyed and the people were taken prisoners, sent hundreds of miles away to live in Babylon. Clearly, the prophets told them, this was God's judgment on their failure to obey and trust him. Then they were sent back to their homeland by Cyrus, and a temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. Great enthusiasm. Great rejoicing. More decades passed, and they were 'in the doldrums'. Ezra the scribe came to teach them the law of Moses all over again. Nehemiah, sent by the Persian emperor, had the city walls rebuilt and made them obey their distinctively Jewish laws. But for the priests and people it was a time of doubt, uncertainty and disillusion. If they were a special case among the peoples of the world, God's special people, why weren't things going better? Then to them came a Messenger.

The word Malachi means Messenger. We do not know if this was his personal name, or whether it was just the title given by those who later on preserved this prophecy. The important thing was the message, and this is very direct. Not until John the Baptist centuries later did anyone recorded in scripture again speak so directly to the people and the religious authorities in Israel. The Messenger took up the moans of a lax and dispirited people, and spoke God's answer.

Their first complaint was that if God loved His people, He had a funny way of showing it. What was the evidence for His love? The Messenger pointed to the condition of the neighbouring land of Edom. The Edomites, descended from Esau, had had their countryside laid waste, with no hope of rebuilding. The people of Judah, descended from Jacob, were

rebuilding their nation. This reflected the situation of long ago, when Jacob's faithfulness to God brought him prosperity. The failure of Edom would be evidence of God's power beyond the borders of his own people. [It is an interesting question whether material prosperity is always proof of God's favour.]

The second protest was that the priests could not see how they were showing contempt for God's name, as they were accused of doing. They said they were obeying Him as their Father, their Master. But the Messenger was very bitter about this. The problem was that they did not honour God with their best - for a temple offering, any second rate carcass would do. The Messenger said it would be better to shut up shop and suspend the temple ritual than to carry on like this. Even foreigners knew how to worship God with proper respect. Such inferior offerings would bring a curse upon them, not a blessing. They would be turned out of the temple courts with ignominy. [Did Jesus remember this when he turned the traders out of the temple?]

The Messenger brought a reminder of the ancient covenant with Levi. The promise to Levi was life and peace, so that they might stand in awe of God's name. Levi (representing the original priests of that tribe) had kept the covenant, teaching the people to live uprightly and turning them from wickedness for he was God's messenger to them. But the Levites of their day taught people to do wrong, took bribes, showed partiality.

God is the Father, the Creator of them all. Why did they not keep faith with one another, members of His family, keep faith with their ancestors - for being God's family means family loyalty. It means not marrying foreign wives who have foreign gods. It precludes divorce. The family of faith can only continue if their children are brought up to worship and obey the true God. They complained that God did not accept their offerings. What more could they expect if this was the way they treated their wives, and were unfaithful to them, as they were unfaithful to God.

Even the people who thought of themselves as faithful came in for a rebuke. The Messenger told them that they were making God tired of them. And the point at issue was that they thought of Him as a moral relativist who did not care how they behaved. Either that, or He was missing. "Where is the God of justice?" they asked. Is He just as pleased with the evil as the good? Why doesn't he come and do something about it?

The reply: He is sending His advance messenger to prepare you. And the Lord will come suddenly to his temple. Watch out! It will not be pleasant. Like a refiner, He will melt out the wrong in you. The sons of Levi will be purified, so that they do their job properly and offer appropriate offerings to the Lord - just like it was in the old times. The following people will be judged: (a) sorcerers (b) adulterers (c) false witnesses on oath (d)

capitalists who bear down on wage slaves, widows and orphans (e) those who cheat immigrants of their rights, and do not fear God.

The Messenger reminded them that their national survival had depended on God keeping to His side of the Covenant. He is more than willing to have them back into the relationship if they will return to Him. "Return to Him - what do you mean?" Well, for one thing, you are robbing Him. "What do you mean, you can't rob God!" What about the tithes - the one tenth of all their produce set aside as food for the priests? Keep up to date with your tithes, says God, and then your crops will not fail and the nation will be eminently prosperous, to be admired by all around.

The Messenger had not finished yet. There was an opinion going around that there was no point in serving God. What was the use of keeping his laws, or being humble before Him if those who went their own sweet way could get away with anything? This opinion amounted to speaking against God.

Those who feared the Lord, on the other hand, kept in fellowship with one another, and the Lord took note of this fact. He promised that when He did act, he would protect them - they were His family. That would be the time when it would be very obvious who were righteous and who were wicked. The experience of the wicked would be like stubble being burned off a field: for the righteous it would be like young animals just let out into a field, jumping and leaping about, trampling on the burnt stubble.

The Messenger finished with a warning and a promise. God was going to act and the Jews should remember the law they had been given through Moses. And keep it. The promise was that they would have the prophet Elijah sent to them, who would reunite the nation - the riotous young and their uncaring elders - so that 'that day' would not be for them a disaster.

Four hundred and fifty years later, John the Baptist came to the nation, in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was more than a prophet, he came as the Messenger who would prepare the way. And the Lord came suddenly to his temple - Herod's magnificent temple - and was rejected by the people there. And another forty years on, the Roman legions brought disaster upon rebellious Jerusalem.

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 23

1 John 5.1-2

"Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." (1 John 5.1)

Belief in the messiah-ship of Jesus is the beginning and end of our Christian faith. It lies in the centre of all that Christianity means to us and it enshrouds and embraces every phase and aspect of the Christian life. In v.1 this belief is an indication that we are *"born of the spirit"*; that points to the beginning of our walk along the Narrow Way. In v.5 the same belief is an assurance that we shall overcome the world, that points to the end of our walk. It is true that in an accommodated sense we can say that we are overcoming, or have overcome the world, here and now, but in the strict and truest sense we cannot say we have overcome until the earthly life has ended and we have passed the final test. It may well be in this passage John is thinking more of present experience than final achievement. Nevertheless, the idea of the last judgment can never be far from his thoughts, and when in v.4 he tells us that the victory that overcomes the world is our faith he must surely be thinking of the same thing that inspired Peter to write *"that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."* (1 Pet.1.7)

It might reasonably be asked at this point if John's statement in v.1. requires us to hold that anyone who professes mere belief in Jesus and his redeeming work without going on to full consecration of life and possessions and talents to God is to be accepted as one born of God. To John, the expression *"believing in Jesus"* means everything that is involved in the logical consequences of belief. It means not only a mental acceptance of the truth regarding Jesus and His mission; not even justification by faith, which comes in consequence of such belief coupled with repentance and acceptance of Jesus as a personal Saviour. It means the life of consecration, the continual walking after the Spirit, the being buried with Christ by baptism into His death. All that, is what John means by believing that Jesus is the Christ.

There is a connection here with the preceding chapter. Having established the fact that we who have thus believed in Jesus are "born of God" there is a tacit assumption that our love has gone out to God, and built upon that, the reminder of what has been repeatedly said before, that we who thus love God must logically and obviously cherish feelings of love for all our fellows who are similarly *"born of God."*

In chapter 3 we are told that to love one another is the commandment of God. In ch.4 v.11 there comes the pleading exhortation "*If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*". That puts the matter on a higher plane than that of mere commandment; it now becomes a moral obligation. Now here in chapter 5 John takes it a step farther and removes the thought of command or obligation out of the argument altogether. He states as a demonstrable fact that anyone who loves God will obviously love his brother also; the two loves must go together. Love for God cannot exist unless there is love for brother. Then following up his advantage, he drives the lesson home with the second verse "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments*".

This theme has already been treated at length in the notes on chaps. 3 and 4. It cannot be stressed too much or too often. Probably that is why John returns to it time and again. Love for the brethren is a most important factor in our Christian lives and, despite the stringent urging of John here in his epistle, one that is often found exceedingly difficult to put into practice. True, we always pay lip-service to it and even when our bungling mismanagement of affairs within our fellowship has resulted in a physical separation of believers who ought still to be worshipping and working together we try to excuse ourselves by saying that we still regard our separated ones as brethren and still have Christian love for them. It is doubtful if the Almighty endorses our words; still more unlikely that He will lightly excuse a condition of things where mutually antagonistic groups of disciples maintain themselves in separate "camps" asserting doggedly that their own views of Divine things necessarily constitute "Truth" and the extent to which their opponents differ is the extent to which those opponents are in 'error'. There is certainly a case for the orderly gathering of Christians into varying groups adapted to their varying spiritual needs. Men are creatures of indeterminate characteristics. But even though one believer feels that he is brought closer to God in the reverential surroundings and ritual of a High Church service, and another only in the Puritan simplicity of a Quaker meeting-house, there can always be a oneness between such, born of mutual respect for each other's beliefs and convictions, in the sober realisation that the Holy Spirit has said "*in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth*" (2 Tim.2.20). Such a oneness can reveal itself in a hundred ways without any "sacrifice of principle" or "lowering of the doctrinal standard" or any of the other sops to conscience which we are so ready to invent to excuse what we know inwardly is our betrayal of our Lord's own heartfelt prayer "*That they may be one, as we are*".

(To be continued) AOH

THE WAY OF AN EAGLE IN THE AIR

Four illustrations

"There be three things that are too wonderful for me, yea, four that I know not; the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid". (Prov. 30. 18-19).

This is one of the wise sayings of Agur the son of Jakeh. We know nothing else of Agur; he is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible; but there is some ground for thinking that he lived in the Arab lands at some time between Abraham and the Exodus, his words being preserved in Israel and added to the Book of Proverbs when King Solomon compiled that book.

What a strange little statement it is! Four everyday sights in the world, two connected with the lower creation, one in the air and one on the earth; two connected with man, one in the sea and one on the land. Four everyday sights, common enough, so common as probably not to excite any remark at all on the part of ninety-nine out of a hundred witnesses—but Agur the son of Jakeh was the hundredth, a serious, reflective man, and as he watched, he confessed that in each of these four sights there resided a mystery, a something that went beyond his understanding, a something that stirred his emotions to their depths and left him with a feeling of quiet awe.

The eagle, winging its swift flight through the higher levels of the air, building its nest on high in the inaccessible crags of the highest rocks, swooping down upon the prey its keen sight had espied from far, cleansing the earth from the defiling presence of dead carcasses: Agur gazed upon the spectacle with wonder. The serpent, slithering out from its den to sun itself upon the warm rock, its brilliantly coloured scaly skin scintillating and glistening in the sunlight as it twisted and darted after its prey: Agur must have stood enthralled as he watched it shed that skin and emerge clothed in an even more brilliant and showy one. He beheld the birds and small animals stand petrified with fear, held spellbound by the serpent's malignant eyes, until it advanced upon them to their doom. The serpent, perhaps mused Agur, brings death to the earth—but the eagle cleanses death from the earth!

Then he lifted up his eyes, and away on the heaving billows of the great sea beheld a vessel, making its way with difficulty and labour through the mounting waves that threatened to submerge it. *"The way of a ship in the midst of the sea"* indicates that he had in mind a boat caught in a storm, tossing and straining in the trough of the waves, helpless in the grip of the elements. However could it get safe to land, Agur must have wondered; yet in the fulness of time the storm would abate and the crew arrive safely home

with their cargo. *"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."* (Psa. 107. 29-30). And in coming to the fourth subject of wonder there is no need to think other than that Agur conned over what Paul himself called a great mystery, the love of a man for the woman who is to be his wife. Perhaps the son of Jakeh caught some echo of those far-off days when the Lord God brought the woman unto the man, and she became his wife. (Gen. 2. 22). In the impulse which drives a man to seek and win the woman of his choice Agur found mystery beyond his ability to solve.

But why are these homely allusions in the text of Scripture? What is there here of instruction or furnishing unto good works for the Christian? Agur may have spoken and written down these words in all sincerity and others may have recorded and preserved them to later generations, but why should they have been taken hold of by the Holy Spirit and granted that immortality which is the lot of every word "written in the Book" ? In short, what is there here for us?

We may take it that Agur ben Jakeh had no idea of any deep significance in his words. He spoke as he felt and said exactly what he meant. He intended the application of no other than a strictly literal meaning to his sayings. But the fact that the Holy Spirit enshrined these words in a setting which presents them for the consideration of every succeeding generation of truth-seekers does indicate that some deeper purpose is in fact intended to be served.

A great deal of Bible teaching is pictorial imagery. Everyday scenes and incidents are described, not for the merit or interest of the particular scene or incident itself, but because in the description of the scene or the relating of the incident parallel thoughts of spiritual things are suggested, and the mind is led to be exercised in the "things of the Spirit". An analogy between the natural illustration and some important spiritual truth is discernible, and although the illustration is at best but an illustration, it has served a valuable purpose in the spiritual truths in which that mind has already been instructed, and familiarises it with the "things of the Spirit". The discerning of a likeness between the natural things of this world and what may be termed their spiritual counterparts brings more reality into our spiritual understanding and accustoms us to look at all things in life from the standpoint of the Spirit rather than the standpoint of the world.

Following this line of thought the four "mysteries" of Agur ben Jakeh may be taken as illustrative of the four great mysteries in the Plan of Salvation—the power of Evil, the Redemption from evil, the call of the Church, and the hope for the World (not in that order). And even if such an application be held to be no more than the use of the text to provide an

illustration—well, it is by illustrations often that the deepest of truths are conveyed to our immature minds.

