

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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“Then, looking up, they saw that the stone was already rolled back: for it was of immense size.” (Mark 16:4 Weymouth)



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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It stands for the pre-millennial 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 on request to all who are genuinely interested. It should never be sold for money.

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

The first advent of Jesus was a very important time for Israel and for us and the people the world over. Jesus ministered for three and a half years before suffering and dying on the cross. People have not long finished celebrating his birth, however, this is the important time of year and the principal time and an event he instructed us to remember.

His death would draw all men unto him and therefore offer salvation to all those who have ever lived from the time of Adam till we reach those at the consummation of this age or world in a plan that concludes at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ and the church.

Mary of Bethany realised the significance of her master. She who had loved him and been a witness of her brother being raised from the dead. Jesus made it very clear that he knew he was going to be buried in a matter of days. But what a comfort she must have been to him at the time.

Jesus handed himself into the hands of his Father's Will and fulfilled the commission in full which his Father had given him. That Will was finished on the cross. In so doing he set us an example that we in our imperfect way should strive to do his Father's will also. At this time of the religious calendar we are more aware of what God's will for him was and Christians now are directed to remember his death by partaking of the Lord's Memorial (Supper).

The Power of God is supreme. It brought into existence all creation, did

many miracles in the Old Testament and also rolled away the stone in front of the garden tomb. It also raised His Son from the dead with the ability to recall his past and open up the scriptures to his many disciples.

The second advent is the background to the prophecy in Zechariah chapter 14 and Jerusalem is once again the location in focus for the events he foretold.

One cannot consider Jesus' death without his resurrection and the whole doctrine of the resurrection is key to the Christian faith.



PRAISE HIS GLORIOUS NAME

Thank you, Jehovah, at the end of the day,
 For helping me walk in the narrow way;
 With very few pilgrims—I do have to say,
 All praise to your glorious name.

Thank you, Jehovah, for giving me life,
 And helping me cope with the toil and the strife;
 I hope to be part of Christ's heavenly wife,
 All praise to your glorious name.

Thank you, Jehovah, for feeding my soul,
 On the wonderful gospel, a message so old;
 So happy I've been, to see great truth unfold,
 All praise to your glorious name.

Thank you, Jehovah, for the grand Kingdom reign,
 How grateful I am, to Christ Jesus who came;
 And when I am risen—I'll ne'er be the same,
 All praise to your glorious name.

Thank you, Jehovah, for a chance in the race,
 The privilege to grow, in both knowledge and grace;
 And the glorious reward—to see Jesus' face,
 All praise to your glorious name.

*Where Eagles Gather
 Rosemary Page*

Magazine content. What is published is believed to have a wide interest, but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

IF I BE LIFTED UP

Even in His darkest hour Jesus' first thought was not for His own welfare but that His Father's plan would be accomplished: "*Father, glorify thy name*" (John 12:28). God immediately assured Him that He had fulfilled His commission perfectly: "*Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, an angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.*" (John 12:28-30) His words to His disciples, that the voice came for their sakes, shows that they were His primary concern—He knew they would be dismayed, their confidence shattered, because they trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21). But now He would be dead. He knew also that they did not comprehend many of the words which He had spoken to them—it was not until after His resurrection that "*...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*" (Luke 24:27)

The judgment of the world

The record in John continues: "*Now is the judgment (Greek: krisis) of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*" (John 12:31) Now was a crisis time for the world; now was the great turning point of the world's history. His sacrifice was crucial—if He successfully completed His work, the prince of this present evil world would be defeated. However if He failed, the whole world of mankind would continue to suffer the fruits of unrighteousness—there would not be any hope of them being restored to their original perfection on the earth which He and His Father had created for them.

For the joy set before Him

The record is that one of the factors which enabled Jesus to complete His sacrifice is the hope held out for Him: "*for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (Heb. 12:2)

It might be difficult to understand how any promise He had received could be an adequate reward for the sacrifice He made: leaving His heavenly home, being despised on earth and then being faced with the prospect of suffering the pain and ignominy of the cross.

It might be difficult to understand how there was any joy set before Him

which could adequately compensate Him for the sacrifice He would make. It is difficult to imagine how that prospect was joyful. Additionally there is no explicit record in the Scriptures that God had promised Him anything, perhaps the most direct reference is Psalm 2:7-8: *“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”*

From a human perspective, an inheritance of the heathen might not be very appealing, and certainly not one that could be deemed to adequately reward Him for the sacrifice He had made, and less so to qualify as a “joy”. Such an assessment is supported by the fact that in a majority of occasions the reference to the heathen means the Gentile nations, in contrast to the sons of Jacob who were Jehovah’s own (Isa. 43:1). Nevertheless that was a promise that God had given Him and He did not shrink from declaring that decree; He rejoiced in it and had total confidence that God would honour it. Thus is exemplified, yet again, the great love He had for mankind. It was the prospect of inheriting them (owning them; they being His own possession)—wayward and sinners though they may be—that was a joy to Him.

A principal feature of Jesus’ inheritance was that He *“would draw all men unto Him”*, not the sick and dying race that was now crucifying Him but the promise that He would draw them just as Moses’ serpent, in earlier times, had drawn the Israelites: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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 God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”* (John 3:14-19)

Moses and the serpent

The record of Moses lifting up the serpent is in Numbers 21:4-9: *“And they (the Israelites) journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the*

wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

The Israelites had sinned and God punished them by sending deadly serpents amongst them. However when the people repented God involved the serpent in the strategy by which He healed them. In this incident there are several parallels and several contrasts with the plight of mankind. One parallel is that God used a serpent as the agent by which mankind was caused to suffer pain and death, with which the disobedient human race has been plagued ever since: “*And...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*” (Rev. 12:9)

On the other hand one contrast between Moses’ serpent and the Devil is that Moses’ serpent was the agent by which God offered healing to the people—the Devil is not, and never will be the agent by which God will heal the human race. In God’s due time the Devil will be destroyed: “*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are...And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*” (Rev. 20:10, 14)

A concise summary

Consequently the lesson to be learned is that, because He was lifted up on the cross, Jesus will yet draw all men unto Him, and when they look upon Him they will be healed. The Apostle Paul summarised God’s plan for mankind in a few words: “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and*

things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:5-11)

Paul’s concise summary lists Jesus’ coming down to earth, taking human form, dying on the cross and the promise that eventually every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess His lordship. Paul captured the scenario prophesied by Isaiah: *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”* (Isa. 11:9)

This do in remembrance of me

Consistent with His devotion to His Father and denial of Himself, Jesus asked His followers to do no more than remember Him in a simple ceremony, the first of which was held on the anniversary of the Jewish Passover: *“And he said unto them, with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined...”* (Luke 22:15-22).

The Apostle Paul, after chastising the Corinthian believers for not attributing due reverence to the occasion, wrote: *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”* (1 Cor. 11:23-28)

And so once more we take our places at that table of the Lord. At such times of feasting, at the Passover especially, there would be a strange

mingling of jubilation with a pensive remembrance of the blood of a lamb by which the moment of deliverance came. From slavery to blessed liberty—a nation is born. But this occasion was unusual. A strange atmosphere pervaded of apprehension and solemn self-searching.

As Judas departs there remain around the Master none but His true friends. The Passover meal is drawing to a close. As the traitor leaves, we may suppose that the cloud of utmost sadness will gradually pass from Jesus' brow. Yet even now the heaviness remains, the Shepherd's mind bewailing one lost sheep. God's word is thus fulfilled, but this no comfort brings to His sad heart who knows what depth of woe awaits that blinded soul.

He turns from that sad prospect to His own. He sees indeed the horror of the Cross, a death abhorrent to that holy perfect frame, and yet beyond that scene of deepest grief a vision of such blessedness now grows, a *joy unspeakable is set before His eyes*; in view of which He can with heartfelt praise appoint for our remembrance of that awesome day a feast to keep, a new memorial, that we may ever share that same sweet joy for us secured at so great a cost.

