



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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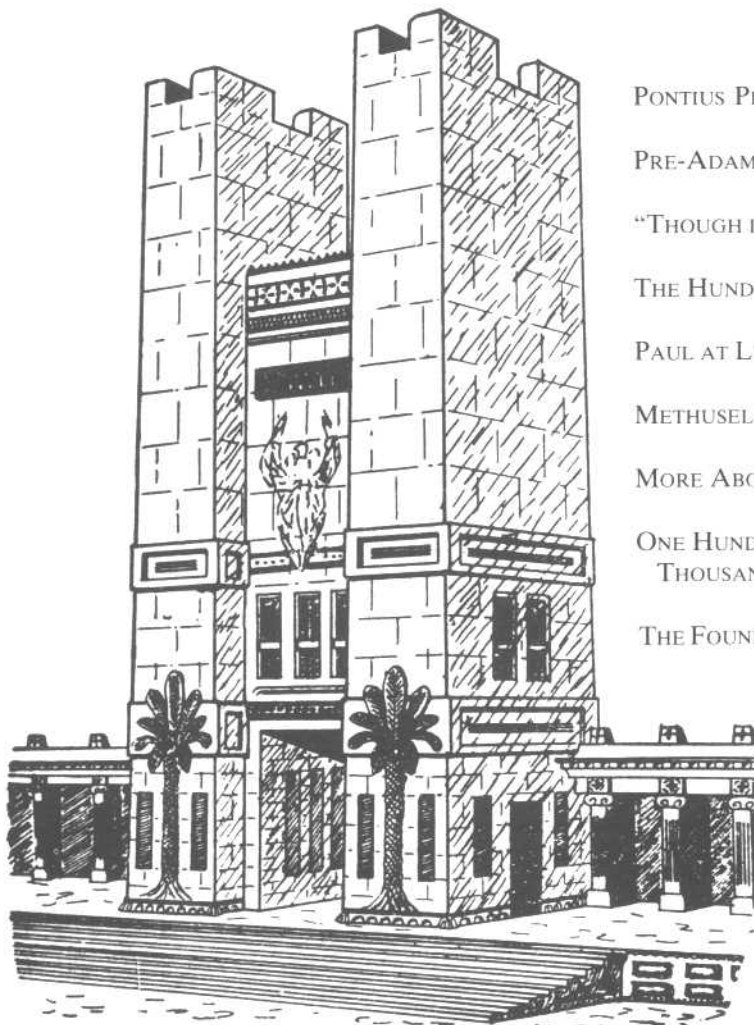
Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

*Published January 1st*

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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of charge to all who are  
genuinely interested, on  
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# Bible Study Monthly

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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and his reign of peace and justice on earth. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

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## REGARDING RENEWALS

Increasing "man-power" difficulties have rendered it advisable to make some changes to the present system of annual renewal of request to continue the "Monthly". At present one half of the readership receives the pink "renewal notice" with the March issue and the other half in September. This results in a rather top-heavy pressure of correspondence at these two periods. As from now, therefore, the renewal notices will be spread over the entire year, so that some who have been getting theirs in March may now have it either in January or May; likewise some who have been getting it in September may find it comes to them either in July or December.

May we ask everyone to try and be prompt in advising their wishes. Particularly is this desirable with respect to overseas readers, since they receive their copies about seven or eight weeks after publication due to time taken by sea mail, by which time the next issue is about to start its journey.

Before inserting a renewal notice we check if you have sent in your request for the ensuing year without being reminded so that in such case no notice will be enclosed. Despite our best endeavours, however, it frequently happens that a pink renewal is received here from overseas just after an issue containing a yellow "Reminder" notice is already on its way in a succeeding issue and there is nothing we can do about that, save to ask you to ignore such yellow reminder if you have already responded to the earlier pink renewal. In any case we do not delete any name from our list until we have taken all steps possible to be certain that you do not wish to continue.

## Gone from us

Bro. A. M. Wall (Gloucester)

*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

## NOTICES

### "Pre-Adamite Man"—an explanation

Readers of the Nov./Dec. issue will have encountered a major error on page 138 of the above article in that the second column is by mistake a repetition of that on page 127 which makes the page meaningless. A "hiccup" on the machine while printing was responsible. For this we must express regret; the error was discovered only after the entire issue had been despatched to readers. It is thought that the best way to remedy the defect is to reprint the entire article in the present issue and ask all our readers' indulgence. It is extremely rare for an incident of this nature to occur. The last major one was in 1941 when an article entitled "Lucifer the Prince of Evil" came out as "Lucifer the Prince of Peace" and had to be hastily corrected.

**An appreciation.** With the close of the year it is meet to express our sincere appreciation of the many gifts which have made possible the continuance of the "Monthly". At a time when almost all Christian journals published on a commercial basis have been compelled to close down on account of unmanageably rising costs it is a matter of real thanksgiving to our Lord that He has inspired the hearts of so many to maintain this relatively small and uninfluential avenue of service. Whilst its principal circulation is in the U.K. and U.S.A., the "Monthly" does penetrate in lesser degree to most parts of the globe—more than one hard-working missionary in a remote corner of the "third world" writes to speak of the encouragement and uplift he receives from its pages. "So mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed!"

Two sixteen-page booklets, "The Cup of the Lord" and "Watcher in Gethsemane" are available free of charge except for stamps to cover postage and packing, suitable for Easter use (enclosing in correspondence, handing to friends etc.) and will be sent on request, as below.

Two copies of each Postage UK 18p.  
 Ten copies of each Postage UK 30p; Overseas one dollar.

Page 19 of this issue features a short note reminiscent of the prophet Jonah, who is famous for having been swallowed by a great fish and come out alive. Any reader interested in following up this subject after reading the note referred to is invited to send for the 80-page booklet "The Mission of Jonah" which is a full treatment of the Book of Jonah and includes comprehensive details of the incidents referred to in the note. The booklet will be sent free of charge on receipt of British stamps to cover costs of postage and packing, as below. (Dollar notes or equivalent from overseas please).

	UK	Eire	Overseas
1 copy	13p	25p	—
2 copies	24p	40p	—
4 copies	40p	60p	One dollar



## PONTIUS PILATE

It has been bitterly remarked that the most well-known Roman in history is Pontius Pilate. That caustic comment is probably true. Nero is renowned for depravity and cruelty, Julius Caesar the man who invaded Britain and was defeated, but much more familiar is the name of this rather minor diplomatic official who had the misfortune to be Procurator (Governor) of Judea at the time of the Crucifixion. Since that day he has been universally despised and vilified, and made to carry the major share of responsibility for the condemnation of Christ. What kind of man was he?

The four Gospels record his behaviour at the trial of Jesus but do not tell us anything about him. The two Jewish historians of the period, Josephus and Philo, have a little to say and what they do say shows him in a bad light. Roman historians only refer to him in passing, so that not much is known about his life before coming to Judea, nor his subsequent career after the tragedy in which he played so prominent a part. What little is known enables a picture of the man to be drawn; the history of his ten years' administration in Judea throws some light upon his character.

Pontius Pilate was appointed Procurator of Judea by the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in A.D. 26, three years before John the Baptist appeared. He was, so far as can be determined, about thirty years of age, of Spanish-Italian blood, born at Seville in Spain, and making considerable progress in Roman government service. He was well known and esteemed at Caesar's court, enjoying the confidence both of Tiberius and Aelius Sejanus, an influential politician who at that time was the "power behind the throne".

Pilate married Claudia Procula, a granddaughter of the late Emperor Augustus Caesar, distantly related therefore to the reigning emperor Tiberius. It was Claudia Procula who sent her husband the warning message at the time of the trial. There is not much doubt that Pilate's connection by marriage with the Caesars was a factor in his rapid promotion, although when he received the intimation that he was to succeed Valerius Gratus in the administration of Judea he might well have considered it a backhanded compliment, for none of Rome's subject peoples were more difficult to govern than the Jews. It was probably with very mixed feelings that Pilate and his wife set sail from Rome to take up his new appointment.

From this point some appraisal of the man's character can be made. One of the paradoxes of history is that Pontius Pilate appears in a much more favourable light in the Gospels than he does in the writings of Jewish historians. All four

Evangelists unite in testifying that Pilate went to extreme lengths to acquit his prisoner and only when threatened with an accusation of treason to Rome did he give way. The literature of the Early Church is generally more favourable towards Pilate than it is toward the Jewish leaders of the day and there is no doubt upon whom the early Christians placed the main responsibility for the Crucifixion. Jewish writers of the time, Philo and Josephus, on the contrary, vilified him in the extreme. Since he represented the hated Roman power their attitude is understandable; the Jews were forever trying to get the governors into trouble with their superiors and often, it is true, with ample justification. Apart from Porcius Festus, who was Governor, A.D. 60-62 (and is mentioned in the Book of Acts) they were an unprincipled lot and usually out for illicit personal gain. Philo defined the administration of Pilate as one of "*corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial, endless and intolerable cruelties*". Josephus describes him as "*mercenary, avaricious, cruel and bloodthirsty, conscienceless, and yet at the decisive moment wanting in decision*". There is not much doubt that Pilate was a ruthless and somewhat obstinate man possessed of a profound contempt for the Jews. The known incidents of his administration highlight that fact. At the same time he was probably, from the viewpoint of Rome, a good governor. Tiberius is known to have been very scrupulous about the men he appointed, and the fact that Pilate lasted ten years would seem to show that there was no official dissatisfaction with his regime although he sailed perilously close to the wind at times. He involved himself in trouble at the beginning of his term of office. It was the custom for Roman troops to carry images of the Emperor on their standards, but on account of Jewish religious scruples former governors had not allowed them to be taken into Jerusalem itself. Pilate, either through ignorance or obstinacy, ordered his legionaries to carry the images into the city and this immediately provoked reaction. A number of leading Jews waited upon him at Caesarea, the official residence of the Roman governor, to plead for their removal. Pilate refused and there was a riot. He ordered his soldiers to draw their swords upon the multitude if they would not disperse and at once the Jews prostrated themselves upon the ground vowing they would suffer death rather than assent to heathen images in their Holy City. Pilate could not afford to start his new appointment with a massacre and he yielded, with bad grace. A few years later he deter-

mined to give Jerusalem a good water supply by building an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon, thirty miles south of the city. Probably thinking that a work of such public utility would be approved by all, he raided the Temple treasury to pay for it, and this provoked another riot which he put down ruthlessly with heavy loss of life. Following this, and probably not long before the events of the Crucifixion, he erected some golden shields with dedications to Caesar in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, and this time the outraged Jews sent a letter of complaint to the Emperor. Tiberius ordered Pilate to remove the shields. Altogether, by the time Jesus appeared before him, Pilate and the leading Jews were on extremely bad terms. Jesus himself referred to an otherwise unknown incident when He spoke (Luke 13. 1) of "*those Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices*". A dispassionate view of the evidence seems to indicate that he was not particularly concerned about justice, had no hesitation in using his soldiers against opposition, was indifferent to the religious observances of the community even although Rome's official policy was one of toleration, was obstinate and callous in his dealings. There is no real ground though for thinking he was personally corrupt, amenable to bribes, or that he sought to enrich himself by unjust use of his power as did most of his predecessors and successors. Several indications point to the conclusion that he was a loyal and devoted servant of the Emperor and probably in all that he did was concerned only for the interests of Rome. For the subject peoples he cared not a jot.

The behaviour of Pilate at the trial of Jesus is therefore something of an enigma. There are four Gospel accounts; between them they provide a detailed narrative, and from that narrative it is clear that this usually ruthless and impatient man used every argument and artifice he could think of to avoid a verdict of guilty. Only when he was blackmailed by the suggestion of disloyalty to Caesar did he reluctantly give way. The concern he showed for this solitary prisoner is altogether out of keeping with his known character. The man who ordered his soldiers to massacre unarmed citizens whose only crime was a protest against violation of their religious customs would hardly be likely to concern himself over the guilt or innocence of one unknown man who had already been tried and condemned by his own people. What was it that made Pilate do all that he could to release Jesus, and when he found it of no avail, issue a public disclaimer of responsibility? Surely there is another side to Pilate's character which is not readily obvious.

Consider the situation. Pilate was brought out "*early in the morning*" to meet the priests and their prisoner. This could point to Pilate having been

approached by the High Priest, Caiaphas, late the previous night with a view to an early trial and quick verdict of guilty, so that all could be over before the Passover ceremonial, due that day, began. This might very well have been the case; the Roman governor would hardly have been amenable to an early morning summons from men he normally disliked and despised unless the appointment had been pre-arranged. His formal question "*What accusation bring ye against this man?*" (Jno. 18. 29) was the normal prelude to a Roman trial and showed the priests that despite any agreement of the night before he intended reopening the entire matter. Hence their surly rejoinder "*If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him up to thee*" (vs. 30), to which Pilate replied by telling them to take the prisoner and judge him according to their own law. This did not suit his opponents, who pointed out that having no power to pass the death sentence their purpose could not be achieved. Balked of this first attempt to rid himself of the problem, Pilate went inside the Prætorium—this battle of wits having taken place on the concourse outside, since the priests did not wish to defile themselves on the Passover day by setting foot inside a Gentile building—where he had left Jesus, and talked to him in private. This was the interview at which Jesus explained the nature of his kingship; that his kingdom was not of this world, that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. But Pilate had no head, and was not in the mood, for philosophising. "*What is truth?*" he exclaimed contemptuously and went out to the waiting Jews. "*I find in him no fault at all*" he told them, and this without giving them any chance to proffer their accusations or produce their witnesses! But this second attempt met with no better success than the first. According to Luke's account (23.5) the Jews vociferously accused Jesus of incitement to tumult, from Jerusalem to Galilee. Pilate's quick mind picked on the latter word; he asked if Jesus was a Galilean. Being told that He was, Pilate saw another possible avenue of escape. His own jurisdiction extended only over Judea; Galilee was under the nominal suzerainty of Herod. Herod was in Jerusalem at the moment for the Passover. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod and told his accusers to go there and proffer their complaint.

This, the third effort, failed also. Herod refused to be involved and sent Jesus back. Pilate remembered then that it was the custom on the occasion of the Feast to release a prisoner as a symbolic act of clemency. The custom was really a Roman one in honour of the gods, but had been observed also in Judea. Once again Pilate repeated his view that no fault was to be found in the prisoner, that he would therefore scourge him and release him in observance of the custom, the scourging being

obviously a sop to the insistent demand of the Jews that Jesus be condemned. That alone highlights Pilate's disregard of the ordinary principles of justice.

The proposal was met with a roar of dissent. "*Not this man, but Barabbas*". Barabbas was a man admittedly and undoubtedly guilty of sedition and treason. Weakly, Pilate yielded and consented to the release of Barabbas. Thus ended his fourth attempt to avoid a decision.

The order of incidents in the trial is a little difficult to follow but it seems that Pilate next brought Jesus out before the crowd, arrayed in the purple robe and the crown of thorns, repeating his former statement, "*I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him*". And as Jesus approached, Pilate uttered the phrase for which he has become famous "*Behold the man!*" It is impossible to determine whether those words were spoken in admiration or contempt; certain it is that Pilate was at that moment profoundly contemptuous of the accusers, for as they vociferously shouted out "*Crucify him; crucify him*" he replied coldly "*Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him*" (Jno. 19. 6). He knew full well that they could not take and crucify anyone; that prerogative belonged only to Pilate. They knew that too, that they must rely upon the consent of the Roman to get their purpose accomplished. In a milder and more conciliatory tone, therefore, they rejoined "*We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God*".

It is significant that although no crime against Roman law was involved in such a claim, Pilate, as soon as he heard the words, was "*the more afraid*", going back into the Prætorium to ask Jesus from whence He really had come. He received no answer. To his reminder that he, the governor, had power both to crucify and to release, Jesus calmly told him that he had no power at all except it were permitted him from above, and at that Pilate was more afraid than ever. He declared once again and for the fifth time that Jesus would be released.

The priests were not defeated. They had a trump card, and now they prepared to use it. They knew where to find Pilate's vulnerable point. The former accusations were put aside; a new one brought to the front. The kingship of Christ had already been mentioned; a new cry fell upon the ears of the harassed Governor. "*If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.*"

Pilate must have heard that cry with a tremor of apprehension. Tiberius was notoriously sensitive on any question of possible treason; these same Jews had already complained once to the Emperor about him and he had received an official reprimand. Any suggestion of connivance at possible rebellion would certainly mean something

much more serious than a reprimand. He could not afford the risk. The considerations which had led him all this while to avoid the condemnation of Jesus met a powerful counter-force. He knew, now, that the priests had won.

So Pilate gave in.

There are two elements in the Gospel narratives which shed some light upon the reasons which led Pilate thus to act so much out of character. One is the fact of his very real concern on hearing that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and his consequent attempt to learn from Jesus' own lips his origin. The other is the intervention of Pilate's wife. According to Matthew, Pilate had taken his place in the "judgment seat", therefore was in the opening stage of the trial, when a hasty message came to him from Claudia "*Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things in a dream this day because of him*". The Prætorium, in which the trial was held, was in the Tower of Antonia. Pilate's official residence when in Jerusalem was in the palace which Herod had originally built for himself, half a mile away. If in fact the High Priest did visit Pilate late the previous night to discuss the trial, Claudia would have known something about it. Pilate left early in the morning for the Prætorium; his wife, awaking later and finding him gone, sent the frantic message, just as Pilate was about to open the trial.

Like most Romans, Pilate probably had at least a nominal belief in the gods. He would certainly have been well acquainted with the literary works current in his time, and he must have been familiar with the stories of gods coming down to earth in the form of men. He could hardly have viewed the God of Israel as other than one of the many gods of heaven, one perhaps solely concerned with the Jews but essentially of the same nature as those of Rome. The histories of his own people and of the Greeks told of occasions when one or another of the gods, coming to earth in the guise of some peasant or poor man, was ill-treated by those to whom he appeared, and of the vengeance the god wrought upon them in consequence. The enigma of Pilate's conduct during this eventful trial can well be explained if the calm and unruffled demeanour of Christ, his assertion that Pilate had no power against him unless it were permitted from above, the Jews' intimation that He had claimed to be the Son of God, and Claudia's anxious warning, had given rise to a real fear in the Procurator's mind that the man before him might well be one of the gods come to earth, just as they had been reported to do in former times. Had he been sure that Jesus was no more than man, Pilate would probably have had no hesitation in condemning him, innocent or guilty, and forgetting the whole matter. But he was not sure, and he feared the vengeance of the gods. So he wavered,



torn between his dread of Jupiter and his fear of Caesar, while the Jews waited, exultant.

One last gesture, one despairing effort to appease the powers of heaven, since those on earth would not be mollified. He called for water, and a bowl was brought. There, in full view of the now quiet multitude, he ceremonially washed his hands. *"I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."* And there arose a great shout, a cry that has echoed down the centuries and earned a terrible fulfilment; *"His blood be on us, and on our children"*.

*"And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."*

Little more is known of the life of Pilate after that dreadful day. Two years later he was involved in a fracas with the Samaritans. A fanatical prophet had promised to reveal the secret hiding place of some sacred objects on Mount Gerizim and a multitude had assembled. Pilate, nerves on edge and fearing an insurrection, sent his soldiers against this unarmed concourse and there was a massacre. The Samaritans appealed to Vitellius, the Governor of Syria, Pilate's superior. Vitellius ordered Pilate to return to Rome to face the Emperor. So, in disgrace, the unhappy man and his wife boarded ship for home. But Tiberius died whilst Pilate was on the voyage, and when he did reach the capital Caligula was Emperor, and what happened to Pilate no one really knows. He was no longer important enough to figure in Roman historians' works and there are only the traditions of the Early Church to go upon.

It is only to be expected that the early Christians of the first few generations would preserve among themselves some recollections relating to the fate of the man who condemned their Lord. There were Jews in Rome at the time; within a matter of ten years there were Christians. The traditions as

they have come down to us are fragmentary and somewhat contradictory; the most probable reconstruction is that Caligula was not greatly interested either in Pilate or his alleged crimes, but deprived him of office and banished him to Gaul (France) where in A.D. 41, eight years after the Crucifixion, he ended his life by his own hand. If that is indeed a true recollection, does that last desperate act indicate remorse for the part he had played or a haunting dread that he had indeed offended the gods beyond repair by his treatment of their Sent One? He must have known of the excitement in Jerusalem associated with the preaching of the Resurrection of Christ and noted how the same priestly fraternity to whose demands he had so weakly submitted proved to be powerless against the unlearned disciples now preaching that this same Jesus lived again. As a Roman, he knew only the Roman gods, but what he saw and heard in Jerusalem in the months after the Crucifixion might well have convinced him that Jesus was one sent from the gods.

Several Apocryphal books contain alleged reports of the trial, said to have been sent to Tiberius by Pilate, but none of them are likely to have any foundation in fact. There is in existence a lengthy treatise claimed to be translated from a manuscript in the Vatican library purporting to be Pilate's official report to the Emperor. Such manuscript, if it exists is most likely to be one of the "religious fictions" of the Middle Ages—many such are known. It is certainly not genuine, for it contains too many inaccuracies, betokening its author's ignorance of the conditions in Judea at the time. If in fact Pilate did make any report justifying his actions it is most unlikely that it has survived; as a document of no particular importance it would have been destroyed at the next clearout of unwanted Government records.

## Beds of Ivory

The prophet Amos condemned the luxury-loving leaders of Israel who in his day lived lives of indulgence, caring not for the hardships of the poor; *"that lie upon beds of ivory and stretch themselves upon their couches"* he says (Amos 6. 4). The accusation was evidently no figure of speech. At about the same time as Amos, or perhaps a century earlier, the Greek poet Homer described in his celebrated epic, the *Odyssey*, just such an ivory bed made for Odysseus the Greek hero.

*"Thence beginning I the bed did mould,  
Shapely and perfect and the whole inlaid  
With ivory and silver and rich gold."*

King Solomon, a century before Amos, imported ivory, among other articles of trade, probably from India. His ocean-going merchant vessels, "ships of Tarshish", took three years to make the round trip, setting out from Solomon's port of Ezion-geber, not far from the modern Israeli port of Eilat on the Red Sea. It is very possible that the ivory used by the early Greeks and referred to by Homer originally came to the West in Hebrew vessels and was the subject of commercial business between the Hebrew King and Greek merchants.

