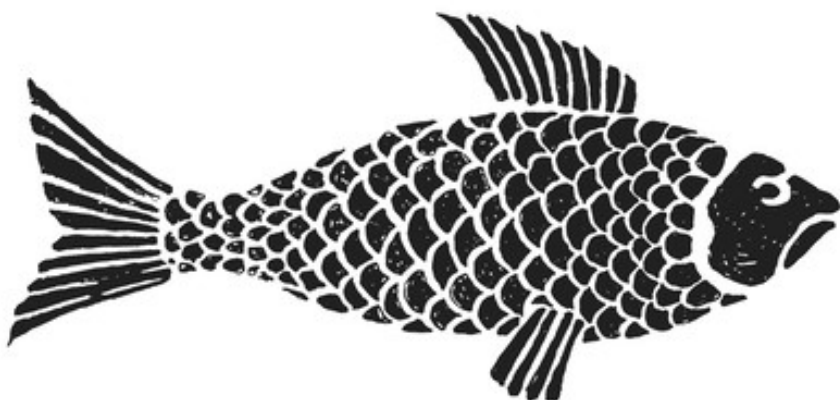


# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 98 Issue 4

July / August 2021

*“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* Matt. 4:19



## **Contents**

Thought for the Month	122
Notices	124
St. Peter's Fish	125
Note on John 21:5	128
Prayers for Children	129
153 Fish	130
Aristarchus	131
The Bible's Song of Love—Pt. 2b	134
Seeking First the Kingdom of God	140
The Plan of God in Brief—Study 4	142
Ten Visions of Christ Triumphant—Pt. 5	148
Parable of the Dragnet	155

# 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.  
Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Britain has many miles of coastline being an island with many isles around its shores. Some have said "the sea is in our blood." There are 3m recreational anglers in the U.K. and recreational angling is worth £1.4 billion to the UK economy. I even recall going mackerel fishing at sea in the past, coming back with some freshly caught fish and smelling of sea-salt.

Fishing has been reported about more and more in recent years since the time of the Brexit vote. Knowledge of the percentage British fishermen are able to catch in UK waters compared to the previous arrangement by the E.U. has increased. Whose fish are whose? Do they spawn in one area and grow in another? We are more informed on the type of fish that is more popular in Britain from Continental Europe and the difficulties of exporting fresh and frozen shellfish.

## FISH

Fish were first known to the Jews while they were in Egypt. Later on they abounded in the sea of Galilee and in the river Jordan and those rivers that flow into the Mediterranean. They were a valuable source of protein and full of nutrition hence it was no surprise they were used in the feeding of the five and four thousand.

**Fishers of men** (Matt 4:18-22; Mark. 1:16-20)

Jesus' first disciples were fishermen. Firstly Simon Peter and his brother Andrew when Jesus uttered those well-remembered words "I will make you fishers of men." Then he met James and John, the sons of Zebedee

and also invited them to follow him. Luke's account (5:2-11) expands on these accounts and records that they had been fishing all night without success till Jesus tells them to cast their nets once more and they catch a load so heavy the nets ought to have broken. What a miracle! No wonder they left at once. These were not the only disciples who were fishermen. John in the last chapter of his gospel records a time when they were fishing with Thomas and Nathanael, which means at least seven disciples who were fishermen.

### **Figure of fish as people**

Habakkuk (1:14) likened the Israelites to fish. The prophecy given to him shows the nation being caught like fish in the net or on the end of a fishing line and being taken into captivity in Babylon. Fish in a net seem powerless and easy prey for a superior opponent. Hence the 70 years in captivity in Babylon before the return following the decree by Cyrus and the return at different times with Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

### **Zionism Prophesied**

“Behold, I will send for many fishermen,’ says the LORD, ‘and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.” (Jeremiah 16:16 NKJV)

Jeremiah spoke at a similar time to Habakkuk. His lamentations were a sad and sorry prophecy for Judah. Yet there was hope with his message. In his account fishermen and hunters would bring back Israel and Judah to the land of promise. This has been in progress since the days of Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Russell when Zionists worked to encourage emigrants from all over the world to what was called Palestine, now Israel, which was formed with the help from other democratic countries in 1948. These were the fishers; the hunters were those who persecuted the Jews in the lands where they had been scattered and caused them to run to safety before and after the holocaust.

### **153 Fish**

Having looked at the start of Jesus' ministry on earth with the selection of disciples that would be fishers of men rather than fish, we can see at the end of his ministry on earth after his resurrection, when we find Jesus and fishermen disciples on the sea of Galilee. (John 21:1-11) Once again at night they caught nothing. Then Jesus tells them to cast the net over the righthand side of the boat and the net was heavy with fishes—to be precise 153 fish. Numerically an odd number. One would expect 12, 144

or 144,000 as symbolic of the bride of Christ. But the number is significant as it forms the shape of a triangle very much like a pyramid suggestive of a time when all are in harmony with the head at different levels.

### **Other Fish**

The parable of the dragnet was used to convey a message to the listeners who would be familiar with catching fish. Also there was the incident of Peter finding coins in the mouth of a fish to show God's provision for us. Fish can relate to the fall of a nation and its economy. Isa. 19 declared the fall of Egypt and its economy, which was so dependent upon the Nile and seasonal floods, causing the failure of the crops and fishing showing how these would collapse reducing that nation's power and strength.

### **Fish in Millennium or Messianic age**

The final chapters of Ezekiel detail a Temple that has not been built even now. It looks forward to the future. It talks of waters, a river, trees, fish, and fruit. Chapter 47 of Ezekiel begins with water flowing East from beneath the Temple door. This stream gets deeper until its too deep to walk in and you would be able to swim in it. Trees grow on the riverbank, aided by the moisture there. It flows to the Jordan valley and descends to what we call the Dead Sea sufficiently enough to turn it fresh and pure so that fish can live there like the great sea that we now call the Mediterranean. Like that sea it supports sufficient numbers of fish that fishermen can work with nets and the nearby trees are fruitful too. The language is reminiscent of the first verses of the last chapter of the Bible. It's a picture of life and hope which is surely the heart of the Christian message.

## NOTICES

**BIBLE STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE  
HIGH LEIGH CONFERENCE CENTRE, HODDESDON  
11-15 AUGUST 2021 DV**

For a programme and booking form, please email  
n.a.charcharos@gmail.com  
or write to 12 Stanley Gardens, Tring HP23 4BS  
Conference centre opens 2 July

**ALL DAY VISITORS NEED TO BOOK BY 31 JULY!**

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.



## ST. PETER'S FISH



One of the New Testament stories that sometimes provokes a smile is that of the fish with a silver coin in its mouth. Peter, approached by the appropriate officials for the customary Temple tribute money, referred the matter to Jesus, who told him to go down to the lake (of Galilee) and cast a line. His first catch would have a silver coin in its mouth which he was to use for the tribute money. The story is found in Matt. 17:24-27. In fact there is today a species of fish in the Sea of Galilee called the musht, alternatively known as St. Peter's fish, the male of which habitually carries its young in its mouth, and at times substitutes a small stone or other object, being especially attracted to anything bright or shining. It has been known thus to carry coins. This aspect of the story is thereby vindicated. (The musht is specially reared in quantity nowadays in Israel for commercial food production.)

Jesus knew from a distance, which may have been a mile or so and could not have been less than a goodly number of yards—He was in the lakeside town of Capernaum at the time—that a particular fish was swimming about in the lake at that moment with a coin in its mouth. Perhaps He exerted the power necessary to bring it into contact with Peter's line. That should not be thought incredible in a day when men can see with their own eyes what is happening in a spacecraft orbiting two hundred miles above the earth, and control the movement of that spacecraft by touching a few buttons. There is no physical link of sight and touch between the controller on earth and the spacecraft above; the power by which the wonder is accomplished is an invisible electrical energy which men have learned to employ. If men can do that, why balk at the idea that Christ, who came from God, whence is the source of all energy, should do the same? One of the fruits of man's increasing knowledge of the powers behind Nature's operations is the realisation that so many 'incredible' stories of olden time are not so fantastic after all; they rest on principles which were formerly undreamed of by man but now are beginning to be understood.

This aspect of the story is, however, the least important. Of greater moment is Jesus' reason for the action. Why employ such an apparently elaborate, and spectacular way of producing the tribute money when just one coin from the disciples' admittedly slender store would have met the need? There is evidently more behind the story than at first sight appears.

First of all, the background. *"Of whom do the kings of the earth take*

*custom or tribute?"* asked Jesus of Peter *"of their own children, or of strangers?"* (v.25) *"Of strangers"* responded Peter. He knew, only too well, the practice of conquering powers like Rome, who taxed their subject nations and occupied territories rather than their own peoples. *"Then are the children free"* said Jesus; free citizens of the Empire do not pay tax. But Jesus was not declaring himself and his disciples free citizens of Rome. He had already, on a previous occasion, told his hearers to *"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."* (Mark 12:17) The tribute money now in question was a levy made upon all Jews for the upkeep of the Temple; it was an ecclesiastical tax and nothing to do with Rome. This is made apparent by the words used. The tribute money due to Rome was a "penny"—the denarius. The tribute demanded of Peter in Matt. 17:24 was the didrachma, the half shekel or "shekel of the sanctuary" worth two denarii and this indicates that it is the Temple tax that was in question. The "piece of money" from the fish's mouth in v.27 was a stater equal to two didrachma\* sufficient for Peter and his Master. Hence Jesus' words in v.27 *"give unto them for me and thee."* As a silver coin the stater was about equivalent to the English half-crown but to obtain the same purchasing power today one would have to spend several pounds or more.