"The way of an eagle in the air." That downward swoop of the swift-pinioned bird to the earth reminds one of the well-known hymn *"He saw men plunged in deep distress, and flew to their relief."* The eagle makes its nest in the highest parts of the mountains from whence it can survey the world around. Wisdom, says the 8th chapter of Proverbs, stands at the head of the ways, the chief of the high places of the earth. (Prov. 8. 2.) The personified "Wisdom" of Prov. 8 is thought to describe the Son of God, our Redeemer, prior to his coming to earth for our salvation. From that high place He surveyed the world, seeing death and corruption, and came down to the world to abolish death and cleanse the earth from the defiling influence of sin. The literal 'eagles' of the Bible were in reality great blessings to the land, for they disposed of animal carcasses which otherwise would quickly putrify in that tropical heat and pollute the land, spreading disease and further death. It is from this standpoint that we must use the illustration. Our Lord, coming to those who were dead in trespasses and sins, *"as the way of an eagle in the air"*, descends to earth, takes to himself the burden of death and sin, and leaves the earth clean and free from defilement, corruption and death. *"O death, I will be thy destruction."* He transmutes death and decay into life and immortality. Surely to us, as to Agur ben Jakeh, this "way of an eagle in the air" is too wonderful for our human understanding. *"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him."* (Deut. 32.11.) The protecting power of God the Father is shown in this picture of the eagle and its care for its young.

"The way of a serpent upon a rock." From the very commencement of the sacred history the serpent has been the symbol of Satan and of sin. The seed of the woman is one day to bruise the serpent's head and righteousness will then be supreme for ever, but in the meantime evil reigns, and that fact is a great mystery not only to the natural man who knows not the things of the Spirit of God, but also in large measure to those to whom have been revealed much of the Divine counsels and the Divine Plan. The way of evil through world history is like the way of a serpent upon a rock, tortuous and sinuous, a stealthiness of progress, first in this direction and then in that, seeking out opportunities for entrance into the good and pure and holy, that it might befool with its corrupting influence. *"Your adversary the devil . . . goeth about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5. 8). *"From whence comest thou?"* asks the Most High of the Adversary in the story of Job. *"From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down it"* answers the Adversary glibly (Job 1.7). That has ever been the way of Satan, like the way

of a serpent upon a rock; and why such a thing has been permitted for so long has been a matter of wonder to men just as the natural case was to Agur ben Jakeh. But evil and the Spirit of evil is earthbound, as is the serpent. Jesus saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven and although he appears to men as an angel of light it is but an earthbound glory; it reflects no radiance to heaven. The serpent cannot follow the eagle into the air; it must forever twist and writhe upon the rock, its sinister beauty dazzling to mortal sight but having nothing in common with the graceful denizens of the air. It emerges from its hole; it suns itself upon the rock and fascinates by its fatal beauty even while it repels; it hypnotises its victims by its baleful stare and strikes death to them before ever they are aware; but its latter end is that it perishes in the dust and is no more. In the new earth which is to be, the nobler animals are to live in peace and concord one with another, but *"dust shall be the serpent's meat"* (Isa. 65. 25)—a metaphorical allusion to everlasting death—for *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"*.

"The way of a ship in the heart of the sea." The ancient peoples looked upon a sea voyage as a hazardous undertaking—as indeed it usually was in those far-off days. The frail ship, with its load of human lives, so utterly at the mercy of the elements, so dependent upon the saving power of God when storm or other danger threatened, very easily became to them a symbol of the uncertainty and difficulty of human life. That symbol is a more than usually apt one. The world of mankind, pursuing its normal course, very generally heedless of God whilst times are calm, becomes transformed into a frightened world when danger and disaster threatens, as it does to-day. And like the mariners in Jonah's ship, men then begin to call upon God for salvation. But, through calm and storm, through fair weather and foul weather, alternating between unbelief and faith, indifference and supplication, the world of man, like a ship in the heart of the sea, goes on its way, forging onward to an unknown land, in imminent danger from the towering waves and yet after each burst of the element's fury is seen to be still afloat, battered and shaken perhaps, but still limping on its way toward the unseen land of promise. That was the wonder to Agur ben Jakeh, that the ship survived at all, that it could still be seen in the far distance until at length, the conflicts and tumults over, it was lost in the calm glory of the far horizon. A fitting symbol, surely, of the way of mankind during this time of sin and death! Not because of their own righteousness, but because of his great mercies, does God save them and bring them at the end into his "afterward of peace". Zechariah, his spiritual vision quickened to perceive the details of that final ending to the ship's voyage, said *"at even time it*

shall be light". The way of the ship in the sea, with all the vicissitudes it experiences, is a great wonder, but it ends in the light of the far horizon, the light of the *"land of far distances"*. (Isa. 33. 17 marg.).

"The way of a man with a maid." There are several words for "man" in the Old Testament, each having its especial significance. There is adam, and "ish", man as an individual, an ordinary being; "enosh", man as a mortal, dying creature; "ben", man as related to his surroundings (as "a man of the city") but in this passage the word is the supreme one of them all, "geber", a "mighty man", a man indeed, a man head and shoulders above his fellows. That takes us at once to the glorious description in the Song of Solomon. *"My beloved is . . . the chiefest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely"*. The last and greatest mystery of the four wonders must surely be the mystery of Christ and his Church. *"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy lord; and worship thou him."* (Psa. 45. 10-11.) That is the "way of a man with a maid", the coming of the Lord from heaven to seek and win his Bride, that He might take her away and present her faultless before the presence of his Father with exceeding joy. We have heard that call and responded to it; we trust that we are of those who *"follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"*; we talk together, as did Paul to the Ephesians, of the love of Christ for his Church, but, like Agur ben Jakeh of old, we still stand in wonderment before this great mystery. We look forward to the *"marriage of the Lamb"* when the Bride has been made ready; we hear in anticipation the words that are one day to be uttered by the Bride to all the world, *"Come—take of the fountain of the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22.17) but still we do not approach to the depths of understanding that must one day be ours when, in the splendour of that marriage feast, and in the overwhelming glory of the Father's presence we look back upon the long story of sin and redemption and perceive the evidences of Divine love and wisdom in every step of the way. Then, perhaps as never before, we shall understand why, long ages ago, a man of God was inspired to look upon the world he knew and speak of four things too wonderful for him to understand: *the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid!*

AOH

KATALLASSEIN

The Greek word *allassein* means to change, in the New Testament it is used to refer to all sorts of changes. Stephen, for example, was accused of teaching that Jesus would change the accepted customs of the Jews (Acts 6.14). Paul, speaking of the resurrection, says 'We shall be changed' (1 Cor.15.51). He also speaks of changing his tone of voice when speaking to the Galatians (Gal. 4.20). But the word *katallassein* is used for a special sort of change.

This is the change required for enemies to become reconciled. It is used in 1 Corinthians 7.11 where Paul discusses the case of separated couples, and urges that estranged wives should preferably be reconciled to their husbands. For such a reconciliation to take place, both parties must be ready for it. Paul had in mind the case where the wife had taken the initiative in moving out, and he urges her to be reconciled: the change would be in her actions, hopefully in her feelings also. He does not refer to the husbands's action or feelings. Reconciliation may be merely formal, or real. In the case of nations at war they may sign a peace treaty and be reconciled, which means they do not attack one another. But true reconciliation means more than the cessation of hostilities, and involves an emotional change. This is especially so when the enmity or separation is a personal matter.

Paul uses the verb *katallassein* (or the noun *katallage* which means reconciliation) to refer to the restoration of the relationship between human beings and God. He speaks in Romans 11.15 of the reconciliation of the world - something which in his experience was only being realised at the cost of the Jews losing their special status: there were so many of them who did nothing but hinder his ministry of reconciliation.

The Reconciliation is received through Jesus (our Lord Jesus Christ).

The **need** for reconciliation. Mentions of the reconciliation in scripture are in the context of being distant from God.

Romans 3.23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 1.18 The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men

2 Corinthians 5.10 We (believers) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or bad, according to what he has done in the body

Ephesians 2.12 You (Gentiles) were... separated from Christ... having no hope and without God in the world

Colossians 1.13 (believers transferred from) the dominion of darkness

A **picture** of the reconciliation is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. The son did not incur hostility from his father, he simply cut himself off from the benefits of a relationship with him. So with mankind. God's 'wrath' expresses the consequences of what men have done, not a personal antagonism on His part. The reconciliation of the prodigal son with his father followed a change of heart on the son's part, and the son actually returning to his father, with the result that he experienced the father's love. It was the making of this contact that made their reconciliation a reality.

The **method** of reconciliation.

Colossians 1.19,20 For in (Jesus Christ) all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Ephesians 2.16 and might reconcile us both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body, through the cross

Romans 5.10 while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life

2 Corinthians 5.19 God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation

God's outflowing love was demonstrated in his giving his Son, a gift involving Christ's living and teaching, serving and healing, completed in his death - a gift which *changes* the hearts of those who hear and believe it. The change amounts to a new creation, new lives, joy, hope. The change, the reconciliation, is effective where the message is carried. It is God's plan to reconcile the whole world to himself. Wherever He gives us the opportunity, whether now or in the age to come, we have a share in the ministry of reconciliation.

"Reconciliation with God is the central experience of the Christian faith." (Barclay)

Ref. W.Barclay New Testament Words

GC

Nothing is sweeter than Love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven and earth; because Love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created beings.

He that loveth, flieth, runneth, and rejoiceth; he is free and is not bound.

Thomas a Kempis

LUCIFER, THE PRINCE OF EVIL

A Study in the personality of the Devil

"The whole world lieth in the wicked one" says the beloved John (1 Jn.5.19) and the bitter truth of this observation is daily manifest. The reign of sin and death has borne fruit in the existence of a "groaning creation" (Rom.8.22) which looks and longs hopelessly for deliverance. The Scriptures confirm quite clearly that Satan is the prince or god of this order of things (Jn.14.30, Cor.4.4) and our Lord himself did not dispute the fact (Luke 4.6). The contrast between the fair beauty of Eden and those scenes of misery and degradation which now mar the earth would be not only saddening in the extreme but productive of hopeless despair were it not for the Divine promise that the power of evil shall one day be overthrown and Eden will bloom again.

Despite the evidence of Satan's rule, so manifest in the world and on the pages of history, there is very little direct reference to his personality and activities in the Old Testament. The existence of evil was plain to all men. Many were the speculations as to why evil was permitted and many there were who endeavoured to overcome the power of evil. Enoch and Noah stand out as early examples of great men leading righteous lives in an environment which was rapidly becoming more and more godless (Gen. 6.5).

Abraham and Job appear as men of faith who were esteemed and respected by their contemporaries. The children of Israel at Sinai recognised the existence of evil and entered into a covenant with God by the provisions of which they formally renounced evil and pledged themselves to absolute holiness of life, but "that covenant they broke" (Jer. 31.32). There was in ancient days no lack of appreciation that mankind was in a fallen state and in the grip of evil. It is apparent, though, that intelligent belief in a presiding genius in the realms of evil, a master mind who directed the forces of evil, was not so widespread. Men and women groaned and suffered under the tyranny of sin without realising just how it came about that they found themselves in this hopeless state. It was left to the seers and pastors of the people of Israel to discern the relation of these things to the story of that happening in Eden so long before; and it is these men who have recorded sufficient of the visions they saw and the revelations they received to constitute a tolerably clear outline of Old Testament teaching regarding the personality and work of the Devil.

From the days of the early Christian Church it has been customary to regard Satan as a powerful spiritual being who is in a state of rebellion against God, one who is the embodiment of all wickedness and whose

whole intellectual and moral nature has become subordinated to evil. But the word "Satan" was not originally the name of a personality, it is a Hebrew word meaning an adversary, an enemy, or an opposing one. In this sense the word appears fourteen times in the Old Testament, translated "adversary" or "to resist" and in these instances it is clear that the reference is not to the arch-enemy of God and man, but to opponents of lesser power and fame. Psa.38.20; 109.4,20,29; and 71.13, are cases in point. In Num.22.22, the angel of the Lord is said to be a "Satan" – an adversary. In 1 Kings 11.14;23, 25, an earthly "satan" was said to be "stirred up" by God.

It should not be thought, however, that this usage of the word means that there is no personal devil - Christians do maintain that understanding, that the Scriptures, in speaking of the Devil or of "Satan," refer to the principle of evil in active operation, and that the idea of a personal devil is an out-worn relic of mediaeval theology. It would appear that this viewpoint overlooks certain important Scriptural considerations. The principle of evil has always existed and will always exist, although the Bible makes it plain that evil will not continue in active operation forever.

A day will come when the whole of Divine creation will be fully in harmony with the laws of God, and evil will not again darken that vast realm; but the Bible declares plainly that evil was introduced into this world by an external agent, that mankind was drawn into evil under circumstances which showed that at least part of the guilt lay at the door of another than man (Gen.3.14), and that during the whole course of human history that other agent has constantly warred against God, tempting and seducing men and angels. Moreover, the Book depicts in no uncertain terms the rectification of all the evil that was introduced by him. To accept all this as picturing the principle of evil in active operation does not do the record justice, for these stories are clearly intended to explain by whom the operation of evil in this world was set in motion. The plain indications in Genesis, in Job, in Isaiah and Ezekiel, and throughout the New Testament, are that there exists a being who, originally created perfect and sinless, harboured thoughts of disloyalty and rebellion which led to open disobedience and culminated in the terrible scenes on this earth which are associated with the reign of sin and death.