The new feast with the old would intertwine. It is “as they are eating” of that feast that He takes bread, and then the cup of wine. For those who have been feasting on a lamb; the time has come—a blinding hour of truth—that Jesus was the One God had in mind before the earth was formed to bear the immeasurable burden of man's sin, whose broken body is to be our Bread of Life. Thus with fresh meaning do we view that loaf unleavened which He breaks, and offering it now to me, I hear afresh my Master's words, so deeply meaningful and personal: “*Take, eat; this is My body,*” given for your sake. (Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:19)

The bread—*unleavened*—from this hour will be the symbol of His sinless flesh. Of the out-poured wine He says, “*This is My blood of the covenant*”. The Revised Version (Matt. 26:28) here omits ‘new’ that added word of doubtful source, but ‘new’ it is, to yet achieve what Sinai's Law could not through man's weak flesh; “My blood—now shed for many—to release from sin.”

The Love of God in Christ is here exposed, though far beyond our powers to comprehend. Such simple tokens what great volumes speak!—The breaking of a loaf and poured out wine. Oh could we now just penetrate that mind of Jesus as He breaks to us this bread and pours this wine and

calls us to this feast of uttermost love.

Consider first how extraordinary it is that at such an hour He should take pains to concentrate the thoughts of His disciples in all time to come upon *His death*. Even the bravest of those who had been with Him in all His trials could never bear that dreadful prospect He portrayed. Nor could that death be other than repulsive to His own pure soul. And from that sight, that agony of flesh and mind, involuntarily we still avert our eyes. Too painful is that scene to contemplate. To His disciples then, and to the world, it seems defeat; yet calmly He provides that which we forever celebrate—its *victory!*

The Passover feast was a memorial of the death of a lamb. Yet it was more, for on that death and through that blood the nation came to life and were from bondage freed. Now Jesus' blood is shed—the means of life for all mankind. Think then what fills the Saviour's mind as He now says, "*Take, this My body—eat.*" How enlarged His soul as again He says, "*My blood—now drink—for many is it shed.*" Simple words, easily spoken; yet as they came from these sacred lips there must rise before His mind the vision of countless multitudes from every age, who would eventually feed on the strangest food of which man ever dreamed. Yet '*meat indeed*'; and '*drink indeed*'; to each instructed soul.

How marvellously the horizon widens round Him as the feast proceeds! The blessing of *all people*—in one loaf. But *first* His thought is centred in the little circle He has called "*My friends.*" "*Of yourselves shall one betray Me.*" The dipping of the sop, its offering to the very one whose mission, though then hidden from their eyes, was so urgently charged. "*What thou doest, do quickly.*" What searching of each heart ensued.

The Man of Sorrows; that He was indeed, but when He takes the bread and then the cup His vision reaches through the endless ages that yet will be. Beyond the cross He sees the glory that shall follow; sees men of all nations and climes coming to the feast He is preparing for them all, the blessed consummation in the heavenly kingdom fills His mind: "*I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*" (Matt. 26:29)

Now hear the Master *singing* to conclude. How bewildered the disciples, how rapt the Master! What a scene for the mind—what a study! What mixture of serene calm and human agitation!

“Remember Me.” How could we ever forget! The blessings of eternity will ever point back to this hour when Jesus gave Himself—His all—to purchase peace with God and endless joys for every trusting soul.

“The Son of God...loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20) The very wonder of this truth will ever grow, the bonds and claims of love untold can never loosen hold upon our inmost mind and dearest thoughts.

Such was the price my Saviour paid for me, who evermore My precious Lord will be.

May we who love our Saviour, keep this life-long feast...with grateful hearts, and *“unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”* (1 Cor. 5:8)

DH

Phil. 2:5-6 *Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who though being in God's Form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God.* (Diaglott)

THUS MAY HE BLESS AND KEEP THEE

THE Lord bless thee!
 How shall He bless thee?
 With the gladness that knoweth no decay;
 With the riches that cannot pass away;
 With the sunshine that makes an endless day—
 Thus may He bless thee!

And keep thee!
 How shall He keep thee?
 With the all-covering shadow of His wings;
 With the strong love that guards from evil things;
 With the sure power that safe to glory brings—
 Thus may He keep thee!

Poems of Dawn

Gone from us

Donald Holliday (West Wickham)
 Pearl Molyneux (Warrington)
 Florence Robinson (Sevenoaks)
 John Shepherd (Tadcaster, formerly Cardiff)

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Introduction

Among the many iconic events that took place a few days before the crucifixion of our Master one of the most heart-touching and soul-searching events for the students of the Word of God is that of the Anointing at Bethany.

Bethany, the home city of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, is where Jesus decided to spend his last Sabbath. He knew that the time of his death was near and that the time was at hand. We may suppose that this was no ordinary supper, but in the nature of a feast or banquet in our Lord's honour. However, one incident that particularly outshone all the other features of that gathering is that of the anointing of our Master. It was one of the most beautiful expressions of love and devotion of which our Lord himself declared, "*Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she (this woman) hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.*" (Mark 14:9) We read from the scriptures in Matthew 26:6-13, "*Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*"

The feast had begun and Jesus along with his disciples were at the table when Mary did the most spectacular service of which the lesson is of a memorial to us all. She had anticipated our Lord's coming and had fully arranged matters so that at this feast she might treat him in a manner which very few except the worldly great would have ever been treated. As we read in the scriptures above, Mary came forward and, broke the seal of her alabaster vase and began to pour the precious perfume upon our Lord's head. From Apostle John's account; she went ahead and poured some of the ointment on our Lord's feet and wiped them with the hair of her head. In contrast to Mary's appreciation of the privilege of anointing the Master, Judas was the first to object. While the perfume of the

spikenard was sweet to many, it smelled of waste to others. Judas with his calculating mind quickly figured the cost of it and called it wasted on Jesus. He loved money more than he loved our dear Lord. Coming under the influence of Judas the other disciples too began to disapprove of her action and began to criticize her. They complained of the great waste of the ointment. “Why this waste” they said. They suggested that it could have instead been sold and given to the poor.

“To what purpose is this waste?”

We are not told of the emotions of Mary to the reaction of the disciples. The severe criticism must have crushed her spirit and would have deeply saddened her heart. She would never have imagined experiencing such disapproval for her sincere love and devotion expressed toward the Lord. But Jesus came to her defence and said to them, *“Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”* (NIV)

It is worthy to pause and note why our Master stopped the critiquing disciples. It was indeed true that there were plenty of poor toward whom the money could have been used and plenty of opportunities to minister to them; but the opportunity to specially honour the Lord, and to pour upon him the fragrant perfume so beautifully expressive of Mary’s love and devotion, would not be possible for long. Our Lord’s acceptance of Mary’s sacrifice declares that the circumstances completely justify the costly expenditure. Our Lord showed himself to be out of sympathy with the sentiments of the disciples. Through her action Jesus experienced a sweet incense of refreshment, reinvigoration and encouragement. Her sweet devotion was a healing balm that prepared him for his burial. He would have seen it as the fulfilment of Song of Solomon 1:12, *“While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.”*

An extravagant action that expressed an extravagant love

Mary’s affection for our Lord was so deep and so strong that it could not be satisfied with any of the ordinary methods of expression. If the kings of earth were perfumed and anointed, much more did she esteem it fitting that her friend, her Lord, the Messiah, should be anointed with the best that she could procure for him. Her love was so intense that it knew no economy—nothing could be too good for her Beloved. She would give expression to the rich sentiments of her heart by giving him the finest and

most costly of sweet natural perfume. Our Lord appreciated the matter fully—the sweet fragrance of the heart-love which prompted the action, much more than the sweet fragrance which filled the entire house.

Mary, more than any other individual in the New Testament, was associated with His feet, betokening her humility, reverence and hunger for spiritual knowledge. She loved to sit quietly and peacefully at Christ's feet and become lost in His unfolding of the truth. She sat at His feet as a disciple, eager to learn of His will and word; fell at His feet in worship; anointed His feet with precious ointment and wiped His feet with her lovely long hair—all of which is in keeping with her spiritual character.

Mary had been the recipient of priceless truth from the lips of Jesus several times before and now she was lavishly communicative of her compassion for Him. The box of spikenard, treasured up for such an occasion (John 12:7), was worth 300 pence, a great sum in those days. "*A penny a day*" wage (Matthew 20:2), means that 300 pennies would cover her wages for almost a year. When Mary sat at His feet and heard His word, she recognized Him as the Great Teacher, and when she anointed His feet, she knew Him to be the King of the whole world. Had He not triumphed over death and raised her beloved brother? No wonder the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

Are His feet perfumed with our richest gifts?