There had been a celebrated dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as to whether this Temple tax should be compulsory or voluntary, and after lengthy discussion in the Sanhedrin the Pharisee party had won the day—the tax was made compulsory. It is quite possible that Jesus was alluding to this dispute and showing that the Pharisees, in imposing a compulsory tax on the people, were no better than their Roman overlords. In theory, every Israelite was a child of God, a Freeman of the Commonwealth of Israel, and his offerings to God were traditionally to be *"of his own voluntary will"* which is the formula used in the instructions for the Levitical rituals as laid down in the Book of Leviticus.\*\* Now the Pharisees had destroyed that spontaneous basis and substituted the rule of law. *"The children are free"* said Jesus. Every man of Israel should be free to bring his monetary offering for the upkeep of the Temple as his heart inspired him. The question which the tribute-collectors had asked Peter was therefore eminently improper.

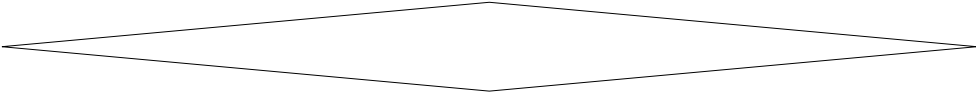
\* "After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?'" (Matt. 17:24 NIV)

"After their arrival at Capernaum the collectors of the half-shekel came and asked Peter, 'Does not your Teacher pay the half-shekel?'" (Matt. 17:24 Weymouth)

\*\* Leviticus 23:38 *Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD.*

It would seem therefore that Jesus could have evaded the tax by quoting the original Levitical law. This He did not do. What the Pharisees demanded as a right He extended to them as a gift. “*Lest we offend* (“scandalise”) *them...*” was the expression He used. He would not use his knowledge of the Mosaic Law to avoid a payment which was exacted out of his fellows anyway. And here, perhaps comes the real point of the story. The scanty store of money He and his disciple possessed was contributed by the poor to whom He ministered and by his followers among the people, who “*ministered unto him of their substance.*” (Luke 8:3) He would not use their offerings, given for the sustenance of his little band of disciples, to meet this impost. This was a case where He could appropriately call upon the wealth of his Father in Heaven, who owns all the gold and silver, and all the treasures of earth. Hence this exercise of his extra-human power in discerning the whereabouts of that silver stater and his instructions to Peter to go and catch that fish. In a very real sense the Father paid the tribute-money for the Son.

*AOH*



“*Ye shall be my witnesses...*” was the promise given by our Lord to those who were with him before his Ascension. (Acts 1:8 RV) So often these words are interpreted to mean that the Apostles would become preachers of the Word, but such interpretation is only part of the whole meaning of witness. Instead of confining the idea of “witness” to the evidence given in a court of law, we should remember that we use the word in other senses, as, for instance, when we speak of a spectator as a witness. Probably the best sense of the word, however, as far as Christianity is concerned, is that implied by the Psalmist when he says, of the moon, that it is “a faithful witness in heaven.” That celestial body witnesses to the sun by reflecting the light of the sun. The Christian’s duty, therefore, is to reflect his Lord, and to be the faithful witness of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

“*It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.*” (Psalm 89:37)

## NOTE ON JOHN 21:5

“Children, have ye any meat?” is the Authorised Version’s way of recording the question addressed by the waiting Lord, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to the unsuccessful toil-weary fishermen after their night’s fruitless work. While it is fairly obvious that Jesus was asking if they had caught any fish, He does not use the word usually equivalent to “fish” (*Ichthys*) but an entirely different and unrelated word (*Prosphagion*). This word has caused the translators and commentators no end of trouble, as reference to the various translations will show. We append a few of these translations to show the line of thought the various versions give.

“Children, have ye aught to eat.” (RV)

“My children, have you anything to eat.” (Twentieth Century)

“Children...have you any food there.” (Weymouth)

“Children, have you any food.” (Diaglott)

“Children! perhaps ye have nothing to eat.” (Rotherham)

“Lads, have ye any meat.” (YLT)

“Lads, have you got anything,” (Moffatt)

“Lads, have you caught anything to eat.” (Ferrar Fenton)

“Little children, have ye any viands.”

Obviously all the translators are referring to the fish they thought to have been in the net—and while Jesus is also referring to fish, He did not put his question that way. He used a word which does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, which really means “to eat with or alongside.”

The force of this word was brought out very vividly to an Englishman, resident in an official capacity in Palestine, during a journey from Tiberias to Jerusalem. He was well acquainted with the Arabic version of the New Testament and knew the Greek “*Prosphagion*” had been translated by the Arabic “*Idiam*”, which, he had been led to believe, was more a classical word than a word of current usage. He had to stand in a crowded bus for about half the journey, but at Nablus—the nearest to Shechen (Shechem), the Sychar of Jesus’ day (John 4:5)—a seat next to a Palestinian Jew became vacant.

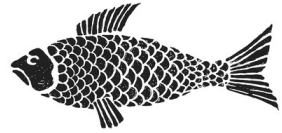
Availing himself of this seat, he heard the Jew ask one of several boys who came round the bus offering food for sale, for two small loaves. On the top of each loaf was a “*kufta*” (or rissole) evidently intended to be eaten with the loaf. The Jew did not want the “*kufta*” and demanded the loaves without them. Indignantly the boy refused to accede to his demand,



blurting out with considerable vexation, “What, sell my loaves without their “Idiam”?—never!”

The Englishman was greatly interested in the little episode. Here he had the key to the word which Jesus used. “*Prospagion*” meant “something to eat with the bread,” to make the bread go down—exactly as we today would eat butter, cheese, jam, and even meat and fish to help the bread along its way.

AOH



**PRAYERS FOR CHILDREN**

Morning

Dear Father, hear a little child  
 Who offers thanks to Thee;  
 Through all the darkness  
 Thou hast kept  
 A watch-care over me.  
 O Father, keep me through this day,  
 I would to Thee belong;  
 May love control my little hands,  
 May kindness rule my tongue.  
 Thy kingdom come,  
 Thy will be done  
 Upon this earth again;  
 Dear Father, hear my little prayer,  
 For Jesus' sake.  
 Amen.

Evening

Dear LORD, before  
 sweet slumber comes  
 To close my weary eyes,  
 Up to Thy throne of heavenly grace  
 My voice in prayer would rise,  
 For all the blessings of this day  
 I give Thee thanks and praise;  
 Forgive me, Lord, For Jesus' sake,  
 For all my naughty ways;  
 And as I lay me down to sleep  
 Do Thou an angel send  
 To watch beside me all the night,  
 For Jesus' sake.  
 Amen

*Rebecca Doney  
 The Call of the Bride*

### 153 FISH

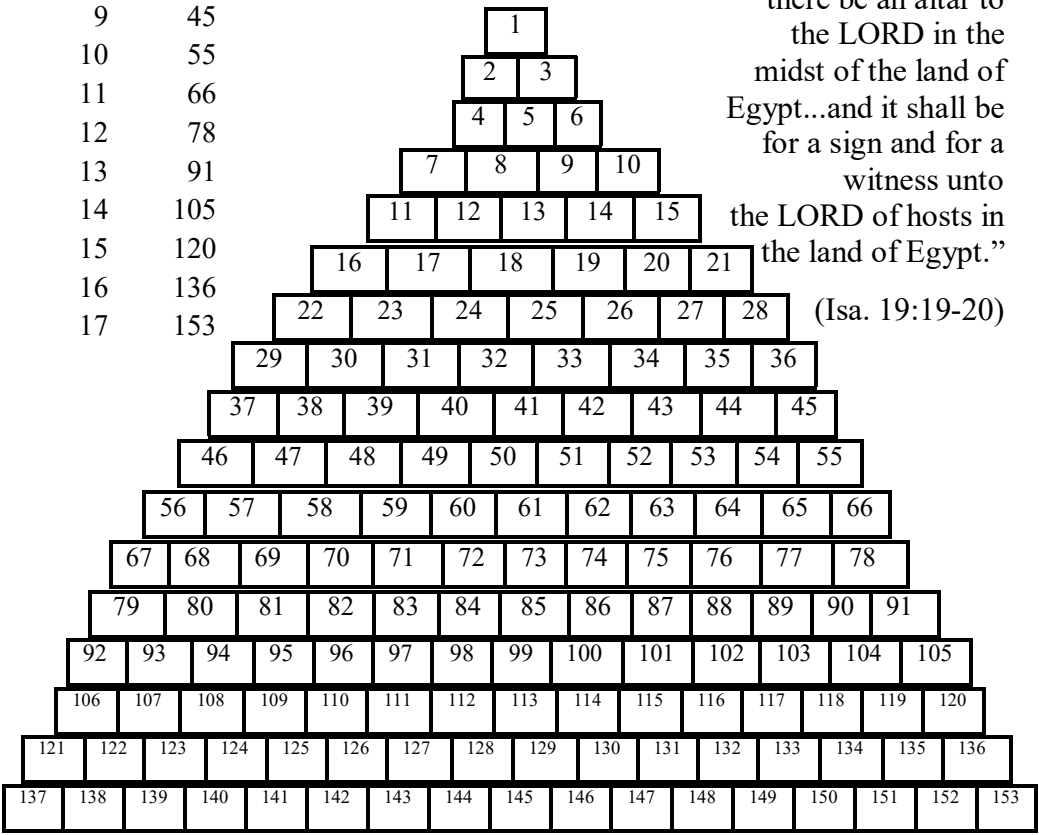
- 1 1
- 2 3
- 3 6
- 4 10
- 5 15
- 6 21
- 7 28
- 8 36
- 9 45
- 10 55
- 11 66
- 12 78
- 13 91
- 14 105
- 15 120
- 16 136
- 17 153

*Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three. (John 21:11 NKJV)*

The charts to the left and below show by adding one more each time, done seventeen times indicates how the number 153 fits in the shape of a pyramid.

“In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt...and it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt.”

(Isa. 19:19-20)



What does this mean? The figure of a pyramid shows harmony with a topstone where the foundation is laid in heaven. It pictures the church in harmony with its head, our Lord Jesus and the future ages when Israel is in harmony with Assyria and Egypt (figuring the world) who would be His heritage, His people and the work of His hand.