Thus it becomes the natural thing for the Hebrew word "Satan"—an opposer—to become the proper name by which this being has been known throughout the Christian era. The popular idea of a grim faced demon with horns and hoofs, a kind of presiding deity of Hell, is borrowed from pagan mythology and has no relation at all to the truth. Satan is a spiritual being, his habitation is the spiritual world, he has all the powers and faculties which

belong to that order of existence; but he is one whose moral nature is inflexibly set in the things of evil.

There are references throughout the New Testament which indicate that Jesus and the Apostles believed in the existence of Satan. The story of our Lord's temptation at the beginning of his ministry is meaningless unless it is accepted that He actually did become the recipient of suggestions from the Devil. It may have been true that He was not literally taken up and set on a pinnacle of the Temple, just as it must have been true that with the natural eyesight He could not have literally beheld all the kingdoms of the earth from his vantage point at Jerusalem. The essence of the story is that Jesus was urged, not to fall down and worship an abstract principle of evil, but to definitely acknowledge as his liege lord one who at that time was admittedly the "prince of this world". Doubtless the proposal was to the effect that He could then undertake his work of healing and blessing mankind without going through the experiences ordained for him by his Father, experiences which must inevitably culminate in the tragedy of Calvary. The Tempter definitely declared that all things in this world, the kingdoms and all their glory, had been "committed" unto him as lord; and this claim, which is supported by many Bible statements, was not denied by Jesus (Luke 4.6).

Words attributed to Jesus such as that in Matt. 12.26 "*If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself*" can only be understood by realising that Satan was already known to be the author of evil works but not of good. The idea of this prince of evil lending his power to the execution of good works, as suggested by the Pharisees, would be an indication that his power to maintain his kingdom by the practice of evil was already tottering. Such language could hardly be applied to an abstract "principle of evil."

The association of the "Devil and his angels" in Matt.25.41, and in certain other Scriptures, indicates a leading personality among all those spiritual beings who are known to be in active rebellion against God. Paul's terrible words in Ephesians 6.12, in which he speaks of the unseen enemies of the Church, imply evil intelligences in the spiritual world, set in battle array against all that is good and pure upon earth and in heaven. Such a picture illuminates the Biblical presentation of one among them, their leader and instigator, who fulfils the description given in the Old Testament.

Moral responsibility cannot be imputed to an abstract principle; and the Scripture very clearly imputes moral responsibility to that agent by which, as it says, the first human beings were induced to swerve from righteousness and so introduce the reign of sin and death. Onward through the centuries the story is the same—behind all the misery and suffering, the hate and greed which characterises the rule of man in the world, there stands

a shadowy figure upon whom is laid the ultimate responsibility – and the inevitability of a personal retribution in due time is as clearly indicated. It was Tertullian who said that although God punished Adam and Eve for their transgression, he did not curse them as he did the serpent, because they were candidates for restoration and the serpent was not. Whether this is a correct conclusion or not, a striking contrast is evident in Scripture when it is seen how throughout the sacred record there runs a golden thread of promise speaking of the ultimate undoing of all the serpent's work, and visualising the reconciliation of "*whosoever will*" to God; but declaring in no unmeasured terms the finality of that judgment which was passed upon the serpent at the beginning.

The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel between them contribute a detailed exposition of the sin and the fall of Lucifer. It remains to three other men of God, Moses, Job and Zechariah, to complete the picture by describing, in allegory and symbol, the three great phases of Satan's activities on the earth. Moses records the story of his successful attempt to introduce evil into this world and its terrible result in the fall of man. The writer of the book of Job pictures in eloquent language Satan's continued sway as the "god of this world," and shows forth in revealing language the inherent baseness of the Satanic character: "*Doth Job fear God for nought?*" (Job 1.2), Zechariah in poetic imagery speaks of Satan as the inveterate enemy of the Church. Apart from these five accounts, the Old Testament is destitute of direct reference to the "prince of this world". Other nations feared and worshipped him; many of the pagan mythologies had their god of evil, to be propitiated and revered; but the Hebrews in their sturdy belief in Jehovah, even at those times when their faith sank to the lowest of ebbs and they turned aside after Baal and Moloch – false conceptions of the once universally worshipped true God – never betrayed their national faith to the extent of deliberately worshipping the prince of evil.

In thus taking a stand for implicit belief in the personality of the Devil, the way is laid open for examination of the two descriptions of his creation and fall which are found in the Old Testament. One is recorded in the twenty-eighth chapter of Ezekiel and the other in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah. In both cases a characteristic feature of Hebrew prophecy is revealed, one that should be kept in mind when studying the Scriptures. In speaking of events or matters remote from their own day, the prophets were accustomed to preface their words with some allusion to contemporary affairs which would be easily understandable to their hearers, and with this "background" in mind gave the deeper message in such a manner that in

future times the earnest student would realise its true application even although it did have a surface application to the days in which it was written. The Revelation given to John in much later times was written in the same style – the background being that of the Roman Empire and events of his own day, but the realities of his vision reaching forth into the distant future.

In these two passages therefore the prophets first addressed their words to the then King of Babylon and the King of Tyre, but as they develop their themes the language becomes more and more inappropriate to an earthly potentate and much more applicable to the powerful spiritual being who in a long past day renounced his loyalty and obedience to God. The burning words of these two inspired prophets echo down the ages with all their primal intensity of feeling. *"Thou shalt be as though thou hast not been: and never shalt thou be any more."* So will the last shadow of sin vanish from earth and the rebellion which has taken its toll of mankind be a thing of the past – only the memory of the days of evil remaining as an ever abiding and never-to-be-forgotten lesson to the sons of men.

AOH

THE SUNRISING

An Exhortation

"And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after rain." (2 Sam. 23. 4).

How eagerly and longingly the watchers of the morning are waiting for the coming or manifestation of the Lord – the Sun of Righteousness. How and when does He come, we often ask ourselves. In the beautiful text quoted above we have a very clear indication of the way in which He comes – even as our Lord himself stated, that it would be in a clear and unmistakable way. *"As the lightning shineth from the east even unto the west, even so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."* Men will doubt no longer. *"Every eye shall see him."*

One by one the years slip by and hearts grow weary with the strain of waiting and watching for the signs of his appearing. Yet God grant that we are found ready and with oil in our lamps when the cry goes forth *"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh"*.

Paul exhorted his disciples again and again to "be patient". He knew that the period of waiting would be very trying; so trying that many would

fail to be ready and some would even be smiting others who were not quite in accord with their own views.

"Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." (Jas.5.7,8). How hard it is to be patient in times of anxious waiting we all know well. How our imagination runs riot and fills us with foreboding or fears until we find the strain well nigh intolerable. When, on the other hand, some great joy awaits us, how eagerly we look forward, counting each day, and then, when the watched for day arrives, watching the clock. This is what we are told to do in these days of waiting – *"watch"*. Not to grow weary, not to lose patience, not to doubt that the time will come at last. Oh yes, it sounds easy to talk, but as weary year succeeds weary year, and the hopes begin to grow fainter, the stoutest and most eager hearted watcher begins to sigh and groan for the longed for time. To some of us more impulsive natures, this is a hard testing time. How, then, are we to keep our hopes high and our confidence steady? Merely, brethren, by calling upon him who alone is able to keep us from falling, and trusting in him implicitly, for *"He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the working of his mighty power"*. Let us ever remember that the *"Everlasting Arms"* are always nigh, and the overshadowing wings ever ready to cover us, and that those who put their trust in him shall never be ashamed.

Soon, soon, the ever growing light of this cloudless morning shall dispel the darkness. The things which have seemed so shadowy and obscure shall be clearly defined and all shall be bright and warm, as the cold morning mists give way to the glowing beams of the glorious Millennial sunrise. *Then shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.* The darkness will be past and the glad day arrived at last.

Take heart, weary watchers, and keep those lamps alight with the oil of love, for though *"the love of many shall wax cold"* in these days of abounding iniquity, He Who is our Guardian is also the Lord of Love, and can fill our hearts through the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, melting down the hardness and keeping them *"hearts of flesh"*. Ah, how soon the chill winds of adversity, ingratitude and unkindness can make that poor, weak flame, flicker and, alas, even die out. Let us call upon him to keep our hearts filled with oil of love, therefore, that when He shall appear, our lamps will be lighted, and we may go out to meet the Bridegroom. He alone can give us this oil, through the plenitude of his Holy Spirit.

Praise God, that in the glorious morning that awaits us *"many nations shall be turned to the Lord"*, and many unbelievers shall be converted unto him *"whom they had pierced"*. Many shall then outgrow the old 'earthy' nature, and 'spring forth' into the 'new birth' even as the tender grass

springing out of the earth by the clear shining of the Sun of Righteousness after the refreshing rains of his Presence. Thus, in the *"Times of Refreshing"* which shall come from the Presence of the Lord, shall many weary wanderers turn their steps to him who has said *"Come unto me, ye weary, and I will give you rest"*.

*"He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth,
And love, joy, hope, like flowers, Spring in his path to birth."*

"Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God even our God shall bless us."

(Reprint BSM 1953 - TH)

SCENES FROM OUR SAVIOUR'S LIFE

Hymn writers have captured in verse many moments in the life of Jesus. We invite you to find a passage of scripture which will match with each verse of a hymn printed below.

You could think of this as a challenge to your knowledge of the Bible. However, as a quiet devotional study you might read each verse printed below, having matched it up with a passage of scripture, and think what the experience meant to Him.

Some suggested references are given at the end, but you may have found other passages which are an even better fit to the hymn verses.

*Forty days and forty nights
Thou was fasting in the wild;
Forty days and forty nights
Tempted still, yet undefiled.
Sunbeams scorching day by day;
Chilly dewdrops nightly shed;
Prowling beasts about thy way,
Stone thy pillow, earth thy bed.*

*He reached out and touched them, the blind, the deaf, the lame;
He spoke and listened gladly to any one who came.*

*At even, when the sun was set,
The sick, O Lord, around thee lay;
O in what divers pains they met!
O with what joy they went away!*

*Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep,
Watch did thy anxious servants keep;
But thou wast wrapped in guileless sleep,
Calm and still.
'Save, Lord, we perish' was their cry,
'O save us in our agony!'
Thy word above the storm rose high,
'Peace! Be still!'*

*Stay, Master, stay upon this heavenly hill;
A little longer, let us linger still;
With all the mighty ones of old beside,
Near to the awful Presence still abide;
Before the throne of light we trembling stand,
And catch a glimpse into the spirit-land.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark, all the tribes 'Hosanna' cry;
Thine humble beast pursues his road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.*

*Kneels at the feet of his friends,
Silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.
Jesu, Jesu,
Fill us with your love,
Show us how to serve
The neighbours we have from you.*

*In life no house, no home
My Lord on earth might have;*

*In death no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.*

*When my love to Christ grows weak,
When for deeper faith I seek,
Then in thought I go to thee,
Garden of Gethsemane.
There I walk amid the shades
While the lingering twilight fades,
See that suffering, friendless One,
Weeping, praying there alone.*

*Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord.
Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign;
He arose! He arose!
Alleluia! Christ arose!*

Bible references

Mark 1.9-13; Matthew 4.23-5; Matthew 8.16-17; Mark 4.35-41; Matthew 17.1-13; Mark 11.1-11; John 13.1-17; Luke 9.57-8 and John 19.38-42; Mark 14.32-42; Matthew 28.1-20.

XX

How easy it is to close eyes, ears and heart to this “electric” Gospel. How much better to be like Michael Faraday, who, when asked by a fellow-scientist on his death-bed, “What are your speculations now?” replied, “Speculations! I have none. I *know* whom I have believed. I am not thinking of speculations; I am resting my soul upon certainties.”

The holy life is not all mountain-top experience.
It has its depths as well as its lofty heights.
The valley of the shadows must alternate with the still waters;
the danger of the path with the shelter of the fold.
The young eaglet must be tossed out of its nest
if it is to learn to fly up the steeps of the air.
God must put his child to the proof
to ascertain if his love is true and deep.
Sorrow, pain and loneliness may have to be allowed
to plough up the subsoil of the heart,
in order that the spirit of obedience, so dear to God,
may become manifest under a thousand tests.
Our Heavenly Father's love and care and protection
are his wings and his feathers,
shielding us from all harm,
keeping us warm and safe.
He is able to make every experience of life
work out for our good.
We are, however, to remember that the promise
that God will make all things work together for our good
is a promise to the new creature in Christ, and not to the old creature.
Our temporal affairs may be permitted to go awry.
We are not wise enough
to know what is for our own best interests as new creatures,
and what would help us most in our fight
against the world, the flesh and the Devil.