## PRE-ADAMITE MAN

*An enquiry*

A thesis which is several centuries old holds the view that before the beginning of human history as recounted in the Genesis story of Adam and the Garden of Eden there was a prior creation of human beings who fell into sin so grievous that God not only destroyed them but made the earth itself a complete ruin and desolation. The six days of Genesis and the creation of Adam constitute, it is claimed, a second creative work of God. This is generally called the "disruption"; it is based upon a variation in the understanding of Gen. 1. 2 *"and the earth was without form, and void"*. It is sometimes said, perhaps too hastily, that no important Christian doctrine is involved, but this can be open to question. The central belief of the Faith, the Ransom for All, is based upon the fact, as plainly stated by St. Paul, that *"By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, for that all have sinned"*; that man, in Paul's theology, was Adam, and before Adam there could have been no men and no sin on earth. On this account the Scriptural position is worth examination.

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, Let there be light, and there was light"*. (Gen. 1. 1-3). On the face of it, this seems to be a perfectly straightforward account of primeval creation. Man has always been conscious of two spheres, two abodes of life, heaven and earth. The Bible opens with the simple statement that God created both. But at the time indicated by the narrative the earth was chaotic and shapeless, enshrouded in darkness, no fit home for man. The first action of God was to bring light upon the cloud-enshrouded earth—not sunlight; that came later, but light sufficient for plants to grow. And so on. On this basis there would seem no need to attach other than the evident meaning of the words to the account.

Not quite so, say the advocates of the thesis. The word "was" in verse 2 should be understood in the sense of "became". God created the earth, but it later "became" waste and void and covered with darkness. God had created a race of men to inhabit the world and they had all been destroyed. Then He started again with new seas and land, new plants and animals, and finally Adam.

The origin of the idea, like so many incursions into the past, is "wrapped in mystery". An Anglo-Saxon monk at Whitby Abbey in the 7th century, Caedmon, known sometimes as the "father of English poetry", advanced something like it in a paraphrase of Genesis, although it is just possible

that he was really thinking of the destruction of mankind and desolation of the earth at the time of the Flood and the Lord starting again with Noah. But in the 17th century one Isaac de la Peyrere, a French Calvinist, in a book published in 1635, resurrected the theme and elaborated it to claim that the first chapter of Genesis in its entirety covered an initial creation and the men then created became ancestors of all Gentile nations; chapter 2 in the Eden story recorded the creation of Adam at a later date to become the ancestors of the Jews. This rather bizarre theory did not survive in its entirety but the basic idea remained in the minds of some.

The dawn of scientific enquiry in the 18th century was the unlikely cause of renewed interest in the thesis. Fossils recovered from cliffs and rocks were being examined scientifically and speculation as to their origin was rife. They appeared to be made of stone, yet obviously had once been living creatures. It was not long before—in theological circles at least—the answer was forthcoming. These were the remains of creatures that had perished in the disruption of the world before Adam was created. An elaborate picture of that world was soon drawn, all on the basis of that one word "was" in Gen. 1.2. A renowned divine, Dr. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)—incidentally leader of the movement which culminated in the creation of the Scottish Free Church in 1843—produced a complete outline of the subject in 1814, a pre-Adamite race of men destroyed on account of their sin in a general desolation of the world. He was followed in 1838 by Dr. Pye Smith and he in turn in 1864 by Dr. E. B. Pusey, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, then in 1887 by Rev. G. H. Pember in *"Earth's Earliest Ages"*, and about the same time by another notable minister, Ethelbert Bullinger. These and others promulgated the general idea that at the first the Lord created a race of men and placed Satan, not as yet a rebel against God, with a concourse of angels, to rule and teach this new earthly race. Satan and his angels rebelled and endeavoured to establish themselves as rulers without God. The earthly race sank into ungovernable sin but, unlike Adam and his children in the Bible story, were not subject to death. After a period of time the length of which was not suggested the Lord resolved the situation by banishing Satan and his followers from Heaven and confining them to the atmosphere of the earth, destroying the race of men completely and the earth with them, after which He proceeded to rebuild the earth as outlined in the six days of Genesis 1 and eventually create Adam. The



former race—since at this time belief in the immortality of the soul was well-nigh universal—being deprived by death of their fleshly bodies, were condemned to wander in the earth as “disembodied spirits”, and became the “demons” of the Old and New Testaments and the forces behind modern Spiritualism.

That this wealth of varying theories should have been derived from nothing more than the word “was” in Gen. 1. 2. is a tribute to the ingenuity of men’s minds; it is not thereby necessarily justified. Even the proponents of the claim admit that it rests on a flimsy basis, as witness the words of Pember in *“Earth’s Earliest Ages”*; “we have no records left to us; the numerous remains in primeval rocks are only those of the lower forms of creation. Yet, as we peer hopelessly into the night, a faint and unsteady gleam seems to emanate from the Scriptures in our hand, a very different light than that which they pour on other subjects, scarcely more than sufficient to make darkness visible . . . . let us consider the scanty light which the Bible seems to offer in regard to this great mystery”. Is it fair to suggest that one would expect such important matters as the nature of man’s appearance on earth, the cause of the introduction of sin, the relation of all this to the coming and death of our Lord, to rest upon something more positive than “scanty hints”, and shed more than “a faint and unsteady gleam” upon the pathway of the man of God who would be thoroughly instructed unto all good works (2 Tim. 3. 17)?

Now to the facts. The word “was” in “and the earth was without form and void” (*“hayah”* masculine and *“haythah”* feminine) is derived from the verb “to be”. When speaking of a past event or condition the meaning is “was” in the ordinary English sense of that word and as implied by the reading of Gen. 1. 2. When the Lord, having already created the earth (vs. 1) began to prepare it for human habitation, the “six days” of Gen. 1, the planet existed in a state described as being without form and void, chaotic and empty. There is no way in which the word “was” here can be rendered “had become” as required by the Disruption thesis. To bear this meaning the word has to be followed by the preposition *le*, meaning to or toward, and in this case it is not. (see Davidson’s Analytical Hebrew Lexicon, Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon, and F. F. Bruce in *“Trans. Vic. Inst.”*) There are many instances in the Old Testament illustrating this difference, as for instance:—

Gen. 3.1 “The serpent was (*hayah*) more subtil than any beast of the field.”

Job 1.1 “There was (*hayah*) a man in the land of Uz.”

Jonah 3.3 “Now Nineveh was (*haythah*) an exceeding great city”.

In the context of these texts, it is clear that “had

become” is inadmissible. In each of these instances the condition implied is that which existed at the time indicated in the narrative.

An example of the use of the word to mean “to become” with the preposition *le*, occurs in Gen. 2. 7: “and-was (*vav-hayah*) the-man (*ha-adam*) to (*le*) a-soul-living”; “man became a living soul”.

There is one instance where the A. V. translators went astray in rendering *hayah*. Gen. 3.22, recording the expulsion from Eden, has the Lord saying “the man is become (*hayah*) as one of us” (*ha-adam hayah cha-khad min-men-na*). The preposition *le* does not appear here and the correct rendering is “the man was as one of us” (i.e. sinless). (A full explanation of this verse appeared in BSM July/August 1982 P79 but in brief a literal rendering is “the man was like one of us to know good and evil, but now, this being so” (sin having intervened) “he shall not put forth his hand and take of the tree of life” . . . etc.

The expression “without form and void” occurs once elsewhere. Jeremiah (4. 23-26), seeing in vision the coming desolation of the land by the Babylonians, says, “I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void, and the heavens, and they had no light”. This whole passage is descriptive of the complete wastage of the land which he knew must come. There is one instance, Isa. 34.11, similarly descriptive of the desolation of the world at the end of this present Age when the godlessness of man brings about the collapse of the present social order; “he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness” and this of course does not refer to the literal planet but the institutions of the present order which man has created. Neither of these allusions has any connection with or similarity to Gen. 1.2.

Dr. Young’s Literal Translation has it “In the beginning of God’s preparing the heavens and the earth, the earth then has existed waste and void”; in his *“Critical Comments”* he says of this passage “Existed—this rendering is perhaps preferable to that of the Common Version ‘was’; the Hebrew verb is not simply the logical nexus ‘is’ ‘was’, etc. but the verb of existence. The thought is, that at the beginning here referred to, (in Gen. 1.1), the earth was, and had been existing, in a certain state described as waste and void . . . utterly void of light and life”.

The use of the word “*katabole*” in the New Testament (about ten times) is sometimes brought in to support the thesis. “*Katabole*”, usually translated “foundation”, means literally to cast down, lay down, or throw down. In nearly every case it refers to the foundation or beginning of the world (*kosmos*—not the literal planet, but the “world of man” the order of things existing on the earth). The argument is that it should be rendered “the casting down of the world” referring to this pro-

pounded ruin and desolation of the planet itself. In fact it refers to the laying down of a foundation, whether of a building or anything else (in 2 Macc. 2.29 it is definitely referred to a building) and hence the beginning of a work, not its destruction. The Book of Life was envisaged from the foundation, beginning, of the world (Rev. 13. 8; 17. 8); so was the prospective Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 25. 34); righteous blood was shed from that point, starting from Abel (Luke 11.50); The Father loved the Son before the foundation, beginning, of the world (Jno. 17.24); Matthew in Matt. 13.25 quotes Psal. 78.2 regarding "*parables kept secret from the foundation of the world,*" where the Greek Septuagint of that Psalm has "*arche*" meaning beginning. Most definite of all, Heb. 11.11 tells us that Sarah received strength to "conceive" (*katabole*) seed; instead of using the word for "conceive" the writer chose "*katabole*" which here should be read

as "laying down" seed, i.e., founding a genealogical line or "dynasty" as we would say. No one could argue that Sarah received strength to "disrupt" seed.

It would appear that the whole theology of human creation, the Fall, the redemption in Christ, the Ransom and its application to man, must rest upon the understanding that Adam was the first man and none preceded him. If man capable of sin, and who did sin, lived prior to Adam then the entire Plan of salvation is itself disrupted. Harmony with that Plan would seem to demand that the first chapter of Genesis is an orderly account of creation, the earth emerging from an original chaotic and formless condition, developing by steady steps until, replete with plants and animals, it received its crowning glory, man. From that point history really commenced.

## A NOTE ON THE DECREE OF CYRUS

The celebrated "*Decree of Cyrus*" in which the Persian king gave a mandate for the return of the Jews to their own land and so ended the "Babylonian Captivity" in the year 536 B.C. has often been quoted as an evidence that Cyrus recognised the hand of God in his advancement to world dominion. The decree as quoted in Ezra 1. 2 certainly reads that way. "*The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up. . .*" There is no reason to suppose that the decree as thus stated is in any way fictitious; the Jews have always claimed that their restoration was due to Cyrus' conviction that he was called of God to restore them to their own land and they point to the prophecy in Isaiah 45 where Cyrus is even mentioned by name, nearly two centuries before the event, as proof that he was foreordained to fulfil this task.

It does seem, however, that in actual practice Cyrus was a bit of a diplomat in his dealings with the gods of antiquity. Whatever his feelings may have been as to the God of Israel, he was able to express himself in very similar terms with respect to other gods of other nations. On bricks used in his day for the restoration of the Temple of Sin, the moon god, at Ur of the Chaldees, he had the following inscription impressed; some of the bricks remain to this day.

"*Sin, the illuminator of heaven and earth, with his favourite sign delivered into my hand the four quarters of the world, and I returned the gods to their shrines. The great gods have delivered all the*

*lands into my hands; the land have I caused to dwell in a peaceful habitation.*"

It seems that Cyrus was not above giving the credit for his victories to each of the gods in turn; playing for safety, perhaps, on the principle that upon this basis he could hardly fail to be right. More likely there was a hint of political expediency. He had just conquered the empire of Babylon and added it to his own, any means of conciliating the varied races and peoples now under his rule would be useful. When dealing with Israel he gave the praise to the God of Israel. When dealing with the people of Ur he gave it to their own special god, Sin, the moon-god. In each case he gave orders for the rebuilding of the national Temple.

None the less Cyrus was definitely a tool in the hand of a higher power. God truly had given him all the kingdoms of the world. More than a century before his birth the Lord through Isaiah had said of him "*he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, thou shalt be built; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid.*" And the Lord went on to say "*I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.*" (Isa. 44. 28, 45. 1-4). That passage in Isaiah is a noteworthy example of the prophetic foresight of God, but no more remarkable than his prediction through the prophet Jeremiah, who promised Israel that their captivity to Babylon would endure for seventy years and then they would be restored to their own land, all of which came to pass exactly as foretold. It is a fascinating conjecture, and a highly probable one, that Daniel showed Cyrus these prophecies and fired him with the ambition to play the part so foretold of him.

## "THOUGH IT TARRY"

A word of  
encouragement

*"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation (Hab. 3. 17-18).*

He was greatly troubled, was this preacher Habakkuk. Living and preaching six centuries before Christ when the ungodly ways of Israel were bringing upon them Divine retribution in the form of invading Babylonian armies, and seeing no outcome other than the captivity and enslavement of his people in Babylon, he besought the Lord for guidance. He knew that one day Israel would become, as their prophets had told them in times past, a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, but in their present irreligious state he could not see that day coming soon. So he went to the Lord for enlightenment. "I will watch" he said "to see what He will say unto me". And the Lord answered him in accordance with his faith, "The vision"—the fulfilment of the promise—said the Lord "is yet for an appointed time. Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry". Patient waiting, in full assurance of faith, for a lifetime if need be; that was the keynote. The prophet's heart sank as he thought of the failing faith of his people and the prospect of years to be spent in the power of an alien nation; in impassioned tones he implored "O Lord, I have heard thy speech; O Lord, preserve alive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known". But the Lord did not preserve alive his work and Israel went into captivity, and Habakkuk with them. Nevertheless he believed, and preserved his faith, and at the end of it all, when hope seemed lost, concluded the message he left for posterity with this sublime expression of conviction. Though all round should fail, and the Divine promise seem to be but a chimera which would never become reality, he would still believe, still rejoice in his Lord and joy in the God of his salvation.

Many of us are in that position today. We have, like Habakkuk, taken our stand upon the watch, set ourselves upon the tower, and waited for the coming of the kingdom. The Lord has told us the time is fixed and certain but we must wait for it. "It will surely come, it will not tarry." There is a remarkable aptness in these words of faith applied in symbol to the expectations of we who live in what so evidently are the closing years of this Age. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom"—the fig tree, Scriptural symbol of the Israel nation. Their emergence as a consecrated holy nation fully con-

verted and ready for their Divine mission was expected long since, and their establishment as a sovereign nation in 1948 heightened the belief that the time was near. But Israel is still a "kingdom of this world", not yet the people of God. The fig tree has not yet blossomed. "Neither shall fruit be in the vine". The proclamation of the call of the Church, that it is the paramount work of the Lord at this time, is not so loudly heard. "The labour of the olive shall fail"; the olive tree, taken by St. Paul in Rom. 11. 45 a symbol of God's purpose in the preparation of his two instruments of service in the next Age, Israel and the Church, seems to have receded into the background. "The flock shall be cut off (separated) from the fold"; the final gathering of the completed Church to the Lord appears to be unaccountably delayed. "And there shall be no herd in the stalls"; many had thought that by now the world of mankind would have been safely carried into the Age of blessing, but they are still under the dominion of this Age. The promise seems on the surface to have failed.

"Though it tarry, wait for it". That is the message for today. Disappointments will come; we are in a hurry to see the fulfilment of all the promises, just as our fathers were before us, and we must have patience as did they and not lose faith. "It will surely come." The unbelieving in the days of Ezekiel intoned mournfully "the days are prolonged, and every vision faileth" (Ezek. 12. 22). Came the word of the Lord in reply, clear and unequivocal: "The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision". And when at last the promise was fulfilled, and the captives in Babylon of that day found themselves back in their own land in freedom, and with a Temple and a city to rebuild, and a national policy to re-establish, it only needed a few setbacks for the doubtful and the faint-hearted to cry out "the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. 1.2). The Lord immediately put his finger on the seat of the trouble—and this is a lesson for us today when very similar conditions prevail—by demanding "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, consider your ways. Ye have sown much and bring in little. Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink but your thirst is not quenched. Ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages does so to put it into a bag with holes—why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own house".

Today we are in the same position. Unfulfilled expectations, diminishing enthusiasm as maturity succeeds youth and old age follows on maturity,



the relentless pressure of other interests and other pleasures, even the enticements of other theologies which offer excuses for lessening or turning away from the life of sacrifice and witness which is the consecrated life, all these lead us away from the building of the Lord's house. And the next step along the road is to conclude that watching and waiting for the Lord and his kingdom is not so important a thing after all, that we would be much better employed in some form of Christian activity which concentrates on worship and fellowship in the present without being concerned overmuch about the future. So the light goes out in the sanctuary of God, because Eli has gone to sleep.

A salient factor in all this is the succession of generations. The generation which caught the vision and gave life and talents and possessions to the proclamation of the message is succeeded by another and yet another which takes its stand farther and farther away from the original light and furthermore belongs to a changing world in which many of the former values are no longer relevant. It was so in the days of Israel's entry into the land. *"And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil, and forsook the Lord God of their fathers"* (Jud. 2. 8-12). They knew not what the Lord had done in past times and the mighty happenings and valiant deeds of the days of the Exodus. How could they? They were not there, and could only listen to the stories their fathers told of those eventful days. And with the arrogance of youth they discounted much of that and thought they knew better, knowing not that their own puny achievements were as nothing compared to those of their fathers in times long past. So they turned aside to gods of their own making, heedless that they had rejected the gold for the tinsel.

Today the same forces are at work. On the one hand, the ageing stalwarts of the past, holding still to the vision they saw in earlier days, certain, despite many disappointments, that they have been rightly led and all for which they look will surely come. On the other hand, the younger generation, born and brought up in a different world which the older ones for the most part frankly do not understand and with which they have little sympathy. In those past days at the beginning of the century, all men understood the language of the Christian faith and ninety-nine per cent of them went to Church. The preaching of the Gospel and proclamation of the Divine Plan was easy and an audience—a large audience—could always be gained. Today hardly anyone understands that language and only five per cent go to Church. The

results today of what is called "public witness" are a travesty of those of two generations ago. And so the temptation comes to those who would serve the Lord to change the message to suit the popular mind and win popular appeal; the sober presentation of an ordered Divine Plan which guarantees everlasting peace and righteousness on earth under the Messianic reign of the Lord Christ, preached and promulgated by those who are prepared to consecrate themselves to a lifetime of sacrifice and service that the message might go forth broadcast and worldwide, is watered down to a life of pleasant Christian fellowship and a "hail-fellow-well-met" attitude to all who can be persuaded to unite together on a basis of "look-to-Jesus-and-be-saved". Natural enough, and for all we know intended by our Lord to have its place in the execution of his plans for this present time.

For, be it remembered, the call of the Church to joint-heirship with Christ has to end some time, and after that there is only the door of invitation to the Millennial world with its opportunity for lasting terrestrial life. At some time during the progress of the events which characterise the closing years of this Age—a time in which we now live—the last members of the company destined to inherit the celestial world in union with Christ must experience that "change" which in Scripture is called the "First Resurrection". And after that there will be a great many devoted Christians left, just as sincerely devoted and loyal to their Lord as those who have gone to be with him, but never having felt or experienced the call to the consecrated life or the celestial salvation which is the characteristic of those who are "dead in Christ". Such there must be, for God has never left himself without a witness in the earth; these who understand the rudiments of the Divine Plan must surely take up the message where the "changed" Church has left it, and perhaps be used of the Lord in the same fashion as restored and converted Israel, to herald the incoming Kingdom and enter upon the work of teaching the nations. If those who are nearing the end of the way and look to an imminent union with their Lord in the heavenly mansions find that to an increasing degree those with whom they fellowship and serve seem impervious to the "High Calling of God in Christ Jesus" and yet have all the enthusiasm and desire to proclaim the message as they themselves, and wonder why, this may be the solution to the enigma.

This perhaps is what might be expected. *"He must increase, but I must decrease"*, said John the Baptist as he saw his own Age merging into the next. Now that this present Age is giving place to the one that is to follow, is it surprising to find the same situation repeating itself?

But those who are "called—and chosen—and faithful", to repeat our Lord's words, can rise

above all this. Despite the outward aspect, inside the Christian community as well as outside it "the word of the Lord remaineth true, the Lord knoweth them that are his". It is he who endures to the end who will be saved. Nothing has gone wrong with the Divine Plan; nothing wrong with our expectation of its development. Peter, nearing the end of the way and knowing he was nearing the end, besought his brethren to remain "established in the 'Present Truth'"; today the same exhortation comes with redoubled emphasis. We play our part, we pass off the scene, others follow, and the execution of the Divine Plan goes grandly on.

The prophets of olden time knew all this. They all suffered frustration, enmity, disappointment, and each went into death not having seen the fulfilment of their hopes. But they all died in faith. Look for a moment at the last words of each of them, redolent of faith in the coming of the Day of Righteousness. Says Isaiah, "*Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . . be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create*". Ezekiel: "*The name of the city from that day shall be, the Lord is there*". Daniel: "*Blessed is he that waiteth . . . thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days*". Hosea: "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death*". Joel: "*Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to genera-*

*tion*". Amos: "*They shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof*". Obadiah: "*Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's*". Micah: "*Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old*". Zephaniah: "*I will make you a name and a praise before all the people of the earth*". Zechariah: "*In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord*". Malachi: "*Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings*". Here are words of confidence and conviction echoing the faith of the prophets. These were men who served the Lord faithfully all their lives and laid themselves down at the end knowing that in a day still far away they would awaken in a world made new and see the fulfilment of all for which they had waited. Just as did the Apostle Paul when in his turn he came to the end. "*I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not only to me, but also to all them that love his appearing*". If we in our turn can say that when the time comes, then all is indeed well.

### Note on Matt. 24, 28

"For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." (Matt. 24. 28).

Travellers in Israel have often remarked on the keenness of sight which characterises the several species of eagle and vulture which formerly abounded, and are still to be found, in the country. Vivid descriptions have been written of occasions when a beast of burden has fallen by the wayside, and although a second previously the sky has been clear in every direction, the animal has hardly become still when far in the heavens appears a black speck—then another, and another—birds of prey travelling with incredible speed to the victim their marvellous power of vision has revealed to them. Thus in drawing attention to that predominant characteristic of the eagle which stamped it out above all other denizens of the air, our Lord inculcated a lesson which must be indelibly impressed upon the mind if Christ's presence in its early stages is to be discerned.

"Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24. 42.). As the eagles can see, as it were by supernatural sight, their prey afar off and come, first in ones and twos, and then in greater numbers to the centre of attraction, so must the disciples of Christ, watching for his coming, expect to see the evidences with a sight which is superior to the natural, and come quickly in concert with others who also have seen. Hence the constant exhortation to watchfulness—not a continual gazing into the physical heavens and an anxious scanning of every cloud that drifts across the sky, lest it be the one which shall cleave asunder to reveal the returning Lord with his attendant angels. Nothing so material as that. The call is to spiritual watchfulness, that a clear understanding of the manner of Christ's manifestation may pave the way to a full and complete acceptance of the reality of his presence when that fact is revealed. (selected).