*“We must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)*

---

## ARISTARCHUS

He is mentioned only five times in the New Testament, casually, as though he was of no particular importance. Yet reading between the lines, and noting how close he seemed to be to the Apostle Paul, it may well be concluded that Aristarchus was a stalwart character who played a relatively significant role in the busy missionary activities of the great Apostle.

He is first mentioned in the story of the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19) when, in company with a fellow-worker, Gaius, he was hurried into the amphitheatre by the irate citizens, angered at the threat posed to their goddess Diana by the faith preached by these men. It is said there that they were Paul's "companions in travel"; from a reference in Acts 20:4 it emerges that Aristarchus hailed from Thessalonica in Greece. It is likely therefore that the two men first met when Paul came to Thessalonica during the course of his second missionary journey (following the dream of the man calling him to "come over into Macedonia, and help us": Acts 16:9; 17:1), some five or six years previously. Paul's party at that time included Timothy, Silas, and Luke. It is very possible that before leaving Greece for Ephesus Aristarchus had given up his occupation in Thessalonica and thrown in his lot with the Apostle.

Does this mean that as a completely new convert he was prepared thus to share the itinerant and arduous life of those who travelled with Paul preaching the gospel of the kingdom? It could have been so, but would Paul on the other hand have been likely to accept an untried man, still new in the faith, for so important a duty? In a similar situation he chose and accepted Timothy at Lystra (Acts 16:1) only after the local Christian communities had given him a glowing report as to the young man's qualities, and he had known the faith long enough to have become reasonably mature. It might well have been that something of the same was the case with Aristarchus. It is true that the church at Thessalonica was founded by Paul on the occasion of his first visit, but the tone of the narrative, "*some of them (the Jews) believed...of the devout Greeks a great multitude and of the chief women not a few*" (Acts 17:4) seems to indicate a readiness to believe and organise into a community separate from the synagogue which could imply that many of them already knew of and had accepted much of the Christian gospel prior to Paul's visit, perhaps without separating from the synagogue, and it only needed the coming of the Apostle and the clearer light he could shed on the elements of the faith to induce the formation of the Thessalonian church. It might well have

been that one or more citizens of Thessalonica—perhaps Aristarchus himself—had been at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and heard the Apostles preach, and taken the news back with them. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Aristarchus was already partially instructed in the faith, already a partial believer in Christ, when Paul met him, and that the Apostle, recognising some sterling qualities in this man, invited him a couple of years later to join him. So when the third missionary journey was in progress this stalwart Greek found himself working with Timothy, Silas and Luke.

The next mention of Aristarchus is about a year later. After the riot at Ephesus, Paul had gone back to Greece, revisiting the churches he had founded during his second missionary journey, and after six months or so set out for what was destined to be his last visit to Jerusalem, from where he was sent to Rome. Quite a party accompanied him on this occasion, and Aristarchus was one of the party. (Acts 20:4) Most of them left Paul at various points on the ensuing journey, in the interests of various commissions and duties, but when at last Paul arrived at Jerusalem Aristarchus was still with him, together with Luke and Trophimus at least. He had now been a companion in travel to Paul for something like five years.

There followed Paul's two years imprisonment at Caesarea under Felix and then his voyage to Rome. Aristarchus was still with him. Luke relates in Acts 27:2 that when the ship set sail from Caesarea "*Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.*" Luke's own sterling loyalty to Paul, and his unfailing refusal to leave his friend no matter what vicissitudes or misfortunes may befall, is well known. It is not so easily realised that Aristarchus also displayed much the same characteristics, and was with Paul almost as long as was Luke.

With Luke, he shared Paul's two years imprisonment at Rome. This we know from Paul's letter to the Colossians (ch. 4:10) in which he says "*Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus*" (Mark). The latter, it is known, made his own way to Rome and spent some time there with the Apostle during those two years. The reference to "fellow-prisoner" probably only means that Aristarchus had voluntarily elected to stay with the Apostle while he was detained in Rome. A round dozen or more, from Greece and Asia, came and went at various times during that two years, but Aristarchus and Luke were there all the time. Another greeting from both these stalwarts appears in the epistle to Philemon (v.24) at about the same time and that is the last that is definitely stated of

Aristarchus. Still with the Apostle, still waiting to know what the Roman authorities were going to do, still preaching the gospel in Rome.

When, at the end of the two years, Paul was acquitted and free to go where he liked, what happened to Aristarchus? Of those who visited Rome during this period the subsequent movements of all can be accounted for except those of Aristarchus. All others, except Luke, left Rome for various Greek and Asian churches. Luke accompanied Paul wherever he went during the ensuing five or six years of which nothing is recorded and was with him when we are able to pick up the thread again. The logical inference is that Aristarchus stayed with him also. If in fact Paul did occupy that silent six years with a missionary tour through Spain, Gaul (France) and Britain, which is the most likely hypothesis, then these two were his companions in that tour. When Paul comes again into sight he is journeying through Dalmatia and Illyricum (former Yugoslavia) and Greece, thence across Macedonia to Berea, voyaging to Crete and back to Nicopolis on the west coast for the winter. (1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 3:12) then through Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi to Troas, where he was arrested for the second time. From there he was taken to Rome, but now only Luke was with him. The implication is that Aristarchus was left in one of the Greek communities—probably his old home at Thessalonica—at Paul’s request, to serve the interests of the faith, and that is as far as logical inference can trace him.

He was a constant companion of and fellow-worker with the Apostle Paul for something like thirteen years, sharing with him the toils and trials of the way, steadfast in his chosen mission of declaring the good tidings of Christ. Luke was the only one who could claim a longer period of companionship with Paul: he joined Paul several years before the other man came on the scene and remained with Paul until the Apostle’s death. There must have been a special friendship between these two; they were both Greeks, they both owed their enlightenment to Paul, they both travelled with him more consistently than any others, more so even than Mark or Timothy, both of whom had other pastoral charges to administer at different times in their careers. His biography, had it been written, would surely have been of absorbing interest to all who realise what a debt is owed to these stalwarts of the middle First Century who, with Paul their acknowledged leader, blazed the trail of Christianity for us to follow. As it is, all we can do is raise our hands in salute to that hardy soul whom we only know in Luke’s words as “Aristarchus, a Macedonian, of Thessalonica.”

*AOH*

## THE BIBLE'S SONG OF LOVE

Verse by verse through the Song of Songs Part 2b CHAPTERS 2:14 – 3:5

All references RV unless otherwise specified

**2:14** The first phrase of verse 14 has been translated both in the Authorised and Revised versions in a way that suggests a contradiction. It reads “O MY DOVE, *THAT ART* IN THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK, IN THE COVERT OF THE STEEP PLACE, LET ME SEE THY COUNTENANCE.” The words “that art” appear in italics telling us that they are not in the original. If we leave them out we can see that the Bridegroom is saying in effect “Let me see thy countenance in the clefts of the rocks etc...” In verse 9 He was “looking in at the windows” to see His loved one who was behind “our wall.” In this verse He asks her again to come away from man-made enclosures to the sheltering clefts and coverts which He provides, for that is where He desires to see her countenance.

Throughout scripture rocks are a symbol of refuge and protection and are used to illustrate Divine care and protection. For example the Psalmist says “the LORD is my rock, and my fortress...” (Psa. 18:2) and the Apostle Paul also described God’s care for Israel in their wilderness experience as a spiritual rock and added “and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:4 KJV)

“...LET ME HEAR THY VOICE”, the Bridegroom continues, “FOR SWEET IS THY VOICE, AND THY COUNTENANCE IS COMELY.” How strange and sad it is that we should be so silent—so slow to pray, so slow to praise, when Jesus is saying to us—“Let Me hear thy voice...” To encourage us He adds “For thy voice is sweet.” The secret of His delight in the voice of His people is simply this—“It is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” (Matt. 10:20) For the same reason He sees beauty in their countenance; for the soul that is much in communion with Jesus reflects His beauty.

**2:15** “And then the maiden responds in words of supplication, “TAKE US THE FOXES, THE LITTLE FOXES, THAT SPOIL THE VINEYARDS; FOR OUR VINEYARDS ARE IN BLOSSOM.” Other translators strengthen her appeal by opening with the words “Seize for us the foxes.”

In Eastern Countries these “little foxes” used to conceal themselves in great numbers under the luxuriant foliage of the vines. Thus do the symbolic “little foxes” hide wherever there is a profusion of the leaves of profession. In appearance they are the size of kittens, with eyes that appear kindly and intelligent, but they have very destructive habits. These

characteristics are brought out in a description of an incident concerning one of these animals in captivity. Whilst lifting the straw in its cage the keeper found a hole which the animal had burrowed deeply under an adjoining wall. The “little fox” had not only covered the hole with straw to avoid detection but had licked its feet and claws clean of tell-tale fragments of earth. Whilst the straw was being moved the animal slunk guiltily away with a drooping “brush.”

Do not these characteristics illustrate the sly and apparently harmless intrusion of worldliness and sin, the little self-indulgences, the small faults unconfessed and carelessly repeated which injure our new nature. This verse seems to have a special application to these days when, as a result of the increase of knowledge, it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the intrusions of worldly affairs by wireless, press and even by ordinary contact with the greatly increased variety and tempo of modern life. The strain under which we live in these days also tends to encourage us to accept some of its apparently harmless and pleasant relaxations as a means of physical refreshment, plausibly assuring ourselves that we shall thus be fitted for greater spiritual activity. But let us remember the warning given to us in God’s word “How great a matter a *little* fire kindleth”, “a *little* leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” (James 3:5; Gal. 5:9 KJV)

It is interesting to note that the “little foxes” only injure the young shoots, not the mature branches. It is under the cover of our profession that our own “little foxes” can so easily shelter and so, if any part of our spiritual growth is still a tender shoot, we shall need to claim His watchful help to “seize for us the little foxes” which would cause us grave harm. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God...” (Heb. 12:15 KJV) praying always “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” (Psa. 19:12 KJV)

**2:16** We might wonder why the maiden has to ask *Him* to seize the little foxes in “*our* vineyard.” Is He not aware of their depredations without her plea? The answer is implied in the request itself, for in it the maiden shows her dependence on His power. Our Lord helps us in these problems by showing us how He lived a life unharmed by the “little foxes” of self-will and self-indulgence. As we consciously strive to follow Him, recognising Him as our Head in all things, His power will “seize for us the little foxes that spoil *our* vineyards.” This will enable us to say with the Apostle “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13 KJV) and ensure that we can echo the maiden’s words “MY BELOVED IS MINE, AND I AM HIS.”