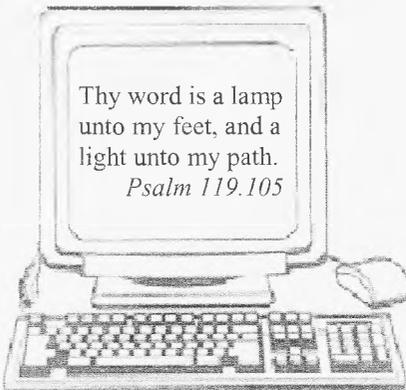
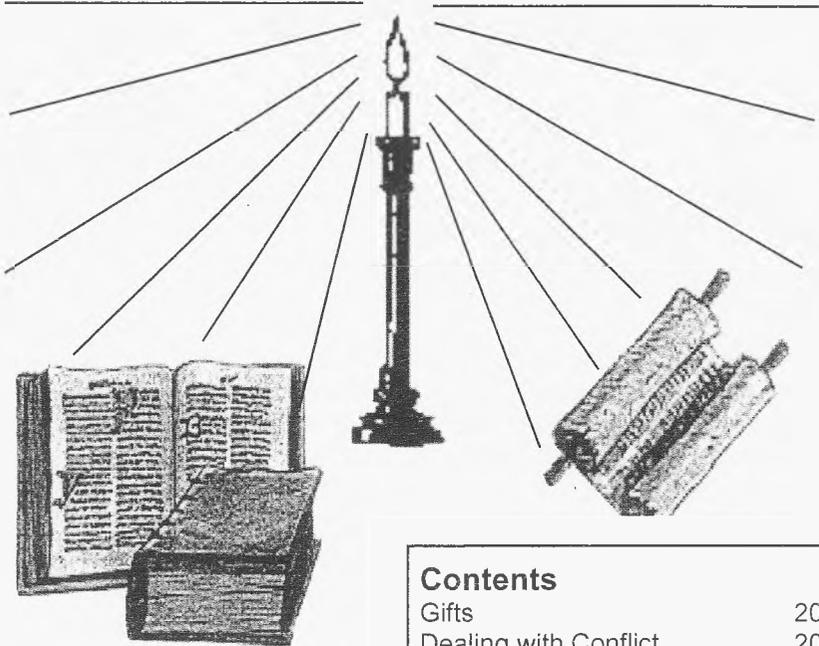
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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.

GIFTS

The season of 'Christmas' is a challenge to the spirit of generosity. It is a time for giving one another gifts - a custom, intended to celebrate God's generosity in sending his Son into the world of humanity. However, like many a custom, giving gifts at the nativity may become merely a habit, something we are expected to do, told to do. Gifts at any time may be given as a matter of custom, or from a sense of duty, or even, given in love. Paul, writing to the Christians at Corinth, encourages them to give generously, and makes it clear that our motives in giving are important: *"Let everyone give as his heart tells him, neither grudgingly nor under compulsion, for God loves the man who gives cheerfully. God can give you more than you can ever need, so that you may always have sufficient for yourselves and enough left over to give to every good cause.... your very giving proves the reality of your faith, and means that men thank God that you practise the gospel of Christ that you profess to believe in"* (2 Corinthians 9.7-8,13 JBP)

It is a good thing when a gift is appreciated. It is a good thing when a gift is appropriate to the receiver. The two often go together: we are thankful for what we need - or want - or would have wanted if we had thought of it. This applies in the matter of 'Christmas presents', but the same considerations apply when we receive all the gifts that God's generosity brings to us. To consider all these gifts would make an enormous study,

branching out into all creation, pointing into the illimitable future. However, for the moment let us just look at three Greek words in the New Testament which are translated 'gift'. These are *doron*, *dorea* and *charisma*.

Doron is often used meaning an offering to God, or to His work. Jesus saw the people rich and poor putting their gifts into the temple treasury (Luke 21.1) and it was the poor widow's two copper coins that drew his praise (it's what's in the heart that counts). The high priest spoken of in Hebrews was appointed to act on men's behalf in offering gifts and sacrifices for sins to God (5.1, 8.3). Such gifts or sacrifices did not give people a good conscience - they pertained to rules and regulations - it took Christ's gift of Himself to affect our hearts (9.9). Back in Genesis, Abel's gifts to God were acceptable because they were offered in faith (Hebrews 11.4). In Matthew gifts are referred to several times: gifts on the altar (23.18), gifts as a token of healing (8.4), gifts which should not be offered until we have gotten forgiveness from those we may have injured (5.23). Promising to give a gift to God cannot be used as an excuse for depriving our nearest and dearest of what is their due (Mark 7.11). In all of this it can be seen that it is not merely the actual gift which is significant but the state of mind in which it is given.

Doron (or the plural *dora*) appears in Matthew 2.11 referring again to ceremonial gifts - but what gifts! It was the rich learned men from the east who had seen their star again, and came joyful, excited, into the house where the baby was, fetched out their gold and frankincense and myrrh, and worshipped - their faith and glowing worship more precious than the things they had brought.

In Ephesians 2.8 *doron* does not refer to men's offering to God, but God's gift to men. God is rich in mercy. He loves us with great love. We were dead because of transgressions, but He has made us alive with Christ. He proposes in the coming ages to demonstrate the surpassing value of his free gift of kindness to us in Christ Jesus. This comes through faith. And it is nothing to do with what we deserve, it is God's gift. He is making us into his 'poem', his work of art, designed to do good things.

Dorea denotes a free gift, freely given, a present. In the New Testament it is God's present to humankind. This is the word for what Jesus said to the woman at the well when he told her she did not recognise God's gift or know who He was. He offered her 'living water' which would spring up inside her and result in eternal life.

Dorea is used in referring to the Holy Spirit and its manifestations. This gift of God was not to be bought with money by people like Simon Magus (Acts 8.20). The same significant gift was given to both Gentiles

and Jews, a proof they were accepted by God. It was the heavenly gift, to be tasted, experienced (Hebrews 6.4).

There were practical consequences as God's grace was given to Paul by the working of His power (Ephesians 3.7). Grace was given to each of the Christians according to the measure of Christ's free gift, which resulted in the church being equipped by the provision of servants to 'build the body' (Ephesians 4.7). The gift of God was beyond telling, impossible to put into words, whether we understand this gift as God's working in the church by His Spirit, or the gift as being Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 9.15).

The third word, *charisma*, speaks of the gift which comes from God's overflowing kindness and grace (*charis*). It is free rather than paid for. In those days soldiers, when an emperor came to the throne, might receive a *charisma*, a free grant of money as distinct from their regular wages. So, in Romans 6.23, Paul states that the wages of sin is death; but the gift (*charisma*) of God is eternal life. That overflowing generosity again!

But there are also gifts of grace along the way. Paul refers to what we might think of as a natural gift in 1 Corinthians 7.7 - but it is a gift none the less. There were special gifts when one was appointed to work in the church - gifts which should not be neglected, but stirred into flame (1 Timothy 4.14, 2 Timothy 1.6). There were special gifts for the church: gifts of people with the ability to take a special part, and fulfil a special function (Romans 12.6-8, 1 Corinthians 12.28-30); and also the particular powers and abilities which they used were Spirit-given (1 Corinthians 12.8-11). They (and we) were to long for the best gifts (*charismata*) ... and the supreme way is that of love. "*Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you, as faithful dispensers of the wonderfully varied grace of God*" (1 Peter 4.10 JBP).

The generosity of God, seen through these words *doron*, *dorea*, *charisma*, is overwhelming. The whole experience of being a Christian is overwhelming. Paul writes, "*God, who first ordered light to shine in darkness, has flooded our hearts with his light, so that we can enlighten men with the knowledge of the glory of God, as we see it in the face of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4.6 JBP). This is a priceless treasure which we hold in the common earthenware of our human nature. Common clay pots we are, cracked perhaps. If we see our Christian friends, colleagues, brethren, ministers, as being less than perfect, then we need to remember that the gift itself which we each receive and pass on is priceless: which is an awe inspiring thought to keep in mind, as we give our gifts with love at this time of year.

GC

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Teaching and examples in the New Testament

The scriptures which follow, given without any comments, provide a fascinating light upon what may happen in fellowship between believers, and may suggest to us ways of dealing with disputes and disagreements.

Someone you've offended

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. (*Matt 5:23-25*)

Someone who's offended you

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (*Matt 18:15-18*)

Paul Opposes Peter

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (*Galatians 2: 11-14*)

Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with

them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Bamabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. (*Acts 15:35-37*)

A dispute between two groups in the church

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. (*Acts 6:1-7*)

A dispute between two church members

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (*Philippians 4:2-3*)

A Church Divided Over Leaders

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (*I Corinthians 1:10-13*)

Unity and Diversity in the Body

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up

of one part but of many.

(1 *Corinthians* 12:12-14)

The bond of peace

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ..

...So then we must always aim at those things that bring peace and help to strengthen each other" (*Romans* 14:13,19)

"Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Ephesians* 4:2)

"Peacemakers who sow in peace, raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:18)

Selected

REBEKAH — BRIDE OF ISAAC

She could hardly have been more than sixteen at the time, this young girl, verging upon womanhood, whom Ferrar Fenton, with his passion for the English vernacular, describes as "*very beautiful to look upon, a maiden who had no sweetheart*" which in any case is exactly what the Hebrew of Gen. 24.16 implies. Eliezer, steward to Abraham, the wealthiest man in faraway Canaan, followed her lithe walk with his eyes as she moved gracefully towards the well beside which he was standing, her water-jar upon her shoulder. His men, waiting beside their laden camels, watched him as he cogitated within himself whether the Lord was about to make his mission prosperous. He had come four hundred miles into Aram-Naharaim, the Land of the Two Rivers, to find a bride for his master's son Isaac, but his instructions were that the woman chosen must be of Abraham's own relatives, settled here in the land from which Abraham had left many years ago, in response to the Divine call, to go to Canaan. Within the next few minutes he was to find that he had been led unerringly directly to the object of his quest.

Rebekah was the grand-daughter of Nahor, Abraham's older brother. From Gen.22.20-24 it would appear that only within the immediate past had Abraham known anything of his brother's family. Evidently travellers from the old homeland had brought news that Nahor had fathered a family of twelve sons of whom one, Bethuel, was the father of

Rebekah. Since Abraham knew none of these children when he left Haran it must be that the daughter of Bethuel was very young when Eliezer met her. Now as he looked upon her he was reminded again of the importance of his choice. Isaac was the covenant child, the promised "seed" of Abraham. Did he know that from him was to spring the dedicated nation destined to preserve the knowledge and revelation of God in history, prepare for the coming of Christ, and ultimately become a light to the nations when at last God should turn to evangelise the world in the days of Christ's kingdom. The steward was cautious as he began to converse with this fresh young girl who might conceivably become involved in so great a destiny.

Rebekah, of course, could have had no such thoughts. Born and brought up in a pastoral community where life was probably remote from the political upheavals that were always in progress, with little thought of the future save what was involved in the growing of crops and the maintenance of flocks and herds, she probably had no knowledge at all of the wider world outside her father's lands. The story of her great-uncle's migration into distant Canaan in obedience to a Divine command might well have been known to her but any thought of her own eventual involvement in that same Divine purpose could not have crossed her mind. The enthusiasm with which she received the stranger was prompted purely by the instinct of hospitality which was so deeply engrained a characteristic of Eastern peoples. It was with wonder and possibly a little apprehension therefore that she received Eliezer's gifts. A gold "earring" – more properly, a ring to wear in the nose, a customary feminine adornment in those days – of half a shekel weight, equal to a British gold sovereign, and two bracelets of gold, each containing ten shekels, as much metal as twenty gold sovereigns. Their effective value was much greater than would appear, however, for in that day and land the wages of an ordinary labourer or shepherd amounted only to six shekels a year and a large house could be purchased for seven or eight shekels. No wonder Rebekah ran quickly to her home to tell her family of the intriguing visitor and of what he had said to her.

This is where a Christian can begin to find a special significance in the story. At many times, in many places, by word and by pen, Eliezer's mission and the subsequent marriage of Isaac and Rebekah has been used as an illustration or symbol of the call of the Church and her union with Christ the heavenly Bridegroom. Perhaps former generations derived a greater measure of spiritual satisfaction from this kind of symbolism than does our modern down-to-earth age, but the picture is compelling none the less. Here is Eliezer, the messenger of Abraham, being received into the house of Bethuel the father of Rebekah as a welcome visitor. "*You are a man whom the LORD has blessed. Why are you standing out here?*" was her brother Laban's

welcome. This is the commencement of the Christian call. The Holy Spirit of God goes abroad in the earth seeking *"a people for God's name"* (Acts. 15.14). Where there is a receptive heart, even although that heart is as yet ignorant of the implications involved in the calling, there the Spirit enters with its gracious invitation: *"My son, give me thine heart"*. Knowing, as we do, that God is working all the time to bring his erring children back to himself, one can sense a world of meaning in the attitude of Eliezer as he looked upon Rebekah; *"and the man kept watching her in silence, to see if the LORD had given him success"* (Gen. 24.21). Will there be a willing response to the Gospel invitation or is the seed destined to fall upon stony ground? Surely God waits, as did that faithful steward of old, to see if the appeal is to be prosperous or not!

In the case of Rebekah, it did prosper. Eliezer told his story to the assembled family, enlarging upon the wealth and prosperity of their kinsman, Abraham, and his desire that Isaac, his heir, should be united with a woman of his own family rather than the more or less idolatrous people of Canaan. He told how God had guided him straight to the household he sought and how therefore he desired to take Rebekah back with him to be Isaac's bride. Having said all, he awaited their decision.