He who would continue to be taught of the Lord must continue to listen for his voice, continue to be in the hearing and obeying attitude of heart. The difficulty with some is that their own wills are not fully extinct, dead—that their consecration is not

complete; hence while consecrated enough to wish not to disobey the Lord's voice, they have certain ideas of their own respecting what his voice should say.



## THE HUNDREDTH PSALM

This psalm is one to be sung before the Throne of God. It is an expression of worship designed to be uttered in the Divine Presence. It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, his glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold him by the eye of faith. This Psalm is one of those "spiritual songs" written aforetime for our encouragement and strength, and it is in the spirit of songs such as this that we can, each one of us, "appear before God in Zion".

Now it is because this is a Psalm to be sung in God's presence that it opens with praise, and more than that, with jubilant praise. No restrained, subdued harmony of quiet notes, this. No softly sung solo, audible to the ears of the faithful few and reaching no farther. This is a universal acclamation of joy, resounding to the ends of the earth. *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with thanksgiving"*. The call is a general one; all peoples, nations and languages are bidden to join in this anthem of praise. Gladness and thanksgiving is the keynote; it would seem that sorrow and sighing have fled away. In this we have the key to the application of the Psalm dispensationally. It fits no Age so well as the Millennial Age, the day of the Kingdom of God upon earth, the day when "the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth". (Psa. 96. 13). Then will be fulfilled the words of Isaiah "It shall be said in that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (Isa. 25. 9). That day is to be one of universal rejoicing and the words of this Psalm will find their richest fulfilment in its light.

But although the words are thus shown to be specially applicable to that future day of blessedness there must be remembered that they can have and do have a rich fulfilment now. True, the nations do not now make a joyful noise unto the Lord neither do all peoples come into his presence with thanksgiving. It would be more correct to say of them that they make a discordant noise unto the god of this world and enter into his slavery with lamentation. But in this world of to-day, dark and evil as it is, there do exist outposts of the new Kingdom, little communities of God's ambassadors, ministers of reconciliation. Because those ambassadors represent the new world that shall be, they

must needs accept the obligation and privilege of fulfilling the exhortation in this psalm, of making a joyful noise before the Lord and coming into his presence with thanksgiving.

In the literal sphere audible praise occupies a very important place in Christian worship. There are many who cannot take place in discourse and study, or cannot offer and lead in prayer, who can join with all their heart and soul in the voicing of praise. What is usually termed a "praise service", one in which the entire congregation joins in the singing of one favourite hymn after another, is occasionally despised or spoken lightly of, by some, but it is in reality a very important and profitable form of corporate worship and fellowship. Such a service, well conducted, is a spiritual stimulus to many devoted souls whose voices are otherwise rarely heard in the assemblies. And if those voices are sometimes a little out of tune, or grate somewhat harshly upon the ear of one who has been trained to appreciate the technique of good music, of what real consequence is that? We may be sure that by the time those imperfectly rendered songs have mounted the heights and echoed through the halls of Heaven all the harshness and lack of tune has been smoothed away and only the perfect rhythm of pure praise remains.

We need not be afraid of heartiness in our songs of praise. There is a dignity about the Truth but it is not the dignity of a cold, lifeless statue. It is the dignity of a warm, vibrant, living thing, animating all with which it comes in contact and ennobling all that it touches. So when the situation calls for praise to be loud, then let the praise be loud. "Praise him upon the loud cymbals" said the Psalmist, and then, upon reflection, decided that he was not being thorough-going enough, and so "Praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals" he concluded (Psa. 150. 5). It was something of this that the Apostle must have had in mind when he spoke of our "singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord" (Eph. 5. 19) for there are high-sounding cymbals in our hearts too, and even although they are of a kind that only God can hear they are there to be used.

It is now that a new note of urgency appears in the Psalm. "Know ye", cries the singer, *"know ye, that the Lord, he is God. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture"*. These sentiments do not command general acceptance to-day. To an increasing degree men endeavour to persuade themselves that they owe nothing to God, no need of gratitude for the blessings of life and intelligence, no acknowledgment of the rightness of his

laws, no service and no praise. They will not know the Lord, that He is God, and as they gather together to worship at the shrine of Darwin they chant in unison "it is we that hath made us, we ourselves". God looks down from his Heaven upon them. Who can doubt that there is a gentle, indulgent smile of tolerance as He watches these self-opinionated and so ignorant children whose whole world revolves around their own constricted circle of vision. They will know better one day, and God is quite content to wait.

These verses, also, then, point to the future Age as the time of their application. It is then that men will know that the Lord is God; then that the man-made theories of modernism and humanism and every other "ism" that at present "darkens counsel without knowledge" will dissolve and vanish away like the early morning mists before the sun, and men come to realise at last that they live, and move, and have their being, in God. Then it is they become conscious of the great truth that they are the sheep of his pasture. The symbol of the shepherd is the predominant one of the Millennial Age. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd . . . and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40. 11). Men will realise that relationship between themselves and their God, and will, for the most part at any rate, come willingly under that rule of the iron rod which is the rule of the shepherding rod, a firm and wise, and yet a loving and benevolent guidance towards God's way of life.

What wonder then that the Psalmist, seeing these things, sings exultantly "*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good, and his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations*". There are several "gates" into which, in a metaphorical sense, man may enter and come face to face with God. In the days of Israel there was a Tabernacle, a tent of curtains with a surrounding enclosure, and at the eastern end of that enclosure a "gate", a way of entry to the sacred mysteries that lay within. But not any man of Israel could enter by that gate; only the Levites. Thus was pictured the great truth that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11. 6). That gate represented the entrance to the condition of justification by faith enjoyed by those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour. To such the world has commenced to be left behind; they are pressing for-

ward to a life of service for God. It is with thanksgiving and praise that the advance is made and such can very truly "enter into his gates" in that attitude of mind. But inside the "court" of the Tabernacle another "gate", the "porch" or "door" of the tent itself, stands before the believer, and entrance through that door denotes consecration unto death, a presenting our whole selves living offerings, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service (Rom. 12. 1). Even here the progress is not ended, for the sequel to that consecrated life is entrance into "Heaven itself" through yet another door, the "veil" which is in the Tabernacle dividing the Holy from the Most Holy. The believer, progressing from sin to righteousness and from time to eternity, must pass these "three" gates in succession, but he has good reason to pass through them all with thanksgiving and praise.

There are gates, too, through which mankind will be invited to pass, when the due time has come. "Open ye the gates" cries the prophet (Isa. 26. 2) "that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in". What gates are these? They are the gates of the Millennial Age, the portals through which men will pass from the darkness of this present evil world to the light and warmth of the future Kingdom. John the Revelator in his vision saw the new Jerusalem come down to earth and those gates flung open that all of mankind—save the unclean, the wilfully wicked—could enter in. They will enter with thanksgiving and praise. "*The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*". (Isa. 35. 10).

So, at long last, men will realise that "*the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations*". Goodness, mercy, truth; these are the distinguishing characteristics of the Divine dealings with men during the Millennial Age. "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other," sang the Psalmist (Psa. 85. 10), and Isaiah, foreseeing the eventual outcome of the Divine Plan, cried ecstatically "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32. 17). One great song of universal praise and thanksgiving will ascend to the Father when at length all men have tasted of his mercies, sin has been driven away, and the Lord Jesus has said to his redeemed ones "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

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Children with "wonder" minds can always see much more in life than those who are coldly calculating in their approach to things. Children of God with "wonder" minds can always see in the

glowing words and thoughts of Paul more than those who are coldly statistical in their definitions of truth.

## PAUL AT LYSTRA

*A story of  
the Apostle Paul*

It was not the mere fact that he was speaking to a great crowd which impressed Paul with a sense of exhilaration. It was something else, an indefinable presence which seemed to be overshadowing him, waiting to exert power in some momentous fashion. True, this concourse in which the men and women of Lystra had been brought together in order to hear the message of Paul and Barnabas was a noteworthy thing in a city composed almost entirely of Lycaonians, neither Jews, Roman nor even Greeks, and owing only scanty allegiance to the Roman Empire anyway. As the Apostle looked down upon the upturned faces beneath him and observed the attention with which the people hung on his words, and their apparent receptivity of the Gospel message, he must mentally have compared them with the cities he had already visited. At Antioch of Pisidia he and Barnabas, attending the synagogue services like all good Jews, had been invited to address the congregation of the faithful. As here, so there, he had received the close attention of his hearers, Jews of the Dispersion, Hellenistic Jews for the most part. Warming to his subject, he had given them a rousing sermon which took them back to the birth of their nation at the coming out from Egypt and led to the time of their famous King David and the promises of God which centred in David and David's seed. From that it was a simple thing to tell them of the events which had taken place in Judea in their own day, of the coming of John the Baptist and then of Jesus of Nazareth, of his life and untimely death, of his innocence and unjust condemnation. Having thus gained their interest, in his own masterly fashion Paul had connected the giving of the promise to David, that of his seed God would raise up to Israel a Saviour, with the fulfilment of that promise in Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead in order that He might accomplish the salvation foretold. Then in his own inimitable fashion he had issued the ringing challenge "*Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, to you is the word of this salvation sent*". As, now, Paul's gaze roamed over the crowd at Lystra hanging on his words, memory must have flickered back to Antioch, how he had laboured hard to present his message to his Jewish brethren, only to find that the Gentiles were the more receptive, asking for more of these words to be preached the next Sabbath, so that when the time came he found gathered "*almost the whole city together to hear the word of God*". Again he felt the surge of triumph which flooded his mind as Jews and Gentiles alike acknowledged their acceptance of the message and the call, professed their faith in Jesus the Saviour

and came together in that spontaneous Christian fellowship which developed into the Church of Antioch at Pisidia. And again he felt the bitter disappointment when the unbelieving Jews, determined to get rid of him, made representations to the civil authorities and had him, with Barnabas, expelled from the city. Here at Lystra, speaking now to just such an attentive audience as he had first found at Antioch, he wondered if events were going to repeat themselves. Expelled from Antioch, he and Barnabas had trudged sixty miles along the high road to Iconium where again they went into the synagogue. Again they were invited to speak, again found a great multitude of both Jews and Gentiles believing—and again a vicious opposition built up by those who did not believe, so that they were constrained to leave the newly formed Church of Iconium and take the high road still farther into the unknown. Was Lystra to repeat the heart breaking sequence and send them once more upon their way with yet another group of immature believers in Christ left to grow in the faith as best they could?

Once more Paul felt that quick stab of feeling, the certainty that this time there was a difference. The power of the Spirit was moving in a different direction; God about to manifest himself in a manner not yet experienced. Paul's mind was still upon his subject, the clarity of his exposition unimpaired and the word finding its way into hearts and minds, but apart from a relatively few Jews this audience was composed of men of another race, and Paul could not be sure to what extent the fundamentals of his appeal were being understood. Was he talking to them in a language they could understand? Did the story of a dying and resurrected Saviour, the fulfilment of Divine promise and the embodiment of Divine purpose, mean as much to them as it had done to the Scripture-trained Jews and proselytes of Antioch and Iconium? That was the question which oppressed his mind as his glance swept over the throng, and it was when that glance intercepted and was arrested by a gaze equally compelling that Paul suddenly knew why and in what manner this day was going to be different.

The man lay there, on a little strip of matting, twisted feet hunched up underneath an ungainly body, right in the front line of the crowd just as he had been dumped by his friends. The trouble was obvious; his feet and legs were hopelessly deformed and had evidently been so from birth. From babyhood to manhood he had never walked, never stood on his own two feet, always had to be carried from place to place or make his own way by labourious and painful crawling. But it was not his



misshapen limbs which caught and held the Apostle's glance; it was his eyes, fixed upon the preacher with a burning, painful intensity which told more than any eloquent speech how much the spoken words meant to him. In that one moment of time a link was forged between the two men which excluded all else, a link which immediately became a channel for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul had stopped speaking—abruptly broken off in mid-sentence. The crowd stood rigid with attention. Those eyes were fixed on him still, eyes mute with unspoken question and appeal—and with something else. Paul could see it; faith reaching out towards the deliverance it already knew would surely come. Paul realised within himself that the time was at hand for a demonstration of the reality of that saving power inherent in the risen Christ about which he had been discoursing to these Lycaonians.

Slowly Paul raised his hand until he was pointing directly at the afflicted man. The onlookers watched, fascinated. He saw, first wonderment, then hope, last of all certainty flicker into those steadfast eyes. He saw an unconscious effort to move those useless limbs . . . . *"Stand upright on thy feet!"* The command rang out over the heads of the audience. The crowd at the back surged and jostled to see what was going on. Those near the cripple gazed in fascinated attention. The man looked around at the curious faces, made a little movement of his hands, stretched his body—and got to his feet. For a moment he stood, uncertainly. Then, he took a few faltering steps: his confidence grew, he turned towards the crowd and in a surge of emotion leaped into the air. He wheeled back towards the watching Apostle and raised his hands high in the air in acknowledgment and gratitude. A hubbub of excited comment arose from the crowd . . . .

This man was healed because he had faith to be healed. So says St. Luke in his chronicle of the events. There were no Christians as yet in Lystra; this was the first impact of the Christian evangel on the city, so the faith this man manifested was not as yet an instructed faith in Christ. The pagan gods of Lystra could not and did not heal; it was not faith in them which effected the healing. The man must have been a Jew, a Jew of the Dispersion, and the faith he had must have been faith in the God of Israel. But there is more to it than that. The account says that Paul perceived *"that he hath faith to be healed"*. His faith told him that the power by which alone he could be healed was of God but through the risen Christ whom this visitor to his city was preaching. It was not until the cripple realised for himself and accepted for himself the fact that God was in Christ reaching out to the world of men for reconciliation and healing, whether of mind or body, that he felt the life-giving

power energise his muscles and he was able to stand, and leap, and glorify God.

This was perhaps the first outward demonstration in St. Paul's career of the fundamental truth which he came to understand so well and which forms the basis of all his teaching, that life comes to man from God through Christ, who is the manifestation of God to man and the only channel through which life can come. There are so many occasions in the Book of Acts where the Apostles insist that there can be no life or salvation without faith in and acceptance of Christ. Jesus himself laid down the same principle. *"He that hath the Son hath life, but he that hath not the Son shall not see life"*. One might ask why this apparently arbitrary dictum should be so stressed. Why must it be that *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved"*? (Rom. 10. 10).

The answer is that because all life comes in the first place from God, and all life is sustained by God, and Jesus is the channel by which all that is of God comes to man, faith and belief is the only means by which that channel can be opened into the mind and heart and body of man. The degree of subnormal life which unregenerate men now possess is like that which the cripple had before his healing—defective, incapable of full expression and full use, forever restraining the man from attaining his full development. Later on Paul was to enshrine this principle in one of his grandest utterances. *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 6. 23).

The reaction of the people gave Paul his opportunity to drive home the deeper aspects of this truth. After the first moment of stunned silence, pandemonium broke loose. Never before had such happening occurred in their city. There could only be one explanation. *"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."* It is to be feared that Paul's preaching had not as yet reconciled them to the falsity of their many gods. They jumped to the conclusion that Barnabas was Zeus, the principal god in the Greek pantheon, and Paul, because he did most of the speaking, was Hermes, the messenger of the gods. (These are the Greek names as given by St. Luke in the original; the A.V. has adopted the Latin equivalents, Jupiter and Mercurius). Without more ado the High Priest of Zeus set about acknowledging this signal honour conferred upon the city by collecting oxen and garlands and preparing to offer sacrifice. His enthusiasm was probably considerably increased by the fact that, according to the ancient historians, Zeus had once before, many ages previously, visited the district in the guise of an old man and had been treated rather unceremoniously by the citizens. Finding only one old couple who would give him hospitality Zeus took his revenge in the fashion quite normal with

the proverbially short-tempered supreme god of Greece. The priests and people of Lystra were not going to be caught a second time, and so Paul and Barnabas found to their dismay that they were being accorded full divine honours. The sheer horror with which Paul and Barnabas must have realised this situation can perhaps be fully appreciated only by members of the Jewish race brought up, like Paul and Barnabas, to believe in the unity of God who alone is the object of all worship. To be adored as gods must have sent a wave of revulsion through every fibre of their being, and the instinctive reaction is immediately understandable and in full accord with what might be expected. Directly the Apostles realised what was happening they ran in among the people, crying out "*Why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways; nevertheless He left not himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with food and gladness*" (Acts 14. 15-17). A wonderful sermon that, and the more telling because of the circumstances under which it was delivered. Perhaps as a sermon it is as appropriate to the Twentieth Century as it was to the First. The God whom Paul preached was not as the gods of the Greeks, as Zeus and Kronos and Uranus and the rest of them, heedless of the welfare and happiness of mankind, capricious, unjust, lustful, cruel. The stories of Greek mythology show how far the pagans were from thinking of God as inherently good, benevolent, loving, planning and working for the welfare of mankind. But that was God as Paul saw him and as he preached him. Later on as his theology developed he was able to show—as he does show us in his Epistles—how that, in Christ and by means of Christ, the Father will reconcile to himself every one who has any capacity whatsoever for right doing; how that the experiences of this present life are but one part of a mighty purpose which is being steadily worked out with the object of preparing and fitting, for his ultimately designed place in God's creation, every one to whom God has given the blessing of life, and will elect to use that in God's way. He whom I preach, Paul might have said, has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth but would that he turns from his evil ways and lives; made man for a definite purpose and to occupy a definite place in his

creation and works to see that purpose accomplished.

So the little group of converts at Lystra entered into the joy and zeal of their new fellowship in the light of this revelation of the nature of God. It was not long before the revengeful Jews from Antioch and Iconium had traced Paul to Lystra and inflamed the people against him. Those who yesterday had been about to worship him as a god were now found stoning him and leaving him for dead. But Paul was not to be disposed of so easily. He was soon on his way to Derbe, twenty miles distant, where he preached again and waited until tempers had cooled. It was at Derbe that he first made the acquaintance of Gaius, who was probably converted at this visit and afterwards became one of the Apostle's travelling companions in Greece.

Derbe was the end of the journey. The missionaries had been away from their home church for more than a year and probably Paul felt that it was time to report progress. They retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia and so to the sea coast, confirming the disciples in each city "*and exhorting them to continue in the faith*". From the port of Attalia they took ship the two hundred and fifty miles back to Antioch in Syria, where their brethren eagerly awaited them.

It was not a long journey, as journeys go. About eleven hundred miles altogether—not much more than a trip say from London to Cardiff, thence to Glasgow and back to London. But it was the first missionary enterprise of Christian evangelists and it resulted in the establishment of at least half a dozen or more new centres from which the Christian faith would afterwards extend in turn. In later days Gaius of Derbe and Timothy of Lystra were to become well known in the Church as men who laboured abroad in the work of the Gospel, co-workers with the great Apostle. Paul and Barnabas must have set foot in the familiar streets of Antioch again with a feeling that it had all been well worth while; they had tasted success and failure, acceptance and opposition, the joys of Christian fellowship and the hardships of persecution. They had sown the seed; now it must be left to God who giveth the increase. That must surely have been their inmost thought as they rehearsed before the Church "*all that God had done with them*", and how in this first missionary journey He had "*opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*".

(To be continued)

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It was both fact and action in Paul's own life and character before it found its way to his manuscript, and because he lived intensely with his Lord, his

pen could write with an intense intimacy about those things he received from his Lord and which he strove so enthusiastically to write for his friends.



## METHUSELAH

The antediluvian patriarch Methuselah, son of Enoch, is chiefly noted for living longer than any other man, a total of nine hundred and sixty-nine years. This is all that is recorded of him in the Bible, although Jewish legend can add a little more.

Seventy or more years ago a suggestion was mooted, by one Arthur Gook in a booklet entitled "Can a young man trust his Bible?" to the effect that the long life of Methuselah was a witness to the world of that day of the inevitable coming of the judgment of the Flood. The meaning of his name, it was claimed, was "*when he is dead, it shall be sent*". Thus, so went the argument, the longer he lived the more cogent the warning, and the fact that he lived longer than any other demonstrated the forbearance of God until the last possible moment. According to the Masoretic chronology of Genesis, which is embodied in the Authorised Version, he is represented as dying in the very year of the Flood.

Arthur Gook evidently based his suggestion upon the Hebrew words *muth*, meaning to die, cause to die, be dead, and *shalach*, a verb "to send", as sending an arrow from a bow, thus making "*Muth-u-shalach*" which correctly reproduces the consonants of the name (the last letter of his name in the Hebrew Received Text is *caph* (ch) and not *hay* (h) as in the A.V.). This would then mean "be dead—send" which unless elaborated as it was in the booklet, is not very informative. Unfortunately for the theory, however, one important point was overlooked. Methuselah was not a Hebrew, and he lived nearly three thousand years before the Hebrew language came into existence. If his name was intended to have any meaning at all, it would have been derived from the language of the day in which he did live, before the Flood.

There is no doubt that the ancients gave significance to names. Thus the Hebrew Je-ho-shua (Joshua in the AV) means "Jehovah saves". Transliterated into Greek the name becomes Iesus and transliterated again into English it is Jesus. So Hebrew Miriam becomes Greek Mariam and thence English Mary. The spelling of the name changes as it passes from language to language but its meaning, if any, must be that which it bore in the language from which it originated.

Because that language in this case is unknown, there can be no certainty. It is possible though to embark upon a little exercise in possibilities and probabilities. The admitted earliest written language at present known is that of the Sumerians, descendants of Ham, son of Noah, in about the

middle of the second millennium B.C. This was only about seven centuries after the Flood and not far from the time when all the earth spoke "*one language and one speech*" (Gen. 11.1). It could be thought hardly likely that the antediluvian language spoken by Noah and his sons had changed much in that short time and it might well be that archaic Sumerian is not very far removed from that earlier tongue. In that case the Sumerian meaning of the name might form a better basis for assessing its significance, if any. In that language the genetic word for men or cattle in the plural is *adamutu* (from which comes the Hebrew word "adam" for man) and from *adamutu* is derived *mutu* for "husband" and *matu* as a prefix denoting men or women in the plural. The second part of the name could well be met by *u-sal-la* (peace) and suffix *ka*, a voice, to speak, to proclaim. Thus "Methuselach" transliterated back into Sumerian would appear as *Matu-usalla-ka*, literally "men of peace proclaiming" or as would be rendered in English, "preachers of peace", or possibly "preacher of peace". Noah his grandson is said in 2 Pet. 2.5 to have been a "preacher of righteousness" and this expression in Sumerian would be *matu-dug-ka*, a very similar word.