Although she is now conscious of possessing the Beloved, the sentiment is not entirely selfless; she has yet to reach the point of development where she can say “I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine.” (6:3) She knows that the joy of Christ is to be with His own (the lilies of verses 2) and so she can go on in confidence to say “HE FEEDETH AMONG THE LILIES” or, as our Lord expressed it: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I *in the midst of them.*” (Matt. 18:20 KJV)

**2:17** “WHEN THE DAY IS COOL,” she continues, “AND THE SHADOWS FLEE AWAY, TURN, MY BELOVED, AND BE THOU LIKE A ROE OR A YOUNG HART UPON THE MOUNTAINS OF SEPARATION.” (mar.)

In the evening after sundown when in Eastern lands the cool evening breeze blows, then the shadows disappear. In the record of creation “the evening and the morning” was the order of each day as it still is amongst Jews today. Similarly the new Millennial Day begins with eventide and, passing through a night, leads on to perfect day. Here, once again, is the thought of our Lord’s presence during the time of the (antitypical) evening breeze at the close of “day” of the Gospel age.

The Hebrew word rendered “turn” conveys more correctly the meaning of “to compass round about.” The maiden now recognises that she no longer needs the “walls,” for Christ is her protection.

We have also observed that mountains are a symbol for Kingdoms. How appropriately this verse applies to the time of our Lord’s second presence, during which “the kingdoms of this world” are rent and divided. Nevertheless there are clefts in those rocks, in the high and steep places, inaccessible to the enemies of the Lord’s people and where He keeps them in perfect safety and peace until “the shadows flee away.” These are the mountains of separation but not of separation from our Lord “For,” the Apostle assures us, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38,39)

The next four verses describe very clearly the general experience of those whose hearts and affections are centred in Christ at this time. This period is represented by the condition of the Church of the Laodiceans described



in Rev. 3:14-21. It is a time during which the Lord returns and rejects the “lukewarm”, boastful and self-satisfied systems of the professing church. This rejection has brought to the true and sincere lover of Christ a dissatisfaction with the condition in which she finds herself, a sense of restlessness and determination to find Him who is the Beloved of her soul.

**3:1** It is helpful to remind ourselves at the point that the Song is expressed by the maiden in retrospect and so, looking back, she can say “BY NIGHT ON MY BED I SOUGHT HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH: I SOUGHT HIM, BUT I FOUND HIM NOT.”

In Rev. 2:22 the Resurrected Lord indicates the symbolic meaning of a “bed” where He declares that the antitypical Jezebel and those who commit spiritual adultery within the Church shall be cast into a bed of their own. In its fulfilment we can recognise that this means a creedal bed, for it is the unscriptural creeds which are the bed of spiritual adultery. Similarly when our Lord spoke of signs of His second presence He told of a separating work when “two men in one bed” shall be separated “the one shall be taken, and the other left.” (Luke 17:34 KJV) This was one of the signs which Jesus said would tell us that our deliverance draweth nigh. (Luke 21:28) “Knowing the season,” says the Apostle, “that now it is high time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed.” (Rom. 13:11) “So then let us not sleep, as do the rest” lest “that day should overtake you as a thief.” (1 Thess. 5:6,4)

The maiden is no longer asleep but her seeking has not so far extended beyond her immediate location—“my bed.” Two other beds are spoken of in the Song “our bed” (1:16 KJV) where she rested with Christ; “His bed” 3:7 KJV) the only safe and satisfying resting place. But now is she on her own bed and there He is not to be found, for the command has gone forth—“Come out of her, my people...” (Rev. 18:4-9 KJV)

**3:2** Now she arouses herself “I WILL RISE NOW,” she says “AND GO ABOUT THE CITY, IN THE STREETS AND IN THE BROAD WAYS, I WILL SEEK HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH.” She still expects to find Him somewhere in the great city of Christendom—amongst those church organisations which are the dwelling-place of those who profess the Name of Christ. But assemblies of Christians are not necessarily gathered together in His name and it is only wherever two or three are gathered together *in His name* that He has promised to be found among them. “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)

But she soon confesses that “I SOUGHT HIM, BUT I FOUND HIM NOT.” Nevertheless the promise is that “they who seek shall find.” Thus the lesson of the maiden’s experience is that no measure of Christian fellowship can bring satisfaction to the heart of those who love Jesus unless He is found there.

**3:3** Nor can those denominational leaders who devote their energies to regulating and keeping watch on the affairs of the “city” of Christendom be relied on to guide us to Him for He has disowned the city which professed His name. As the maiden tells us “THE WATCHMEN THAT GO ABOUT THE CITY FOUND ME: TO WHOM I SAID, SAW YE HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH?” The prophet foretold this experience in the words “His watchmen are blind...” (Isa. 56:10,11)

The original text emphasises the last four words of this verse. This is the driving power which keeps her searching for close, personal communion with her Beloved because He is “Him whom my soul loveth.”

**3:4** “IT WAS BUT A LITTLE THAT I PASSED FROM THEM, WHEN I FOUND HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH.”

Her restlessness was proof of her sincerity. Is not this the test of a true child of God as distinguished from one who merely professes to love the Lord? The true Christian can be satisfied with nothing short of direct and personal appropriation of Him. So “let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9)

Now, free from her old entanglement and associations; roused from her “bed” which had held her; no longer having confidence in the watchmen, she turns away from it all, for now she has “found Him whom my soul loveth” and, in a new intensity of affection, she says “I HELD HIM, AND WOULD NOT LET HIM GO.” In every experience the maiden has seen that her Beloved responds only when she shows that quality and character of earnestness which He looks for in His own. In this experience we learn that, although He has “set His love upon us,” He will withhold the manifestation of His love until we seek for Him as for hidden treasure. In other words—we must claim the relationship to which He has invited us.

“UNTIL I HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO MY MOTHER’S HOUSE.” In the first part of the Song we read of His grace in bringing her into His

chambers. In these words the maiden recognises that the basis of her relationship to Christ is the Covenant of Grace. As Isaac was, so is she, a child of promise. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ...and if ye be Christ’s, then are ye...heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:16,29 KJV; 4:22-28)

To emphasise the full depth of this statement the maiden repeats the thought “AND INTO THE CHAMBER OF HER THAT CONCEIVED ME.” This is the basis of our relationship to Him in the Divine family and must be recognised and appropriated.

**3:5** Once more the Bridegroom responds, this time to ensure the spiritual season of rest to which her searching has brought her as at the end of Part 1. He addresses the Daughters of Jerusalem: “I ADJURE YOU, O DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM, BY THE ROES, AND BY THE HINDS OF THE FIELD, THAT YE STIR NOT UP, NOR AWAKEN LOVE, UNTIL IT PLEASE.” He does not deny them opportunity to share this same rest for, as the Apostle John declares, “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us,” adding the important distinction that “our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3 KJV) All who seek the Lord from amongst the daughters of Jerusalem are hereby encouraged to follow in the maiden’s steps but warned not “to stir up” or disturb the spiritual rest of those who have found Him.

*EAA/LB*

“Don’t you remember? When I asked you one day what love is, you told me “Love depends on the sighs of your heart. The more you love, the bigger the sighs!”

The two women looked at each other for a moment. Mom didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. As she stooped down to hug her child she did a little of both.

“Mom, every time you hold me I sigh. When you and Daddy come home from work and hug each other, you both sigh. I knew I would find the right puppy if it sighed when I held it in my arms,” she said.

Then, holding the puppy up close to her face she said, “Mom, he loves me. I heard the sighs of his heart.”

Close your eyes for a moment and think about the love that makes you sigh.

## SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Matt. 6:33

*It is the Kingdom of God* that we find to be the great theme of the Saviour, as He commenced His illustrious mission of world redemption: It is the Kingdom of God from first to last that He had His eyes, His heart and mind upon, and that because Jehovah had presented to Him the glorious vision of the programme of the Ages, wherein He saw the great consummation in the establishment of the reign of righteousness upon the earth of which He was to be the Head. He saw also the selection of joint heirs or associates with Him, and to them He gave the exhortation to “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

Surely the Master could never have given any better advice than this. No one up to that time gave advice so perfect as that, because none could. No one could come *before* that sacrifice and the call will never be offered again. *With the conclusion of this age* the entire Christ will be called out, the door will be shut, never to be opened again. Seeking a place in the Kingdom of God involves a very heavy expense; it is altogether too hard for the majority who even profess to be interested in the subject. This is in fulfilment of the Master’s words, “Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life and few there be that find it.” We have had to have these points impressed on our minds over and over again, through our experiences, as far as we have realised the narrowness of the way. Our Lord most certainly gave us to understand that it was a very solemn and serious application that one was assuming any undertaking to walk in His footsteps and seek first the Kingdom of God. Therefore, He declared that not all who say “Lord! Lord! shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father in Heaven,” implying that many would say “Lord! Lord!” and yet are not willing to pay the price, not willing to bear the cross, not willing to go all the way that was stipulated in His various injunctions. *When Christ said to His followers*, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,” He did not mean anyone to reply, “Yes, Lord, I will go with you in the Kingdom, just let me know when you get that Kingdom established, and I will be there!” None but His actual followers will ever get there, those trained by the great teacher, and who learn of Him and accept His instructions. We get a hint from the Apostle’s statement, “Brethren, take *heed* how you build and what kind of material you use in your building because there are two kinds, one is good and the other not so good; there is gold, silver and precious stones, and there is wood, hay and stubble, and if you use the gold, silver and precious stones you will use material indestructible, which will not be harmed by fire, but if you use “wood” you may have a building that will look very nice and attractive from the outside, but it will not be

able to resist the “fire” and time shall declare the nature of substance you have used.” Gold, silver and precious stones stand for doctrinal truth based upon a pure understanding of God, the practical spiritual life going hand in hand.