There are many valuable lessons we learn from Mary's action of love and gratitude. For us our alabaster boxes are our hearts which should always be full of the choicest and richest perfumes of good wishes, kindness and love toward all, but especially toward the Christ and all the members of his body, the Church. Our alabaster boxes are a vessel for the holy spirit, the spirit of love which is most precious to the Lord; and like the ointment in it the holy spirit in us is expensive because it cannot be gathered rapidly but requires patient perseverance in well-doing to be filled with all the fulness of God.

As Mary began the anointing of the Lord, she began with His head and then reached to His feet. Likewise, our divine love should be upon the Head—Christ first, and subsequently upon the members of his body, including the humblest and the lowliest, the feet.

In these last days we have a special opportunity to perform our deeds of love and kindness towards our fellow feet members. Let us not waste any golden opportunity to demonstrate the smallest action of love and

kindness one toward another, as whatever we do unto the least of our brethren, we do it unto Him. The more our sacrifices cost us, the more our Lord appreciates it.

Mary's sacrifice toward our Lord encourages us to:

1. Not limit our lengths of love, sacrifice and devotion when serving our Lord. (Rom. 12:1)
2. Cultivate great love, compassion and kindness one toward another, especially toward our brethren. (1 John 3:14; 4:21)
3. Have great zeal and a willingness to serve our Lord and the brethren even though it might at times cost us physically, emotionally, economically. (Gal. 5:13)
4. Have an attitude of gratefulness for all that the Lord has done for us and for circumstances that he permits in our lives. (Eph. 5:19-20)
5. Encourage and kindle the zeal we see in each other toward serving our Lord and the Truth. (Heb. 10:24-25)

In conclusion

God can use anything or anybody as His agent, His messenger. But there were very few of the human family in Jesus' day capable of being used as God's comforting angels to our Lord. Mary of Bethany was one of these. She was one who gave Him consolation when His mind was agitated with the thought that five days thereafter He would be crucified. He realized that none of the people understood, that none of them were able to enter into His feelings. But Mary's service was very precious to the Lord—it was very encouraging to Him.

The Memorial season is an especially important period for the saints of the Lord. It is a period where we specially call to remembrance the sacrificial life of our Master and the great price He paid as the Ransom for the whole world of mankind. It is a period of severe testings and trials as was in the case of our Lord and his disciples. It is also a period where each one of us have the opportunity to introspect and examine our consecration and reaffirm our vows. As we prepare ourselves for our Lord's Memorial, may we specially recall this most benign action of Mary and strive hard to be among those who encourage and uplift our brethren in their most trying experiences.

FC

Sincerity is validated by actions rather than words.

*Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook
Harvest Activities*

GOD'S WILL

"I delight to do thy will, O my God."—Psalm 40:8

The Essence of Consecration is contained in the words of our theme text; and although these words of the psalmist prophetically spoke of Jesus they also speak of the attitude that Jesus' body members—the church—must have developed fully in them. The 'will' may be expressed as one's desire, delight, what one takes pleasure in, what one wants, approves of, and deems acceptable. When we speak of God's will, as does this verse, we speak of God's desire, delight, what God takes pleasure in, what God wants, what God approves of and deems acceptable.

The Scriptures point out various important features about God's will. Jesus said that it would not be enough just to believe or to even know God's will, but that doing it was necessary also. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matt. 7:21) The Apostle Paul tells us that God's will must be done from the heart—it must be rooted in a heart's desire to please God. *"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* (Eph. 6:6) In order to do God's will, we must know what that will is. Hence these words, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* (Col. 1:9) Summing up the eternal importance of doing God's will, the Apostle John says, *"He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."* (1 John 2:17)

Learning His Will

Those who have taken the step of full consecration to God, whether recently or many years ago, have likewise dedicated their lives to the doing of the Lord's will. Yet, actually doing and performing in full accord with the Lord's will is a struggle. The influences of the world, the adversary, and our own weak flesh hinder us at times from doing the Lord's will to the extent we would like. Like many endeavours in the Christian walk, the matter of doing the Lord's will is something we learn over time, through experience. Our sentiment in all this is that expressed by the psalmist, "Teach me to do thy will." (Psa. 143:10) Before we can do the Lord's will, however, we must first know what that will is. This is the primary focus of our lesson—determining the Lord's will.

Fortunate it is that in many of the day-to-day experiences of life it is quite easy to determine the Lord's will, both in temporal and spiritual ways. If

we are employed, we believe the Lord would be pleased that we go to our job each day and carry it out to the best of our ability. If we have a home, he would expect us, as part of his will, to take care of it and not let it fall into disrepair. The Lord, we believe, is also pleased that we take reasonable care of our physical bodies and our health. These, and many others, are temporal things, yet they are part of our stewardship, and it is the Lord's will that we take care of these responsibilities as part of our consecration vows. Likewise, concerning the all-important spiritual responsibilities of our life, we can easily understand that it is the Lord's will that we come to meetings regularly, attend conventions when possible, spend time in study, prayer, and meditation, speak the gospel message to others, and develop a character in the likeness of our head, Jesus. These are all part of God's will.

God's Will Not Always Obvious

The focus of our lesson, however, is not so much the clear-cut matters described above, important though they are, but on the experiences of life in which the Lord's will is not so obvious. Suffice it to say that in some experiences it is difficult to determine God's will and, in those cases, we need assistance and help to make such a determination. The Scriptures set some 'ground rules' for helping us determine God's will. The first rule is that we cannot determine God's will in an experience by using worldly or fleshly thinking. "*Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*" (Rom. 12:2) Notice that the will of God is proven by having our mind transformed from 'this world' and renewed by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. To put it another way, we must use Godlike or Christlike thinking—spiritual thinking—to determine the Lord's will. The second ground rule for determining the Lord's will is that, in order to do so, our walk must be circumspect. The Apostle Paul makes this connection between walking circumspectly and understanding the will of the Lord using these words, "*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*"—Eph. 5:15-17

Even with these ground rules though we sometimes struggle in our determining of the Lord's will. God, in his great love, has provided tools to help us in this endeavour. One such tool is found in this touchstone scripture, "*Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*" (Isa. 30:21) We note in this scripture the fact that God knows we

will face experiences in life which present us with a choice to go either in one direction or another. When we come upon such experiences we should realize that we have not sinned because we face a fork in the road, but we have come to a point at which we need to be especially guided by God in our decision making. The ‘word behind thee’ is not to be considered literal, but figurative, referring to the tools we have to help us. These tools or methods that say symbolically, ‘this is the way, walk ye in it’ are suggested as follows: 1) Prayer; 2) The Word of God; 3) The brethren; 4) Family; and 5) Experiences / God’s providence.

Having begun by following the ground rules of spiritual thinking and walking circumspectly, through spiritual exercise is very important.

Spiritual Exercise

The key verses are 1 Tim. 4:7-9. The Apostle Paul frequently borrowed metaphors from the athletics track. (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:7; Phil. 2:16) The picture here is the Greek gymnasium, with grounds for exercise, running, wrestling etc. It was a place for bodily exercise and competition. Now see what Paul says to Timothy: “You, as a Christian, must exercise your soul as carefully, regularly and rigorously as the worldly Greeks exercise their bodies. Their motto was body-culture. Yours must be soul-culture. Theirs is a physical exercise. Yours is a spiritual exercise. Theirs makes the body well and develops it. Your objective must be to keep your soul fit and to develop it into godliness”—in order that you may become a godly person, growing in spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness.

It is very important to notice that the apostle does not despise or dismiss bodily exercise and physical health. No Christian should neglect his body. On the contrary, every Christian should by wise living, sensible eating, and taking the right amount of rest, fresh air and exercise, maintain a body that is fit and well. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) But having said this, notice Paul’s emphasis. He says (1 Tim. 4:8 NIV) “physical training is of some value” that is, for this life only. After all, the body is only the body, however much you exercise it. The body is not the man; it is only the house in which the man lives. Spiritual exercise, however, profits and benefits the soul, the person who lives in the body. To train yourself for godly living and keep yourself spiritually fit—notice three things about this taking time and trouble to become and to keep fit:

(1) *It is a Personal matter*—the apostle says, “Train yourself.” (v.7 NIV) This is something we must do for ourselves—compare 1 Tim. 4:16.