If in fact Methuselah's name did bear this significance—there can be no certainty—it does evoke an interesting reflection. Enoch his father was devoted to God; he "walked with God" according to Gen. 5.24. Methuselah's son Lamech was a godly man as shown by Gen. 5.29. His grandson Noah was also and had Divine approval (Gen. 6.8-9). It could be a reasonable assumption that Methuselah himself, in this God-fearing line, shared and conveyed the same faith from father to son. If this be conceded, then from at least the early days of Enoch to the time of Noah, something like a thousand years of history, there was a consistent witness to God and righteousness in the world before the Flood.

There is some support for this conclusion in Jewish legends. Whilst mere tradition should not be taken too seriously, there is usually some basis of truth hidden at the kernel of such stories, handed down through the ages and being constantly modified and changed in the process. Nevertheless tradition does have some value. The British legend of St. George and the dragon can be traced back to the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda, in which the hero delivered the maiden from the sea-monster of Joppa, and from that myth back to the story of Jonah and the great fish as narrated in the Bible. In this case the old traditions of Israel (preserved in this case mainly

in the apocryphal Book of Enoch) depict Methuselah in this light. He is said to have been charged by his father Enoch to preserve the sacred books for future generations and to have received a vision of the coming Flood, whereupon he called together all his brothers to warn them. Later on his son Lamech at the birth of Noah came to him in great distress because of the striking appearance of his newly-born son, whereupon Methuselah took a journey to the ends of the earth to his father Enoch to seek advice and was given the full story of the coming Flood and the part the child Noah was destined to play. All legendary but at least tending to show that in the traditions of Israel Methuselah was credited with faith.

It may have been, then, that there was a nucleus

of faithful believers almost up to the end in a world that had become so hopelessly corrupt that at the last God looked down and "*saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*". So God sent the Flood.

Methuselah, if righteous, must have been dead by then. According to the Septuagint (Greek Bible) chronology, which is nowadays established to be nearer the truth, he died six years before the Flood, and his son Lamech pre-deceased him. Name or no name, if that was the case and he the last righteous man to die before the cataclysm, he was indeed a sign to that generation. There was at least a final six years for repentance. But no one repented. And they all perished.

### MORE ABOUT JONAH

If the Bible contained a story about a dog who was swallowed by a fish and when his master caught and opened the fish the dog jumped out barking and fully alive, critics would scoff and point to it as another example of fictitious and totally incredible Bible stories. Yet so it has happened in our own day and time.

The London "*Daily Express*" of 8 October 1987 carried the story as it was broadcast a few days previously by Moscow radio. It appears that a fisherman was fishing on one side of the Pechora river in Soviet Russia, some seven hundred miles east of Moscow. His dog was swimming across when it was attacked and swallowed by a monster pike six feet long. The fisherman caught the pike and cut it open. Out jumped the dog, barking and unhurt.

That such things can happen is well attested. Twenty-five years ago a schoolboy in India was locked in a woodshed for some petty misdemeanour and when the schoolmaster came to release him it was found that he had been swallowed whole by a huge boa-constrictor unknown to have been in the shed. The reptile was killed and the boy released alive, although in this case he later died in hospital.

Coming nearer to the story of Jonah, it is a known fact that whales and other large sea-creatures can and do swallow other living denizens of the seas and sometime eject them alive. The London "*Daily Mail*" of 31 December 1964 tells of a Russian whaler taking from the stomach of a whale

a still living giant squid twice the size of a man and weighing four hundredweight. Hans Hass, the celebrated undersea explorer, in his book "*We come from the sea*" (London 1958) records his experience with a fifty-foot whale off the Azores, in the stomach of which were found two sharks, one ten feet and the other eight feet long. A giant tunny fish forty-five feet long captured off the Florida coast in 1917 contained a four hundred pound octopus and another unknown fish weighing three-quarters of a ton—these were dead when extricated.

The two factually established cases of modern Jonahs are those of Marshall Jenkins, seaman in a U.S.A. whaler, swallowed by a twenty-foot whale in the Mediterranean in 1758 and disgorged almost at once not much the worse, and James Bartley in a British whaler operating near the Falkland Islands in 1891, discovered alive in the whale's stomach when his comrades were cutting it up twenty-four hours later. Bartley is known to have lived thirty or more years after his experience. Both these incidents made news—the latter in newspapers all over the world, and the subject of scientific enquiry with results establishing its truth in both the French scientific journal "*Journal des Debats*" of 25 August 1891 and the British "*Literary Digest*" of 4 April 1896.

Jonah himself, so far as is known, still holds the record. He survived three days inside the great fish before getting out!

The old Lollards were called "Holdfasts", not only because of their firmness under persecution, but of their strong grasp of the truth. Coleridge said, with a practical aptness unusual with him: "What does not withstand has no standing-ground". "Hold fast, then, the form of sound

words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." Be modest, unostentatious in all that is your own, willing to concede everything you have a right to yield, but be scrupulous and immovable about all that is Christ's.

## ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR THOUSAND

*"And I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of Israel" (Rev. 7.4).*

Literal or symbolic? Many have been the discussions on the implications of this rather debatable expression. The argument that it refers to literal Israel is rather vitiated by the fact that Revelation is predominantly an exposition of Christian history, in which Christ stands revealing the story of the conflict between his Church and the powers of evil up to and into the Millennial Age. And a good many factors in the chapter point to the Church of the present Age as pictured in symbol by this obviously idealised picture of the twelve tribes of Israel, numbering precisely twelve thousand from each tribe; these will be alluded to hereafter. At this moment it is necessary to commence at the beginning.

The chapter opens by picturing the powers of evil poised to attack; they are restrained by Divine command until *"the servants of God"* have been *"sealed in their foreheads"*. The sealing proceeds until the destined number is complete but nothing more is said about these *"servants of God"* except that they number twelve times twelve thousand and likened to the twelve tribes of Israel. Following this comes a sequel which shows an innumerable multitude who have passed through great tribulation and emerge into the glory of the Divine presence, so the key point which needs to be elucidated is the meaning of the number and the tribes.

Before doing this one has to think of the background of the vision. Here are four angels holding back the four winds of heaven which are poised to *"hurt"* the earth and the sea. What does this signify?

Says John *"I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree"* (Rev. 7.1). Another angel arises from the east having a mission to *"seal the servants of our God in their foreheads"* and until this sealing is completed the winds may not be let loose. In ancient lore, long before Israel existed as a nation, it was believed that the winds of earth were controlled by angelic powers situated above earth's *"four corners"*, and the Hebrews preserved this conception. Thus in Jer. 49. 36. the Lord brings judgment upon Elam by sending the four winds from the four corners of the earth to destroy her. In Dan. 7.2 the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea and in consequence four diverse beasts rose up out of the sea and played their part in the Divine drama; since the beginning of the Christian era this latter vision has been almost

universally accepted as a prophetic picture of the four universal empires of men which have exercised control in the Biblical world from Daniel's day to the present. Hence the four winds here well picture those elements of human rulership which have determined the policies which now, at the last, are bringing the world social order to destruction. But that destruction is to be delayed until the work of the Lord with his Church, is complete. The sealing—branding with a mark as of the ownership of a slave—is to be finished first. The calling and perfecting and translating to the heavenly realm of those who are truly Christ's precedes the letting loose of the four winds which will then complete the breaking down of the present world system. The winds will blow upon the earth (the ordered and orderly sections of society and the governments); the sea (the restless and lawless elements, striving for mastery—Isa. 57.20) and the trees (the upright and righteously inclined of mankind—Psa. 1. 1-3—those who have not answered or heard the call to joint-heirship with Christ and so not included in the *"sealed"*) and thus every section of world society will be affected by the *"Time of Trouble"* which Jesus in Matt. 24 predicted would come upon the world at this time preparatory to the setting up of his Kingdom of peace and justice and righteousness.

It has been suggested that the sealing consists of the impressing upon the mind an intellectual understanding of Divine truth, of the Divine Plan, but there must be something more fundamental than that in it. The allusion relates to the ancient practice of branding temple slaves with the name of the temple god, so denoting that the slave was the property of the god and not to be claimed by anyone else. In this context it indicates that the sealed ones are utterly and unreservedly consecrated to God, their lives given to his service. They are not of this world, even as Jesus was not of this world. That the sealing goes on throughout this present Age, generation after generation, is obvious from Rev. 9.4. where in the period of the fifth trumpet, which by any system of historic interpretation is way back in earlier centuries of the Age, there are some having the seal who are not to be harmed by the symbolic *"locusts"*. Putting the whole thing into plain language, it does mean that the church of Christ, the community of true believers upon earth in every generation, will not be harmed in-so-far as their eternal salvation is concerned by the disruptive influences which are increasingly active in the earth. Only after their Lord has taken them to himself in the preliminary stage of his Second Advent will the restraining bar-



riers be lifted and the full force of what in Rev. 16. 16. is called "Armageddon" be unleashed upon the world, preparatory to the revelation of the returned Lord with his Church, and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.

At this point the Revelator turns away from the background and looks at the company of sealed ones. "I heard their number", he says; "*a hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel*". At first sight one might conclude that he is seeing the literal nation of Israel, or at least a selection from among them. Further thought shows that this cannot be, for the Book of Revelation is a book of symbols, a kind of picturesque allegory drawn from the vivid visions of the Old Testament and intended to be interpreted as such. The angels, the winds, the trees, all have an allegorical meaning, and so must the central feature, this idealised assembly of twelve tribes. Perhaps the most convincing evidence that this is so is the fact that the twelve tribal names here mentioned are not in their entirety those of the twelve tribes of history. Dan and Ephraim are omitted and Levi and Joseph substituted. The Levite tribe was not recognised as one of the tribes after the establishment of the priesthood and Joseph never was the head of a tribe. The inclusion of Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, made up the number to twelve following the absence of Levi and Joseph. The order of the names in Revelation differs both from the order of birth of Jacob's twelve sons, the order of seniority of the tribes as laid down in the Book of Numbers (Chaps. 1, 2 & 7), and the restored Israel of the future as seen by Ezekiel in Ezek. 48. It seems evident that in Rev. 7. the twelve-tribe Israel here described is used as a symbol for something of greater moment.

It is fairly clear that Dan and Ephraim are omitted because they were the two tribes who introduced idolatry into Israel, Dan soon after the entry into the land (Jud. 18. 14-31) and Ephraim during the period of the Judges (Jer. 7. 12-15 and Psalms 78). That idolatry persisted until the Ten Tribes were carried into captivity in Assyria six or seven centuries later. If it is that the twelve tribes in Rev. 7. picture the company of the faithful, these two could not possibly be included, and so Levi and Joseph were substituted. Judah appears first in the list although he actually was the fourth son of Jacob and this would seem proper since Judah is the tribe of whom came Joseph and Mary the parents of Jesus and in Scripture is the leading tribe although in fact Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob was the original holder of the birthright. Because of his crime in dishonouring his father (Gen. 35. 22; 49. 4) his father deprived him of the birthright and conferred it upon Ephraim son of Joseph (Gen. 48.17). The idolatry of the tribe of Ephraim cost them the birthright four centuries later and the

Lord gave it to Judah; and our Lord came of that line. Hence it is appropriate that Judah should head the list in Rev. 7. Jacob before his death had prophesied that Judah would eventually take the lead in Israel (Gen. 49.10).

Twelve thousand of each tribe! Why so? The number twelve is prominent in Scripture as a symbol of completeness, the complete number. Twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve leaders and prophets from Moses to Daniel, twelve "minor" prophets in the Old Testament, twelve legions of angels in Matt. 26. 53. twelve baskets of fragments in Matt. 14. 20, twelve fruits of the Tree of Life in Rev. 22.2 and Ezek. 47.12; the number appears in many settings to denote a complete number. The idea derives from ancient metrology going back into pre-history and perhaps before the Flood. The ancients had twelve hours to the day making a complete cycle, twelve months to the year, and twelve signs of the Zodiac to complete the circle of the heavens. Their mathematical system was based on twelves—much more flexible and adaptable than the metric system based on tens—and this remained for five thousand years or more virtually unchallenged. The twelve hour day was only beginning to be superseded by one of twenty-four hours in the time of the First Advent. The figure of one thousand is associated with the Millennium and the Divine purpose for that Age. The saints are to reign with Christ a thousand years. The Devil is to be restrained a thousand years (Rev. 20.3-4). The Day of Judgment, which is synonymous with the Millennium, is "*with the Lord as a thousand years*" although only a day to him (2 Pet. 3.7-8). The promise of the Lord in the Abrahamic covenant regarding the work of the Millennium has been made sure, commanded, to a thousand generations (Psa. 105.8-9); since there cannot possibly have been more than three hundred generations since the beginning that thousand must indicate a span of time stretching into the distant future and certainly including the Millennium. The River of Life of Ezek. 48, picturing Divine life entering into man increasingly in that Age, is pictured as deepening and widening a thousand cubits each time as the process of giving new life continues.

Hence the combination of twelve with one thousand, twelve thousand per tribe, can well symbolise the completion of the anointed company, the Church, and its entry to its destined work of administering the Divine kingdom on earth during the thousand years of the Millennial Age.

There is another consideration in Revelation which may well support this conclusion. Rev. 21.2 speaks of "*the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*". This is undeniably a reference to the same event, the entry of the Church, with her Lord, upon the Millennial work

of world reconciliation. The following few verses make this plain. Then in vs. 15-16 this holy city, the Church, is measured; square in shape, it is twelve thousand stades (Eng. furlongs) each way, and the height of the city is equal to its width, i.e. it is represented as a cube (which no city can possibly be; but this is a symbol). Now a cube has twelve sides, and twelve times twelve thousand is, again, a hundred and forty-four thousand. This then is the symbolic expression denoting the completed Church ready for its Millennial duty, both in Rev. 7. and Rev. 21. Since that Church is taken from all nations and from all generations since Pentecost, it is obvious that the actual number of individual members must exceed that many times over; the hundred and forty-four thousand itself stands for the complete number whatever that may prove to be.

What then of the remainder of the chapter, vss. 9-17? Here is pictured an innumerable multitude, "of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues" standing before the heavenly Throne clothed in white and carrying palms in their hands—both symbols of victory and of resurrection. They raise a cry of praise, ascribing their salvation to God who is on the throne before them, reminding one of the Millennial cry of mankind in Isa. 25.9 "it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation". This ascribing salvation to God implies conversion and only in the next Age can an innumerable multitude from all nations be expected to be thus converted. According to vs. 14 they have come out of great tribulation and washed "their robes white in the blood of the Lamb" which implies not only conversion but also justification by faith and reconciliation with God at a time when tribulation is past, salvation is achieved, and they

are before the Throne—not in the Throne as are the Church—and God himself is dwelling among them—just as in Rev. 21 in the parallel vision of the Bride, the new Jerusalem, "the dwelling of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21.3, almost identical with Rev. 7, 9 and 15.). The similarity is heightened when one compares Isa. 49 with this passage in Rev. 7. Says Isaiah "they shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them" (Isa. 49.9-10). John rejoins in Rev. 7. 16-17 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes". And this latter expression is repeated in Rev. 21.4. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes". That is a word which can only be fulfilled among mankind in the Millennial Age when the dark night of sin has ended.

Is it the case then that here in Rev. 7. we have a picture of the doctrine of the two salvations; first, that of the Church, complete and exalted to the heavens in association with the Lord for the reconciling work of the Millennial Age, and second, the earthly calling of the residue of men, delivered at last from the thralldom of sin and death and ushered by resurrection into the peaceable reign of righteousness of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, when the word will go forth, as Rev. 22.17 says it will go forth, "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"?

## Soliloquy

"O Saviour, was it not enough for thee to be manifested in flesh? Did not that elementary composition carry in it abasement enough, without any further addition; since for thee to become man was more than for all things to be returned to nothing; but that, in the rank of miserable manhood, thou wouldst humble thyself to the lowest of humanity, and become a servant? O Saviour, in how despicable a condition do I find thee exhibited to the world! lodged in a stable, cradled in a manger, visited by poor shepherds, employed in a homely trade, attended by fishermen, tempted by presumptuous devils, persecuted by the malice of envious men, exposed to hunger, thirst, nakedness, weariness, contumely. How many slaves, under the vassalage of an enemy, fare better than thou didst from ungrateful man, whom thou

camest to save! Oh, let me not see only, but feel, this thy great mystery of godliness effectually working in me to all hearty thankfulness for so inestimable a mercy. And now, O Saviour, what a superabundant amends is made to thy glorified humanity for all thy bitter sufferings on earth! Thine agony was extreme, but thy glory is infinite, thy cross was heavy, but thy crown transcendently glorious; thy pains were inconceivably grievous, but short; thy glory is everlasting. Thou that stoodest before the judgment seat of a Pilate, shalt come in all heavenly magnificence to judge both the quick and the dead; thou that wouldst stoop to be a servant on earth, rulest and reignest for ever in heaven, as the King of eternal glory."

(Bishop Hall)



## THE FOUNDATION IS SURE

*"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his'"* (2 Tim. 2.19). It is the refined gold of the martyr's faith that carries him through his Gethsemanes and Calvarys. Though he himself may fall, he will not admit defeat. The ruthless oppressor may ride roughshod over his prostrate body, and blend his life-blood with the dust, yet as he falls he never doubts the triumph of his testimony. He knew that it was the tyrant's hour, and the tyrant's juggernaut could lay him low at any time, yet he had held aloft his torch, and lifted up his voice to testify his conviction against all odds. The Stephens and James's Riddleys and Latimers of this noble band never feared to die. Never did they think the witnessing would be extinguished by their death. The cause of Jesus was greater than themselves, and, as each faithful witness fell, it sprouted forth new life, more vigorous because watered with martyr blood. It could not die while Jesus lives. And He, thank God, can never die. Come what may before our witnessing is done, the Lord of all the martyrs lives, and while He lives, his fellowship can never be destroyed. With that conviction we may look the tyrant in the face, then look aloft, like Stephen, with faith's undaunted eye, and see the Lord stand waiting to receive us to himself.

One of the noble band whose hour was nearly come was our beloved brother Paul. The hour of his departure was at hand. He had long kept the faith. He had maintained the goodly fight for many years. But now the end was near. In earlier days he had a host of friends. In every city and every land where he had held aloft the torch of truth these friends had rallied to his side. The good tidings which he told had drawn them by its magnet power. Like children in a father's care they had clustered to his knee, and from his words and tears they learned the story of God's great love. But darker days had come—Paul's foes had won the day. The Roman's last decree had fallen on his head, and there could now be no reprieve. He had no host of friends to comfort and console him now. *"All they which are in Asia be turned away from me"* (2 Tim. 1.15). The binding spell of earlier days was gone; men who had shared his love had now forsaken him. Now he was left alone—yet not alone, for *"the Lord stood with me and strengthened me"*. The shallow-minded friends had disappeared, the timid-hearted time-servers were gone—but what mattered that, so long as God's foundation remained!

Again, some of the precious truths had been debased. Doctrines for whose defence, when free,

he had so faithfully stood, were now subverted. The holy things of God entrusted to his care were now distorted by hostile tongues. Naturally it bit deep into his soul. What soldier could see his defences pierced and overthrown, and not show some concern? What custodian could see his treasures violated and not resent the sacrilege? Oh, if he were free, and could meet Hymenæus face to face, or take Philetus on the spot! But, then, what mattered their puny batterings upon the walls, if only God's foundations remained sure? They might swear black was white, and say future events were past, but they were only creatures of a day. They might misguide befuddled brains, and turn the doctrine upside down. That mattered not so long as the bedrock itself remained unchanged. They might prate and chatter like a flock of rooks—what matter that, if God, the God of truth, remained immovable!

Let Demas forsake. Let those of Asia turn away. Let Hymenæus canker and corrode. Let Philetus destroy shoddy faith. What mattered these, and more beside, if only God and his foundation stood fast? Nay, more, let the whole world conspire in common cause to bind and slay the servants of the Lord. So long as God's word was free, all still was well. So then, we hear him say: *"I suffer trouble, as an evildoer unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound"*. How often men have tried to bind God's words in chains, and how often they have failed. Petrified creeds, dead tongues, pontifical decrees, the furnace flames, have been men's cords to hold God's word in thrall, and stultify its voice, but still it lives and speaks and imparts life to those who long for God. And when the hammers of its enemies are outworn and cast away, the anvil will stand unhurt and undefaced.

*"Nevertheless."* This shows the heart at rest. It shows reliance doubly-based on God. In every sense all still was well, within himself, yes, and without. A soul at rest in God could look out upon the wreckage wrought by men, without a single fear or quiver of a lip. A lifetime's work may seem to lie shattered into dust and yet know neither remorse nor regret. Whence came this confidence and trust?

Paul's unwavering assurance, in good days and bad, came from the holy root (Rom. 11. 16), the basic promise laid as foundation for all God's works on Mount Moriah's flanks. The deep-laid purposes of God, to bless the nations of the earth, through Abraham and his seed, were laid upon the basic rock of almighty Promise and Immutable Oath—more deeply and immovably laid than the

foundations of the earth itself. That sworn foundation of the Eternal God stood fast, though men deserted or defamed. No shock or impact of mere human dust, of thought or word or act, could move one fragment from that more-than-granite rock. This was the rock whereon Paul's confidence was built. Men may come near as friends, and then depart as foes, but they could not strike a tiny splinter from that rock. Men may prate against the truth, but they could not remove one syllable from the Promise and the Oath.

Broad-based upon the foundation-rock, another Oath was laid. "*Kings . . . shall be of her*" said the Most High to Abraham (Gen. 17.16). And in due time a king appeared. Taken from the sheepfold to tend a nation for his flock, God again gave his promise and his Oath. "*I have made a Covenant with my chosen. I have sworn unto David my servant. Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations*" (Psa. 89. 23). Thus, the "sure mercies of David" were laid upon the basic rock of unchanging promise and oath immutable.

"Remember" says the aged and death-ready warrior and father to his son and lieutenant-in-the-field—"remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead . . ." (2 Tim. 2.8). Jesus Christ—David's Seed. Israel's future King. Then, on the oath of God "that cannot lie", and on the life of Jesus Christ, who cannot die, that broad foundation cannot be shaken, no matter what mere man may do. "Jesus Christ . . . was raised from the dead" and is alive for evermore. Demas is dead; all they in Asia are dead; Hymenæus is dead and Philetus is dead; but Jesus Christ is raised up from the dead. They had their little day, and muddled through their little work, but Jesus has his day to come. He has long waited beyond the reach of his puny foes, until his Day shall have come.