*Frankly, there is no real value* in spending one’s life in building up an intellectual conception, and overlooking the fact that knowledge that comes to the head is intended to reach the heart. We have had a demonstration of how these things work out in the various crises that have come upon the Church. Many have not dealt with these in a way that has been to their credit or their honour. Conversations have run somewhat after these lines:-

“Brother, what are you going to do, here is a matter to settle, what are you going to do?”

“Well, I don’t know, it is a serious question, I will have to think it over, and besides, I want to see what the rest will do. No doubt we’ll have a meeting though I don’t know what I’ll do about it.”

What is the matter with the man? He has been building on wood, hay and stubble! So we ask someone else what he is going to do about the same problems in the Church.

“Have you thought about them, brother?” “Yes, I have thought about them, and I am going to take my stand on the side of the Divine principles that are involved,” and then he receives the answer:-

“Well, if you take that stand, you know you won’t have very many with you.”

“Well,” he replies, “I know, but that is not my consideration, for it does not make any difference. I have my eyes fixed upon Christ, and I am considering Him first in this matter and what He wants me to do, and, therefore, that is where I stand on this question now.”

What is the difference between the two men. One has taken his stand, and made his building of wood, hay and stubble, the other out of gold, silver and precious stones.

*May God in His infinite mercy* and suffering and patience continue to lead us on amidst the present confusion and cause our hearts to feel the deeper yearning for Him and the consciousness of His Presence that we may more fully deport ourselves as true and worthy exponents of the life of Him who is the great example, and see that we walk as He walked.

*IJH*

## THE PLAN OF GOD—IN BRIEF

### STUDY 4—Our Lord's Return

“And He shall send Jesus Christ, which [who] before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive (retain) until the times of restitution (restoration) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20, 21.

That our Lord intended His disciples to understand that for some purpose, in some manner, and at some time, He would come again, is, we presume, admitted, and believed by all familiar with the Scriptures. True, Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20 NKJV), and by His Spirit and by His Word He has been with the Church continually, guiding, directing, comforting, and sustaining His saints, and cheering them in the midst of all their afflictions. But though the Church has been blessedly conscious of the Lord's knowledge of all her ways and of His constant care and love, yet she longs for His promised personal return; for, when He said, “If I go...I will come again” (John 14:3), He certainly referred to a *second personal coming*.

The specific work of the first advent was to redeem men; and that of the second is to restore, and bless, and liberate the redeemed. Having given His life a ransom for all, our Saviour ascended to present that sacrifice to the Father, so making reconciliation for man's iniquity. He tarries and permits “the prince of this world” to continue the rule of evil, until after the selection of “the Bride, the Lamb's wife,” who, to be accounted worthy of such honour, must overcome the influences of the present evil world. Then the work of giving to the world of mankind the great blessings secured to them by His sacrifice will be due to commence, and He will come forth to bless all families of the earth.

True, the restoring and blessing could have commenced at once, when the ransom price was paid by the Redeemer, and then the coming of Messiah would have been but one event, the reign and blessing beginning at once, as the apostles at first expected. (Acts 1:6) But God had provided “some better thing for us”—the Christian Church (Heb. 11:40); hence it is in our interest that the reign of Christ is separated from the sufferings of the Head by many centuries.

This period between the first and second advents, between the ransom of all and the blessing of all, is for the trial and selection of the Church, which is the body of Christ, otherwise there would have been only the one advent, and the work which will be done during the period of His second

presence, in the Millennium, would have followed the resurrection of Jesus. Or, instead of saying that the work of the second advent would have followed at once the work of the first, let us say rather that had Jehovah not purposed the selection of the “little flock,” “the body of Christ;” the first advent would not have taken place when it did, but would have occurred at the time of the second advent, and there would have been but the one. For God has evidently designed the *permission* of evil for six thousand years, as well as that the cleansing and restoration of all shall be accomplished during the seventh thousand.

Thus seen, the coming of Jesus, as the sacrifice and ransom for sinners, was just long enough in advance of the blessing and restoring time to allow for the selection of His “little flock” of “joint-heirs.” This will account for some of the apparent delay on God’s part in giving the blessings promised, and provided for, in the ransom. The blessings will come in due time, as at first planned, though, for a glorious purpose, the price was paid longer beforehand than men would have expected.

The Apostle informs us that Jesus has been absent from earth—in the heaven—during all the intervening time from His ascension to the beginning of the times of restoration, or the Millennial age—“whom, indeed, heaven must retain till the times of restoration of all things,” etc. (Acts 3:21 Diaglott) Since the Scriptures teach that the object of our Lord’s second advent is the restoration of all things, and that at the time of His appearing the nations are so far from being converted as to be angry (Rev 11:18) and in opposition, it must be admitted either that the Church will fail to accomplish her mission, and that the plan of God will be thus far frustrated, or else, as we claim and have shown, that the conversion of the world in the present age was not expected of the Church, but that her mission has been to preach the Gospel in all the world *for a witness*, and to prepare herself under divine direction for her great future work. God has not yet by any means exhausted His power for the world’s conversion. Rather: He has not yet *even attempted* the world’s conversion.

Some who can see something of the blessings due at the second advent, and who appreciate in some measure the fact that the Lord comes to bestow the grand blessing purchased by His death, fail to see this last proposition, viz.: that those in their graves have as much interest in that glorious reign of Messiah as those who at that time will be less completely under the bondage of corruption—death. But as surely as Jesus died for *all*, they all must have the blessings and opportunities which He purchased with His own precious blood. Hence we should expect blessings in

the Millennial age upon all those in their graves as well as upon those not in them; and of this we will find abundant proof, as we look further into the Lord's testimony on the subject. It is because of God's plan for their release that those in the tomb are called "prisoners of hope."

"God is love," and "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish." (1 John 4:8; John 3:16 NKJV). Would it not seem that if God loved the world so much He might have made provision, not only that believers might be saved, but also that all might hear in order to believe?

Again, when we read, "That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9 NKJV), our observation says, not so; every man has not been enlightened; we cannot see that our Lord has lighted more than a few of earth's billions. Even in this comparatively enlightened day, millions of heathen give no evidence of such enlightenment; neither did the Sodomites, nor multitudes of others in past ages.

We read that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death "*for every man.*" (Heb. 2:9) But if He tasted death for the one hundred and forty-three billion, and from any cause that sacrifice becomes efficacious (effective) to only one billion, was not the redemption comparatively a failure? And in that case, is not the Apostle's statement too broad? When again we read, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE" (Luke 2:10), and, looking about us, see that it is only to a "little flock" that it has been good tidings, and not to all people, we would be compelled to wonder whether the angels had not overstated the goodness and breadth of their message, and overrated the importance of the work to be accomplished by the Messiah whom they announced.

Another statement is, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." (1 Tim. 2:5, 6) A ransom for all? Then why should not all the ransomed have some benefit from Christ's death? Why should not *all* come to a knowledge of the truth, that they may believe?

Without the key, how dark, how inconsistent, these statements appear; but when we find the key to God's plan, these texts all declare with one voice, "God is love." This key is found in the latter part of the text last quoted—"Who gave Himself a ransom for all, TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME." God has a due time for everything. He could have testified it to these in their past lifetime; but since He did not, it proves that their due



time must be future. For those who will be of the Church, the bride of Christ, and share the kingdom honours, the present is the “due time” to hear; and whosoever now has an ear to hear, let him hear and heed, and he will be blessed accordingly. Though Jesus paid our ransom before we were born, it was not our “due time” to hear of it for long years afterward, and only the appreciation of it brought responsibility; and this, only to the extent of our ability and appreciation. The same principle applies to all: in God’s due time it will be testified to all, and all will then have opportunity to believe and to be blessed by it.

The prevailing opinion is that death ends all probation; but there is no Scripture which so teaches; and all the above, and many more Scriptures, would be meaningless, or worse, if death ends all hope for the ignorant masses of the world.

Since God does not propose to save men on account of ignorance, but “will have all men to...come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4); and since the masses of mankind have died in ignorance; and since “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave” (Eccl. 9:10) therefore God has prepared for the awakening of the dead, in order for knowledge, faith and salvation. Hence His plan is, that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each one in his own order”—The Gospel Church, the Bride, the body of Christ, first; afterward during the Millennial age, all who shall become His during that thousand years of His presence (mistranslated coming), the Lord’s due time for all to know Him, from the least to the greatest.—1 Cor. 15:22-23 NKJV.

As death came by the first Adam, so life comes by Christ, the second Adam. Everything that mankind lost through being in the first Adam is to be restored to those who believe in the second Adam. When awakened, with the advantage of experience with evil, which Adam lacked, those who thankfully accept the redemption as God’s gift may continue to live everlastingly on the original condition of obedience. Perfect obedience will be required, and perfect ability to obey will be given, under the righteous reign of the Prince of Peace. Here is the salvation offered to the world.

Though many of the prophecies and promises of future blessing seem to apply to Israel only, it must be remembered that they were a typical people, and hence the promises made to them, while sometimes having a special application to themselves, generally have also a wider application

to the whole world of mankind which that nation typified. While Israel as a nation was typical of the whole world, its priesthood was typical of the elect “little flock,” the head and body of Christ, the “Royal Priesthood;” and the sacrifices, cleansings and atonements made for Israel typified the “better sacrifices,” fuller cleansings and real atonement “for the sins of the whole world,” of which they are a part.