(2) *It is a Profitable matter*—for it is, as verse 7 shows, “to be godly.” In verse 8 (NIV) we are told that this exercise “has value for all things”, that

is, in every way! Verse 8 also tells us that spiritual exercise is profitable in two special ways: (i) in “the present life”, and: (ii) “the life to come”. How profitable it is to live a godly life! We receive the benefit in this life and in the life to come.

(3) *It is a Progressive matter*—“Train yourself to be godly.” It takes patience, hard work and discipline to achieve godliness—see 2 Peter 3:18.

All this leads us to ask the question: How are we to train ourselves for godly living? What are the exercises in which we are to engage in order to produce and maintain spiritual fitness? We are to exercise ourselves privately and corporately, that is, alone and in fellowship with others. Both are equally important.

Ways in which we are to exercise ourselves privately

- (1) *By entering the secret place of prayer.* Look up Matthew 6:6 and notice that the emphasis is upon being alone. This should be the Christian’s first exercise, to be often alone in the presence of his Heavenly Father, communing with Him (Psa. 4:4); receiving His pardon (John 8:10-11); His cleansing (1 John 1:9); His rest (Matt. 11:28-30); and listening to His voice (Luke 10:39). Do you have a regular private prayer time?
- (2) *By the devotional reading of God’s Word.* If the athlete is to get strong, grow muscles and produce tone, he must have the right food and so must we if we are going to become strong Christians. This is strikingly brought out in 1 Timothy 4:6—notice the words brought up “on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching.” (NIV) Are you a well-nourished Christian, feeding on God’s Word? See what we read about the Bereans in Acts 17:11! Alone with God’s Word we hear Him speak to us (Psa. 85:8); we receive His guidance (Isa. 30:21); His wisdom (James 1:5); His comfort (Psa. 23:4); His illumination (Psa. 119:18) and all we need for godly living.
- (3) *By practising the presence of God.* How are we to obey? 1 Thessalonians 5:17—by living in fellowship with the Lord, as Brother Lawrence (1614-1691) did when he “practised the presence of God”. This is the way to true godliness.

Ways in which we are to exercise ourselves corporately

- (1) *By attending Public Worship.* According to Luke 4:16 it was the custom of the Lord Jesus to attend the house of God, and there is a danger of getting out of this good habit (Heb. 10:25). Many Christians forsake the house of God. They attend infrequently and they do not recognise the privilege and benefit of meeting together

with other brethren to worship the Lord. (Matt. 18:20) We easily stay away for a variety of reasons or distractions. Little wonder that our spiritual life suffers! (Psa. 122:1)

- (2) *By partaking of the Lord's Supper.* 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. When we take the bread and the wine, we exercise ourselves spiritually as we look back to Calvary and forward to the return of our Lord Jesus. If we neglect His Table, we neglect the culture of our souls (John 6:50-51).
- (3) *By engaging in specific service.* According to Ephesians 2:8-10 we are saved to serve, and we are to serve in accordance with the specific plan that God has for us. Are we exercising ourselves by doing that service?

The Holy Spirit Necessary

One very important element which allows all of the aforementioned tools to work together in harmony is the Holy Spirit—God's power and influence directed in our lives. Note that the previously mentioned scripture which spoke of walking circumspectly (Eph. 5:15-17) is immediately followed by these words, "be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) It is this Holy Spirit which works with the mind of our new creature mind to help us use all these tools to their best possible benefit in assisting us to determine the Lord's will. Therefore, as we utilize the first tool of prayer and watching, we should include in our prayers the request for more of the Holy Spirit's guidance in seeking God's will.

Summarizing these tools as they relate to the touchstone scripture of Isaiah 30:21, we see that we are to use prayer, the Bible, the brethren, our family, and the experiences of life as words behind us, saying figuratively, 'Here is the way, here is the Lord's will.' The word 'behind' also implies that although we have these tools, we must still proceed with the eye of faith. We are not looking for, nor will God give us, a miraculous vision of what his will is, but by faith we should see his direction as we use the tools He has given us. "We walk by faith, not by sight."—2 Cor. 5:7

Making Needed Decisions

Let us suppose, however, that an experience comes upon us, and in spite of our best efforts to use all the tools provided to assist us in determining God's will, the path to choose remains unclear. Additionally, let us suppose we are faced with a decision which must be made. What should we do? First, we should continue to pray and watch, and not stop using all the other tools given to us. Second, we must claim the precious promises, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to

them who are the called according to his purpose.” “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Rom. 8:28; Heb. 13:5) Third, we should then make the very best decision we can in the matter, being firm in it, not wavering, and carrying it through. We should be full of faith that God, who knows our very hearts, will guide our decision in some way. In such cases, we should pray again, after making a decision asking God to overrule according to his will that our decision will be made to work to our best spiritual welfare and watching for his further providence in the matter.

We must always remember that God’s hand is not short—He can and will overrule. “Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness.” “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” (Isa. 50:2; 59:1) These promises are all by faith, and such experiences in which the Lord’s will is not made clear to us may actually be permitted as a test of our faith.

Doing God’s Will the Ultimate Goal

The key to success in the narrow way is not only determining the Lord’s will, but actually doing it to the best of our imperfect ability. This requires action on our part. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:17) The Apostle James states the matter with these words, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—James 1:22,25

If we follow the ground rules of spiritual thinking and a circumspect walk through spiritual exercise; if we use the tools of prayer, the Word of God, the assistance of our brethren and families, our past experiences and providences; if we make the best decisions we can; if we use the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit; if we are watchful, claim the precious promises, and have an unwavering faith, we cannot fail. In so doing, let us echo the words of Jesus, “I can of mine own self do nothing...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 5:30; 4:34)

PP

He bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph beheld where he was laid. (Mark 15:46-47)

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

To start with we can look and share together (the Power) which culminates the Glory. We know from experience that for the past 6,000 years mankind has never fully understood the working Power from God on high, but we can say with conviction that even now we accept it from the Almighty. Listen if you will to the words in 1 Chronicles 29:10-12 “Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.” It is wonderful how David who was a shepherd boy and now is able to express his thanks to God in such a way as King over Jerusalem for 33 years, and 7 years prior to that in Hebron. We can testify to God’s power in His wondrous works; and declare this as the psalmist “Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.” (Psalm 75:1) We have substantial evidence before us. The one that comes to my mind when we see the mighty oceans and how God in His infinite wisdom used His creation as well as Himself to control the seas. Some of us might have seen a restless sea that pounds against the rocks and after some time reshapes the rocks by it’s continual force. And the same sea can be so calm that we say it’s like a mill-pond. Then we get the concentrated rays of the sun that can burn dry grassland. This is limited power from God’s wonderful creation.

Let us at this point refresh our minds to the fourth day of creation Genesis 1:16 “And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also.” As we know the greater light we call the sun and the lesser light the moon. It says God made these lights to rule, which indicates to have control. Psa. 29:4 “The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.” This is the all-powerful, almighty God, full of strength and majesty. He is the One whom we serve and dwell with. Is this not a terrific rich and wonderful blessing. He has the authority to do anything. We are told that His Kingdom is not in word, but power. A God of excellence. In other words He uses His power in a dignified manner. As we know God is always worthy of honour.

Psalm 104 in the first five verses gives a wonderful description on the points we are making. “Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds His chariot: who walketh upon the wings of wind: who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire: who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever.” We all can say with an honest heart “This is our God.”

The psalmist David went through some frightening and difficult experiences, even to the point of life threatening. He thanked his God for His power of deliverance which was impossible in David’s own strength. There is a remarkable chapter in the book of Samuel, so we can now cite a few verses, 2 Samuel 22, it opens with words of deliverance. Then he mentions what God means to him. Let us mentally remember or keep in mind those words recorded in verse four. He says “I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised”. As we go down the verses to seven “in my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God”. Why? Because He is God, almighty and powerful. When we come to verse eighteen it confirms what we have just said, “He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me.” Is it any wonder that he called upon his all powerful God. We now come to verse thirty-three “God is my strength and power: and He maketh my way perfect”. And David closes with a word of gratitude and thanks.