Thus the unfettered heart of the deserted, fettered servant of the Lord could sweep the wide horizons of time, past and to come, and bring the microscopic trivial things of man's little day into perspective with the foundations and erections of the Most High God, and find comfort therein for his last weariness and final strife. Through all the ebb and flow of both darker and better days, one mighty thought had gripped the heart of the Apostle. Election-selection-preferment-choice, had for long centuries been vested in Abraham's Seed. "Them that are his" had hitherto been found only there. Of such the Son of God had said: "*Thine they were, thou gavest them to me*" (John 17.6). In earlier days, one of God's messengers had said: "*The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in him*"

(Nahum 1.7). Also, in a dark day, when rebellion against the ordinance of God was abroad in the camp, Moses had said "*. . . the Lord will show who are his*" (Num. 16.5). With thoughts like these culled from the storehouse of God's Promises, the aged prisoner of Jesus Christ could take to himself heart of grace, and know that, though his enemies could overthrow the faith of unstable men, the end of things would be with God. Amid the ant-like activity of this fallen world, the kindly eye of God rested with extreme delight upon such and such "them that are his".

But God has his price for this. "Them that are his" must seek to be like him. They may not league themselves with evil men or evil things. They may not choose alliance with God's enemy. They may not permit this world's evil ways, nor fallen flesh, not subtlety of demon powers to permeate their lives. They must depart from iniquity. They must be responsive to God's highest law. They must be imbued through and through with the Spirit of his covenant, and desire, like God, when the due time comes, to bless their fallen kin. Participation with God is an exacting privilege. It will demand our all. Like him, we must hate sin and iniquity, and love holiness, justice and truth.

Paul's day was a dark and cheerless day. A long life's ardent work was ending in seeming disaster. The thrill of the nine-days' wonder of the faith had "petered out" for so many of his faithful friends, and, for the nation too, the handwriting was on the wall. A fearful doom lay just ahead; both people and city were fated to be laid in the dust. The work of God for centuries past was near collapse, and the children of Abraham, God's friend, were to be ousted from the land. From the bleak depths of that forbidding environment the eye of Paul could look onward down the years, and see the better things which Abraham saw. Like that worthy sire, who, aged and childless, looked onwards with faith's unfailing eyes to see a seed grown numerous as the seaside sands, so Paul, with enlightened vision, took the long view against all life's odds, and saw the Kingdom of the Lord begun. "*We shall reign with him, if . . .*" Yes, he could see the King in power, the Son of David, and withal the Son of God, upon the throne, and if now the martyr kept his vows, then he would ascend to his Master's side. Out of the dense darkness the light of faith shone out more clear, because it knew that God's well and truly laid foundation stood fast and sure, because God's word of promise could not fail, and because Jesus Christ, the Son of David, God's living Foundation, had been raised from the dead, and other foundation there is none.



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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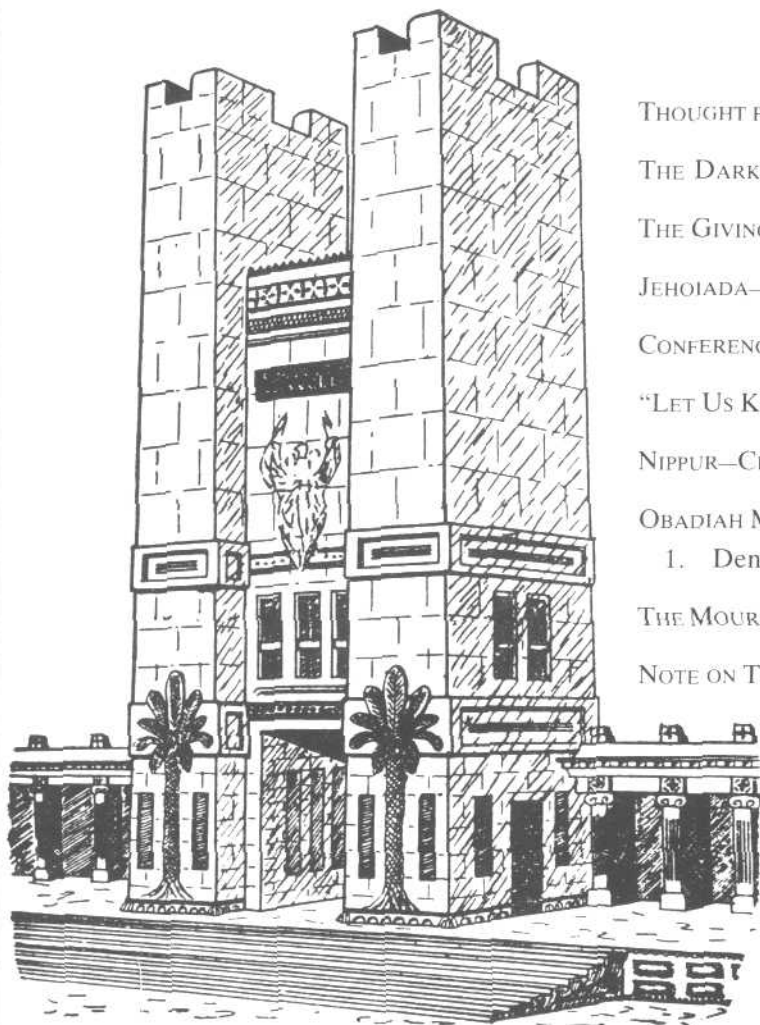
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

The latest exhibition of human endeavour is the Soviet intention to send a manned space vehicle to the planet Mars within the next ten years. Now that pictures of the Martian landscape have been shown on the world's television screens in full colour the explorers will be able presumably to find their way about if they do succeed in effecting a landing—although it looks a pretty desolate place so far as available photographs go. When man first planned to fly to the moon twenty or so years ago some quite worthy Christian ministers declared that God would never allow it—but God did, and that without in any way relinquishing his control of the situation. He gives man a long rope—but He always holds the other end! At the time of the moon landings it was suggested in some quarters that the proceeding was presumptuous and a sin in the sight of God. Christopher Columbus was accused of the same thing when he set out to discover what lay beyond the Atlantic Ocean, though he declared that his object in part was to contribute to the fulfilment of the prophecy that the Gospel would be preached in all the world for a witness before the end should come. *"In the execution of my enterprise to the Indies"* he said in his book on Divine prophecy written in AD 1498, six years after he discovered the New World *"human reason, mathematics and maps of the world have served me nothing. It has accomplished simply that which the prophet Isaiah had predicted, that before the end of the world all the prophecies should have their accomplishment"*. From his studies in chronology Columbus held that the Second Advent would take place in AD 1656.

Now it might be that the motives behind this modern endeavour are not so altruistic as those professed by Columbus. Insofar as the effort is dictated by man's inherent urge to exploration and discovery there is nothing to deprecate and much to commend. There is no question there of sin. Man had that urge inbuilt at the time of his crea-

tion, and it is God-given. But if an element in the inspiring motive is to gain military and war-making advantages, to the extent this is true there is sin involved. But this differs in no wise from similar activities of men on this earth. Sin resides in the mis-use man makes of his God-given powers to disturb the orderly progress of God's creation, not in travelling to places in that creation which those same God-given powers enable him to visit.

The more important thing to realise is that no matter how far men may eventually range through the vastness of space they can never get away from God. *"Whither shall I flee from thy presence?"* asks the Psalmist (139.7). *"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me"*. Of course the Most High follows the flight of every astronaut and not one will ever get beyond the bounds that He has set, but He is not thinking in terms of presumptuous sin but of his ultimate purpose for those astronauts and for all mankind. It might well be that when that purpose is achieved and the entire earthly creation is at peace with God and with itself, men will be fully satisfied with their lot and no longer yearn to fly to other worlds. They will find so many things of more absorbing interest down here.

**Milborne Port.** One-day convention Easter Sunday April 3 at Gainsborough House. Details A. O. Hudson, Ashley House, Wick Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

**Yeovil.** One-day convention Sunday May 1 at Westfield School, Preston Road. Details Mrs. J. Hardwicke, "Bethany", Higher Kingsbury, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

**Storrington (near Worthing).** Seven day convention 1—7 may at conference centre. Details and accommodation Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

**Memorial Service 1988** Evening of Thursday March 31 up to the afternoon of Good Friday April 1.

## THE DARKNESS AT THE CRUCIFIXION

*A historical study*

The darkness which Matthew, Mark and Luke all record as enshrouding the land from the sixth hour to the ninth—noon to 3.0 p.m.—is often assumed to be the result of an eclipse of the sun. In fact, the N.E.B., Dr. Moffat and the 20th Century N.T. use this term. In so doing they have all fallen into what ought to have been a fairly obvious error. The Crucifixion was at the time of the Passover, when the moon is of necessity at the full, and there cannot be an eclipse of the sun at full moon. Furthermore, the darkness is said to have continued for the space of three hours whereas the longest time that an eclipse of the sun can persist at any one place is seven minutes. Whatever the nature of this rather mysterious darkness, it certainly was not an eclipse.

The happening is mentioned in Matt. 27. 45, Mark 15. 33 and Luke 23. 44-45. Matthew and Mark would have been eye-witnesses; Luke got his information from someone who had been an eye-witness. Matthew says that there was an earthquake at the same time; the others say nothing about this. Apart from that remark, the three accounts are identical in detail and this points to a very clear and undisputed recollection of what actually took place. Throughout all time since the event, this darkness has been accepted as having actually occurred and generally taken as a sign of Divine displeasure with those then guilty of the condemnation of the Lord. Matthew's statement that the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain, throwing the sacred Most Holy open to public view at this time, is taken as pointing to the same conclusion.

Confirming evidence that this darkness did in fact occur is extant from a secular source. Phlegon Trallianus, a Greek historian who was born not long after the Crucifixion and died in the middle of the Second Century, wrote a history of the times from 776 B.C. to his own day, and in this had this to say:

*"In the Fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad there was a great eclipse of the sun, greater than had ever been known before; for at the sixth hour the day was changed into night and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bithynia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicæa."*

Although existing copies of Phlegon's statement use the word *ekleipsis*, from which our technical word "eclipse" is derived, it is not implied that he intended the modern meaning since the word in his day was used to denote darkening of the heavens from whatever cause. Of greater importance is the relation of the date given to that of the Crucifixion.

Dates in Greece at the time of the First Advent

were denoted by Olympiads, four-year periods starting from the institution of the Olympic games in Greece in the midsummer of 776 B.C. Thus summer 776 B.C. to summer 775 B.C. was the First year of the First Olympiad, and this system of dating continued until A.D. 394. On this basis the Fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad would commence in July A.D. 32 and finish in June A.D. 33. At some time during that twelve months occurred the darkness over Asia—in which lay Bithynia and Nicæa—to which Phlegon refers. It is astronomically established that during that year there was no eclipse of the sun visible from the territory in question.

The date of our Lord's death is generally agreed nowadays, in the light of modern knowledge of relevant history, to have been in the spring of A.D. 33 and of course at the time of the Jewish Passover, on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year, Nisan. One of the essentials in this matter is that 14 Nisan in the year of the Crucifixion must have fallen on a Friday. There are only two years in the relevant period when this was the case. In A.D. 30 the 14th Nisan fell on Friday 7 April (Julian) and in A.D. 33 on Friday 3 April (commencing of course at 6.0 p.m. on the evening of 2nd April in accordance with Jewish custom). Phlegon makes no mention of the happening as affecting Judea; it is doubtful if he ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and Bithynia is six hundred miles from Jerusalem. The fact that the year he specifies is the same as the year of the Crucifixion is presumptive evidence that Phlegon records the same darkness and the same earthquake as do the three Gospels; that it extended over the entire Middle East from Bithynia on the shores of the Black Sea, across Greek Asia and Syria into Galilee and Judea. Thallus, a Syrian historian contemporary with Phlegon, is credited with recording a similar day of darkness without, however, giving the date of the occurrence, which does at least give some ground for thinking that it was also observed in Syria.

The cause of the darkness—apart from being an act of God—remains a mystery. The apparent area affected precludes its being the effect of low-lying clouds blotting out sunlight, such as does occur sometimes over valleys when by a vagary of the wind dense cloud masses build up and remain stationary over a relatively small area and block all light. Volcanic dust from an eruption has been known to produce the same effect, but always in the vicinity of volcanoes and there are no volcanoes anywhere near Judea.

A rather interesting parallel to this darkening at the Crucifixion is the celebrated "Dark Day of

1780". This happening is so near to our own time that it is fully authenticated, although, despite investigation by the best scientific minds of the time, the cause has never been established. It does seem, however, to have been a similar phenomenon—from the physical point of view—to that associated with the death of Jesus.

May 19, 1780, dawned on the eastern coast of North America without incident and the customary daily routine of the citizens of New York State, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire was soon under way. But at 10 a.m. the sunlight began inexplicably to fail from the sky and by 11 o'clock an area of some six hundred and fifty miles in each direction was completely dark. Work ceased and workers returned to their homes, where lights burned as at night. The Connecticut Legislature, in session at the time, adjourned its proceedings and noted the phenomenon in the Journal of the Senate. A few hours later, discovering that an impression was gaining ground to the effect that the Last Day had come and the Judgment was at hand, the members returned to the House that they might be found doing their duty should the Lord return unexpectedly. The darkness continued until about 2.0 a.m. the following morning, although the moon was in full at the time; the disturbance, whatever it was affected sunlight and moonlight equally. By 4.0 a.m. on the morning of the 20th normal conditions were restored everywhere.

No explanation has ever been found. Sir William Herschel, the celebrated British astronomer, who lived at the time, said "*the dark day in Northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of Nature which will always be read of with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain*". A New Hampshire eye-witness, Judge Tenney, writing on the subject five years later, said "*I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the Universe had been shrouded in impenetrable darkness, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eye was equally invisible with the blackest velvet*". Another eye-witness, Rev. Elam Potter, expressed himself in a sermon nine days after the happening "*Specially I mention that wonderful darkness on the 19th of May last. Then, as in our text, the sun was darkened; such a darkness as was probably never known since the crucifixion of our Lord. People left their work in the house and in the field; travellers stopped; schools broke up at 11 o'clock; people*

*lighted candles at noon-day and the fire shone as at night. Some people, I am told, were in dismay, and thought whether the Day of Judgment was not drawing on. A great part of the following night also was singularly dark. The moon, though in the full, gave no light, as in our text . . .*"

The minister was, of course, referring to Biblical references associated with the Second Advent such as Joel 3. 15 "*The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining*" and Matt. 24. 29 "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven*". It is not surprising that some sections of the Christian world hailed this strange happening as the fulfilment of such predictions, a physical sign that the time of the Second Advent was at hand. Who shall say that they were not justified, even although these texts are primarily symbols of realities greater by far than a transient darkness over a small patch of earth's surface on a particular day. As a literal sign, repeating that given at the Crucifixion, incomprehensible to men and incapable of explanation by the then state of human knowledge, there is much to recommend the conclusion.

One other related point is of interest. If Phlegon's record is accepted as factual, the area covered by the darkness in our Lord's day must have been almost identical with that known to have been covered in 1780. From Bithynia to Jerusalem is about the same distance as that across the extremities of the dark area in North America. The two incidents appear to be of one and the same nature, and both inexplicable to human scientific knowledge. Is this an indication that God does from time to time in the course of human history interject an occasional reminder that there are things outside not only the understanding but the control of man, by means of which all humanity's boasted powers and achievements could be rendered impotent in a matter of time. Suppose there was a third such inexplicable darkness, not of three hours this time, nor yet of fifteen hours, but, say, of fifteen days or fifteen weeks; not limited to Judea or to a few American States, but over all the world! And all life on earth depends on sunlight; without the sun we perish! How easily God can cry "Halt!" to human self-will when in his wisdom He sees the time is ripe, and that without necessarily losing a single human life. Just by taking the light away for a short while, for example.

It is not necessary to be always audibly speaking to God in prayer, or always to be hearing from God by the ministry of his Word to have communion

with him. There is an inarticulate fellowship more sweet than words.



## THE GIVING OF THE MANNA

The giving of manna to serve the children of Israel for food was an outstanding feature of the Exodus. The imagination of generation upon generation, first of Hebrews and then of Christians, has been stirred by this inexplicable provision of food for a multitude in the otherwise barren wilderness. It is true that modern discovery has established that Sinai in the days of the Exodus was by no means so barren and desolate as the popular expositors conceived it, or as it is now; but even so the marvellous story has lost none of its appeal, and the wonder of it has passed into the language of every day so that "manna from heaven" has become an expression denoting any unexpected and beneficial gift. It was no less so in Old Testament days, for the Psalmist (78. 24-25) sings exultantly "He . . . rained down manna for them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food, he sent them meat to the full". The language is poetic; the Psalmist did not mean to convey that this white substance "like hoar frost upon the ground" is literally eaten in heaven by the glorious angels who in their perfection of spiritual life do always behold the face of the Father. Rather does the Psalmist, in a flight of poetic fervour, attribute the provision and the qualities of the manna to the direct intervention of Heaven at a time of sore necessity, and quite naturally speaks of God as sending down food from His own table to meet the need of His people on earth.

Let the narrative be examined in the light of all that the twentieth century can tell us regarding the district in which this thing happened and the circumstances under which it took place. The wonder of the story will be by no means lessened and our reverence for the Divine power which brought this about just at the time when it was needed will be immeasurably increased.

*"And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another 'It is manna' for they wist not what it was . . . And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted . . . And it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey."* (Exod. 16. 14-35).

It was at Elim, just after the passage of the Red Sea, that the manna first appeared (Exod. 16. 1) and at Gilgal, following the crossing of Jordan, forty years later, that it ceased (Josh. 5 12). During the whole of the intervening period, throughout the length and breadth of Sinai, wherever the people wandered, there was the manna, ready for

gathering, fresh every morning, *except on the Sabbath*. When they dwelt in Egypt, manna was unknown; after they settled in Canaan it was seen no more; the phenomenon was confined entirely to the Sinai peninsula and the green hills of Edom and Moab, but so integral a part of the whole account is this story of the manna that unless we accept the fact that this thing really did happen we must reject the historical trustworthiness of the entire Exodus narrative.

The story never died. Long after the strings of the Psalmist's harp were stilled Nehemiah encouraged his brethren by telling them of the "bread from heaven" (Neh. 9. 15). Jesus, in His teaching, reminded His hearers that their fathers did eat manna in the wilderness. (John 6. 49). The Psalmist's "angels' food" was not able to arrest the processes of death at work in the bodies of the Israelites, and their daily gathering sufficed only to sustain life for another day. Jesus turned their minds to Himself, "the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6. 51) and talked to them about those things without which no man can enter into life. So, in words intended for His disciples of this Age, the consecrated members of the Church of Christ on earth, the resurrected Lord promises (Rev. 2. 17) to give to "him that overcometh to eat of the hidden manna"—that spiritual quality, immortality, the Divine nature—of which the earthly manna of the Exodus was but a symbol.

The same truth is taught in the fact that a vessel of the literal manna, miraculously preserved, was laid up and preserved in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle throughout Israel's national existence (Exod. 16. 30-34; Heb. 9. 4). There, where the supernatural Shekinah glory blazed out over the mercy-seat, where the presence of God in His Heaven was symbolised, stood the sacred vessel, century after century, its contents the incorruptible symbol of that "life-in-itself" which is to be the inheritance of those who are "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2. 10).

Now what is there known about this manna? Can it be identified to-day? Did Sinai's hills and valleys no more receive the "bread from heaven" after Israel's hosts had travelled that way and departed? Or was it that God did take hold of something in Nature to meet the needs of the occasion?

Through the centuries it has been commonly reported that the manna of the Exodus is still to be seen in Sinai. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century, said that it never disappeared but was even then to be found in the places where Israel gathered it. In the fifteenth century, a

traveller, Breidenbach, declared that manna was common in the valleys surrounding Mount Sinai, hanging in drops on twigs and grass and stones, sweet as honey, and sticky. Since then various travellers have reported finding this substance and have hazarded various theories as to its origin. It is established that the Sinai Arabs have known and collected it for centuries, and in the sixteenth century it could be found on sale in Cairo. In the eighteenth century it was observed that the substance is connected with, and found upon the tamarisk tree, and Burckhardt, the eighteenth century traveller, describes it thus:—

"In the month of June it drops from the thorns of the tamarisk upon the fallen twigs, leaves and stones which always cover the ground beneath that tree in its natural state. The manna is collected before sunrise, when it is coagulated, but it dissolves as soon as the sun shines upon it. The Arabs clear away the leaves and dirt which adhere to it, boil it, strain it through a coarse piece of cloth, and put it into leathern skins. In this way they preserve it until the following year, and use it as they do honey, to pour over their unleavened bread, or to dip their bread into. I could not learn that they ever make it into cakes and loaves. The manna is found only in years when copious rains have fallen, sometimes it is not produced at all."

The Arabic name for this substance is "*manu*" and this has been its name so far back as it can be traced. The writer of Exodus says that the children of Israel called it "*manna*" "*for they wist not what it was*". The Hebrew word is *man hu*—"What is this?"

Appropriately enough, however, it is the glory of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem finally to have cleared up the question of manna. Dr. Bodenheimer, of that University, has investigated the problem upon the spot and published a book on the subject, illustrated by photographs. The manna, it is definitely established, is produced by two insects which feed upon the tamarisk tree. They bear the somewhat terrifying names of *Trabutina mannipara* and *majococcus serpentinus minor*. Just as bees visit flowers to produce honey, so do these insects live on the tree and from its sweet juices manufacture manna. Dr. Bodenheimer has photographed them in actual process of producing manna in beads varying in size from pinheads to peas ("like coriander seed, white"). At first the beads are transparent as glass and later they crystallise, becoming milk-white to yellow-brown. They are found all over the leaves and twigs on the ground, and are soon carried off by ants. The modern counterpart of Moses' golden vessel of manna is now in the University, where glass vials of the "bread from heaven" are preserved.

But in thus identifying the manna we have not

disposed of Divine intervention and reduced this wonderful story to the mere level of a commonplace happening which might be repeated any day. The scanty amount of manna which Sinai produces at the present time would not feed a hundredth part of Israel's multitudes. We need the fruits of research in other directions fully to illuminate this wonderful story.

The first chapter of Numbers gives the number of men of twenty years and upwards, able to go to war, as being 603,550. The twenty-sixth chapter gives the number at the entering into the land, forty years later, as 601,730. These figures are confirmed by the numbers accredited to each tribe and it makes nonsense of the record to assert, as do some modern scholars, that the word translated "thousands" properly means "families" and that actually there were merely six hundred families that went out of Egypt. According to a leading present-day economist, Colin Clark, in "*The Economics of 1960*" (1942), the proportion of males between the ages of 20 and 60 to the whole population can be taken as averaging 1 to 4. On this basis, and allowing for the tribe of Levi, there would be about two and a half millions of men, women and children in that long trek through the wilderness. One might say, hastily, that all of Sinai would not produce manna enough for such a multitude.