And not only so, but God mentions by name other nations and promises their restoration. As a forcible illustration we mention the Sodomites. Surely, if we shall find the restoration of the Sodomites clearly taught, we may feel satisfied of the truth of this glorious doctrine of Restoration for all mankind, spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets. And why should not the Sodomites have an opportunity to reach perfection and everlasting life as well as Israel, or as any of us? True, they were not righteous, but neither was Israel, nor were we who now hear the gospel. “There is none righteous; no, not one,” aside from the imputed righteousness of Christ, who died for all. Our Lord’s own words tell us that although God rained down fire from heaven and destroyed them all because of their wickedness, yet the Sodomites were not so great sinners in His sight as were the Jews, who had more knowledge. (Gen. 19:24; Luke 17:29) Unto the Jews of Capernaum He said, “If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”—Matt. 11:23 NKJV

So our Lord teaches that the Sodomites did not have a full opportunity; and He guarantees them such opportunity when He adds (Verse 24), “But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment than for you.” The character of the Day of Judgment and its work will be shown in succeeding studies. Here we merely call attention to the fact that it will be a *tolerable* time for Capernaum, and yet *more tolerable* for Sodom; because, though neither had yet had *full* knowledge, nor all the blessings designed to come through the “Seed,” yet Capernaum had sinned against more light.

We need not wonder that Jews, Sodomites, Samaritans, and all mankind, will be ashamed and confounded when in His own “due time” God shows forth the riches of His favour. Yea, many of those who are now God’s children will be confounded and amazed when they see how God so loved THE WORLD and how much His thoughts and plans were above their own.

Christian people generally believe that God’s blessings are all and only for

the selected Church, but now we begin to see that God's plan is wider than we had supposed, and that though He has given the Church "exceeding great and precious promises," He has also made bountiful provision for the world which He so loved as to redeem. The Jews made a very similar mistake in supposing that all the promises of God were to and for them alone; but when the "due time" came and the Gentiles were favoured, the remnant of Israel, whose hearts were large enough to rejoice in this wider evidence of God's grace, shared that increased favour, while the rest were blinded by prejudice and human tradition. Let those of the Church who now see the dawning light of the Millennial age, with its gracious advantages for all the world, take heed lest they be found in opposition to the advancing light, and so for a time be blinded to its glory and blessings.

Seeing, then, that so many of the great and glorious features of God's plan for human salvation from sin and death lie in the future, and that the second advent of our Lord Jesus is the designed first step in the accomplishment of those long promised and long expected blessings, shall we not even more earnestly long for the time of His second advent than the less informed Jew looked and longed for His first advent? Seeing that the time of evil, injustice, and death is to be brought to an end by the dominion of power which He will then exercise, and that righteousness, truth and peace are to be universal, who should not rejoice to see His day? And who that is now suffering with Christ, inspired by the precious promise that "if we suffer [with Him] we shall also reign with Him," (2 Tim. 2:12) will not lift up his head and rejoice at any evidence of the approach of the Master, knowing thereby that our deliverance and our glorification with Him draw nigh? Surely all in sympathy with His mission of blessing and His spirit of love will hail every evidence of His coming as the approach of the "great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke 2:10)



The ruins of Capernaum

## TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

### 5 . Visions 8 & 9. The Lamb goes forth to war

*“After these things I saw another angel come (coming) down from heaven...and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen.”* (Rev. 18:1-2)

One of the most significant events in the chequered history of Israel was the collapse of the Babylonian world power when Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon, and restored the people of Israel to their own land. In a very real sense the fall of the ancient city of Babylon marked the end of a world order. The Babylonians were the last surviving remnants of the people who populated the “plain of Shinar” after the Flood, built the notorious Tower of Babel, and instituted a system of world dominance allied with false religion which profoundly affected and moulded human thought and development for twenty-five centuries. Writing, mathematics, the sciences, law, together with religious doctrine and ceremonial, all has its source in Babylon. As a centre of population it goes back nearly five thousand years; as a political power dominant over the then known world more than four thousand. Our units of time and distance, our weights and measures—until the considerably inferior metric system was adopted—all are derived from Babylon. The ceremonials, the trappings, the buildings, even to some extent the doctrines of institutional Christianity in the world today include much that is derived from Babylon. And the dominant characteristic of Babylon was that it supported a politico-religious system based upon the worship of false gods which themselves were but reflections of the imaginations and standards and vices of men. Abraham was called to separate himself from the land of which Babylon was the chief city and to come into a land which God would show him and which therefore became in due time the land peculiarly sacred to God. The two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, became respectively the cities of the ways of God and the ways of man. To the God-fearing Jew who looked upon Jerusalem as the city of righteousness, Babylon was the city of evil.

It is for this reason that the eventual fall of Babylon and the end of that order of things is alluded to so often in the Scriptures to picture the end of the very imperfect and largely godless rule of man upon earth at the time when the Lord Christ takes up his power and commences his Messianic reign. In the symbolism of Revelation, the fall of symbolic Babylon occurs at the time of the Second Advent. Just as Cyrus the Persian with his armies put an end to the empire of Babylon and assumed the regal power, so does the Lord Christ with his Church from heaven put an end to the present world order and initiate a new one, “wherein dwelleth

righteousness” as Peter puts it. (2 Pet. 3:13) This is the theme of this 18th chapter.

The angel coming down from heaven in power and great glory of verse 1 is our Lord Jesus Christ in one of the many aspects of his Second Advent. This is not merely an angelic messenger commissioned to come to earth with a message. The description is too exalted for that. There is a definite correspondence between Rev. 18:1 and the vision of the Almighty described by Ezekiel in Ezek. 43:2-4 and Ezek. chaps. 1-5. The same expression is used of the coming of the Most High in Ezekiel’s vision “*the earth shined with his glory*” (v.2) and the theme was the same, the Lord coming to execute judgment upon an evil order of things that approached its deserved end. But just as the vision was vouchsafed only to Ezekiel and it was his responsibility to make its implications known to Israel, so now the glory of the revealed Lord at this moment is perceptible only to the people of the Lord, the Church in the flesh at the time of the event, and the Church is to make the message known. The remainder of chapter 18 makes it plain that the destruction of Babylon, although expressed in the past tense, is a future, albeit imminent, event—what is known in prophetic parlance as “proleptic”, i.e., a future event described as though it has already taken place.

This aspect of the Advent is that in which the returned Lord, already moving in the affairs of the world to bring about the introduction of his kingdom, as yet unperceived by mankind in general, is revealing to his own followers the nature of the judgment which is about to befall the world order. In the first place (ch. 18:2) He declares that Babylon has become the haunt of demons and unclean spirits. It is tempting to associate this statement with the tremendous increase in dealings with the occult and supernatural which is so marked a feature of contemporary society, and it may yet be demonstrated that in sober fact the hidden spiritual powers of evil are attaining a sphere of influence in the affairs of the world today similar to that obtaining (existing) in the days before the Flood. It was that malevolent interference in the affairs of earth by those demonic powers of evil which more than anything else “filled the earth with violence” (Gen. 6:13) and brought about the end of that world. Maybe history will repeat itself.

Verse 3 pictures all nations as intoxicated by their allegiance to the ruling principles of Babylon, the ruling powers united in purpose and action, and the commercial interests drawing their wealth and position from their connection with the system. The picture is that of the entire world making

common cause in supporting a world order which enshrines much that is immoral and unjust, but men cling to it partly because it serves their self-interest and partly because they know no other. But to those who are Christ's, whose lives are dedicated to him and who look for a vastly better order of things when He takes his great power and assumes control of this world, there comes his call to stand separate from this corrupt and doomed system. "*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*" (v.4) That injunction is not to withdraw from the world as such and adopt a hermit-like, separatist, and exclusive existence, eschewing even the good things and the beautiful things and all that is upright and just and moral in the world; there is much of that even though the evil things appear to be in the ascendancy. The command is to withdraw from co-operation with, and support of, the evil elements which are driving the world to destruction. Christians are to stand as lights in the world, having "*no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" (Eph. 5:11)

The reaction of men to this collapse of the world system is vividly portrayed in the remainder of this chapter, all depicted as part of the message declared by the present Lord at the relevant time. The position is markedly similar to that obtaining at the time of the Flood. Jesus likened his own Advent to that time. As it was in the days of Noah, He said, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:37-39) The world of that day went on its way, completely heedless of the prophet in its midst who warned of the cataclysm that was imminent and would put an end to that world and all the evil that was in it. (2 Pet. 2:5) (The details of Noah's preaching and witness to the coming destruction are not elaborated in Genesis but are related in fuller degree in the "Book of Enoch.") So it will be now. The message will be given; in fact has been given, consistently and persistently, by Christian groups large and small, warning those who would listen of the inevitable consequence of the world's present course. As in the days of Noah, the warning has been ignored, and will be, until the end comes. Here in this chapter three distinct classes of society are mentioned, each lamenting the disaster which has come upon them. The kings of the earth, the rulers of men, the political powers and organisations, (vv. 9-10) will, more or less unavailingly in all probability, hurriedly try to dissociate themselves from the system which is crashing into ruins in their midst, and bewail the end of all that in which for so long they have put their trust. And be it remembered that the end of organised political rule in the earth invites anarchy and no man can foresee what form it will take. Hence the commercial interests of the earth (vv. 11-16) join in the general apprehension as they see their own particular interests

threatened and their commercial empires vanish overnight. “*No man buyeth their merchandise any more*” is the eloquent comment in v. 11. The commercial men have relied upon the political powers to keep the world safe for their activities and the political powers have failed them. Finally the trading systems of the world, pictured here in vv. 17-19 as shipowners (not “shipmaster” as in the A .V.) and all who have to do with trade by sea, join in the general outcry, like the others chiefly concerned over the effect upon their own interests, “*wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea.*” (v.19)