Two verses from the prayer of Moses—Psa. 90:1, 2 “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” There is no God like our God. The mighty power of God that divided the sea for a pathway of deliverance. The almighty God that defended His people in battle. The all-powerful God that sent fire from heaven. He sent plagues for the injustice and disobedience. His power caused a dislocated ankle for His purpose. If it was not for God’s power we would not be here today. We shall expand this thought a little later. Only the power of the almighty God could rent the veil in the temple from top to bottom. Only the power of God could open prison gates without a key or roll a huge stone away from a tomb. The power we speak of is beyond human comprehension. Who can change the hearts of a whole nation? This is by God’s almighty power. In fact He will bring all nations unto Jerusalem. The all-powerful almighty God has and will manifest His power in His works as well as His Word of

promise. His power is in everything we see that He has created because He declared it as being very good. In His wisdom and power this means nothing else can excel. Have you heard or read how man tries to play God and what a mess he often makes of it? If you name one thing man has made powerful; it is usually noisy. Whereas, God's power is almost unnoticeable. Every living organism God has created has breath of life. One example is living cells. A hidden power from on high. These cells are ten square micrometres. This in itself is almost unbelievable if it was not from such a mighty powerful creator. When it comes to us regarding God's power we should pause and consider the words the apostle Paul gave to Timothy. We go to verse seven of the second epistle to Timothy chapter one, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The spirit of power, love and a sound mind. As we know it's all by His grace. How do we use it? And for what possible purpose was it given? If we fear anything is it not a mind of uncertainty. The words "fear not" are given for each day of the calendar year in the word of God. Let's for example take the spirit of power and love together. This will rule out any possible doubts, because the love that is spoken of here is perfect love and perfect love casteth out fear. A description of casting out can be used in the sense of fishing. Once the line is cast out into the mid oceans, that part is gone, and it needs physical power to pull in the fish.

We come back to the second part of the question which was—What possible purpose was given? One simple answer could be to help us overcome evil with good. What does the sound mind part of the text imply? Two suggestions:

1. A sound mind is one singleness of mind, for scripture has it that "a double minded man (person) is unstable in all his ways". (James 1:8)
2. The other is by the power of God to have "the mind of Christ". For we know that the same Power that we are called by is the mighty power that raised Jesus Christ from the grave and not only that it is the same power from God that worketh in us to do the will of God. Prior to that scripture has it in Ephesians 1:17. I think we need to take it to the end of the chapter, Eph. 1:17-23 (NASB), "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He

brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” How amazing is that!

Let us highlight these scriptures. It is good to read them but the suggestion is to mentally ponder over what we highlight and think about what it means to us individually. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of Glory. Think in our mind now the word Selah meaning—pause, consider and meditate. Then again God gives us the spirit but this time it is in relationship with His Son. The spirit of wisdom and revelation (Selah). Now we come to the mind because it reacts to what we see and understand. The true light from God opens up our minds by the windows of our eyes. (Selah).

Then to that great and mighty power of God of whom we have been speaking about, verse twenty we have already considered. The next three verses gives the expanse and vastness of God’s power to its ultimate end. Everything we have expressed, should we trust, to the glory of God. It seems now appropriate to turn our thoughts to Psalm 19 the first two verses “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” The psalmist knew what he was referring to. This was possibly the literal heavens in David’s mind for he often gazed to the heavens. God’s glory is even revealed to us today when we look at the grandeur. The heavens revolving day and night in perfect silence. This in itself should also confirm our faith in God and the knowledge of Him is increased.

Some have asked the question—What is glory? The dictionary describes it this way—illustrious, splendid, excellent, delightful and heavenly bliss. It certainly is illustrious and excellent. There are many other ways in describing the glory of the heavens. If we have any knowledge and understanding at all; we do know it did not evolve or came with a bang. These are only theories. The prophet Isaiah states that the earth is full of His glory. One writer puts it this way—“Our spiritual lives would benefit if we would stand aside from the ordinary pursuits of our daily lives and enter into the majestic presence of God who set the stars in orbits, and say within ourselves, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him”?” (Psalm

8:4) Perhaps the most needful spiritual experience, not only among secular man, but also among believers today, is a sense of awe such as Isaiah experienced in the presence of the holy God whose glory fills the whole earth.

Let us turn to the Mount Sinai scene. Exodus 24:15-18 “Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” (NASB) We mention this scene because it describes the glory of the Lord upon Mount Sinai. We then have a detailed description of the tabernacle and its furnishings. The entrance to the tabernacle always faced east. This is important when we read Ezekiel 10:19 “and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’s house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.” The Shekinah Glory is the presence of God. Another evidence of the Shekinah is found in Ezekiel 43. Look at verse two “and behold; the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.” (NASB) The well-known historian Josephus makes an interesting thought as regards to the Shekinah; here’s what he mentions: “that in the Spring of 66 A.D. some astonishing events took place within the Temple. He recorded three miracles associated with Yehovah’s ‘Shekinah’ and the Temple—each one showed clearly that the ‘Shekinah’ was departing from the Holy of Holies. He stated “that a Great Light shone over the altar for thirty minutes at 3 o’clock in the morning (a week before Passover in A.D. 66) and then it departed. He said the sacred scribes interpreted this sign as a bad omen for the Temple. It was like the Shekinah Glory moving away from the Tabernacle in the wilderness as a sign to disassemble the Tabernacle and transport it to another location” (ibid.). Josephus goes on to say that a few days later (during Passover itself) the enormous brass gates of Nicanor, requiring twenty men to open and close them, opened at midnight of their own accord. This was also interpreted as showing a desolation coming upon the Temple. And then about fifty days later, on Pentecost, the final sign was given which definitely showed that the Shekinah Glory was departing the Temple as the other signs indicated.” (ibid.) There are many more occasions of God’s Glory with many references but we now want to move forward to the New Testament. At the time of Jesus’ birth you will remember the shepherds were carrying

out their normal duties watching over their sheep at night, the angel of Lord appeared to them suddenly which is itself very frightening. The possibly bright light which was brighter than the mid-day sun shone over them. The scripture states that this is the glory of the Lord. Where was the star that guided the wise men? Yes! in the east; significant; possibly. When Jesus commenced His ministry by the power of the Spirit He was known throughout the region of Galilee. As we know He taught in the synagogues. In Luke 4:16-19 (NASB) “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED (downtrodden), TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” Then verse twenty is the reaction and as their eyes were fixed on Him: He began to say unto them, (v.21) “This Day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” So, throughout His ministry the Spirit of God empowered Him to heal the sick and perform those outstanding miracles that could never be achieved in any other way.

Let’s go to the city called Nain; a mother who was a widow with her dead and only son. The Lord Jesus had compassion on her, and said unto her; “Weep not.” And He touched the bier and they that bare him stood still. And He said, “young man, I say unto thee, Arise, and he that was dead sat up and began to speak.” What a miracle, what a power and they glorified God. (Luke 7:11-17) Well: the power and the glory, so amazing.

Now we come to the Day of Pentecost. God chose His twelve disciples to dwell together in one place; in an upper room to experience a unique power from on high. For it was the third hour on the day of Pentecost. And while they were praying and offering up supplications, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Well, the nearest we can describe this is possibly like our whirlwinds. True to say we do not know but I understand the sound is terrific and frightening. The word describes it a sound of a rushing mighty wind. Acts 2:3,4 “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were...filled with the Holy Spirit.” Each one of them were empowered by the almighty Himself. Why is that? The scriptures once again as

evidence: if needed to be fulfilled. The prophet Joel refers to the time when the Lord God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. As a reference it is Joel 2:28 onwards. The same as Peter proclaimed to clear the confusion of drunkenness and the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:14 onwards.