It is here we have evidence that the God whom Abraham served was equally acknowledged in the family of his brother Nahor. *"Since this matter comes from the Lord, it is not for us to make a decision"* said both Bethuel and Laban. *"Here is Rebekah; take her and go. Let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD himself has said"* (Gen.24. 50-51). Here, in this house, the leading and the overruling providence of God was recognised and obeyed. They had never seen this man before; they had to accept his word that he was in fact who he said he was. He arrived out of the blue with a cool request that he be allowed to take their young daughter to a land four hundred miles away to marry a man none of them had ever seen and of whose very existence they had until then been ignorant. The name of Abraham they knew as that of Laban's grandfather's brother, but he had gone off into the wilds of Canaan some seventy years previously before any of them were born and they could have been excused if they had demanded some proof that he was in fact still alive. Nevertheless they displayed what can only be accepted as an acute perception of the hand of God in this thing; *"the thing proceedeth from the Lord take her, and go"*.

And Rebekah herself; what of her? To show friendship to a stranger and accept his presents and introduce him into her family was one thing; to trust herself to a stranger and go with him into the trackless wilderness under promise of marriage to a man she had never seen, knowing that she was leaving her own people for ever, was quite another. Not unnaturally her

family wanted her to remain with them a year, or at least ten months (the literal meaning of Gen. 24.55) before leaving for good, but at Eliezer's insistence that he must return with her at once or not at all, they referred the matter to Rebekah herself. *"Let's call the girl and see what she has to say.... Do you want to go with this man? Yes, she answered"* (v.58). That prompt decision speaks volumes for the character and the faith of this youngster. She evidently shared the conviction of her elders; she too believed that the hand of God was outstretched to lead her into a life of new experiences involving the Divine purpose, and like her illustrious kinsman nearly a century before her own time, she "went out, not knowing whither she went" (Heb.11.8). Abraham had been called out of Haran to Canaan in just the same fashion, knowing nothing of what awaited him; now his great-niece received the same call and answered it in the same certainty of faith. So the sixteen-year-old Rebekah, her chaperon Deborah, her attendant maids, Eliezer with his men, and his train of ten camels, set out from Haran to go to Canaan where Abraham and Isaac were waiting.

We can see in this a wonderful picture of the response to the Call, the act of consecration of life, and all that life holds, to God! "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him" (Psa.45.10-11). Thus does the Psalmist extol the coming of the Bride to the Heavenly Bridegroom, the union of Christ and his Church. He may well have had Rebekah in mind when he penned the words. No one, taking the decision to serve Christ and to belong to Christ, to yield life and powers to his service and to be his unto death, has any idea where or to what that decision is going to lead. Like Rebekah, they go forward in implicit faith, knowing only that God leads.

Nothing is said of the journey. Verse 61 tells of the departure from Haran and v.62 records the arrival in Canaan. Of that four hundred miles trek, over difficult mountain terrain for the most part, no account is given. It could not have been easy. The first part, after crossing the Euphrates, lay through the flat fertile lands of Northern Syria but the travellers would soon find themselves traversing the mountains of Lebanon, bleak and cold. Next came the semi-desert of the Hauran, where the sun blazed down from a cloudless skies and dust storms were frequent. Then down into the humid sweltering heat of the Jordan valley and the crossing of that river by one of its numerous fords, and the slow and painful climb up the ravines of the Canaanite highlands which were afterwards to become Samaria and Judea. Finally the little caravan made its way into the south country, the Negev, not

so desert and waterless as it is today; more of a productive pastureland: and there Isaac was waiting for his bride.

That journey could not but be arduous and trying in the extreme for this young girl and her companions, accustomed as they were to the genial landscape and climate of their homeland. Day after day, for probably four or five weeks, they endured the heat by day and the frost by night, the hazards of brigands and wild animals, the difficulties of travel; but Rebekah, like her descendant Moses, "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11.27). The depth of her devotion, the sincerity of her purpose and fixity of her faith carried her through all the difficulties and oppositions of the way and when at last she reached the goal of her hopes it was to her, as the hymn has it, "the trials of the road will seem nothing, when we come to the end of the way".

In the triumph of attainment, are the difficulties of reaching the end nothing to be regarded, not worth mentioning? Says the Apostle "*our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" Again, "*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (2 Cor.4.17: Rom.8.18). The experiences of life, oftentimes hard, wearisome and even bitter, must of necessity occupy the span of our pilgrim journey between our consecration to God and our attainment of its object in the glory of the 'First Resurrection', our ultimate union with Christ, but in the realisation of that consummation all the difficulties of the way there will pass from the mind and be forgotten. So nothing need be said about the journey.

"And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her" (v.67). There would of course have been the usual wedding feast, in which all of Abraham's considerable establishment of servants, shepherds, herdsmen and land workers would participate. Abraham's farming interests covered an area of Canaan some forty by thirty miles and he must have employed several hundred workers. Rebekah's wedding was probably an event to be long remembered.

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God has completely different standards –when we think that we are at the end of our resources, He gives new commissions and new strength

M.Martyria Madauss

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 24

1 John 5.3-5

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (vs. 3.)

Somehow one is reminded of the words of King Solomon here. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* (Eccl. 12. 13-14.) Man was created in order to give glory to God. He was constituted the climax and head of all God's earthly creation so that there might be one more place in His universe from whence joy and happiness and sincere worship might radiate and testify to His all-abounding goodness. He asks only one thing - obedience to His laws of righteousness, the laws which alone can guarantee the perpetual continuance of this that His hands have fashioned and made. Solomon says that to observe these laws is the duty - the whole duty - of man. Micah the Morasthite had perhaps a little clearer discernment of the Father's own outlook on this when he declared in his impassioned tones *"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good,' and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy. and to walk humbly with thy God."* (Micah 6. 8.) This is coming very near to our Lord's own interpretation of the Law. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* (Matt. 22. 37-40.) And that in turn is very plainly the basis of John's words. Love of God and love of fellow; these two embrace everything, and if this truth is received into the heart there is no longer any need of the Decalogue, for we know the law even without having it recited to us. His commandments are not grievous—burdensome, heavy, the Greek means - says John. "What doth the Lord require of thee" asks Micah, as much as to say, "He does not ask much". Perhaps one of the lessons behind the apparently trivial prohibition placed upon our first parents in Eden is that God does not really ask much of us, and what He does ask is well within our power to render, if we will. To love God; to love our brethren His sons; these things ought to be easy. And once we have attained this position we have kept his commandments. It is as simple as that!

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest" invites Jesus. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ...and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

(Matt. 11. 28-30.) Here is an invitation the acceptance of which is not burdensome, a commandment obedience to which is not grievous. It is indeed the very contrary; the entrance into this condition of love toward God and love toward fellow-men, so far from being a grievous burden, actually means a lightening the burden already borne. *"Ye shall find rest unto your souls."* That is the final outcome of that faith which is so exercised as to lead us to answer our Father's invitation by the full presentation of ourselves in lifelong consecration to Him, even unto death.

That is the thought which comes next into John's mind as he pursues his theme. In this chapter he has reflected on the truth that believing in Jesus the Christ, we are born of God; that in loving the one who has thus become our Father we naturally and obviously love those His other sons our brethren and in so doing find that this dual love has brought us within the circle of those who keep His commandments, commandments that are by no means burdensome. But it is also true that he who keeps the commandments is an overcomer, and so John declares *"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world"* -is an overcomer -and then by a swift extension of thought *"and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"*. (vs. 4.)

That latter phrase is the one that we very frequently quote in our communion one with another, in our devotional studies, in the word of exhortation from the platform or pulpit. Do we as often realise the connection? The "faith" of verse 4 is intimately associated with the "love" and the commandments" of verses 1 to 3. We are born of God because we believe, because we love God and our brother, because we keep the commandments. and because we have faith. All these factors enter into our overcoming and without any one of them we cannot retain that "Spiritborn" condition. The Spirit can be -and is—bestowed upon us, and can be withdrawn. We are exhorted to be "filled with the Spirit" but also warned that we "quench not the Spirit". *"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God"* cries the apostle *"whereby ye are sealed unto the day of deliverance"* (Eph. 4. 30) where "grieve" is -lupeo, the same word that in Mark 10. 22 is applied to the rich young ruler, who on being told by Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life "went away grieved; for he had great possessions". So does the Spirit go away grieved when rejected by one in whom the light has become darkness. Always, at all times, we have to remember that God has made man a creature of freewill, capable of accepting light or darkness, good or evil. That choice will be put before

the world of men in the next Age, the Millennial Age, but for we, who have heard the call of this Age, the choice is before us now, and we have liberty to walk in the light of the glory of God and find that it leads us into the heavenly Kingdom at the end, and liberty to turn aside from that light and find out, too late, that we are back again where we started. There are many called, but few are found chosen -choice, elect, fitted for the purpose for which God has called us all.

So, finally, John comes right back to his first position and asks the question to which he immediately gives his own answer. "*Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*" (vs. 5). We are born of God if we believe in Jesus, that is the intimation of verse 1. We overcome the world if we are born of God' that is the theme of verse 4. *Therefore*, says John in verse 5, we overcome the world if we believe in Jesus. The act of belief is our part in the process; the being born of the Spirit is God's part; the having overcome the world is the product of both parts. Again we are brought up against this incontestable truth that our salvation depends upon two parties, upon the Father and upon ourselves. He will be faithful; He cannot deny Himself; He will not of His own volition let us go. But we also must be faithful; and that is by no means so assured a thing as is the faithfulness of God. He will not be unfaithful to us; but we may insist on being unfaithful to Him. John, recognising that fact, adds his own factor to the argument by pointing out in verse 4 that in the last analysis the victory is entirely dependent upon our faith.

So it all comes back once more to the old familiar theme---belief. If *ye believe!* Those of old never entered in because of unbelief. There remains to us a promise of entering into his rest; the achievement depends upon our belief, our faith. We are made partakers of Christ, says the writer to the Hebrews, only if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Even although there is that promise and opportunity of entering into his rest there is the possibility and danger that some of us will come short of it, fail to enter it. So real is that danger that we are exhorted "Let us therefore *fear*, lest. .." We are bid to 'labour', that is, to strain our best energies, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after Israel's example of unbelief. How vital, then, how important it is, that the one who overcomes the world is the one who *believes*, and fulfils all the implications of his belief, that Jesus is the Son of God.

AOH

A call to worship

Are you talking to me?
I'd better come closer.
My hearing is not what it used to be.
It used to be that I heard you clearly, Lord.
But now I'm coming closer.
Are you talking to me?
Speak clearly, Lord,
And help me to hear.
Are you talking to us?
We want to come closer.
We want to hear you clearly, Lord.
Speak clearly, Lord,
And help us to hear.

A prayer of approach

We come to you,
Lord of the living water.
We come to you,
source of that living water.
We celebrate together.
You are the living water.
We come to you
who knows all about us.
We come to you
who loves each one of us.
We give praise to you,
because you know us and love us.
Enter our worship,
Lord of the well.
Enter our hearts,
Lord of all knowledge.
Enter our lives,
Lord of all love,
that we might meet you at the well
and draw deeply of your living love.

Selected

The Two Accounts of the Nativity

It is well known that two parents can have widely differing memories of their children and their childhood. Scripture contains two very different accounts of the amazing events that accompanied the arrival of the Lord Jesus into this world. Both their geography and their chronology appear to differ.

Matthew's account gives the events from the viewpoint of Joseph, Luke's account from the viewpoint of Mary. Both must have been reported to the gospel writers three or four decades later.

Both parents had angelic revelations of the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and were told the sex and name of the child to be born to Mary. Joseph married Mary as he had been told, and as obedient citizens they went to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. But from there the reports diverge.

Mary did not tell about the visit of the Magi and its tragic consequences. She appears to recall their return to Nazareth as occurring some six weeks after the birth of Jesus, i.e. shortly after His presentation in the Temple and their inspiring meeting with Simeon and Anna. Joseph, on the other hand, remembered and reported most clearly the arrival of the magi at a house, evidently in Bethlehem, and a series of four dreams, three of them his, regarding their escape from Herod and becoming refugees in Egypt until Herod's death.

A simple explanation of the difference, that does not violate Luke's account, could well be that Mary, in her attention to the welfare of the Baby and all that followed in the next thirty years, had forgotten all the trauma that involved them in long journeys. It was Joseph who took full responsibility for all the problems of travel and accommodation of mother and child. Mary simply recalled that when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. She did not however say 'straightway'. Memory has a happy knack of overlooking traumatic events in our lives.

But Mary, endowed and overshadowed by God's Spirit may have made a deliberate choice to blot out those months of tragedy from her mind, meditating on 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report'. Her life was totally taken up with the care of her unique Son, pondering in her heart all that He showed her of the love of his Father. Gabriel's extensive conversation with her could of course never be forgotten. Her thrilling three months with Elizabeth, at opposite ends of their pregnancies, the excitement of the shepherds at the angelic message, would often fill her heart with joy.

It was Joseph who was left to recall his care of his wife and her holy child through those months of sadness and exile, guided by angelic

instructions by means of dreams at key points, until they were safely back at their home village. His attempt to return to Bethlehem had been overruled. His memories of the magi and the fleeing into Egypt must often have been re-lived as he reflected on the arrival of Jesus in the world.

Both Mary and he were told separately the name of the baby: JESUS (the LORD saves). On this name they were totally agreed and it was given to Him at his circumcision at Bethlehem eight days after his birth.