The suddenness of the catastrophe is clearly marked. “*In one hour is thy judgment come*” (v.10) say the kings and rulers of the earth. “*In one hour so great riches is come to nought*” (v.17) echo the commercial men, the merchants. “*In one hour is she made desolate*” (v.19) cry the trading tycoons. The implication is that when the crash does come, it will be swift and decisive. This old world has been a long time dying; it was not really until the twentieth century that it became more or less a single unit with each nation or area interdependent upon all the others. But almost at once the rot began and for all of the century the forces of disintegration have been active and gathering strength. So many observers have said that the year 1914 was the beginning of the end and nothing has gone right since. The structure of modern society—political, commercial, social—is such today that it only wants one kingpin to be knocked out of place for the entire edifice to come down with a crash. That aspect of the matter is vividly forthshown by the sequel to this vision. John listened to the message to its end and then he beheld while “*a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.*” (v.21) That which John thus witnessed was a repetition of a similar incident in the story of literal Babylon. A few years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians at the time of the Captivity, when Babylon was at the height of its power and magnificence under its famous king Nebuchadnezzar II, Jeremiah the prophet sent an emissary to Babylon with a book—probably a parchment or leather scroll—in which he had written a complete prophecy of the eventual doom and destruction of Babylon, then more than half a century distant. That denunciation is recorded for modern readers in the 50th and 51st chapters of Jeremiah. Arrived at Babylon, Seraiah was to read the entire message in public and then, tying the parchment to a stone, throw it into the midst of Euphrates, which ran through the centre of the city. He probably stood in the centre of the stone bridge which spanned the river near the celebrated Tower of Babel to do so—as public a place as Westminster Bridge in London: the

Euphrates at Babylon was as wide as is the Thames at Westminster. And as he thus cast the book into the water, he was to say “*thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her*” (Jer. 51:64)

So, suddenly but not without warning, the existing worn-out world order crumbles to dust and vanishes away. “That which decayeth and waxeth old” said the writer to the Hebrews “is ready to vanish away.” (Heb. 8:13) It will be a drastic and a terrible end to a world order which has been built up during thousands of years and has served the needs of humanity tolerably well for much of that time, but because injustice and inequity, to say nothing of downright evil, has been built into its structure there is only one possible end. Whatever is of evil contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. And there is a better world to succeed it. Babylon falls, as fall it must, but by the grace and mercy of God its fall is timed to occur at just that period when the kingdom of Christ on earth is ready to take its place. The transition will give rise to violence, for after Babylon’s fall the powers of earth make one final attempt to resist the incoming kingdom, but the influences of Heaven will be victorious, and humanity will enter upon the Millennium, the thousand years of peace, with Christ in full and effective control.

\* \* \*

It is that last conflict which is the subject of **vision 9**. The story is found in the nineteenth chapter of Revelation. Following an important sequence in which the Revelator hears the announcement of the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” indicating that at this point the completed Church of this present Age has been fully gathered to eternal association in the heavens with the Lord Christ, there comes an aspect of the Advent in which that resurrected and glorified company directly participates from the celestial realm. This is the point of history at which the reality of the Advent is forced home upon the peoples of earth. In some unmistakable manner no one will be able to deny the fact; it will be true that in some very definite manner all peoples of earth shall “*see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*”, as Jesus predicted in Matt. 24:30.

The vision as it is unfolded in ch. 19:11-21 opens with the spectacle of a majestic figure upon a white horse descending from the heavens. He is a martial figure, armed for combat, crowned to denote that he is also a king—in fact his name is given as “*King of kings, and Lord of lords.*” He is also designated “*The Word (Logos) of God.*” (v.13) Both titles identify the Rider as the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes as a warrior; “*in righteous-*



*ness he doth judge and make war.”* (ch. 19:11) He is followed by *“the armies which were in heaven”* all upon white horses and clothed in fine linen. (v.14) This is a symbol of the resurrected Church, for *“to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen...for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”* (v.8) This then is the revelation of Christ and his Church to the world at the extreme end of the Age when Heaven actively intervenes in earth’s affairs to quell all opposition and initiate the Millennial or Messianic era. Thus verse 15 comes in naturally at this point: *“out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”* This is an allusion from the Old Testament. The “rod of iron” is the *shebet*, which is the word used for both a king’s sceptre and a shepherd’s crook. In this case, where “rule” is *poimaino*, meaning to shepherd a flock, the true meaning of the phrase is that Christ will shepherd the nations with his shepherding crook, by no means so oppressive a process as might be surmised from the mistranslation “rule them with a rod of iron.” The “sharp sword,” be it noted, comes from his mouth; it is the piercing and penetrating power of his message and his teaching which will “smite” the nations, a clear and incisive exposition of right and wrong which will vindicate the righteously inclined and condemn the unrighteous. Isaiah had the same idea in mind when he said, referring to this precise same event in history *“he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”* (Isa. 11:4) So our Lord is revealed to the world as their Deliverer, to put down all forces of evil and injustice and establish an era of peace and security in which all men will be able to develop their full potential for useful and happy living.

At this point battle is joined. *“I saw the (wild) beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.”* (ch. 19:19)

The “wild beast” is a symbolic figure appearing at various points in the Book of Revelation to picture, in general terms, the whole conglomeration of religious-cum-political power which, arising from the ruins of the Roman empire in the early centuries of the Christian era, progressively extended its scope and influence until a thousand or more years later it had attained world-wide dimensions. Upon the well-known principle that “all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” the “wild-beast” justified its Biblical name by using its power for the oppression of men in general. Now here there is pictured a complete alliance between what is left of this system in the Last Days, and the kings and rulers of all the earth, of whatever ideology or political complexion, to resist the threat to

their interests from above. In what way they are able to sense the nature of this celestial invasion, and with what kind of weapons they propose to achieve their object, is by no means clear in the Revelation passage. It is evident, however, that this vision in Revelation is a highly symbolised representation of the same event in history that is foreseen by the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah. (Ezek. 38-39 & Zech. 14) They saw the last conflict of this Age in terms of a united onslaught by the nations from the four quarters of the earth upon the earthly people of God, purified Israel, dwelling at peace in its own land, and the intervention of Heaven to save Israel, defeat the attackers, and immediately establish the Millennial kingdom. Be the details what they may, the vision here in Revelation pictures a final conflict at the end of this Age between the incoming beneficent powers of Heaven and the united powers of evil of the earth, determined to resist and prevent the introduction of a completely just and beneficent rulership over mankind. As might be expected, Heaven is the victor and the opponents are dispersed. As Isaiah (chaps. 11 & 32), says of this stupendous event and the era of peace and blessing that will follow, *“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment...the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear (reverence) of the LORD...and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places...they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain (kingdom): for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea...and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.”* (Isa. 32:1; 11:2; 32:18; 11:9; 32:17)

AOH

*To be concluded*



## **FISHING NETS**

The New Testament mentions different types of nets used in fishing. These include the small cast net that was thrown out by hand, and the large drag net that was several hundred yards long and whose two ends were laboriously hauled into shore. Many of Jesus' disciples were fishermen, and the Bible also mentions the work of maintaining the nets, including washing (Luke 5:2), spreading and drying (Ezek. 47:10), and mending. (Matt. 4:21)

## **THE GALILEE BOAT**

Jesus spent much of his time around the Sea of Galilee, and even on fishing boats in the sea. In 1985, such a boat from Jesus' time was recovered from the mud of the seabed, which was exposed during a drought. The boat would have been rowed by four men, could hold up to 15 men, and could easily have accommodated Jesus and his disciples.

*Fascinating Bible Facts, Howard & Burge*



## PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

Matt. 13:47-50



The thirteenth chapter of Matthew is a collection of six parables, and of these there are two, that of the Wheat and Tares and that of the Dragnet, which are so similar in their main principles although set against different backgrounds that they are frequently assumed to bear the same meaning or to have much the same application. This is not necessarily so. In both parables there is a gathering together of two classes, the worthy and the worthless, a process of differentiation and separation, the acceptance of the worthy for preservation and the rejection and destruction of the worthless. At a time when Christian theology insisted upon the final separation of all created beings at death into two classes, destined for heaven and hell respectively, there was not much room for discerning any difference between the two parables. It is now being increasingly realised that God is working in successive ages of earth's history to effect, first, the selection from amongst all mankind of a dedicated community, the Church, to be associated with the Lord Christ in his future work of world conversion, and second, the reconciliation to God of all of mankind who can thus be reached in the Age which has been ordained for that purpose. On this account there is latitude for the discernment of shades of difference and application in these two parables. Whilst they obviously both have reference to aspects of the Divine purpose in separating between that which is good and that which is evil, and ensuring the permanence of the one and the elimination of the other, it may well be that each parable is intended to have its impact upon one particular aspect of this twofold Divine Plan.

The Kingdom of Heaven, said Jesus, is like a dragnet that, being cast into the sea, gathered a full haul of varied fish, and was drawn to shore. The fishers proceeded to sort out their catch, gathering the useful and good fish into their baskets and throwing the worthless away. Just so, said Jesus, will it be in the end of the Age; there will have been a great gathering of worthy and worthless; the time for the cessation of gathering will come; the angels will proceed forth and effect the separation, and the worthless will be cast into a furnace of fire where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The words are few and simple; the parable as it is recorded is very brief; but there is deep dispensational truth hidden in its half-dozen sentences. This is obvious from the use of the expression "the end of the *world*" (*aion*, age, meaning an age in human history or in the development of the Divine Plan, not necessarily the end of all things terrestrial). There are four significant elements in the explanation which Jesus gave for his disciples' enlightenment and to understand the parable

aright we have to consider, first, what these elements stood for in the minds of the immediate hearers, versed as they were in the theology and expectations of Judaism, and second, what the same elements imply when set against the background of our own Christian understanding of the Divine Plan as it has been revealed in later times by the Holy Spirit. These elements are:—

- (a) The end of the age
- (b) The angels
- (c) The separation of righteous and wicked
- (d) The casting of the wicked into the fire

The physical picture which forms the substance of the parable must have been commonplace enough to the disciples. Fishers themselves, several of them, or closely associated with the fishing activities carried on around the Sea of Galilee as the remainder of them must have been, they would all readily have entered into the Master's thoughts. So often had they themselves assisted in just such an operation, going out in their boats to extend their long net, usually between two boats, over a wide stretch of water and coming steadily towards land, sweeping into its confines all living creatures in its path. Then the strenuous task of hauling the heavy net, with its living load, out of the water and up the beach to a place where they could sit down and begin to sort their catch. With what satisfaction and delight would they watch the growing pile of good fish in the baskets; with what contempt toss the worthless ones down the beach towards the water, not caring whether they went back into the lake or not, so quickly were they forgotten and the attention turned to the better specimens which were the objects of their quest. Not every variety of fish was suitable for their purpose, but everything in the water that could possibly be taken must be gathered in, so that no creature which could by any means be found of use should be missed. The purpose of the operation was to gather in all the worthy, that only the truly and demonstrably worthless should be rejected.