We said earlier if it was not God's power at work, we would not be here today. Because, of the resurrection of Jesus by the power of God. There would not be any purpose or belief in thinking that there is life after death, no hope in living, no blessings now and certainly no hope for mankind. Everything would be corrupt and of a futile nature. Thank God that we have been given the power that raised Jesus Christ from the tomb. As we know those who are born of the spirit are also led by the spirit. It is not only believing and receiving, which is worthwhile and right; but what do we do with it? We all have a personal responsibility. To want to be here should be some of the answer, so that we can help and build one another up in love. This is the privileged power God has given us; and this in itself pleases God. When we praise and thank Him we are bringing respectful honour and glory to God through Jesus Christ His Son. There are times when the whole of heaven sing praises to God. Because we believe in the power and the glory of God and all that we receive of Him is through His Son we do testify for "we know that the Son of God is come, and given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (1 John 5:20)

The power and the glory of God have complete control even today. If there is any slightest doubt, it is because He still has the authority to allow some things to take place; so that His creation is tried and tested and that in due time will turn man's hearts and minds to the great and powerful God and creator of all things. We continue to give Him the honour and the glory. We continue to resound His name abroad and proclaim Him as the God of the universe. May our prayers be similar to David's in Psalm 72:18,19 "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen." (NASB)

PW

Oh God, wilt thou teach us to begin the music of heaven!
 Grant us grace to have many rehearsals of eternal Hallelujahs!
 "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me,
 Bless his holy name!"

songs of the nightingale

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

14. The Valley of the Mountain

“Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle” (Zechariah 14:3).

This is the climax, this the farthest limit of the powers of this world. At this point God breaks through into human history, and for the first time, perhaps, since the days of Jehoshaphat, the armed forces of earth come up against a power which is from heaven, and because it is from heaven cannot be resisted. The Lord comes forth to war, as He did do several times in Israel’s national history, but this time He comes forth not only for the deliverance of the Holy Nation from its immediate enemies, but the deliverance of all mankind from the great enemy. Here, at this time, the dominion of evil is to be overthrown and in its place instituted an order of things *“wherein dwelleth righteousness”*.

How does the Lord go forth and with what weapons does He fight? There are not wanting expositors who visualise a sanguinary (bloodthirsty) combat in which all the instruments of devilry devised by man are used on both sides, and a victory distinguished by masses of dead and wounded strewn over a blood-soaked land. It is true that many of the prophetic foreviews of this final conflict are couched in such terms but this is because men, accustomed to such scenes, can only visualise a conflict in which one side gains the victory and the other suffers defeat in some such manner. These foreviews must be taken as pictures illustrating the principles involved; the issues to be decided in this battle are greater by far than can be resolved by the indiscriminate slaughter of human beings, most of whom are still so ignorant of the eternal verities that, like the men of Nineveh in Jonah’s time, they cannot *“discern between their right hand and their left hand”*. (4:11) Just as Jesus said *“the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them”* so now, when God is pictured as descending upon the Mount of Olives amid awesome cataclysms of Nature it is not that He might destroy men, opposed to His righteousness and unregenerate as they are, but that He might destroy their capacity for accomplishing their evil designs and reduce them to a condition of submissiveness before Him, that He might then *“withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.”* (Job 33:17) It must be expected therefore that the actual concrete actions and events by means of which the prophecy is to be accomplished can be only imperfectly visualised, involved as they are with celestial powers the nature of which is outside our ken (perception). The natural picture presented by Zechariah, the

descent, the earthquake, the battle and so on, is to be regarded as a picture, a painting which, when regarded and considered, conveys a message; it is the message that is of importance.

Perhaps the cardinal principle to be built into a satisfactory understanding of this passage is that which was illustrated on those previous occasions when Israel, exercising faith, was delivered in the face of apparently hopeless odds. *“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD”* said Moses just before the Red Sea crossing. *“The Egyptians whom you have seen today: ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace”* (Exod. 14:13-14). The people obeying, in faith stepped down into the sea-bed and were delivered. *“Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him”* was good King Hezekiah’s exhortation to his people at the time of the siege. *“With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah”*. (2 Chron. 32:7-8) And in that night the host of the armies of Assyria melted away. When the forces of Moab and Ammon and Edom invaded Judah, to cut them off from being a people, *“all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children”* while King Jehoshaphat, standing in the Temple court, lifted up his voice to God *“we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee”* (2 Chron. 20:12-13); their faith was vindicated and Judah was saved. So in this, the greatest and final deliverance, the situation that is pictured is one in which the cleansed and dedicated Nation manifests serene confidence as to the outcome, the enemy surrounds the land with every expectation of an easy victory; the armies of heaven advance to the battle and in an awe-inspiring display of other-worldly power frustrate the invaders’ purpose and reduce their armed might to nothingness.

The features which Zechariah saw in his prophetic vision are well known. The people, in the city, waiting. The invaders, having already taken captive and sent into exile the fainthearted and apostates from among the people, preparing to follow up their advantage. Only the men of faith remain and it seems that even for them there is now no hope. Perhaps they have all gathered in the Temple courts as did their predecessors in the days of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah to pray for deliverance, the while the enemy is already rifling the houses. And at that moment besieged and besiegers alike look up into the skies and behold a stupendous sight; God Most High, the Ancient of Days, descending, accompanied by His

attendants and holy ones, descending upon the Mount of Olives, His feet touching the sacred soil, a mighty earthquake, the Mount cloven in two, a deep chasm from west to east separating the mountain into two parts, that great multitude of exultant foes halting in their tracks as they move in for the kill, finding their eyes being burned out of their sockets by the dazzling radiance, their tongues stilled and destroyed by the terror and thunder of the earthquake, their bodies maimed and destroyed as the earth heaves and opens and swallows them up; a blind unreasoning panic seizes them and they turn each against other, the blind, the dumb and the maimed until, at the end, there are none left. The mountainous districts surrounding Jerusalem which, from time immemorial, had looked down upon the city from their superior height of several hundreds of feet, are broken up by the earthquake and sink down to form a low-lying plain like the plain of Jordan, and within that broken up terrain is buried for ever the remains of the host that had defied the living God. In the centre of the plain stands, proudly, Jerusalem upon her hills, exalted “*above the tops of the mountains*”. And so the Nation is saved, and so perish all the enemies of the Lord. That is the picture as drawn in verses 4-15 of Zechariah’s 14th chapter. How should it be interpreted?

“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives...and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.” (ch. 14:4)

This is an earthquake; but is it a literal or a metaphorical earthquake? It is a very common practice among prophetic students to interpret the whole of this passage upon a literal basis. Geologically, there is nothing against the possibility. The entire land is in an earthquake zone which runs up from the Red Sea and into Galilee and Syria. Earthquakes have occurred there a goodly number of times in history and Zechariah refers to one such in his very next verse. There is nothing in the prophetic description from verse 4 to 11 which is physically—geologically—incapable of realisation. That does not demand, of course, that the prophecy is intended to have such literal fulfilment; the possibility that this is a figurative use of language, in line with practically the whole of Zechariah’s prophecy, to picture happenings and processes of a more fundamental nature and involving greater issues, must also be considered. It could also be argued that the prophecy has a dual function, possessing literal and figurative elements. But it has to be shown that the interpretation suggested has some valid place and purpose in the outworking of the plan, that it

contributes towards the attainment of the predetermined end, which in this case is the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, and this will be the endeavour here.

The descent of the Lord upon the Mount of Olives obviously marks the moment of Divine intervention in earth's affairs. This is true whether the descent is literal, the Deity in visible human form taking His stance upon the mountain top, or figurative. This same theme is dwelt upon elsewhere. "*The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake*" says Joel (Joel 3:16). "*The LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft*" is Micah's contribution (Micah 1:3-4) although here the prophet is talking about Divine judgment imminent upon Israel and Judah of his own day. In like fashion Nahum tells of coming judgment upon Assyria; "*The LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries...the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence*" (Nahum 1:2,5). In these latter two instances the language is figurative; history shows that. Likewise the variety of allusions in the Old Testament to the event now under consideration directs the conclusion that the language here is figurative also. In Joel the Lord "roars out of Zion"—Jerusalem. In Daniel 7 He appears on a heavenly throne to conduct the Last Assize and invest the Son of Man with the rulership of earth. In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, quoted by Jude, (Jude 14-15) and possibly enshrining some very ancient prophecy not otherwise included in the canonical books, the place of descent is said to be Sinai, "*The Holy Great One will come forth from his dwelling, and the eternal God will dwell upon the earth, on Mount Sinai, and appear in the strength of his might from the heavens...and the high mountains shall be shaken and the high hills shall be made low, and the earth shall be rent in sunder...and behold, he cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all...*" (Enoch 1:3-2:1). In any case this whole picture has to be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation that it is Christ the Son who comes in person to the earth at this time to deliver Israel and subdue all evil; since this deliverance is but one of the sequence of events occupying the *Parousia*, his presence, the descent on the Mount of Olives becomes the symbol of the first outward evidence that his Presence is an accomplished fact. Up to that point of time many will have continued to say "*where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as... from the beginning of...creation*" (2 Pet. 3:4). Beyond that point, all will realise the fact, and believe.