JT from 'Accentuate the Positive'

A CHRISTMAS POEM

Doubt and faith at Christ's coming

When first you came to earth,
You, who had been before the world was made,
We weren't expecting such a humble birth,
Despite what all the prophets had foretold.
Caesar had said that we must be enrolled
And he must be obeyed.

The porter at the inn
Told us he'd turned away a family.
We heard a new-born baby cry, within -
How could we possibly have understood?
And anyway, who ever heard that good
Came out of Galilee?

We saw the shepherds come,
Muttering something, all about a star.
They went through to the stable-yard, and some
Knelt down before the child whose cry we'd heard.
The whole thing seemed so patently absurd -
You know what shepherds are.

So when you come once more
Give us due warning, so that we're prepared.
We'd rather keep on sinning, as before -
With notice, we can turn before we're spent.
But maybe we'll need practice to repent,
And that is why we're scared.

B.K-S.

THE HEAVENS ARE THE LORD'S

Impact of space science upon Christian belief

Only during the twentieth century did men come to realise what an insignificant little speck of dust is our earth in the immensity of God's creation. The achievement of modern astronomers and physicists, probing the secrets of distant stars, discovering strange objects in outer space which no one previously suspected were there, have given almost everyone a completely new outlook upon man's place in the universe, and led some to wonder just how this new knowledge fits in with traditional ideas about God and the Christian faith. There are those who declare that it spells the doom of belief in Christianity; that the idea of Christ coming down to this little earth to save this puny human race is quite irreconcilable with the fact – which, incidentally, is quite unproven – that there must be many other worlds having intelligent creatures living on them. The scientific journal *'Nature'* as far back as 1944, said that the new discoveries were "ticking like a time bomb at the foundation of Christian belief"; the discoveries which have been made since then render the knowledge of 1944 by comparison almost like that of the Dark Ages. One noted space expert said in 1965, "*One of the results of space travel will be the end of the old religions*".

It is because these things are said by men possessing various academic qualifications which are thought to confer upon them wisdom greater than therest of us, and because in consequence ordinary people do not know the answers or do not perceive the fallacies in such statements and are liable therefore to be misled, it is very desirable that this question of the relation of Christian belief to the new knowledge of 'space science' be examined in the light of the Scriptures. If the Bible is indeed God's revelation to mankind, it has nothing to fear from such examination and in fact may be found to have much to contribute. It is not always remembered that Twenty-first Century scientists are not the world's first scientists and some of the men whose words and writings are preserved in the Bible were pretty acute observers in their own day; moreover they had the advantage of a much closer association with God than most of their modern counterparts.

The universe, vast as it is, is the work of God. The Christian faith is able to include in its philosophy the effect of every astronomical discovery man has made and every one he will yet make. That men until now have associated their faith only with this earth and with mankind is because they had no idea that any other sphere of life is possible. Primitive peoples pictured the earth as an island floating on a circular sea covered by a curved vault in which moved the sun, moon and stars. God, or the gods, as the case

might be, dwelt somewhere on the earth although in a place inaccessible to man. Then there developed the idea that God's dwelling was in an aerial heaven outside the curved vault but still quite near the earth. Even when, not much more than two thousand years ago, it was realised that the earth is a globe, it was still considered the centre of the universe with the sun circling it at a respectful distance and this was the accepted scientific belief until the seventeenth century when Galileo and Kepler showed that the sun is the centre of the solar system. As late as the year 1920, it was still held by astronomers generally that the solar system is in the centre of the universe, due to its apparent position amongst all the visible stars in the heavens. (An earlier astronomer, Thomas Wright, in 1750 had claimed this same honour for the constellation Pleiades.) All of this tended to preserve the idea that there could be only two abodes of life, heaven, the place of God's throne and the home of the angels, and earth, the home of man. God speaks to men in the language used on earth and so He became, to them, a God of the earth and of mankind, having no other conceivable interests. The spiritual insight of Solomon, King of Israel, at the dedication of his temple a thousand years before Christ was appreciated and heeded only by a relative few. *"But will God dwell indeed with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!"* (2 Chron.6.13-19). Only in the twentieth century have men realised that God is intrinsically independent of the physical universe; because He created it and sustains it, His existence must be limited by it.

Since 1920, knowledge of the universe has increased enormously, particularly so during the last seventy years. It is known now that our solar system is one component member of a vast conglomeration of stars, estimated by competent astronomers to number anything between ten thousand millions and thirty thousand millions, generally known by the term "Galaxy". The Galaxy has the shape of a gigantic cartwheel, revolving slowly in space, taking something like two or three hundred million years to complete one revolution. When we look up at the "Milky Way", the dense band of stars which arches over the heavens, we are looking straight into the "rim" of the "cartwheel"; but of all those millions of stars the naked eye can pick out only about six hundred at most. This, then, thought the observers, is the universe, a cloud of stars most of which are at such colossal distances that, although expressed in figures, the imagination cannot visualise them. But this is not the end; in more recent years it has found that far beyond the bounds of our Galaxy there are other galaxies, millions of them, each comprising more millions of stars,

extending as far as men's measuring instruments can reach. There seems to be no end to it all, and although one expert, Hubble, has calculated the size of the universe from certain theoretical considerations, another, Hoyle, declares that there is no end – it goes on into infinity. Since 1950 there have been new and mysterious objects discovered in deep space, radio stars, pulsars and quasars, not stars in the conventional sense but certainly storehouses of tremendous energy and no one is quite sure exactly what they are and what they do. It is still true that the only One who knows what the universe is all about is God!

The prophet Isaiah was aware of this, so was King David. *"He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is infinite"* (Psa. 147. 4-5). *"Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these. He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by names by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing"* (Isa.40.26). Of course these statements were made by men, but they were men attuned to the Holy Spirit of God, and what they said and wrote was the word of God. Vast as is this creation, it all owes its existence to God. Range as far as men might range in the most sophisticated of space ships, they will never get away from God. The Psalmist knew that! *"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol" (the under-world, the grave, the death state) "thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me"* (Psa. 139.7-10). A modern application of that last phrase might well in principle be applied to man's ambition to wing his flight to the distant recesses of outer space; if he does succeed in doing so he will still be within the sphere of Divine power. As the old hymn has it *"God is present everywhere"*.

At the moment, however, man is still limited to this earth. Astronauts have landed on the Moon for a few hours but the Moon is only just outside our front door, so to speak, and can be reached in two or three days, less than the time it takes a container ship to cross the Atlantic. But the Moon is not habitable. Neither are our neighbour planets, Mars and Venus, which men hope to visit some day although the journey may take years. Amongst the nine planets and their many moons which together constitute the solar system this earth is still man's only practicable home. That fact is in itself remarkable. This one planet of the nine is so admirably adapted for our needs that it gives every evidence of having been especially designed for creatures like ourselves.. Isaiah says as much. *"The Lord formed the earth and made it. He did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isa.45.18). The Apostle Paul told the philosophers of Athens that

God "*made from one every nation of men to live on the face of the earth, having determined... the boundaries of their habitation*" (Acts 17.26) which seems almost to hint that the practical limit of man's normal habitat is on and around this planet. At a much earlier date, David said much the same thing. "*The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth hath he given to the sons of men*". (Psa.115.16).

Now all this in itself does not require logically that men will never, in the eternal ages of the future, find their way to distant planets. It only means that there is no Scriptural warrant for supposing that they will. It is true that one group from amongst mankind, the Christian church of this Age, dedicated believers in Christ, are promised a resurrection to another sphere of life. But so far as the Bible tells of the destiny of mankind in general, apart from the Church, it pictures them ultimately attaining a state of sinless perfection upon the earth; what might conceivably happen in the future ages of eternity can only be speculation.

Neither do the texts above quoted or any other direct Scripture statement forbid the possibility of the existence of intelligent beings in other parts of the universe. It neither affirms nor denies, and the likelihood or otherwise of such forms of life existing can only be considered in the light of the relation of that possibility to the basic principles of God's purpose in creation.

It is well established that the same physical laws operate throughout the universe and all the heavenly bodies are built up substantially from the same substances. Most of the stars, it is believed, are accompanied by planets in the same fashion as the star which is our sun, and although most of such planets are unsuitable for human life, it has been calculated by competent authorities that our own "Galaxy", the cloud of stars of which our solar system is a member, must contain between one hundred million and six hundred million planets – the latter staggering figure being the latest and most favoured – so similar to this earth that human beings could live on them comfortably. And this is in our own Galaxy only; Aslmov says that there are more than one hundred million galaxies! There would appear to be plenty of room for living creatures in God's universe.

It is not to be expected, though, that an astronaut of the future can land on the first piece of solid ground he encounters and expect to make himself at home. For a human being to survive there must be air and water. If the planet is less than six thousand miles in diameter it cannot retain enough breathable atmosphere for life; if greater than ten thousand the heavier force of gravity would render movement well nigh impossible. The earth at eight thousand is nicely between these limits. The 'sunlight' from the parent star or 'sun' must be within certain limits if plant and animal life

is to flourish. The seasons, the length of day and night, the length of the year, and many other factors, determine whether a planet is habitable or not. In addition to the six hundred millions which could conceivably support beings like ourselves there is inevitably a much greater number which could not.

Could such planets support forms of life unknown to us? Some authorities think so. Genesis tells us that God made man of the '*dust of the ground*' (Gen. 2.7); in other words, the elements of which the earth itself is made. More than 98% of the human body is composed of three elements, carbon, oxygen and hydrogen, and human beings can live only on a planet where these three elements are plentiful, so that water and air are essential. It is believed by some investigators that life processes could proceed in creatures constituted of certain other elements when placed in an appropriate environment. Thus a world might be possible in which ammonia replaced water and nitrogen replaced oxygen. Such creatures could stand intense cold intolerable to human beings. Another form of life is envisaged in which the physical body is made of sulphur, silicon and phosphorus and all the seas and rivers are of sulphuric acid instead of water; such beings could live in intense heat sufficient to burn everything on this earth to a cinder. These deductions are not at present greatly favoured because for a number of reasons it would appear, in the present state of knowledge, that the presence of carbon is essential to any kind of living creature. The knowledge of tomorrow may well upset this position but so far as science goes today the dictum is that if there are intelligent beings elsewhere in the universe they must be like ourselves.

Now before considering the effect upon the Christian faith if life should indeed exist elsewhere in the universe it may be well to take a look at the state of current scientific thought on the subject. The search for signs of what is called, in the best circles, "extraterrestrial life", has been going on for fifty years past. The most spectacular element in the search was "Project Ozma", the setting up of radio receivers at an American observatory in 1960, to listen for possible man-made signals from possible planets surrounding two relatively near-by stars. Observations were continued without success for two years and then the project was abandoned. Five years later Russian astronomers believed they had detected such signals from another part of the universe, but it was later established that the 'signals' were natural radio waves emanating from a particular kind of star known as a 'quasar'. The emphasis nowadays therefore is directed to investigating the physical conditions necessary for life and the type of life that could conceivably exist, and the probability of suitable centres for such life existing in other parts of space. A very comprehensive investigation into this subject a few years ago produced the conclusion that the average distance between any two

"habitable" planets would not be less than 24 light years. A 'light year' is the distance light travels in one year at its speed of 186,000 miles a second; that does not convey much to the average reader but if we say that a moon rocket ship which could cross the Atlantic from Britain to America in ten minutes would take one million years to travel to the nearest habitable planet, it might give a better idea of the enormous distances involved. Our nearest neighbours, if they exist, are not so very near after all. And there is another difficulty. Shklovskh, of the State Astronomical Institute at Moscow, reputedly one of the world's foremost astronomers, has made calculations leading to the supposition that whilst there could be as many as three hundred thousand planets on which life has at some time appeared, the birth and death of any two such civilisations could well be separated in time by up to a million years! One is led to reflect what a disappointment it would be to some future space travellers, or, rather, to their descendants in the space ship, after spending several million years making their way to an inhabited planet, to find upon arrival that all the inhabitants had died a million years earlier. One feels that the Bible message is both more helpful, more logical and more rational than some pronouncements based upon current wisdom. At any rate, the Scriptures do promise the solution of all human problems, and the attainment of God's purpose with man, at the end of another 'thousand years', which is a lot better than the astronomer's millions.

It is this vast universe, with all its possibilities, that we have to picture in our minds when we talk about the relevance of the Christian faith today. Men, in all sincerity but with great arrogance, look out at the vastness of it all and aspire to conquer it for themselves. They do not realise, or do not believe, that it is God's universe and that God created it for his own purposes, which though they may be unrevealed to us, will certainly be accomplished. Man's view is well expressed in words spoken at an astronomical conference some years ago: *"Unrestrained expansion of human activity throughout the entire near-solar space is an inevitability.. various criteria seem to suggest that humanity will conquer and transform the solar system in a few thousand years . . . there can be no limit to the abilities of that highly organised form of existence of matter which we call life "*

Long years ago the Creator of the universe and of man, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, said, *"Have you not known ? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grass-hoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nought and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem*

taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble" (Isa.40.21-24).

For, after all, the heavens are the Lord's.

AOH

This article is reprinted, slightly edited, from the booklet 'God of all Space' which is available from BFU.

ONE ANOTHER

Some 'one anothers' in the Bible

John 13.38 "A new command I give you. Love one another."