The Scripture itself gives us the data necessary for a calculation. The ration for each person was to be one omer per day (Exod. 16. 16-18). An omer is roughly equivalent to three pints, as far as Hebrew measures are at present understood. A little less than a million gallons or 150,000 cubic feet of manna therefore, would be required daily to satisfy the terms of the Bible account. It has been shown that the manna, or rather the insects producing it, depend upon rainy years and the presence of the tamarisk tree. It is known that in former times Sinai was thickly forested with tamarisk and acacia (the latter is the "shittim wood" of which the Tabernacle was constructed). Much of this forest lingered until the nineteenth century, but during that century there was a great burning of the trees by the Arabs for the sake of producing charcoal, which was carried into Egypt, a great trade in this being conducted resulting in Sinai becoming almost completely defrosted and transformed into the sterile barren waste that it is now. It was only in 1944 that the Egyptian Government decided to undertake the systematic afforestation of Sinai to restore its ancient productivity.

It was shown, some years ago, in a paper "*Climatic changes since the Ice Age*" read before the Victoria Institute, that the world in general experienced a period of intense wet weather round about the time of the Exodus and on to the ninth

century B.C. Several features of the ten plagues on the Egyptians confirm the thought that the time of Moses was one of plentiful rainfall. We have evidence therefore that the two factors necessary to the production of manna, viz., trees and rainfall, were present to an unusual degree and with the assurance we have that Divine control over the powers of nature is constantly being exercised in the interests of God's Plan we may be certain that this was of design. Given the climatic conditions indicated above, the quantity of manna just mentioned could be produced, and gathered, over an area of no more than two square miles. The host of Israel, with all the tents and impedimenta required for camping would be spread, at any one time, over an area of fifteen square miles, the size of a British city such as Coventry. It need not be thought incredible then, that such a vast host should be able to find a sufficiency of manna for their needs, gathered day by day on either side of the line of march.

But the wonder of the miracle remains. Men of science may reveal to us the nature of this mystic food, showing that God laid hold of that which the wilderness already brought forth. They can bear

unwitting witness to the unerring foresight of God for His people's needs and His control of natural forces when they tell us that the climatic conditions at that period were unusually favourable to the satisfaction of those needs. But they cannot explain why it is that for forty long years those myriads of busy insects worked unceasingly for six days in every week—and *rested on the remaining day!* For when the Israelites looked out of their tents on every Sabbath morning, there was no manna on the ground! They must needs gather on the sixth day enough for two days. That mysterious cessation of the natural course on one day in every week has a regularity which is not of Nature unaided—it is of God. Only the One who rules the universe from above could so command and restrain the labours of His creatures that they rested every sixth day so that there might be no manna on the seventh. Therein is the hand of God revealed, as it is revealed throughout the whole of this wonderful account, taking up the ordinary, insignificant things of earth, bending them to His purpose, and in that totally inexplicable fashion which men call "miraculous" using them to fulfil a vital need in the execution of His Plans.

## WORK

There is a wealth of good common sense in Christian instruction, in the 25 verses of Colossians chapter 3, but the verse that this short article is directed on is the twenty third, which says, "*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto man*". This verse refers to our daily work, as you will see if you read the surrounding verses in the chapter.

Our life, for the most part, broadly speaking, is divided into three sections:—eating, sleeping and working. Seeing that sleeping and eating is little short of a means to keep us physically fit to work, work, then, it will be admitted, is the most important thing in our daily existence.

God is a creative being, and takes pleasure in creating (see Rev. 4. 11). We, therefore, being made in His Image (Gen. 1. 27) should have a natural desire to work, create, and take pride and pleasure in doing so.

It is a sad state of affairs when we realise that a large percentage of the working public are only interested in the wage packet at the end of the week and getting through their work with the least possible effort and concentration. To a large extent this is due to mechanisation. Most occupations have been broken down into small sections. One man or woman for each section of a particular job contributes towards the finished article. Whilst

it is true that precision is as high, if not higher than it has ever been, in many fields of industry, the average worker is left with the feeling that he or she has not created anything. Individuality and sense of satisfaction at the finish of the product has left many crafts.

Be this as it may, the Christian must adapt himself to these changes and continue to perform his best service. To repeat our former verse, "*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily . . .*", meaning surely, that we should tackle our work in a good spirit, giving it our best:—and as the remainder of the verse says, "*as unto the Lord and not unto man*". This implies that we have to make an extra effort and work for our earthly master (regardless of what they may be like as individuals) as we would for the Lord.

We would never dream of turning out poor or inferior work for the Lord, we would give our best, and so it must be if we are to honour the name of Christ.

There are many occupations, ranging from that of road sweeper to the big business executive, the prime minister and even the Queen. Each occupation is equally important in God's eyes, for it is the spirit in which we perform our daily task in which He is interested.

(From "Young Bible Students Messenger" 1964)



## JEHOIADA—PRIEST AND PATRIOT

The story of Jehoiada is that of a man upright and resolute, fearless in his loyalty to God and ruthless in his hatred of idolatry. To the piety of a priest he added the sagacity of a statesman; by his courage and faith he saved the royal line of David from becoming extinct little more than a century after David's death, and in that became an instrument in the hand of God. His sterling worth shines out from the dramatic narratives in 2 Kings 11. 4-13. 9 and 2 Chron. 22. 11-24. 25, and the manner in which prosperity or adversity respectively followed the nation's adherence to, or apostasy from, the terms of the Mosaic Covenant forms a colourful background to the story.

Jehoiada was High Priest of the Temple at Jerusalem in the time of Ahaziah and Joash, kings of Judah. He died a few years before the death of Joash at the unusually advanced age of a hundred and thirty years, according to the narrative, and although the credibility of this fact has been questioned, all known sources including Josephus, are unanimous and consistent on the point and there seems no ground on which the statement can be rejected. In such case he must have been born some ten years after the death of Solomon and lived through the reigns of nine monarchs, from Rehoboam to Joash.

The first eighty years of the life of Jehoiada were years of prosperity and peace in Judah. Four successive kings, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa and Jehoshaphat, were noted for their allegiance, in the main, to the Lord God of Israel and the exaltation of the Covenant. Idolatry was not allowed to flourish, the Temple services continued and the Aaronic priesthood discharged the duties of its office with the support and endorsement of the people. Apart from one lapse into idolatry on the part of Rehoboam, which resulted in Shishak the king of Egypt waging successful warfare against Judah, various attacks by Philistines, Ethiopians, Arabians and even their brethren of the northern ten-tribe kingdom were all easily repulsed, in some cases with signal demonstrations of Divine power. Twice is the statement made that the land "had no more war", once in the reign of Asa and once in that of Jehoshaphat. This was the golden age of Judah's tranquillity when the law of the Lord was observed in the land and the blessings of the covenant came upon the people in consequence—and then good king Jehoshaphat died and his son Jehoram took the throne.

At once the situation changed. Jehoram had married Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, of the ten-tribe kingdom. Athaliah, like her mother, was a fervent worshipper of Baal, and

so, too, was Jehoram. The royal pair immediately began to institute Baal worship in the Kingdom and seduce the people from allegiance to the God of Israel. Jehoram murdered his six brothers, the remaining sons of Jehoshaphat, to eliminate possible rivalry. Whether Jehoiada was High Priest at this time is not known; the records are fragmentary—one Amariah held the office during the reign of Jehoshaphat and may have continued into that of Jehoram, but the time of Jehoiada's entry upon the stage was in any case imminent. In the meantime, Jehoram's reign of twenty-five years, during which the Covenant was repudiated, cost Judah the loss of her Edomite possessions, and various successful invasions of peoples from the east and south, all of whom took considerable spoil culminating in the slaying of all Jehoram's sons except one, Ahaziah. Finally the king himself died a lingering death of a malignant disease and, says the narrator scornfully, "*departed without being desired*". He was denied burial in the tombs of the kings, which showed pretty clearly that the nation had had enough of him and refused him the customary honours at death.

The surviving son, Ahaziah, a young man of twenty-two, already married and the father of several young sons, reigned only one year but managed to crowd into it a considerable amount of villainy. Urged on by his mother Athaliah, "*that wicked woman*" as the Chronicler calls her in 2 Chron. 24. 7, he continued the policy of his father and got himself involved with the ten-tribe kingdom in that nation's wars with Syria, in consequence of which he was first seriously wounded in battle and then finally despatched by Jehu the avenging Israelite who was engaged in the elimination of all royal idolators with particular emphasis upon the ruling house of the ten-tribe kingdom. Thus Judah was left without a king and the royal heirs were children of only a few years old.

At this point Athaliah, the widow of Jehoram, stepped in. She was a bold, ambitious woman like her mother Jezebel and she had no intention of retiring into obscurity. She had a powerful court party on her side; it seems evident that Baal worship and idolatry was rampant among the nobility and aristocratic circles of the nation although the bulk of the populace were still loyal to God. Athaliah had just lost in death her brother Joram king of the ten tribes, as well as her husband. Jehu was increasingly victorious in the north and had vowed to destroy idolatry in Israel; by a bold counterstroke Athaliah determined to consolidate idolatry in Judah, by wiping out the Davidic line through whom the Divine promises were to be ful-

filled. She had her forces seek out and put to death all the sons of Ahaziah, her own grandchildren, and herself assumed the title of queen of Judah, reigning supreme over a land which she intended should never again honour the name of the God of Israel.

But she reckoned without Jehoiada.

Jehoiada had married Jehosheba, a daughter of Jehoram, not by Athaliah but one of his other wives, so that Athaliah was her stepmother. She evidently shared her husband's sterling faith, and by a quick-witted stroke whilst the slaughter of Ahaziah's sons was proceeding she rescued the youngest, a baby not more than a few months old, and hid him in an adjunct to the Temple where his presence would not be suspected. There, in concealment, the child lived for six years, and grew, while Athaliah reigned over the land and Jehoiada waited and planned. How many devout souls in Judah at that time must have mourned the calamity that had fallen upon their land and wondered if God had "*forgotten to be gracious*", little dreaming that the means of deliverance was present, unseen, in their own midst and would be revealed in due time.

It is here that the astute statesmanship of Jehoiada becomes evident. Biding his time during those six years, allowing no suspicion of the existence of the lad to arise in any mind, he evidently decided that at seven years of age Joash could be presented to the people as their lawful king. The account in 2 Chron. 23 has all the drama of a typical Eastern palace plot. Five leading officers in the armed forces whom Jehoiada knew to be trustworthy were let into the secret; they in turn went throughout the length and breadth of Judah selecting equally trustworthy Levites and heads of families and brought them to Jerusalem. Weapons which had been stored in the Temple since the days of King David were brought out and with these an armed force was created, posted to guard the approaches to the Temple. That venerable building must have speedily taken on the semblance of a fortress.

When all was ready, the seven-year old Joash was brought from his seclusion into the Temple, closely guarded by a determined body of priests and Levites who alone might enter the sacred precincts. In the outer court were massed a crowd of spectators who had evidently been told what to expect, flanked on either side by serried ranks of stalwart armed men eager to defend their king. It is evident that a substantial opposition to Athaliah and her paganism existed in Judah and the news that a king possessing right of lineal descent from David still lived and was now to be crowned met with very general approbation among the people in general. So well had Jehoiada laid and executed his plans that it seems no one of the Baal party knew

anything of what was afoot until it was too late. With all solemnity the High Priest placed the crown upon the head of Joash, anointed him and put into his hand a copy of the Law of Moses. The trumpets sounded and the cry went up "God save the King". It is an interesting point to notice that this expression, so familiar to us as a tribute of loyalty and respect to the British monarchy should have had its origin at this dramatic moment in the history of the "People of the Book".

Athaliah heard the shouting and the music from the royal palace, which occupied a position almost adjacent to the Temple, and came out immediately to investigate. According to vs. 13 of 2 Chron. 23 there were trumpets and musical instruments and choral singing so that she could hardly have failed to realise that something very unusual was transpiring in the usually quiet and deserted Temple. She only had time to see the boy-king standing arrayed in all the regalia of his office before being seized, together with apparently a small body of her compatriots in idolatry, and hurried to the valley of the Kidron below the Temple walls, where without further ceremony she was put to death. They were savage days and passions ran high, and the followers of the Everliving had suffered a great deal at the hands of the idolaters; their patriotism too had been affronted by the manner in which their nation had been made almost a subservient province of Phoenicia—for Jezebel was a daughter of the famous King Ethbaal of Tyre and for generations Tyre had exercised a strong influence in Israel's affairs. Now that the opportunity was theirs the people of Judah vented their pent-up resentment on all that had to do with the hated foreigners and their alien religion. The great Temple of Baal at Jerusalem, which stood alongside Solomon's Temple, was completely destroyed, Mattan, its high priest, slain in front of his own altar, and all the images and instruments of Baal worship in the land broken into pieces and dispersed. In a solemn ceremony, presided over by Jehoiada, the people and the king pledged themselves to each other "*that they should be the Lord's people*", implying a formal avowal of loyalty to the Mosaic Covenant and renunciation of all that was not in accord therewith.

So Joash began his reign and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. For the first twenty years or so of that period Jehoiada was undoubtedly the power behind the throne, in effect the uncrowned king of the land, guiding and instructing the young lad until he was mature enough to assume the duties of kingship himself. It is rather puzzling to note that during this twenty year period, when Jehoiada was the acknowledged director of the nation's destinies, there seems to have been singularly little progress made in restoring the Temple, rescuing it from the neglect of the past three reigns,

and making it again the centre of national worship. The impulse to restore the Temple seems to have come, not from the High Priest, but from the king, and this could hardly have been before he was a young man in his late teens. In fact, so late as the twenty-third year of his reign the work had not been completed and it was the king who called Jehoiada to account over this and instructed him to expedite and finish the work. It might be charitable to conclude that the advancing age of the High Priest, now more than a century old, is the explanation of this apparent shortcoming, although he seems to have been vigorous enough in affairs of state. It might on the other hand have been that, after all, he was a better statesman than priest, that the secular cares which had devolved upon him for so many years left insufficient time and energy for his sacred duties. If so, Jehoiada would not be the only one in history to whom that has happened, and it is a lesson to all of us. "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*" is always a sound injunction, and all other things must take second place.

The saddest commentary on the story is that immediately following Jehoiada's death the whole of his work was undone. The king's new youthful advisers had scant sympathy for the old priest's piety and reforms. The rising generation neglected the Temple and forgot the Covenant. Idolatry came back and the idol shrines once more desecrated the land. Prophets of the Lord raised their voices in protest and were unheeded; Zechariah the son and successor of Jehoiada in the priesthood publicly rebuked the offenders, and by the king's command was stoned to death in the court of the Temple. At once the Divine protection that had been over Judah was withdrawn; the penalty of the covenant came into effect. The armies of Syria invaded the land, slew all the leaders—those same leaders who had advised the king to his idolatrous

course—laid the land under tribute and took great spoil back to Damascus. The disasters coming upon the nation led to a palace plot which resulted in the murder of the king. As with his father and grandfather, he was not buried in the tombs of the kings of Judah, being deemed unworthy of that honour; it is worthy of notice that Jehoiada, although not of royal lineage, was in fact buried in the tombs of the kings "*because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house*" (2 Chron. 24, 16). Throughout those troubled times, this venerable old High Priest was the true king of Israel; under the hand of God he preserved the Davidic line from extinction and he struck idolatry in Judah a blow from which it never really recovered. In after years there were periods of idolatry under Ahaz and Manasseh, but not to the extent of former times. The contribution which Jehoiada made to the outworking purpose of God was a valid and a lasting contribution, even although his personal work may seem to have been nullified at his death. It takes more than a temporary resurgence of evil to cancel good that has already been done, for good is enduring; it may be temporarily overlaid with evil but cannot be destroyed by it. A lesson for those of us who may be faced with similar situations in our own lives and in our own days is that the faithfulness and untiring service of Jehoiada bore its real fruitage, not in his own day and lifetime, but eight centuries later when the Lord of glory came to a people, a "remnant", who were the heirs and successors of all that he had done and for which he stood. Something of the faith and hope he instilled into men's hearts in those dark days was passed on through the generations until it emerged in the lives of those at the First Advent who "looked for deliverance" in Jerusalem, and, seeing Jesus, recognised him indeed as "He that should come".

### Things worth striving for

The *patient perseverance* which defeat cannot discourage nor discouragement defeat.

The *Impartiality* which delights as much in a good work another has done as if you had done it yourself.

The *Spirit* which finds a more ready excuse for your brother than for yourself.

The *charity* which always looks for some good intentions even where a slight or wrong was seemingly intended.

The *righteousness* which would rather right a wrong than conceal your own share of it.

The *loyalty* which even your own stumblings and failures cannot dishearten.

The *wisdom* which knows when to speak and when to be silent.

The *zeal* which can never do enough and yet seeks no credit and asks for no compliments.

The *forgiveness* which not only pardons in word but proves its reality by never referring to the matter again.

The *humility* which chooses the meaner and more undesirable part of a service to leave the nobler and the more honourable part for another.

The *Christianity* which is as careful how we live in our homes as how we act before our brethren.



## CONFERENCE AT JERUSALEM

*A story of  
the Apostle Paul*

Fourteen years after his conversion St. Paul found himself in the middle of a major doctrinal squabble. Ten of those years had been spent in a fruitful and satisfying ministry in the Church at Antioch, the most important and influential Christian community after the original church at Jerusalem. In company with his brother minister, Barnabas, he had undertaken one journey—a charitable one, bearing a gift of money—to the Jerusalem church and one missionary journey into Asia. The rest of the time he had spent at Antioch, building up the faith of the believers in co-operation with his fellow elders. During all this time his principal theme was salvation through justification by faith in Christ. Acts 13. 39 records his stirring declaration in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, *“by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses”*. That was the keynote of St. Paul’s early preaching. Later on he was to deal with every aspect of Christian theology, with dispensational expectations and with prophecy, with the Second Coming and the Messianic Kingdom, and what he had to say has immeasurably enriched our Christian heritage, but at this time he dwelt upon one main theme, justification by faith. It was not without reason that he stressed this foundation truth. St. Paul realised, what so many even in our own day fail to realise, that the Divine insistence upon faith and belief in Christ as an essential to salvation is based upon a profound law, the law which decrees that life can flow to man only from God and only through Christ. That all life originates in God and can only be lastingly sustained by God is a self-evident truth to every believer in God. Because the Son is the essential channel through which the Father is manifested to man He is also the only channel by which the life which is of God can come to man. So it is literally true that *“he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life”*. The Apostle must have contrasted this understanding with his former belief that life could be gained by adherence to the law of Moses; *“the man that doeth these things shall live by them”*. The law promised life to the man who could keep its provisions inviolate, but no man ever succeeded in doing so, for all men without exception are born imperfect, subject to Adamic frailty, and unable from the start to stand upright and righteous in the sight of God. Of all the Apostles St. Paul was probably the first to grasp the meaning of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and to realise that in the Divine arrangement it only needs the man to come before God in frank disavowal of his former shortcomings and failures and

unbelief, and open his heart and mind without reserve to God, outreaching toward him in Christ, for the channel to be opened and life to flow into him and make him a justified and reconciled child of God.

It must have been with a sense of shock therefore when one day Paul found visitors from Jerusalem assembled with the brethren at Antioch promulgating the old doctrine of salvation through the Mosaic law. These Judaistic Christians would, if they had their way, shackle the new virile faith of Christ with the old bonds of Judaism and virtually compel all Gentile converts to become Jews. They were quite definite about it too. *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved”*. (Acts 15. 1). Circumcision was the outward sign of the covenant made at Sinai between God and Israel and it bound the one who bore it to a life of ritual observance and scrupulous adherence to a set of rigid rules which left little room for that free expansion of the spirit, that wide exercise of individual judgment, which is the privilege and the hallmark of true Christianity. This was a direct challenge to the Pauline message of salvation through faith in Christ alone; it was immediately obvious that one or the other must give way, and so in a moment the first great doctrinal controversy of the Age was thrust upon the Church.

The brethren of the Church at Antioch, many of them Gentile converts, very evidently held their fellows at Jerusalem in high esteem and respect. That is not surprising. The Jerusalem Church was the senior, established at Pentecost some eighteen years previously, numerous and influential, including many of the priests and Pharisees, headquarters of the Apostles and those who had known Christ in the flesh, but it was almost exclusively Jewish in composition and outlook. Antioch was not more than ten years old, much more cosmopolitan in character, but conscious that it owed its inception and early growth to Jerusalem. This open conflict of teaching between the centre they had such cause to honour and respect and their own much loved teachers Barnabas and Paul, and doubtless their elders, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen, must therefore have been a puzzling and distressing thing. The brevity of Acts 15. 2 probably veils a succession of tense church sessions at which the protagonists of the opposing views advanced their arguments and theses, each claiming Scriptural authority and the reported sayings of Jesus for the stand taken, each seeking to carry the assembled Church with their own point of view.

This Church at Antioch, for all its relative youth as a Christian community, seems to have been a

singularly well-balanced and farsighted congregation of believers. Every reference to its activities in the Book of Acts gives the impression of a sober, zealous and harmonious company, possessing a clear outlook on the verities of the faith. Perhaps the mixture of Jews and Gentiles and the fact they were citizens of one of the world's principal cities tended to discourage extremes of thought and practice in their midst. At any rate, the decision to which they eventually came was one worthy of a Church over which men like Barnabas and Paul presided. They determined that a commission of their leading ministers should go to Jerusalem and consult with the Apostles and elders of the Jerusalem Church about this question.

One does not realise at first how deep a spirit of wisdom and love dictated this move. It meant that Antioch, whilst not for one moment yielding her own right as an independent Christian Church to decide her own matters of faith and practice, acknowledged her obligation to maintain harmony with her Jerusalem counterpart by entering into discussion on the matter. There was no slight or slur cast upon those of the twelve Apostles of Christ who were still at Jerusalem; they were to be consulted and their views taken into full account. When it came to choosing the personnel of the commission, Barnabas and Paul at least were a foregone conclusion. From Galatians 2, which refers to this same visit, it seems that Titus, a pure-blooded Greek, was one of the party and there were one or two more whose names are not given. They travelled by land through Phenice, the ancient Phoenicia, and Samaria, calling upon local churches on the way—this was all Gentile territory and many of those whom they met must have been non-Jews—declaring their own convictions as they went to the joy and satisfaction of their hearers. So, at last, they came to Jerusalem.