The impact of that intervention upon men, and its consequences upon the enemy, is likened to an earthquake. At the coming of the Lord the earth will quake, the heavens pass away, the sun and the moon become dark, the stars cease to shine, the works of man be burned up—all these symbols are used to describe the disintegration and utter destruction of man's world, which in this context is synonymous with evil things, because man's world is predominately evil. A new world is to follow in which all the good that has survived—for such good as does exist in this present world, because good is lasting, will survive—will blossom forth into greater good under the more favourable conditions of that world. So Zechariah tells of a great earthquake which splits the Mount of Olives into northern and southern parts with a valley between. Geographically that valley, running east-west, would be exactly opposite the East Gate of the Temple; the idea is irresistible that the prophecy intends some notice to be taken of that fact.

The succeeding verse has given translators—and expositors—a great deal of trouble. As it appears in the A.V. the meaning is very obscure. Speaking of this valley the verse says “*ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.*” (14:5) When the descent and the earthquake are held to be literal it is said that the citizens of Jerusalem will flee into this valley for protection and shelter—ignoring the fact that people do not run toward the site of an earthquake for safety but away from it. In any case the text, as with all such obscure passages, needs closer examination before interpreting.

The preposition “to” is in italics, having been supplied by the A.V. translators because there is no preposition in the Hebrew, which should read in the A.V. “ye shall flee the valley” i.e. away from it and not into it.

The word *Azal* has been put in as a place name but no such place in the district is known. Properly, the word is *el-atsal* and some expositors have suggested that this may be intended for the *Bet-ha-etsal* of Micah 1:11 which, say some hopefully, was perhaps to the east of the Mount of Olives. In fact this place was near Beer-Sheba, twenty-five miles in the other direction, so that geographically this could not have been intended.

The mention of the earthquake in the days of Uzziah should next be investigated. Zechariah refers to this as though it was a well-known event to the people of his day even although it was by then over two centuries in

the past. No account of this earthquake is given in Biblical history, the only other allusion being by the prophet Amos, who says he began his prophetic ministry in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel, “*two years before the earthquake.*” (Amos 1:1) It was evidently a happening which made a deep impression and of which the memory was long lasting. Fortunately Josephus gives an account of it; his account reveals the similarities which led Zechariah to use it as an illustration in this later picture of Divine intervention and Divine judgment. It will be remembered that the books of Kings and Chronicles relate how Uzziah arrogated to himself the priestly duty of offering incense in the Temple, for which sacrilege he was smitten with leprosy. Josephus declares that the earthquake came as Divine judgment for the act. He says (Ant. 9. 10. 4). “*Uzziah...was corrupted in his mind by pride... Accordingly, when a...general festival was to be celebrated, he put on the holy garment, and went into the temple to offer incense to God upon the golden altar, which he was prohibited to do by Azariah the high-priest...And when they cried out, that he must go out of the temple,...he was wroth at them, and threatened to kill them...In the meantime, a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king’s face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately; and before the city, at a place called Eroge, half the mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself four stadia (four furlongs, about half a mile), and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king’s gardens, were spoiled (blocked) by the obstruction*”. The source of Josephus’ information is unknown and no independent check on its veracity is possible; physically however, the account is consistent with the topography of Jerusalem. His “east mountain” is the Mount of Olives; the “west mountain”, the heights of Ophel at the south-eastern corner of the city half a mile away, on the slopes of which were the “king’s gardens”, and at the foot, the “fountain of the fowler” called En-rogel, the “Eroge” of his account. It would appear that part of Ophel collapsed and fell four hundred feet into the valley separating it from the Mount of Olives and blocked the valley besides burying the king’s gardens. Such a line of cleavage, extended northward, would intersect the Temple area and account for the effect noted by Josephus.

With this background story in mind attention can be turned back to verse 5. The first important factor to notice is the expression “ye shall flee”, appearing twice in the verse. A great many ancient authorities adopt a term meaning “to be blocked up” in lieu of this expression and this rendering, which is also that of the Septuagint, has been adopted by

modern translators such as the R.S.V. and Moffatt. The determining word in the original Hebrew, which was without vowels, is *ynstm*, which is pointed in some manuscripts as *yenastem*, “ye shall flee”, and in others as *yenistam*, “shall be blocked up”. The expression in the A.V. “*shall reach unto Azal*”, critically rendered, means to turn toward each other so as to touch or join together. Thus the sense of this verse is not that of anyone fleeing, either into or away from, the valley, but of the valley itself being closed or blocked up. This is where the analogy of Uzziah’s earthquake holds good; Josephus says that the valley was blocked by the earthquake. So the best translation of this verse, supported by the LXX and the modern translators mentioned, would read “and the valley of the mountains shall be blocked up, for the valley of the mountains shall close together as it was blocked up by the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah”.

So far for the rendering, but what does it mean? Why should there be an earthquake, creating a valley through the centre of the Mount of Olives, if the next step is to close up that valley again? Is the solution connected with the remaining elements in the verse “*and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him*” (LXX)?

This, in fact, is the answer. This dividing of the Mount of Olives pictures not only the last event of “this present evil world” but also the first event of the “world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness”. It pictures God, in Christ, not only coming to judgment upon the last adversaries to resist the incoming Kingdom, but also His coming in splendour to take up His dwelling with men, as realised in the Millennial Presence. And to appreciate this it is necessary to associate this vision of Zechariah with that of his predecessor Ezekiel when that prophet saw, in like manner, the glory of the Lord coming from the East to take up residence with his people.


The 43rd chapter of Ezekiel’s prophecy describes how he took his stand by the East Gate of the Millennial Temple. “*And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory*”. (Ezek. 43:2) And the glory of the Lord came into the Temple by the East Gate, and a proclamation was made to the effect that the Lord was now to dwell with Israel for ever—and then the East Gate was shut, never again to be opened. The reason? “*This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut*”. (Ezek. 44:2) In figurative

sense, the Lord had come, finding the gate open to receive Him. He was never again to go away, for now His people were ready to accept Him and not repudiate Him again. No need for another to come would ever arise, for He will be all-sufficient. So the gate would never need to be used again; it could be shut and the way closed for all time.

Now this is what Zechariah also saw. Within the limits of his vision he saw Jerusalem and its Temple, with its own East Gate fronting directly upon the Mount of Olives. He saw the enemies of Israel around the city and he knew that God was coming, not only for their overthrow but to dwell with Israel eternally. And the valley through the middle of the Mount of Olives made a passage for the God of Israel, coming from the East straight to that East Gate. That is why, when before his eyes that great chasm appeared in the Mount, and he saw also the Lord advancing through it toward the city he cried out in ecstasy “*and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee (him)*”. (Zech. 14:5)

That explains why the valley is to be blocked up. Just as in Ezekiel’s vision the East Gate of his Temple was to be permanently closed after the God of Israel had passed through it into the Temple, so here, the valley is similarly to be blocked up after the God of Israel has passed through it on His way to deliver his people. The symbols used by the two prophets differ, but the principle is the same. There are yet other effects of the earthquake to be described in succeeding verses, but here at this point, the Lord comes, His holy ones with Him, to deliver His people and remain with them forever.

AOH



He closes his tender farewell by commending them to God, praying both for himself and for them, as he turns away to tread the winepress ALONE. Remembrance of his pre-human existence, and its “glory”, gave him courage. He prayed for his own, not for the world. He came to save the world, but his special interest was in those who believed on him. He drew a definite line between those who were his and those who were not. This runs all the way through John’s writings.

Halley’s Bible Handbook

I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. (Acts 24:14-15 RSV)

RESURRECTION—WHAT IS IT?

How is it accomplished?