Romans 13.8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

Romans 15.7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

1 Corinthians 1.10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1 Thessalonians 5.11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 3.13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

1 Peter 3.8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 John 1.7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 4.7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 Peter 4.8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

James 5.9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door.

Hebrews 13.1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

1 Thessalonians 4.9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

1 Thessalonians 3.12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

Colossians 3.13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Ephesians 4.32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Galatians 5.26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Galatians 6.2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

All quotations are from the NIV.

Selected

MEDDLING MOTHER?

Of the events of Rebekah's married life there is not much recorded save for one major incident. She had given birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob, Esau being the eldest by a few minutes and therefore in the ordinary way, the heir of Isaac and custodian of the Divine birthright. Through Esau it could have been that the promised "seed of blessing" should come. But at the birth it was Divinely revealed to Rebekah that the younger, Jacob, would inherit the birthright and she never forgot that. As the years passed, Esau developed into an "earthy" character and had no concern for, or faith in, the validity of his birthright. Quite light heartedly he traded it with Jacob in exchange for a savoury meal of the latter's preparation which took his fancy.

Jacob would appear to have been the more reverently minded of the two and in all probability had already been told of the Divine intimation by his mother. Nevertheless it seems he took advantage of this opportunity in order to establish his claim to the birthright. The significant, and perhaps rather strange, element in the situation is that whereas Rebekah loved Jacob best, Isaac's preference was for Esau. One would think that Isaac, the child of promise and indoctrinated from birth in the intentions of God regarding the succession of the 'seed', would have faced up to the fact that Esau was not the type of man suited to that succession and Jacob would much more likely be the Lord's choice, but he did not do so. Isaac doted on Esau, and because of that fact Rebekah, remembering the Lord's word that Jacob was to be the heir, began to plot and scheme a means whereby he might be formally invested with the birthright. The story is well known, how that at her instigation Jacob impersonated Esau before the near-blind Isaac and so obtained the patriarchal blessing which, once bestowed and because it was uttered in the hearing of God, could not be revoked.

Rebekah has been blamed too severely for her part in the transaction. From her point of view she was acting to prevent Isaac going against the will of God. He too must have known the revelation made to her at the children's birth. The end justified the means in her view; even this blatant deception of Isaac could be excused on the grounds that only thus could the will of the Lord be accomplished. And in all this Rebekah quite failed to realise that the Lord is perfectly capable of carrying out his own designs and needs not the use of questionable artifices by well-meaning assistants in the same. It does seem as if the unquestioning faith which did characterise the youthful Rebekah when first she received the call to leave her own land for a strange new life had lost something of its intensity, and now as a mature woman of about ninety she was not so certain that the Lord could effect his intentions without a little human scheming to help them along.

Rebekah was, after all, like so many of us, prone to plan and scheme to ensure the welfare or the continuance of the Lord's work when all the time all He wants us to do is diligently to prosecute the interests of that which He has placed in our hands to do, leaving the further development of his work to him. He has powers at his disposal that we wot not of, and the problems which may seem insoluble to us unless we instil into their solution a certain amount of human scheming or effort can be handled by him in the twinkling of an eye and far more effectively than we with our limited insight and even more limited powers could ever hope to do.

The unfortunate Rebekah paid the penalty, for she never saw her much-loved son again. In the face of Esau's justifiable resentment at the deception and his threats against Jacob's life, she counselled her son to take himself off to her brother's home in Haran for a while until the trouble blew over. "*Flee thou*" she said "*to Laban my brother in Haran, and tarry with him a few days until thy brother's fury turn away....then will send and fetch thee from thence.*" (Gen.27.43-45). The "few days" probably meant a short space, a year or two maybe; in any case Esau's resentment was short-lived and he soon forgot all about it; he was not really concerned about the birthright and not the sort to bear a grudge. Whether Rebekah ever did send to tell Jacob it was safe to return we do not know, but in any case her message would have been of no avail, for Jacob himself had been manoeuvred into a contract with Laban which bound him to Haran for many years, and by the time he did get back to Canaan his mother was dead.

It was a rather sad ending to a life that opened so full of promise but at any rate Rebekah did play a very important part in the outworking of the Divine plan. If for seventy years or so she did show the same degree of faith to which aspire all who would be not only called and chosen, but also faithful, we can well imagine that the All-Merciful would be likely to forgive that last lapse, undertaken as it was in the best of intentions.

AOH

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Take my eyes and let them see
Everything as seen by Thee.
Take my ears and let them hear
Thy voice speaking everywhere.

JT, pace FRH

THE KING OF TYRE

A biblical conundrum

The 28th chapter of Ezekiel has long been a conundrum to commentators and students. Ostensibly it is a denunciation of the king of the Phoenician merchant city of Tyre in the days of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It is part of the section of the book of Ezekiel which contains prophecies against nations surrounding Israel. In chapter 25 it is the Ammonites, then Moab, Edom and the Philistines. Tyre is the subject of chapters 26, 27 and 28. Chapter 28 contains messages against the Prince of Tyre and the King of Tyre, turning next against Sidon. Egypt is the subject of chapters 29 to 32... However, the description in 28.11-19 seems far too exaggerated to apply to any man, no matter how exalted. There are some who insist that it can only fit the story of the original sinless state of Satan, his rebellion and sin, and his ultimate end.

Tyre's principal stronghold was a rocky islet just off the coast, encircled by a high defensive wall which rendered them more or less immune from attack. More than one ancient conqueror essayed to capture the city without success; Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to it for thirteen years and gave up; Alexander the Great finally achieved the victory by building a mole from the mainland across the intervening water, which mole still remains. That was the end of Tyre, the greatest merchant city and seafaring people of ancient times. In the days of King David, Tyrian merchant vessels went to West Africa, Spain, Britain, and the West Indies and South America more than two thousand years before Columbus. Not so many years ago a cache of 800 BC Phoenician coins was found in Venezuela; some unlucky Tyrian captain either had to leave in a hurry or met his end without revealing the whereabouts of his trading capital.

Israel always got on well with Tyre. Hiram, king of Tyre was "*ever a lover of David*" (1 Kings 5.1). He could well afford to be; both David and Solomon were good customers. Hiram supplied the timber and stone for the Temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 6.10) and probably a great deal of other material besides. Ithobal I of Tyre was the father of the notorious Jezebel wife of Ahab, and Ahab enriched his palace at Samaria with much of the luxury goods supplied by Tyre. And now in here was Ithobal II ruling in Tyre with Ezekiel in Babylonia and Nebuchadnezzar hammering at the gates of the city.

The first ten verses of this 28th chapter comprise a message delivered against one termed "*the prince*" (properly "ruler") "*of Tyrus*". Tyre was a merchant city rather than a nation, part of the land generally known as

Phoenicia, a Canaanite people of mixed Semitic and Hamitic race. It wielded no political power and paid tribute to any great power which could back its demands by force, in the meantime waxing extremely rich by its world-wide trading interests. This is indicated in this passage; this ruler of Tyre, (in history Ithobal II), arrogant in his riches and world-wide influence, is pictured as saying "*I am a god*" ("*el*", mighty one, without claiming to be *the* God) wiser than Daniel, (who at this time was in Babylon, high in state office and enjoying a reputation which was certainly known throughout the Middle East) and particularly because of the wisdom and understanding (28.4-5) exemplified in the world trade responsible for the very considerable wealth of the Tyrian people. Because of his arrogance, said the Lord through the prophet, he would be brought to the dust and his people beggared and dispersed. He was, after all, no god; he was only a man.

History records the fulfilment of the prediction. The 27th chapter describes it in full. Within three centuries Tyre was no more and the commercial supremacy of the world passed to the Greeks.

At this point the prophet passes from history to poetry, poetry which is based partly on the story of creation and partly on the philosophy of sin. Says the Lord to Ezekiel (v.12) "*take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus*". This word "lamentation" stamps the succeeding account as poetry, prophetic poetry, for "lamentation" here means a "mournful song" and its connection with the literal Tyre rests upon an analogy which is not immediately apparent at first sight - the meaning of the Hebrew word for "merchant" which (probably because of its trading and commercial implications) came to enshrine the combined ideas of one who goes about, goes to and fro, and one who bargains, misrepresents and slanders. In a rather clever manner Ezekiel pictures the one who, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5.8. "*goes about seeking who he may devour*", and Jesus says, "*was a liar and a deceiver from the beginning*" in the guise of a Tyrian merchant king, whose people likewise misrepresent and deceive in their commercial dealings.

On this basis, and through the medium of a splendid piece of poetic symbolism, the prophet is used to present the full story of Satan's original creation as a perfect and sinless celestial being, his declension into sin, a sin which involved the entire human race, and his destiny. A mournful song it is in truth.

Scholars are not necessarily agreed on this understanding of the passage. To take two examples:

"Ezekiel seems to have adopted... a popular story, presumably current in Tyre as elsewhere, of a primal being who dwelt in the Garden of God in

splendour and purity, but was subsequently driven out through pride. So shall the King of Tyre shortly fall from his glory. It looks like a highly mythological version [containing ancient stories] of the story in Genesis 3, but the prophet does not hesitate to use it, since it was well known and admirably suited to his purpose.” (New Bible Commentary Revised)

“In the language used of the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 we have references that can be applied to Satan himself, who is elsewhere called the prince of this world (John 12.31) He too is judged (John 16.11) along with the great city. Behind such imperial forces lies this satanic power, always doomed, but always needing to be recognised and opposed.” (Collins Bible Companion)

As in all conundrums and points of discussion, readers will make up their own minds. For ease of reference, here are the verses in question as they appear in the NIV:

The word of the Lord came to me, “Son of man, take up a lament concerning the King of Tyre, and say to him: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you.... Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.

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Love— absorbs trouble and distils kindness... is contented, lowly and self-effacing... well-behaved, outgoing, self-controlled... forgiving and forgetting... valuing justice... enjoying goodness... covering up for any and all... takes everyone at face value... is always optimistic... willing to be on the bottom rung... and persevering to the last. Love is always successful.

Paraphrase by JT

TURN YOU NORTHWARD

"Ye have compassed this mountain long enough. Turn you northward."
(Deut. 2,3.)

The generation that came out of Egypt had passed away. Forty long years of penance in the desolate territory at the northern end of the Red Sea had been endured and then the word of the Lord came again to Israel and electrified the host with its promise of great things to come.

At the terrible tragedy of Hormah, the host who had come from Egypt had attempted to take the land by force in defiance of the Divine command. They had trusted in their own swords and personal prowess instead of the arm of the Lord, and had in consequence been soundly defeated by the Canaanites. This was forty years in the past and the present warriors of Israel had not then been born. All they knew of the far-off stirring times had been told them by their fathers: when God came down upon Mount Sinai, revealing himself by signs and terrible wonders; when the pillar of cloud and fire led the tribes through the wilderness; when the judgments of God had been exacted, time and time again, in consequence of Israel's rebellion and perversity. All that remained to give evidence of those far-off days was manifest in the persons of three men, Moses, Joshua and Caleb, and those three stood before Israel, the only witnesses to the truth of God's promise.

For nearly forty years the people had lived in one place. Most of the travels of the Exodus had been accomplished in the first year of wanderings. For most of the time they dwelt, spread irregularly over the eastern half of the Sinai peninsula, from Kadesh in the north to the Gulf of Akaba in the south. They waited and hoped for God to relax his stern decree that they should remain there and not see the good land which he had promised them until his wrath was assuaged and his due time had come.

This was a new and virile generation, sons of the desert, accustomed from birth to hardship and stern endurance. They had been brought up in an atmosphere of religious observance and ritual worship that pervaded every activity of life. They were free from the idolatrous influences of Egypt and were ready for the task of building up a new nation in a new land. To them came the call *"Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward!"*

Northward lay Canaan, the land of promise. Northward lay the fulfilment of all their hopes, the golden land of all their dreams, the place where they would become a great nation, and God himself would dwell

with them. Under his leadership and in the glory of his presence they would fulfil the promise to Abraham resulting in the blessing of all men. No wonder that the host was excited as messengers went swiftly from camp to camp, from settlement to settlement, throughout the whole area where lived the three millions of Israel; proclaiming the message: *"The time is fulfilled; the kingdom is at hand; prepare yourselves, O men of Israel, to go forward. Turn you northward!"*

So these were the men who conquered Canaan and translated the promise and the hope into reality. The generation that came out of Egypt could never have done that. They began the journey; they were the people who willingly entered into the Divine Covenant and cried with enthusiasm "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient", and they were the people who endured the hardships and privations of that terrible desert, that "waste and howling wilderness" where the sun scorched by day and the frost chilled by night, where they hungered and thirsted and suffered as perhaps few have ever suffered. They did it for an ideal. They followed Moses because they believed he would lead them to a land of freedom for their children, and despite their often waywardness and rebellion they did, in the main, hold to that ideal throughout. We are perhaps too apt to condemn that generation for its unbelief without giving sufficient value to the credit side of the picture. Those people brought into the world, and trained in the national hope and worship, another generation which was better fitted than they themselves to complete the work. Those slaves who came out of Egypt could never, in the natural way, have conquered Canaan for themselves. They were too weak physically, too divided in counsel, too insecure in their conception of the common ideal, to act with sufficient resolution ever to win themselves the land by the sword. True, God knew that and expressly forbade them to make any such attempt. He would empty the land from before them, He said, and all they need do was to march right up in faith and possess it. But the adverse report of the ten spies was sufficient to destroy any assurance Israel might have had that God could do this thing. So, because they would not gain the land by faith, and could not gain it by the sword, their carcasses rotted in the wilderness, forty years. Even so, they did, even in their failure, make a great and essential contribution to the ultimate winning of the land. They brought into the world the men and women who did eventually enter, and prepared them for the task, and for that we must give them due credit.