This was Paul's third visit since his conversion. He must have approached the city with mixed feelings, yet with a secret joy. On the first occasion he arrived a fugitive from Damascus and no one wanted anything to do with him. In the end he had to be smuggled out again and hurried out of the country before his enemies could get at him. The second time he came bringing a gift of money from the Antioch Church for the benefit of the poverty-stricken believers in the approaching famine. Now he was coming to contend for the principles of the faith with the leaders of the Church. He must have known what an important occasion this would prove to be. The forces working to make Christianity merely one more sect, even though a progressive sect, of the Jewish religion were by no means to be despised. Here in Jerusalem and in all the country round about the Christians had been brought up from birth under the ritual and the obligations of the Mosaic Law; it was hardly to be

expected that they could abandon in a moment their ingrained belief that the blessing and favour of God was indissolubly tied up with the observance of that Law. After all, they might have reasoned, these are the royal laws of God; they must be as good for Gentiles as for us. The faith of Christ must involve obligations of some kind; believers must be different in some way from the pagans and the unbelievers around. What better distinction could there be than this system of laws and observances which had kept Israel apart from the nations as a people dedicated to God for fifteen hundred years past? This kind of reasoning could have had a strong appeal and it required the mind of a man like Paul to discern its fallacy. The whole future of his work as an ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles, if it was to be continued with the approval and endorsement of the Church, was bound up with the result of this conference.

The first session was apparently in the assembly of the entire church. Before them, and in the presence of the Apostles and elders, both Paul and Barnabas recounted all that they had done among the peoples of Asia, the converts which had been gained, and the churches that had been established. Without doubt Paul expounded his own understanding of the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ and the complete irrelevance of the Mosaic Law to the Christian dispensation into which they had now passed. More clearly than the others, perhaps, Paul perceived that at Pentecost a new Age in respect to the outworking of the Divine Plan had dawned and that the old Age of the Law had passed away. Not all the believers were prepared to accept that position; there must have been many who adhered still to the older view of two dispensations only, the one in which Moses was predominant until the coming of the Messianic Kingdom in power, the other when Messiah appeared to reign as king upon the throne of David and fulfil all the golden Millennial visions of the prophets. Until Jesus should fulfil his promise and come again to receive them to himself and set up his kingdom of righteousness, Moses must remain. The newly emerging realisation that there was to be an intermediate Age, a Christian Age, between these two had not yet found full acceptance. No wonder that, in the words of verse 7, there was "much disputing", even although the Greek word denotes debating or discussion without necessarily involving the acrimony which usually goes with modern English usage of the word "dispute".

It seems to have been Peter who turned the tide of the discussion—Peter, who some fifteen years previously had most reluctantly gone to Caesarea to accept probably the first Gentile convert to Christianity, Cornelius, the Roman centurion. He reminded his hearers of that story—they seem to have been familiar with it—and virtually

demanding of the Pharisee believers present why they required a yoke to be put on the necks of the disciples, "*which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*". Then he came out boldly on the side of Paul and his thesis of justification by faith. "*We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they*". This was the turning of the tables with a vengeance; not only did Peter deny the necessity of the Mosaic Law for Gentile believers, he denied its necessity for Jewish believers also. It says a lot for the sincerity and sense of responsibility of these Jews that the meeting did not break up into a riot. Instead, "*all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul*". Perfect order and decorum reigned as the visitors from Antioch put their case and recounted the evidence of Divine approval upon all their work among the Gentiles and the evident purpose of God to bestow his Spirit upon all who truly believe, whether Jew or Greek, bond or free, civilised or barbarian. There must have been a long and impressive silence after that, a period of quiet cogitation on the part of all present, for all men realised that the decision to be attained must be a generally accepted one if the future of the Christian enterprise was not to be threatened. A breach between the two main churches, Jerusalem and Antioch, was unthinkable. Calm, mature judgment was vital at this juncture. All eyes were fixed upon the tall, ascetic figure of the principal elder, the "Bishop" as he would be known today, of the Jerusalem Church, as he climbed the rostrum to deliver judgment.

James the Just, natural half-brother of Jesus, converted only after the Lord's death, was renowned and respected in all Jerusalem, even by the Pharisees and the priests, for his rigid uprightness and his devotion to the principles of the Law. The New Testament Epistle which bears his name shews very clearly how he set this devotion in proper relation to his Christianity. James could find no place for faith without works, and no place for works without faith. He was able to take a calm, unimpassioned view of the merits and demerits of Judaism and infuse that which was good into the new faith which now he professed. Completely convinced as now he was of the truth of Christianity—and he eventually died a martyr to his faith—he also understood the purpose of Judaism in the Divine Plan and the manner in which it made the advance into Christianity possible. Of all the early believers he had, apparently by common consent, been chosen the first elder of the Church at Jerusalem, and of all men he was probably the best fitted to voice the general feeling in this matter which had come before them for decision. The judgment of James, delivered on this occasion, is a most remarkable pronouncement. In a few well-chosen words, conspicuous for their

brevity, he summed up the three-fold aspect of the Divine purpose and working. It is a pity that for the past three or four generations the tendency of Christian theology to diverge away from the older and well-established doctrine of the pre-Millennial Second Advent of Christ has beclouded current understanding of the implications of this passage. Christians of earlier centuries understood it perfectly and it is certain that James' hearers followed him in his application of Old Testament prophecy and endorsed it.

James' first word was to call attention to what St. Peter had just told them. God was sending the word of the Gospel into all the world to all hearers, making no difference between Jew and Gentile. He was reconciling to himself all who came to him through faith in Christ. Now this, said James, was God's first and primary work, to take out of the nations a people for his Name. This is a work of selection, a kind of first-fruits of God's final harvest. To some extent the full force of this passage is minimised by the A.V. translators' use of "Gentiles" in this verse (15. 14) for that suggests the idea that James was talking only of the gospel going to non-Jews, in contrast to the prejudices of the Pharisaic party in the Church. In fact the Greek word "*ethnos*" really means nations as such and should only be translated Gentiles when the peculiar relationship of Jews with non-Jews is implicit in the context. In this verse that is not so; James is quoting Peter's insistence upon the very reverse, that God is making no distinction whatever between Jew and non-Jew in this matter of proclaiming the Gospel message to gather "a people for his Name". Hence "nations" is the correct rendering here as in some other 64 places where the word is so translated.

So, said James, Peter has declared how both doctrinal belief and the logic of events concur in showing that God has taken a first step in sending forth the Gospel to gather a people for his Name—obviously the Christian Church, then in its infancy, but destined to grow through coming generations until this part of the Divine purpose should be fulfilled. To this conception, proceeded James, agree the Old Testament prophecies; he quoted in support the words of Amos 9. 11-12 "*After this I will return, and will build again the dwelling-place of David, which is fallen down; and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the nations upon whom my Name is called*". Properly to understand what James was talking about it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament, and here it is immediately noticeable that the Septuagint, from which James quoted as being the version then in common use, differs somewhat from the Massoretic of the ninth century on which the A.V. is chiefly based. The A.V. of Amos 9 says nothing about the residue of men calling upon the name of



the Lord and substitutes instead a meaningless statement about Israel possessing the remnant of Edom. James, however, was talking to men who knew the Book of Amos thoroughly. The general theme of that prophet is the fact that Israel as a nation was unfaithful to God throughout her history and because of that unfaithfulness would be scattered among all nations. That apparently hopeless state was to become the means in God's providence for the promulgation of his truth among all peoples, and at the Last Days, that work having been finished, God would gather up the "grains of wheat", the true-hearted among the sons of Israel and regather them to their own land, revived and restored. That is what James meant by "After this I will return and build again the dwelling place of David". The Septuagint of Amos 9. 11-12 has it "In that day I will raise up the dwelling place of David that is fallen . . . that the remnant of men and all the nations upon whom my Name is called may earnestly seek me". After the selection of the people for God's Name, the Christian church, and when the Last Day, the end of the Age, shall have come, God will restore to the faithful of Israel a national existence, and that for a great purpose, that the remnant of men, those who are neither of the Church nor of restored Israel, may then have an opportunity to seek the Lord. This latter is quite clearly the work of the Messianic Kingdom following the Second Advent of our Lord, and it is this clear understanding of the future which makes James' words so remarkable. The church really believed and held that they had entered upon a period in which their unbelieving countrymen were to be scattered among the nations—and that came true enough twenty years later when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and ended their national existence—but that during the scattering the Gospel would be preached and the Christian church developed and gathered out from all nations. Then, at the end of the Age and at the time of the Second Coming, Israel would be regathered in faith to the Holy Land and the Millennial Kingdom, with its world wide evangelism, have its commencement, "that the remnant of men and all the nations may earnestly seek me".

It was this wide conception of the Plan of God, of Jesus Christ coming into the world, not in the interests of the few, but of the many, not "to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved", to "seek and to save that which was lost", which finally steered the growing Christian community away from the shackles of Judaism. The battle was not over; there were still disputes and objections: but henceforward James and Paul, Jerusalem and Antioch, saw eye to eye on this cardinal issue and the missionary work of the Church went on with new impetus. Much in St. Paul's later teaching must have stemmed at least in part from

this historic conference. "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2. 4). "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order" (1 Cor. 15. 22-23). "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2. 10-11). Some have accused the great Apostle of ignoring, in these and similar passages, the fact of sin and the consequences of sin but that is unjust. St. Paul never swerved from the basic truth that the wages of sin is death and that sin and sinners must one day perish together; what he did reject, and unhesitatingly reject, was the old Judaistic idea which unhappily lingers in some Christian circles today, that God has his favourite people whom He will bring into eternal felicity and will condemn out of hand any from among the remainder who do not measure up to his standards, whether or not they have had a full opportunity to know of him and to accept him. That was the normal Judaistic view of all the Gentiles, fit objects of Divine wrath and in no sense potential inheritors of the Kingdom of God; St. Paul, although once he himself had espoused that view, now would have none of it.

So the delegates from Antioch began their homeward journey, enriched and encouraged by all they had seen and heard, and bearing with them the precious letter which enshrined the judgment of James and the endorsement of the Church at Jerusalem. One or two concessions were asked of the brethren at Antioch, matters that if conceded would eliminate any tendency to misunderstanding and possibly scandal in the church. The Greek believers were recommended to abstain from the ceremonial pollution of pagan idols. This probably referred to the prevalent custom of adorning house and gardens with artistic statues or busts representing the gods of Greece and Rome, and of eating meats part of which had previously been ceremonially offered on pagan altars: this latter meant refraining from many social feasts and visits and could mean measurable sacrifice or loss on occasion. They were recommended to abstain from the eating of flesh with the blood, something abhorrent to every Jew and likely to make a barrier between Jewish and Gentile believers in their social intercourse, their fellowship and their "agape feasts". They were warned against fornication—in this case the reference is evidently to practices common in the pagan temples, associated with pagan worship and hallowed or made respectable on that account. It would not always be easy for a new convert quickly to realise the gulf that existed between pagan and Christian ethics in matters of this nature. But that was all. These suggestions were made in a brotherly spirit, and with that the Church at Jerusalem gave its blessing and endorsement to all that was going on at Antioch.

Judas Barsabas and Silas, two "chief men" in the Church at Jerusalem, accompanied the Apostles to Antioch. They were sent by the Church to confirm by word of mouth all that the letter contained. This whole episode is a wonderful example of Christian brotherhood and fellowship between two independent communities. They had differed on an important matter of doctrine, they might well have taken a stand each on their particular standpoint and maintained an attitude of aloofness the one from the other. A schism might have developed right at the outset which could seriously have hindered the Church's outward witness. The manner in which these two bodies of believers tackled their difficulties on the basis of their common standing in Christ constitutes a wonderful example to Christians of after times and is a condemnation of many sad events in Christian history which might have been prevented had a similar spirit prevailed. The letter was read to the assembled Church at Antioch, and, says St. Luke, "*they rejoiced for the consolation*".

The visitors from Jerusalem "*exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them*". So were the bonds of unity forged strongly and the way laid open for further extension of the Christian gospel.

Judas Barsabas returned home; Silas remained at Antioch. Later on he became Paul's companion on his second missionary journey and appears later in the New Testament as Silvanus, the Latin form of his name (1 Thess. 1. 1. 2 Thess. 1. 1 and 1 Pet. 5. 12).

Paul had not only enriched his own outlook and grasp of the faith; he had established a vital link between the two principal churches of "the Way", and he had gained a new and valuable helper. The prospect at this time must have seemed brighter than ever before, and it must have been with renewed optimism and expectation that Paul took up his duties again in Antioch, waiting for the next Divine leading for missionary service among the nations.

(To be continued)

## "LET US KEEP THE FEAST"

A Memorial  
reflection

The ceremony and words used by Jesus at the last supper, which have given inspiration for two thousand years of Christian celebration, must have followed close upon, and indeed were probably intermingled with, the disciples keeping of the Passover according to Mosaic law. It is not so much that the one ceremony was distinct from the other in point of time and sequence as that it was distinct in purpose. The Passover was a ceremony of tradition, looking back to a deliverance of fourteen centuries past; the Last Supper was the inaugural ceremony of a new fellowship, looking forward to a deliverance which was still two thousand years in the future. The one was a remembrance of the past, the other a pledge of the future.

We therefore need to balance the future with the past. When Jesus said "This do in remembrance of Me" He meant us to remember, not only his life on earth and death on the Cross, but also his promised coming again in the glory of his Kingdom and his *apokulupsis* to all men when that Kingdom is established in power. Ours is not a faith which dwells forever on the things of the past, however soul-stirring and inspiring they may be, however mighty in Divine power for the furtherance of God's Plan. It is a faith that looks forward to the future, that beholds with clear, undimmed eyes those glories that shall be when the Son of Man has fully come in the power of his Kingdom, and all nations have gathered before him to learn the pure language that He will turn unto them, that they may call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. It is *that* coming which we have in mind as we raise the cup to our lips and repeat

together "*Till He come!*"

There were eleven gathered with him in that upper room. The others were not there—those who, beside the apostles, were constant attendants upon our Lord during his ministry. The three Marys, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Mark, were not there. Neither were Mary and Martha of Bethany, nor Joanna nor Salome. Neither was Lazarus, nor those secret disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus. The "five hundred brethren" to whom the Lord showed himself after his resurrection were elsewhere, all unconscious of the ceremony that was being enacted for the first time and which they themselves would repeat, year by year continually, for the rest of their lives. It was in the truest sense of the word a family gathering, and it marked the institution of a new family, the Christian family, a family that was to hold together and endure, through centuries of suffering and persecution, until our own day; and endures still. Despite misunderstandings, difficulties, disappointments, disillusionments, we remain a family still, and those who have grasped this truth and practice it in their relations with the brethren are the ones who alone have remained truly faithful to the cause of Christ.

It was appropriate therefore that the institution of the Christian family should be marked by a ceremonial which, whatever else it was intended to symbolise, did in fact bring home to the disciples one vivid realisation. They were to eat bread in the presence of their host! That meant a great deal more to those men in that day than ever it means to Western Europeans to-day. From time immem-

orial—yea, and even until to-day in the Arabian deserts—to eat bread in a man's house or in his tent in the land of the sons of Abraham meant that the host was forever bound to accept the eater as one of his family, even to the extent of sacrificing his own life if needs be in the defence of his guest. It was no idle word that Jesus uttered when He said "This is my body, broken for you. Take, eat". By that action He was assuring them, in symbol, that, having partaken of bread at his hands, they were forever under his protection and members of his family. "*Greater love hath no man than this,*" said Jesus, "*that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" He knew full well that He must lay down his own life on behalf of those who had eaten bread with him, and in the earnestness of his communion with the Father He prayed that these who by this ceremonial eating of bread had signified their desire to be of his family forevermore might be as one family whilst still in the flesh, "that they may be one, as we are one". We need to reflect here that to be one body in heaven means to be one family on earth; the unity for which our Lord prayed is not one to be achieved as it were instantaneously upon our "change" to spiritual conditions and our entrance upon heavenly glory, but here and now in our fellowship together and our common pilgrim walk toward the Holy City. "*The bread which we break,*" says Paul in 1 Cor. 10. 16 "*is it not the communion—common union—"of the body of Christ?"*" It is only as we enter into the real meaning of the term "communion of saints" that we can perceive the basis of that fellowship which shall be our inheritance beyond the Vail but for which we must be prepared here and now if we are ever to inherit it.

The significance of the bread, then, is his life given for us, our acceptance into his family, binding us together in one body. If we take the symbol to ourselves and partake of the broken bread, we must identify ourselves with that position.

But the eleven were to be initiated into an understanding even deeper than that. Not only were they to enter into a passive relationship as members of the Christ family but they were also to enter into an active partnership as blood-brothers with Jesus Christ himself. He called them, not only to accept of his hospitality and sacrifice upon their behalf, but also to become associated with him in a work of service which should make them for all

time "*joint-heirs with Christ—if so be that we suffer (endure) with him, that we may also be glorified together*". And so He bade them drink of the wine which was his blood.

The assimilating of blood meant the acquiring of blood relationship to the donor, to these men of the Eastern world. Two Bedouin Arabs, resolved to become blood-brothers to each other, would each open a vein in his wrist and the two together would allow their blood to mingle. From henceforth they were blood-brothers—each had the other's blood run in his veins. The drinking of blood, too, meant the acquiring of life from another. "*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you,*" said Jesus. Hence this symbol of the cup involved a second and deeper obligation, one more personal between each believer and his Lord. It implied eternal association together in as close a sense as two brothers are together. It implied a companionship with the beloved partner in all things, in life or in death. So if Jesus spent his life in serving mankind and doing good to all, so do we. If Jesus forsook earthly ambitions and aims in order to further the interests of God's Kingdom, then so should we. If Jesus went into death at the hands of wicked men rather than swerve one iota from the course which Divine wisdom had planned, then we should be ready to do the same. "*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*"

The symbol of the cup, then, is that of a voluntary sharing with him in all that He does, both in the service of mankind now, limited in scope and power though it must be, and in the infinitely wider sphere of Millennial work when that Age shall have come. "*Are ye able,*" asked our Lord of some who desired to reign with him, "*to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am baptised?*" "Lord, we are able," was the confident reply. They knew not what they said. So, often, in our confidence, we say the same thing and understand the implication of what we say as little as did those disciples. May we have grace and sincerity to enter more deeply into the spirit of these things, and, approaching the holy table with full awareness of our responsibility and privilege, let us "*keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*".

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There is need to ponder the assertion of the prophet Isaiah, who assures us that "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear". We live in an age

when too much emphasis is being placed upon what man can do, and are in danger of overlooking that the One who sits upon the throne is omnipotent, able to make all grace abound.



## NIPPUR—CITY OF THE MOST HIGH

One of the world's earliest cities of which traces and records still remain is Nippur, the holy city of the people among whom Abraham lived, the Sumerians. Founded about seven hundred years before his birth, and not long after the founding of Babylon, it shared with that city the distinction of being, at first, sacred to the Most High God, for this was at a time when paganism and idolatry had not as yet had its rise in the earth, and the God universally worshipped was the God of Noah. So although this city is mentioned only once in the Bible it is of some interest to the Bible student who would know more of the true faith as it was revealed and preached in those early days of human history.

Nippur is mentioned in Gen. 10.8 under the name of Calneh as one of the four cities springing from the dominion of the celebrated warrior Nimrod. The reason for the difference in name was not known until modern times although the Talmud insisted that Nippur was the city alluded to in Genesis. It has been found in our day that Nippur—in the native tongue Niffer—was its name in later Old Testament times and until its disappearance in the Twelfth Christian century. In ancient times, the days of Abraham, it was known as Enlil-ki, meaning the city of the Sumerian god Enlil, at that time the god of the heavens. At some intervening time some scribe translating the old cuneiform record of Genesis into Hebrew mistakenly read the cuneiform sign for the city name backwards, thus producing the consonants k-l-n, which the later Masorites, when they came to add vowels to the Hebrew words, turned into Kalneh, or Calneh as now in the AV. Here is one evidence of the antiquity of the Genesis record; had it been composed in the era of the Israelite monarchy as many text books still claim, the later name would have appeared.

The earth was still very thinly peopled when Nippur was founded—not yet a city, a small settlement of reed huts but already having a temple of baked brick sacred to the Most High. The episode of the Tower of Babel was probably at least two centuries in the past and the people had scattered, as Gen. 11 said they did. The sons of Japhet had gone north, penetrating Europe on the one hand and Siberia on the other. Those of Shem, Abraham's ancestor, had taken the northern area of the Euphrates—Tigris plain and made Babylon their holy city, also sacred then to the true God. Bab-ilu, they called it, the Gate of God. The sons of Ham had emigrated, to the south, and in after years produced the Egyptians and the Canaanites and the peoples of North Africa, but one of them,

Cush, remained in the plain and developed the first great world civilisation, that of Sumer. So Nippur became their holy city and was always held in veneration on that account. It is rather intriguing to think that in those early days, before Jerusalem existed, there were two holy cities where the worship of the true God was kept alive, continuing on from the days of Noah nearly a thousand years earlier, and that just about the time that worship was being corrupted by the development of idolatry and paganism, the eternally holy city, Jerusalem, the city of God, came into being in the land which the Lord had already destined to be peculiarly his own. There would seem to have been no time in those far-distant days when the worship of God had altogether vanished from the earth.

No one knows when Jerusalem was founded. The recent discovery of the ancient city-state of Ebla in northern Syria has revealed that Jerusalem was in existence at least three or four centuries before Abraham and that points roughly to the time when polytheism, the worship of many gods, began to be developed from the original pure worship and both Babylon and Nippur ceased to be holy to the Most High God of heaven. It could be conjectured that some faithful souls of the line of Shem before Abraham was born perceived the drift of events and forsook the land of Sumer as did that patriarch after them and migrated to the as yet undeveloped land of Canaan, there to establish a new holy city which should perpetuate their faith and their worship. Thus when Abraham in his turn entered that land he found Jerusalem ruled by a king who was also "priest of the Most High God" and the patriarch accepted him a fellow-worshipper with himself. He later found other fellow-believers, Abimelech king of Gerar in the south land, and Pharaoh ruler of Egypt with his people, all similarly believers. As the true faith died out in one place it became re-established in another, and thus it has been through all history.

By the time of Abraham Nippur was a sizeable city, very similar in nature to the two which do figure in Bible history, Babylon and Ur of the Chaldees. It is very likely that Abraham knew it well, for it was only a hundred miles from his own home at Ur. It must have been well known to Daniel also, fifteen hundred years later, for many of the Jews taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar settled in Nippur, and it carried a thriving Jewish population continuously from then until the Middle Ages. It was in fact then that the well-known Jewish flair for commercial dealing came to the top. When the city was excavated in 1887-1900 by the University of Pennsylvania there was found,



among the thirty thousand inscribed tablets discovered on its site, what amounted to complete collection of records of the commercial dealings of a firm of Jewish bankers and dealers named Murashi and Sons, covering the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to the year 403 BC, a period of nearly two centuries. The enterprising Murashi (his Babylonian name) had apparently been brought from Jerusalem with the captives and had set himself up in business with his headquarters at Nippur and before long was trading in every conceivable kind of merchandise, including, regrettably, male and female slaves, banking and lending money at thirty per cent interest, financing state projects at considerable profit, and with complete impartiality supplying weapons and stores to both sides of any pair of city-states wanting to go to war with one another. (The armaments manufacturers still do the same to-day, of course.) The ramifications of Murashi and Sons extended all over the Middle East and their activities must have contributed in no small degree to the prosperity of

Nippur. It is of interest to note that during the excavations there were discovered a number of "banknotes" of the time, worded just like modern banknotes but made of baked clay tablets instead of paper.