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

1 Corinthians 15:22

“That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” John 1:9 (NKJV)

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth...” John 5:28-29 (NKJV)

If “*every man*” is to receive enlightenment by the “*true light*”, and “*all*” are to be “*made alive*”, and “*all*” in the graves are to “*hear his voice*”, then the billions of deceased human beings must be restored to life again. This is known as the “resurrection of the dead”.

The Christian Doctrine of the Resurrection

The re-creation of the deceased individual by the impression of the previous identity upon a new bodily organism (suited to its intended environment), in consequence of a fresh operation of Divine power, restores living, sentient existence that is the ability to use its senses. The unique individual lives again!

So, what is identity? The identity (“who we are”) exists in the mind (which operates through the human brain, via electrical and chemical impulses), and includes all that makes each individual a unique being. This includes character, personality, will, emotions, memory, motives, hopes, and more. At death this identity is preserved by God and later restored to a newly-created body, which is given a newly-infused life.

In the Beginning

The first human was brought into being by God; compounded out of the elements of the earth: carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur, potassium etc., infused with the power of life by the Holy Spirit of God and became a living sentient being:—*“The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”* (Genesis 2:7)

Once the body had been created, God started it ‘operating’, by putting the life principle, the power of life, into it. The human began to live. The heart started beating; the lungs started breathing (hence, “the breath of life”), the brain began to awaken; the eyes opened. The human began to experience his environment by means of his five senses i.e. he became a sentient being. The human became a “*living soul (being)*”; he became the

human being named Adam. But he had no identity as yet; that was still a blank slate. His existence as a living, breathing, sentient human being had just begun.

Then there was the admonition; refusal or failure to preserve his loyalty to God, or to transgress the laws of his being, would involve the loss of all that God had given him, the loss of life itself, extinction of being.

“In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17)
“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Gen. 3:19 (NKJV)

Logically, death is the antithesis of life. If life only continues when the individual is in a state of harmony with God, of loyalty to Him, then the entry of sin must indicate the extinction of that life, the dissolution of the *“living soul”* (being) which subsists only when life, bodily organism, and mind are joined. If any of these three is missing, the *“living soul (being)”*, the sentient individual, does not exist.

With What Body do they come?

The apostle Paul addresses the “resurrection” question in 1 Cor. 15. He tells us in v. 37 that *“you do not sow”* (in death) *“that body that shall be”*. But he continues in v. 38, *“God gives it a body as He pleases”*. (NKJV) Following this, he writes at some length about *“celestial”* and *“terrestrial”* bodies; i.e. bodies for heavenly, spirit beings, and bodies for earthly, physical beings. Seemingly, the type of body one receives will depend upon the type of mind (character) one has developed during this life; a mind attuned to the earth, will get a suitable earthly body; a mind fully attuned to heavenly, spiritual things, will get a suitable heavenly body (this, the *“upward calling”* to heaven, is offered only to the Gospel-age disciples of Jesus). There will be no mind-body mismatches.

Resurrections

The resurrection of the faithful Gospel-age (Christian Era) church to be the *“Bride”* of Christ, is known in Scripture as the *“First Resurrection”* (Rev. 20:4-6; 1 Cor. 15:23; Romans 8:19), because it precedes the general resurrection of the remainder of mankind.

This *“First Resurrection”* has a dual aspect. At the time of the Second Advent there is to be initially the resurrection to spirit life of believers who are described as *“asleep”* i.e. in the grave, having finished their earthly lives prior to the Second Advent. Moments later comes the

“*change*” to spirit life of those who are still living at the time of the Second Advent. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. The “*Bride*” now glorified spirit beings, ascends “*together*” to “*meet the Lord*”. The physical bodies no longer needed, lie dead.

The net effect is the same; in both cases the individuals concerned close their eyes to the earth, in death; they enter an unconscious dreamless “*sleep*”; they come to the end of consciousness and existence as experienced through the human organism, which thereafter returns to its dust. They open their eyes to a new and celestial world in which consciousness and existence is experienced (by the same identity) through a new and celestial body, one adapted to that order of life. The apostle Paul only alludes to the fact in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:51-52 where the sleeping ones are “*raised*” and the living ones are “*changed*” or “*translated*”. The philosophy of the matter is much more closely set out in 1 Cor. 15:35-50 and 2 Cor. 5:1-4.

The first overt act of the Second Advent—and this is stressed repeatedly in the New Testament—is the resurrection or “*change*” of the church, the joining of all those dedicated believers, of whatever generation between Pentecost and the end, to the Lord, in Heaven, as his “*Bride*”. The apostle Paul describes this in 1 Cor. 15 as a change from the terrestrial state of being to the celestial, a change not only of habitat but also of nature. The celestial is of a superior and totally different order of being; the celestial world, as real to its own citizens as the earth is to humanity, is one in which powers and potentialities, and consequently activities and achievements, are upon an immensely wider basis than are those of man upon earth.

What about the remainder of humanity, those not of the glorified Church? There are billions living, and tens of billions already in the grave. What about them? When the Millennial Kingdom starts, it seems reasonable to assume that those human beings living at that time will be dealt with first. They will be taught clearly the ways of God, and encouraged to accept Jesus as Saviour, and to enter (into) that new arrangement, pictured as the “*highway that leads to holiness*” (Isa. 35:8). Once the Kingdom operations are well underway with this group, the next phase can begin.

There follows during the Millennial Kingdom, the (probably gradual) resurrection of all the remainder of the dead human race all the way back to Adam and Eve. This will be a return to physical human life, with the previous identity restored.

NOTICES

For the benefit of those who wish to keep the memorial of our Lord's death at the time nearest the anniversary, it is suggested that Tuesday 7 April (14 Nisan) after 6 p.m. is the appropriate date and time.

BIBLE STUDENTS SEMINAR DAY
Saturday 25 April 2020, Studham Village Hall, LU6 2QG

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Eternal life will be offered to all, but only on God's terms. Those who refuse this offer will, at some point, lose their existence—forever. The death sentence will be applied the second time for such.

Mankind, i.e. human beings, has been destined to occupy a definite and unique place in the Divine scheme of things. No other conceivable order of sentient beings, fitted as they might be for their own ordained place, can or will fill the position intended for physical humankind.

The Bible does in fact indicate that the mode of existence we know is not the only one; that this earth is not the only scene of life, that there is at the very least one other universe (i.e., heaven—a spirit world) not perceptible by human senses, the citizens of which are always and altogether in absolute harmony with each other and with God—so much so that the ideal is set before men that God's Will might eventually be universally accepted here as it is there.

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
Matthew 6:10 (NKJV)

How Does God Actually Do This?

Well, of course, we do not know the details; so we offer a little speculation here based on current technology of digital recording on disks (perhaps a very weak illustration). Perhaps God records (on some kind of spiritual “disk”) the activities of the person’s “identity”, all the way from birth until death, and then puts the completed “disk”, with the person’s identification written on it, on a shelf. At resurrection time, this “disk”, containing the “identity” information, is “downloaded” into the new body, and the person, the unique individual, lives again. Or perhaps God simply remembers everything. Or perhaps it is beyond our comprehension.

Can All This Really Be True?

Absolutely. God did this for Jesus. God can also do it for all others, in due time. Jesus is still the only one ever resurrected to eternal life (a few others, like Lazarus, were resuscitated but died again).

The man Jesus died, was buried, and on the third day raised from death by the Heavenly Father. Jesus then was given a new spirit body, of which we are told that it is the “*express image of His (God’s) person*” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus also now has life on the very highest plane of existence. And yet with all this the angel plainly tells the disciples that it is “*this same Jesus*” (Acts 1:11) that shall return one day.

Jesus remains the same even though he has experienced a change of nature—twice: from spirit to human; from human to highly exalted spirit existence.

To the Christian death has lost its fear and sting. Because Christ lives, we also have the hope, the promise that we shall live; experiencing a change from physical to spirit life (forever, in the heavens). And the willing and obedient of the human race too, will live again through a gradual process of restoration to perfect human life in an earthly paradise.

“The Saviour of the world”

The only ones to be lost forever, both physical beings and spirit beings i.e. Satan and his angels, will be those who absolutely, positively refuse the gift of life on God’s terms. The universe will then be clean; no more sin or evil, forever, anywhere—ever.

LS

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