Today, we stand at such a time. There has been a long time of waiting in the wilderness. The exodus from spiritual Egypt is already a long way in the past. We who now live have no personal experience with the difficulties of the pioneers who through the 19th century proclaimed with fire and zeal

the message they had received: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" There have been experiences many and varied since then; there has without doubt been lack of faith and vision and because of that a loss of power in service and witness. The proclamation has without doubt suffered because of that. The bright vision of the coming Kingdom has measurably faded. The assurance and certainty of things to come is not so firmly held.

So consider, "*The night is far spent; the day is at hand; therefore let us put off the bonds of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*" There are such tremendous possibilities before us. We can march up and possess the land, if we will. Surely we have lingered overlong in Kadesh. The Holy Spirit is with us, a Shekinah that will lead us safely if we as a people will follow together. "*Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.... Ye have compassed this mountain long enough. TURN YOU NORTHWARD!*"

AOH

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'Going to heaven' isn't really good enough as a description of the Christian hope.... 'New heavens and new earth' is what we are promised - and God has already launched that project with Jesus. God's kingdom isn't 'from' this world, but it is certainly *for* this world. Our ultimate hope is to be raised from the dead to share in the running of God's new creation. *And all that we do by way of Christian, Spirit-led work in the present is a genuine foretaste of that.* When we work for the poor, or for victims of a disaster, or whatever, we are not oiling the wheels of a machine that will then drive over a cliff. We are not 'building the kingdom' by our own efforts. Only God does that. But we are building *for* the kingdom. And that has to be done... in very practical ways at the local level.

N.T.Wright

TRAINING TO BE A MINISTER

And what about the Bible?

Launching into theological training for ministry is a daunting prospect, especially when your formal education finished many years earlier. There is the possibility that what you hold most dear in your

faith, the long-held truths you hold from biblical teaching and understanding, will be challenged. Those who give the teaching might feel it to be a good thing to encourage students to re-examine what they have based their faith upon so far. While for the student it may not always feel that way, the purpose is that the basis for faith will be broadened and deepened. If faith starts out on shaky ground there is a danger that it will topple, but if it is rooted and grounded in the love of God and bible-based, then investigating and examining it will lead to greater self-awareness and a firmer foundation for faith.

The pathway of training which I followed was modular, part-time evening and weekend study whilst remaining in my own home, job and church, and the timescale was over three years. The learning was alongside others who were following different pathways~ some full time students over shorter periods of time; some mission students from a variety of countries in England for a year before returning to work in their native lands; there were students being prepared for ministry in Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and Pentecostal churches as well as students following study for their own personal reasons. Some classes were of around 20 students but some were as large as 50 or 60 and all contained students from a variety of backgrounds, experience, and opinion, which brought diversity to discussion and in itself broadened experience and knowledge of the breadth of ways of believing and following Christ that exist.

One of the first modules was *Introduction to Christian Theology* and its purpose was to give the tools to enable thinking about God in response to questions which life throws up, to listen to what others say about God, picking up what is useful in our own search, and to communicate these thoughts in a clear and accessible way. After a few weeks of being given some study and research tools and techniques we came to a session on 'Reading, authority and the Bible' in which we looked at the sources for what is included in the canon of scripture, discussed different understandings of its revelation or inspiration and how that might affect our understanding of what it says.

There was discussion 1. About reading the Bible in context, both of the surrounding passages of a text but also understanding it in the culture of the time in which it was written 2. We discussed how to use the bible in theology, the different approaches there are to its authority and how all approaches would agree that biblical interpretation in theology should be governed by the life, words and example of Jesus. They should also take account of the way the world has changed since the Palestine of Jesus. We also need to be conscious of the particular interests and perspectives we each bring to our thinking, and be open to challenge and argument from people of

different contexts, views and perspectives. We were encouraged to see discussion and argument as important to growth of faith and search for truth. No one group holds all the understanding or truth that scripture encompasses.

The course raised all sorts of issues. The following poem was written in response to some of them.

A poem-prayer

I am given tools for learning, being taught to 'read' is next
Digging deep, skipping and spiraling, to read beneath the text.
Then it's mapping minds and subjects, multi-coloured red, blue, brown
Will we still get where we're going if the map is upside-down?

Lord, this next one is a biggie - can we really trust your Word?
It wasn't written as it happened, folk wrote what they later heard
So is it revealed, or is it inspired? Knowing which might change our view
But I'm really glad they wrote it and it all points us to you.

We have wrestled with our reason, our tradition we've reviewed
We interpreted experience, but our viewpoint could be skewed.
We have thought on good and evil, of creation and the fall,
There's so much of you to know Lord, I could never know it all.

We have learned to ask more questions and to think of why we pray
Can we bring it all to you Lord? Or be careful what we say?
Do you really intervene Lord? I believe that it is so
But then how do I explain it when you're silent or say 'no'?

Of suffering and forgiveness we have pondered and we've talked
Though we cannot know another's pain till in their shoes we've walked
There's so much more in earth and heaven, we'll never understand
That I'm glad you travel with us and I'm holding fast your hand.

The use of the Bible in theological training for ministry has affirmed to me its importance in the mainstream Christian churches of this country. It has encouraged me to continue with further broadening my understanding of biblical contexts and themes through reading and on-going training and study. It has given me confidence in using the Bible in teaching, preaching

and worship within my present role as an Anglican priest. I believe I have been particularly fortunate in undertaking training at an ecumenical and mission college, which brought together such a wide range of thought and experience. While my own theological position may not have vastly altered, my understanding of the wider church of which we are all a part has grown tremendously.

Thanks be to God that he meets us where we are and draws us to himself from that place, and for the part his written word plays in that journey.

EB

MAKING PROGRESS TOGETHER

There are three aspects of the Christian life which exercise a profound effect upon communion one with the other and the manner in which we make progress. They may be expressed by the three words "fellowship", "revelation" and "evangelism" and each of these aspects must be well considered in relation to the future.

Fellowship involves much more than the mere exchange of social pleasantries or the spending time together on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Our fellowship involves the life of a family of God, in which each member is deeply and intimately concerned with the welfare of every other member and all are conscious of a common bond in a common aim and ideal. The first essential to any kind of progress together, whether in knowledge or in service, is a union of like minds and the only possible lasting basis for this is our common standing in Christ as his consecrated disciples. As students we are bound to arrive at varying conclusions in the interpretation of Scripture and this is to the good if by this means the constantly unfolding vista of Divine Truth is seen more clearly in all aspects. As we proclaim the glad tidings and herald the Kingdom, there are bound to be different ideas as to the most effective methods of proclamation. This is good, inasmuch as it serves to reveal by the acid test of actual experience how best the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour may be made known. But there is only one fellowship; only one bond of union. That bond is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in each one to sanctification of life, and flowing out from each one to edification and building up. The Shekinah glory, the Angel of the Presence, was in the midst of the host of Israel and under that overshadowing Cloud, and in the radiance of that Light, that host moved

forward as one man. We have the Holy Spirit in our midst, around us and within us, to guide and protect us in our turn. It is as a Spirit-guided company that we shall be united as one family so to fulfil our Divine calling, now, as well as in the future, to be a "people for a purpose".

The second essential is revelation. God in his wisdom has from time to time "set" teachers in the Church and their stamp of Divine authority has been such that many, recognising that authority, have accepted the Divine provision thus made and advanced in the unfolding light accordingly. God sees to it that the Church is provided with 'helps' of all kinds, ministers who are able, in varying degrees, to instruct, encourage and exhort the household of faith. God has not provided that a few monopolise this work of the Spirit; every member of the Body of Christ is a 'help' in greater or lesser degree according to ability and zeal. So it comes about that although from time to time in the history of the Church, a teacher arises to shed some particularly bright light upon a difficult part of its pathway, such interventions are the exceptions rather than the rule. The more continuous revelation of truth lies in the ministries of each one of God's people as the Holy Spirit works through them all. It is in our study fellowship, the quiet conversation and reading together, that revelation comes to each mind to appreciate truth. It is essential therefore that as the well known exhortation has it, we "*forsake not the assembling of ourselves together*" so that our progress, in the understanding of God's plan, may proceed apace and fit us the more for the third essential — evangelism.

Currently, at the beginning of the 21st Century, we must realise that our Christian world has changed during the last century and Christian interest in the Second Advent and its related matters no longer sweeps the world like a prairie fire. The recurrent failure of dates set for events, the rather lurid emphasis upon judgment and condemnation and the fiery dissolution of this planet, combined to bring the subject into disrepute with later and more knowledgeable generations. Not much is said now about the great conferences of the 19th Century when crowds of responsible ministers and layman voiced their convictions regarding the nearness of the age "*wherein dwells righteousness*". Later came a more balanced and reasoned view of the purpose and manner of the Advent and the Messianic Kingdom. With the expansion of man's knowledge of the Universe and its possibilities, characteristic of our own day, there is a challenge laid before every one of us to relate Scriptural truth to that knowledge and show that God is supreme in this greater Creation of which the human race is now aware. The Christian message must take all this into consideration.

The message should include more than the mere proclamation of the coming Kingdom and the issue of present events in a great Time of Trouble to precede that Kingdom. In proclaiming the "acceptable year of the Lord"

and the "day of vengeance of our God" we need to place before all who will listen, the essential truths of the Bible regarding Sin, Redemption, Repentance and the Divine calling to consecration of life for the service of God. There must be a very necessary explanation and exposition of the Bible itself, its history, its trustworthiness, and particularly its basic principle, that man was created perfect and fell into sin, from which fall he is to be saved by the reign of Christ. Let us become known, not as prophets of coming woes to be followed by golden days, but serious, reasonable exponents of a Scriptural philosophy that is solidly founded on the "impregnable rock of Holy Scripture". This must attempt to meet objections though it may not always provide a complete answer. It must view the problems of today in accurate focus and show how the Divine way of life is the only solution to those problems. It will involve much re-examination of general ideas tacitly accepted for years but not necessarily well founded on Scripture. But it will lead to a new realisation of the appeal underlying those historic words "*Go ye, teach all nations*".

AOH

BIBLE JOURNEYS - A Quiz

The question is, *who made the following journeys?*

(Answers and scripture references are on p.239.)

It would make a good study to go on and consider, in each case,

- * what was the reason for the journey?
- * what were people's experiences along the way?
- * was a blessing received in any way?
- * was the journey significant in the working out of God's purpose?

1. CAESAREA to ROME
2. SAMARIA to the GAZA ROAD
3. BETHLEHEM to EGYPT
4. JERUSALEM to MAHANAIM
5. PLAINS OF MOAB to MOUNT NEBO
6. HARAN to SHECHEM
7. KIRIATH JEARIM to the HOUSE OF OBED EDOM
8. BEERSHEBA to HOREB
9. MOAB to BETHLEHEM
10. CENCHREA to ROME

The Voyage of Life

It sometimes seems to me as though there are only three courses a man can take in life. He is like a ship on the ocean, an ocean dark and restless, with mysterious tides, brooding tempests, strange currents, and ever the cruel rocks from which the Sirens call. He can steer straight for the rocks. Very few do that, though some do so because the Sirens are too much for them. Many take the second course - they decide to drift. And let it be clearly seen that that is just as much a decision as any other. Then, after they have visited the ports of sin, they may take the Pilot on board and conceive the hope that somehow they may find the harbour at sunset. And some do when 'all is but a wreck'. It is a poor return to make of our personality to God.

There is a far finer choice than that. It is to take the Pilot on board in all the glory and purity of life's golden morning; not when sin has been tasted, and turned to dust and ashes in the mouth; not when desire - which seems as beautiful as a child's soap bubble till we grasp it and find only a wet mess in the palm of our hand - has left us more hungry, restless and dissatisfied than before; not when all the ports of evil have been visited and found to be no true harbour of the spirit; but to sail with Christ with all the kingdoms of the world in sight, while life is young and fresh and beautiful

Thus to love, thus to serve, thus to follow, thus to sail in unknown seas with the breath of life in one's nostrils, the wine of life in one's lips, the joy of life in one's heart; this is to find what life is, and why man was created in the morning of the world, when all the stars of God sang together; this is to find the joy Christ had - a joy unquenchable through all the sorrows of His earthly voyaging; this is to find what Paul meant by the 'glorious liberty of the children of God'. This is life. This is conquest. This is adventure. This is religion.

Leslie Weatherhead from The Transforming Friendship

10.	Phoebe Romans 6.1,2
9.	Naomi and Ruth 1.6,19
8.	Elijah 1 Kings 19.3-8
7.	The Ark of God with King David 1 Chronicles 13.6-13
6.	Abraham and his company Genesis 12.1-6
5.	Moses Deuteronomy 34.1
4.	King David and his loyal friends 2 Samuel 15.14, 17.27
3.	Joseph, Mary and Jesus Matthew 2.13-15
2.	Philip Acts 8.5,26
1.	Paul and his companions Acts 27

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