But Jesus introduced a new set of ideas even while the disciples' minds were still busy with the picture He had drawn for them. Not the close of a day's work, but the end of an Age! Not fishermen, but angels! Not the casting back into the sea, but into a furnace of fire! These symbols belong to an altogether different range of thought; the simple story was, after all, only a means to an end; now they must perforce turn their attention to another background with which they were at any rate equally familiar, the knowledge and instruction that had been drilled into them from childhood concerning the coming Day when God would rise up to make an end of

evil and evildoers, and usher the righteous into everlasting bliss. The usual tacit assumption of zealous Jews was that the separation at the Last Day would be in the main between Jews and Gentiles, the Jews, as the chosen people, to be ushered into eternal felicity and the Gentiles consigned to everlasting destruction. One of the purposes of this parable was to teach them that the distinction and the separation, when it did come, was not to be on the basis of racial origin but upon that of worthiness or unworthiness.

The disciples at the time knew nothing of that threefold “end of the Age” which is so familiar to New Testament students today—the respective endings of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age and the Millennial Age. They knew of one Age only, the Age in which they lived, and which they believed was to be brought to an end by the appearance of the Messiah and his holy ones, his angels, the destruction of all God’s enemies in a furnace of fire, and the exaltation of his friends, his followers, to reign over the submissive nations of earth forever. That had been the expectation of Jewry for centuries past and when Jesus explained the parable in these terms this is how they must have understood those terms. They apprehended the matter correctly enough in principle but had only a very rudimentary conception of the reality towards which our Lord was pointing.

We should expect to see this parable in more detailed and possibly more accurate form than did the disciples for we have the advantage of a much more detailed knowledge of the ages and dispensations marked out in the Divine Plan. That period of time which to the disciples was one Age, terminated by the “Last Day” and the destruction of all evil, has to us become three Ages, known generally as the Jewish Age, terminated by the ending of Jewish national existence forty years after the Crucifixion; the Gospel Age, terminated by the Second Advent, and the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom upon earth; and the Millennial Age, terminated by the end of the incorrigibly sinful and the entry into everlasting life of all redeemed and perfected humanity. The expression “end of the world” (*aión, age*) refers sometimes to one and sometimes to another of these Ages. Thus Heb. 9:26 “*Once in the end of the world hath he (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*” refers obviously to the end of the Jewish Age, the time of the First Advent. So also must 1 Cor. 10:11 “*They are written for our admonition (the early Church), upon whom the ends of the world (ages) are (have) come.*”

At the other extreme we have 1 Cor. 15:24. “*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father*” referring

undoubtedly to Jesus' surrender of his Millennial Kingship at the close of his Mediatorial work, at the end of the Millennial Age. Then there are such words as Matt. 24:3 "*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" and Matt. 24:14 "*This gospel of the kingdom shall (must) be preached in all the world for a witness...and then shall the end come*" clearly, whether the disciples realised the fact or not, applying to the end of the Gospel Age and the time of the Second Advent. To which of these three Age-endings shall the judgment of the Dragnet parable be applied?

The nature of the story affords an indication. It is a picture of the taking of fish, and fish in large quantities at that. The "fishers" are the angels, the "holy ones" who appear with the Messiah in returning glory. The general setting therefore would seem to be after the Second Advent has taken place, when the "angels" are equipped and qualified for their work. But who are these "angels" who appear so often in association with the returning Messiah at his Second Advent? The word, of course, merely means messengers. To the disciples, who knew of no Divine messengers save the glorious beings who constantly wait on the presence of God, the words of Jesus could only conjure up visions of celestial visitants coming with him to do his work. It could only have been after Pentecost that they realised the great truth that they themselves, if faithful, would be among that triumphant company that is commissioned to do the work of God upon earth during the next Age. This is an important matter. It is sometimes suggested that the angels of the heavenly courts are referred to in passages such as this, but that is mainly the consequence of traditional ideas regarding the angels of heaven, always engaged in what might be described as the extra-terrestrial works of God. When it is realised that the resurrected Church, "changed" to celestial conditions and fully equipped to engage, in association with the Lord, in the evangelistic work amongst men which is to characterise the Millennial Age, fully and completely meet the requirements of the parable, the term "angel" takes on a much wider significance. The Apostle Paul declared that "the saints shall judge the world." (1 Cor. 6:2) The Revelator speaks of the Church as living and reigning with Christ over the nations for the thousand years, which is a synonym for the Millennial Age. It is clear then that the "holy ones" who at our Lord's Second Advent and throughout the entire thousand years of his Mediatorial reign are executing all his work for and amongst men, will be the "called, and chosen, and faithful" of this Age, raised to the glory of spiritual being, resplendent in their celestial bodies. To men on earth, of course, they will be as angels; angels of the highest possible order, the constant companions of the Lord himself.

The universal gathering-in of the dragnet, therefore, well symbolises the world-wide evangelical work of the Messianic Age in which *“the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come...And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”* (Rev. 22:17) None will then be able to escape the drawing power of Christ. He himself did say *“I, if I be lifted up...will draw all men unto me.”* (John 12:32) *“They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD.”* (Jer. 31:34) And the use of fish as a symbol of humanity in the mass is appropriate and Scriptural. *“Man also knoweth not his time”* says the Preacher in Eccl. 9:12 *“as the fishes that are taken in an evil net.”* God is said to *“makest men as the fishes of the sea”* in Hab. 1:14, and Amos 4:2 has a somewhat similar allusion. And more impressive, because nearer home, is the well-known expression of Jesus in Matt. 4:19 *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* It may well be concluded, therefore, that the towing of the dragnet through the sea pictures such a work in the future day, and its being brought to shore, with the consequent separation of good and bad fish, the final judgment upon each individual man and woman as to their worthiness of everlasting life in God’s then sinless creation, or unworthiness through conscious and deliberate refusal to come into union with God and accept life from him, which refusal can only eventuate in the loss of life.

This latter alternative is pictured by the furnace of fire. What is this? Is it a refining and purifying fire, from which that which is thrown into it will be taken, cleansed and perfected? Or is it a consuming fire, burning until all that has been cast into it is consumed into ashes and is as though it had never been? Clearly the latter. There is no suggestion that the worthless fish are subjected to some remedial treatment that renders them acceptable and fit for use after all. They are already beyond hope of being put to any useful purpose, and they are cast out to be destroyed, utterly and without hope. Here again is another pointer to the interpretation of the parable. It is only at the end of the Millennial Age that what might be termed the “wastage” of God’s creation suffers the penalty of its failure to come into harmony with the Divine ideals, and in consequence is utterly consumed. This is the fire of Divine condemnation on sin and sinners, and just as, in the picture, the fishermen cast the worthless fish away only when it was clear it could serve no useful purpose, so in the Age which God has appointed for the reconciliation of “whosoever will” among all men, none will be lost eternally until it has been abundantly demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that the continued conscious existence of such could bring nothing but misery to themselves and to others. None will be cast out until God has exhausted every power at his command to bring them

into harmony with those laws which are both the rules which God has ordained for life and the principles by which alone life can be sustained.

*“There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* (v.50) As in other New Testament instances where this figure of speech is used, it pictures the impotent rage and resentment of those thus rejected. It does not imply remorse or repentance; the same allusion in the Old Testament indicates the fixed enmity and hatred of the wicked for the righteous. It is only a figure of speech; that which is cast into the fire is in no position either to wail or gnash teeth. It does serve to stress the fact that those thus barred from the light and life of the eternal state maintain their enmity and their rebellion to the last. Had there been any possibility of repentance and conversion in their hearts God would have waited, for an aeon (age) if need be, to receive them to himself. But in these cases there is no such possibility, there is no hope, and the life that will not have God comes to its inevitable end. Some there are who maintain that there will be none such, that the drawing power of God will eventually succeed in reconciling all men, without exception, to himself, so that eventually all men will be saved. Should that indeed be the happy outcome all who love the Lord will rejoice, for that is the desire of the Father himself and no one of his followers can desire less. But if so, it can only be because all such have in the exercise of their own free will and of their own volition come to him in full loyalty and dedication of life. The Scripture reveals the principles upon which God is working and the relative destinies of those who become righteous on the one hand and those who deliberately refuse to become righteous on the other; perhaps it will be found at the end that the number of those who steadfastly refuse to accept the appeal of the Lord Jesus is going to be very small, very small indeed. We can at any rate be sure that if God allows any of his created sons to go into darkness it will be because even He is powerless to keep him in the light—powerless in the face of the man’s own will. For that is a fortress which God will never take by force; allegiance and loyalty must be of voluntary yielding or not at all.

*AOH*



*Love, like the one basket of loaves and fishes, looks insufficient until you start giving it away.*

*Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*

**Published by the Bible Fellowship Union  
12 Stanley Gardens, Tring, HP23 4BS, U.K.**

email—[editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk](mailto:editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk)

[www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk](http://www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk) [www.biblestudymonthly.uk](http://www.biblestudymonthly.uk)