Nippur was inhabited up to the 12th century AD and was by then not only a Jewish centre but the seat of a Christian bishopric. Then came Turkish domination and the whole land languished. The city lost its prosperity, the inhabitants drifted away, the houses collapsed into ruins, and the desert sands covered what was left until Austin Layard in 1851 discovered the site of the old city. Since then modern excavation has revealed much of its secrets and ancient history, and added considerably to the world's knowledge of Abraham's day and earlier. Like its sister city Babylon, it was once a holy city to the Most High, but idolatry came in, it became a centre of paganism, and the proud title passed to a city which will bear it to all eternity, Jerusalem, the city of the great king.

## Augustine on Hell

Saint Augustine in his writings (*"City of God," Book 21, chap. 4*) asserted as proof of the doctrine of eternal torment the "known facts", first, that salamanders could live in fire without coming to harm, second, there are mountains in Sicily which burn for ever without wasting away. Both his "facts", of course, were fallacious. It was an old superstition in his day that salamanders—a type of lizard—could live in fire; the great theologian evidently had no knowledge of the nature of volcanoes. It is important to realise that in any age the understanding of Divine truth is of necessity limited and coloured by the prevailing knowledge of the outer world, the level of current scientific knowledge and social ethics. That is one reason why it should be expected that although the basic principles of the Christian faith laid down by Christ and his Apostles for all time, their detailed interpretation and significance grows clearer and deeper as generation succeeds generation. Many perfectly sincere Christians in our own day come short of the clear vision they might otherwise enjoy by reason of their clinging to outdated interpretations and theologies having their origin against the mental background of several centuries ago.

## Feeding the World

A great deal is written and said about the world's inability to feed its exploding population but such statements are mostly ill-informed. The possibilities inherent in Nature's powers applied to food production are as yet scarcely realised. A "break-through" in Russia is a case in point. A combination of aqua-culture (the growing of plants in a medium constantly supplied with water combined with nutrients) and intense light, under controlled conditions, has resulted in the production of tomatoes at the rate of over two hundredweights per square yard of cultivated area per year, and of strawberries fifty pounds. At this rate the space taken up by the family car would provide all the food required by a family of three. Objections to the validity of the Biblical doctrine of the Millennium are sometimes raised on the score that the earth could not possibly feed the multitudes depicted as experiencing the Messianic Era. The Psalmist, talking of that day, when God will "rule the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth", continues "then shall the earth yield her increase" (Psa. 67. 6). Perhaps this Russian scientist is showing the world one way in which it can be done.

The people who are lonely in this world are those who are always looking for something to come to them; they hope for pleasant adventures; they exact much from their friends and from their family, and they are never satisfied. The happy

men and women are those who never think to demand for themselves—who give and give again, and find joy whenever they find opportunity to give joy.

# OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

*An exposition*

## 1. Denunciation of Edom.

The historical narratives of the Bible mention eleven men who bore the name "Obadiah", out of at least six tribes, but it is quite certain that the Obadiah whose prophecy is the shortest book of the Old Testament was not any one of them. This Obadiah must have lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and it would appear that he was one of the few who remained in the land after the Babylonian king had carried the greater part of the people into captivity. The account of this disastrous episode in Israel's history tells us that the Babylonians left some of the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen, and appointed Gedaliah their governor (2 Kings 25. 12 and 22). Very possibly Obadiah remained with this little community of peasants, in which case he must undoubtedly have been in contact with the prophet Jeremiah, who also remained in Judea after the captives had been taken to Babylon. Following the murder of Gedaliah, a few months later, Jeremiah was forcibly taken into Egypt by the panic-stricken peasantry. Whether Obadiah went with them or remained by himself in Judea and died there, we have no means of knowing. Jeremiah must have had a copy of Obadiah's prophecy in his possession when writing his own book, for Jer. 49. 7-22 is quite evidently a paraphrase of the greater part of the book of Obadiah.

From this evidence, then, we can say with some certainty that Obadiah lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and penned his prophecy at about the same time, so that Jeremiah could have possessed and copied it some years later when writing his own.

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of one chapter, of twenty-one verses only. The prophecy is concerned with the judgment of God upon the nation and land of Edom for its enmity against Judah at the time of the Captivity. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, and were therefore viewed by Israel in a rather different light than the rest of the nations. Even although there was often unfriendliness and enmity between the two peoples, there was always the injunction of the Law of Moses in Deut. 23. 7 "*Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother.*" It was all the more reprehensible, therefore, that when the Babylonians were ravaging Judea the Edomites should have gone out of their way to assist them in their work of destruction. The children of Israel regarded this action as a base betrayal of the—admittedly rather flimsy—blood

relationship between them, and Obadiah's passionate denunciation, predicting the irretrievable ruin of Edom at the hands of God, is the outcome.

Edom was a little country about the size of Cornwall, lying to the south-east of Judea, on the way to the Red Sea. It is an extremely mountainous country; its one-time capital city, Petra, has been described as a "rose-red city, half as old as Time", alluding to its extreme antiquity and the fact that it was built in a well-nigh inaccessible gorge flanked by precipitous red granite cliffs which made the city virtually impregnable against enemies. The original name of the district was Mount Seir, derived from the first settler known to have occupied the mountain gorge, Seir the Horite. It used to be thought that the Horites were merely an insignificant tribe of cave-dwellers, but within the last fifty years it has been discovered that they were, in fact, a wide-spread civilised people which had attained a high degree of culture. The Hurrian civilisation, as it is called to-day, covered a large part of what is now known as Syria and Jordan. By a comparison of genealogies it would seem that Seir lived at about the same time as Terah the father of Abraham, so that when Abraham entered Canaan the Hurrian civilisation was already well established there. One of Esau's wives was Aholibamah the great-granddaughter of Seir. It is easy then to understand that when Canaan became unable to support the flocks and herds of both Jacob and Esau, the latter moved out and went to Mount Seir to his father-in-law (Gen. 36. 6-8). That in turn is how Mount Seir became known as Edom, for the name Edom (meaning "Red") was another name for Esau. From that time onward the land was known by either name, Seir or Edom, or as the "Mount of Esau". It is evident from the extended history of Esau given in Gen. 36 that the Horites and the sons of Esau intermarried and eventually became one race, the "Edomites". That race continued in possession of the land of Edom throughout the periods of Israel in Egypt, the Judges and the Kings, and were in possession when Obadiah uttered his prophecy of coming judgment.

The prophecy of Obadiah was fulfilled. Not many more years were to pass before another people, the Nabatheans, were to drive the Edomites out of the last recesses into which Nebuchadnezzar had pursued them soon after the fall of Jerusalem, to occupy the whole land themselves until they in turn were overrun by Arab hordes from the desert. The dispossessed Edomites migrated to the desert regions south of Judea and were gradually absorbed in the Jewish nation.

It is said that the last true Edomites perished in the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

So the prophecy of Obadiah has proved to be true history. There is no doubt about the time that he lived and no doubt about the events that marked the passage of the years after his death, events which proved him to be a true prophet. The Book of Obadiah would have served a great purpose had it been intended to do no more than that, to record the coming of Divine judgment upon a nation that by reason of ancestry and associations was intimately connected with the people of God's covenant but chose instead to repudiate their kinship and betray those to whom they should have been as brothers, in order to curry favour with the godless power which at the time was ruling in the world.

But that was not the only purpose of the Book of Obadiah. All these kinships and events fit so marvellously an even greater betrayal of God's people in this Age by those who should have been their spiritual brethren, for the sake of an unholy alliance with the powers of this world, that it is impossible not to see in the preservation of this short book in the canon of Scripture a record of Divine judgment pertaining to our own day and time. Rightly to understand that record it is necessary to go through the book in detail.

The primary object of the prophecy was to declare Divine judgment on Edom for its betrayal of its brother nation, Israel. The prophecy was fulfilled, so far as that object was concerned, during the century following the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. By the year 135 B.C., when John Hyrcanus, priest-king of the temporarily independent Jewish state, compelled the remaining Edomites to become proselytes to Judaism and crushed their last claims to separate nationhood, the last words of Obadiah had been literally fulfilled to the letter. Those who had escaped from Babylonian captivity ruled again from Mount Zion, and ruled what was left of the Mount of Esau. It is true that the kingdom was not the Lord's in the sense that we expect it to be when He has taken to himself his great power to reign, but within the limited scope of the prophecy it was true enough. Judea was free from the foreign yoke, the Temple worship went on unmolested, and every true Jew looked with heightened expectation for the coming of Messiah. It requires only a moderate knowledge of the history of the years between Nehemiah and John the Baptist to realise that Obadiah's prophecy enjoyed an outward fulfilment during that period.

What then of its preservation into Christian times? There is surely something more in this dramatic denunciation than a mere recapitulation of the doom which came upon an ungodly people, a doom which we can read about in secular history

books anyway. There must be some instruction appropriate to those who live in this latter day of Divine judgment, whose conditions match so closely those of Israel in the days of Obadiah.

Strangely enough, it is the Rabbinical school of interpretation which gives the clue. The Edomites, said the Rabbis of the First Century, prefigured all Christians everywhere. Edom prefigured Rome. The doom described in such bitter terms in the Book of Obadiah was to be fulfilled upon the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and Rome was to fall before Judaism, never to rise again.

The Rabbis said this of all who named the name of Christ, whether true or professors. In that they were not right. Nothing of the denunciations in the Book of Obadiah can fittingly be applied to anyone who is in covenant relationship with God. None of those sweeping condemnations can relate to any true-hearted Christian any more than in Obadiah's own time they could be applied to any true son of Israel. But just as the Edomites were guilty of allying themselves with the nations of the world against their own blood-brothers the Jews, so have professors of Christianity who have taken the name of Christ without partaking of his spirit allied themselves with the nations of the world against their own blood-brothers the true disciples of Christ, members of the Church in the flesh. These apostate, worldly-minded ones, are the spiritual Edomites against whom the secondary fulfilment of this prophecy is directed.

During the greater part of this Age the true disciples of Christ have been in a condition which could properly be called a "Babylonian captivity". The powers of this world have persecuted, oppressed and martyred, or have ignored, slighted and humiliated, the Christians in their midst as they have from time to time seen fit. During all that time, except for the early centuries when Paganism was in the saddle, there has always been a so-called Christian power which was allied with the world against the true Church. They are the Edomites upon whom the spiritual counter-parts of Obadiah's judgments have descended and will yet descend.

Viewed in this light the book becomes charged with new meaning. It is the record of God's judgment upon "nominal Christendom", expressed in terms directly applicable to those who in an earlier age behaved in exactly the same way. And in order that there shall be no misunderstanding it is necessary at this point clearly to define terms and explain exactly what is intended to be conveyed by the expression "nominal Christendom".

It is not a name to be applied to the organisations and sects which constitute what is known as the Christian world. It is not any one or other of the great denominational groups. Nominal Christendom is the aggregate of nominal Christians

everywhere, just as the true Church on earth is the aggregate of all true disciples of Jesus wherever they may be found. It is an admitted fact that no single sect contains all the members of the true Church. Their "names are written in Heaven" and only the Master knows just where they are to be found on earth, but we do know that they are likely to be in every sect and group and sometimes outside of all sects and groups. In like manner "nominal" Christians are also to be found in every sect and group, even in those which enjoy the clearest light on the Divine Plan. But just as it is true that the smallest and most insignificant of Christian groups usually contain the highest proportion of true disciples of Christ, chiefly because such groups have nothing of material advantage to offer the "nominal" professors, so it is equally true that the largest and most powerful sects usually contain the highest proportion of nominal Christians, because it is in such circles that there can be obtained the worldly advantages which they seek.

These two classes, true Christians and nominal Christians, have existed side by side throughout the Age, just as the wheat and the tares in the parable of Matt. 13 grew together until the harvest. Typical characteristics distinguish the respective individuals. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The Christianity of a true Christian is usually fairly obvious to his neighbours and companions. It is certainly obvious to his fellow-believers. The worldliness of a nominal Christian is more or less equally obvious—at least to one whose own life is devoted to Christ. Because the darkness hateth the light, because it is reproved by it, because its deeds are evil, nominal Christians usually display a thinly-concealed resentment, or on occasion open enmity, against true Christians. That resentment leads such to take sides with the powers of this world against the disciples of Christ when conditions are such that conflict of some sort is inevitable. In that attitude they become spiritual Edomites.

An ecclesiastic who places the glory and power of his position above his duties as a pastor, and uses it to obtain material advantage, is an Edomite. There were many such in past ages and there are some to-day. Worthless shepherds, who leave the flock, they are called by the prophet Zechariah. A man who takes the name of Christ upon his lips but in his heart is far from him, is an Edomite. The unfaithful steward of Matt. 24, who beats his fellow-servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, is an Edomite. The false teachers and seducers of the Pauline epistles are Edomites. Those who malign and vilify their fellow-brethren for supposed errors of doctrine or practice, and manifest anything but the spirit of Christ in their dealings with their fellows whom God has also received, these too are Edomites, for this thing

goes very deep. Like Paul, who knew that even if he understood all mysteries, and all knowledge, if he was without love, he was nothing, so we must keep very near to the spirit and teaching of our Master if we too are not to fall under this condemnation.

So the Book of Obadiah has a strong but very necessary message. It reveals the Divine attitude toward all who have taken his name upon their lips unworthily. It shows how He will vindicate his own people in due time and bring retribution upon their oppressors. It declares in no uncertain terms that God is guiding his people's destiny and that in his own due time deliverance will be their portion and judgment that of their enemies.

That does not mean eternal damnation for the judged. More than one sect to-day proclaims a message of no hope for all who do not accept the peculiar tenets of the particular sect. That is quite in line with the spirit of the old creeds. "This is the Catholic faith, which unless a man believe, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly" says one of them. That is not God's design. The vindication of true Christian discipleship at the end of this Age ("Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their father", Matt. 13. 43) is to be followed by the Millennial reign of Christ in which all who have never heard of him or have never had his claims properly presented or have ignored him or, like the Edomites, have fought against him, will be subjected to the full force of the persuasive power of Divine love, and only then, as Dr. Pateron Smyth says in his "Gospel of the Hereafter" will God, after having put his arms around the sinner and looked into his eyes with his own eyes of unutterable love, and been rejected, will He turn sorrowfully away and leave the sinner to the consequences of his sin.

It is in this light that we must read the prophecy. The doom of the Edomites is complete and final, but the House of Israel is at the last to rule over the House of Esau. The Edomites die as subjects of Esau but they reappear as subjects of Jacob. Edom shall be no more but its citizens shall know another and better rule. "The kingdom shall be the Lord's." In that there is promise for all, for in that kingdom there is to be Sodom, Gomorrah, Nineveh, all restored to their former estate and having part in the opportunity for salvation. That lies outside the scope of Obadiah's prophecy; he is concerned only with the immediate picture of judgment, and it is with that picture we are concerned also. And now we will look at Obadiah's message in detail.

(To be continued)



## THE MOURNING OF HADAD-RIMMON

*A First and Second  
Advent theme*

*"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son . . . In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon." (Zech. 12. 10-11).*

The twelfth chapter of Zechariah's prophecy embraces, when the allusions are understood, one of the most beautiful visions of the establishment of the Kingdom ever penned. The setting is in that time when Israel's restoration is complete, the Ancient Worthies have returned from the grave and assumed control of affairs, the evilly disposed nations of the earth have ranged themselves to do battle against the Holy Land, and God has come out of his place to deliver his ancient people. The last four verses of the chapter describe a great outpouring of the spirit of grace and of supplication upon the people, their turning to God in repentance, and a great mourning which, likened to that of Hadadrimmon, is the occasion for cleansing from sin.

Verse 10 is often misquoted "they shall look upon *him* whom they have pierced" and used as a "proof-text" that the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent will appear to all men in his pre-crucifixion body, exhibiting the wounds inflicted on the Cross. The careful student will realise at once that this is not the meaning of the passage at all. It is God Who is speaking, Who in this chapter declares his intention of defending his people, and says "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced". The word for "pierced" is *dakar*, meaning "to thrust through", and alludes to the piercing of the Father's heart by the unfaithfulness and waywardness of his chosen people. "Upon me" is not the happiest translation—"toward me" is much better, the Hebrew word being a preposition signifying motion toward a place, or used of the turning toward a thing. Hence the idea here is that of the people upon whom the spirit of grace and supplication has been poured turning and looking toward the God Whom they had forsaken.

It is true that in John 19. 37 the Apostle quotes this Scripture in reference to the death of Jesus upon the cross; but he is not quoting it as a prophecy of that event, but rather as an application of an appropriate Old Testament phrase. The word "*him*" does not appear in the Greek. John's words are "*They shall look unto whom they pierced*" which is a correct Greek translation of the Hebrew text of Zech. 12.

It is with this understanding in mind that we consider this "great mourning as for an only son". It should be noted that although the people "look to

*me* whom they have pierced", it is said that they "mourn for *him*, as one mourneth for an only son" (vs. 10). The immediate allusion here is to the rejected shepherd of chap. 11. vs. 13-14, who had been valued by Israel at thirty pieces of silver. Now in chap. 12 Israel is pictured as having turned toward God, Whom they had pierced in rejecting his shepherd, and mourning for that shepherd as for an only son, a firstborn. The symbolic application to our Lord Jesus is obvious. It would seem that this entire passage refers to that time when restored Israel turns to God, and accepts Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King.

This is where the "mourning of Hadadrimmon" becomes a picture fraught with spiritual meaning once the import of the allusion is understood. Expositors have had a great deal of trouble with this verse; it is usual to suggest that the reference is to that great mourning which took place in Judah upon the death of good King Josiah at Megiddo nearly two centuries before Zechariah's day (2 Chron. 35. 24-25). It is surmised that Hadadrimmon must have been the name of the precise spot in the valley of Megiddo where the battle took place, but there is no knowledge of any such place and no evidence that any district or village bearing the name of Hadadrimmon ever existed. Rummaneh, near the site of the ancient Jezreel, is pointed to as having a somewhat similar name, but the similarity is more apparent than real. It is the writer's conviction that the allusion to the mourning of Hadadrimmon has reference to something of much more immediate import to Zechariah's people than the events surrounding King Josiah's death several generations previously. It referred, in short, to the annual commemoration, maintained by Semitic peoples for over three thousand years, of the death and resurrection of the pagan god Tammuz or Adonis.

What is called the Tammuz-Adonis myth goes back to antiquity. Its influence was widespread over Western Asia, and allusions to it are scattered here and there in the Old Testament. Mothers told the story to their babes and fathers to their sons; how that, in the dim long ago, the youthful god Adonis, as he was known in Palestine and Phoenicia, or Tammuz, as he was called in Babylonia, was slain by a wild boar in a dense forest, and went down into the netherworld, cut off in the bloom of his youth. At his going the world went dark; the sun hid itself, the trees and vegetation withered, and flocks and herds dwindled and died. In the face of this calamity, the goddess Ishtar (Venus), who loved Adonis, descended into the underworld to implore permission for the

Divine Son to return to earth. Leave being granted, Adonis was raised to life, the earth bloomed and blossomed forth once more in the power of the new life he brought with him, and there was great rejoicing among the sons of men.

Fantastic and meaningless as the story may appear to be, the serious student cannot help but observe how parallel it runs to the story of One Who, at a much later time in history, truly did suffer a violent death, descend into *Hades*, and was raised again by the Holy Spirit, the Divine power of God, to reappear upon earth bringing new life to men. There is sufficient likeness here to make the subject worthy of exploration.

Once every year, from long before the time of Abraham until the tenth century of our own era—shortly before the time of William the Conqueror—the peoples of Canaan held a great “mourning” to commemorate the death of Adonis. In northern Palestine the native tribes—and, alas, many Israelites also—watched for the time (the springtime), when the waters of the river Adonis ran red, due to the red earth of the mountains being washed down to the sea. That, said they, was the blood of the slain god, and immediately the great mourning was raised. Women, their hair streaming behind them, ran about weeping and crying. Images of the dead god were carried in procession and thrown into rivers or into the sea. The shepherds took up their reed pipes and sang their laments over the departed deity, how that with his passing the fields would dry up and wither and their flocks languish and die. In the towns and within the temples ceremonial mourning was instituted, and all the land was given up to the universal lamentation.

Then came a day—usually the sixth day of the ceremony—when the note was changed. “*Adonis is not dead—he is risen!*” That was the cry which resounded through the streets and across the fields. The citizens decorated their houses and took offerings of flowers and fruit to their temples. The reed pipes of the shepherds played joyful strains and even the lambs and kids seemed to share in the general rejoicing. *He is not dead; he is risen; and now new life will come to us all.* That was the note upon which this pagan festival ended, year by year, on the mountains of Lebanon and in the valleys of Galilee and Megiddo.

And that is why the prophet Zechariah, searching for an illustration fitly to picture that great expression of national sorrow for the tragedy of the past, and national joy for the Lord’s resurrection and his return to bring new life to the world, which will arise “in that day”, was guided by the Holy Spirit to liken it to the “mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon”. *Hadad* is the Aramaic “*Adad*”—mighty Lord—and *Rimmon* a local name for Adonis. Reference to this name of

the god in this same district is made in the story of Naaman the Syrian, who besought Elisha’s indulgence when he went into “the house of Rimmon” (2 Kings 5. 18). Ezekiel refers to this same commemoration when in his vision he saw the idolatrous women of Israel “weeping for Tammuz” at the north gate of the temple (Ezek. 8. 14).

Jesus, as a youth, must often have witnessed this festival. He had but to wander a few miles from his home in Nazareth, into the mountains northward, to find himself surrounded by ruins of pagan temples and relics of ancient faiths. There in those wild districts where Israelite, Phoenician and Syrian had lived side by side for centuries, the old shepherds must have told the boy Jesus the story of Adonis, and pointed to the bright red anemones growing in profusion everywhere, telling him that they were the drops of blood falling from the dying god. The boy Jesus knew these stories for the fables that they were; but in them He might have seen some foreshadowing of a day to come when He himself was to be taken by wicked hands, crucified and slain (Acts 2. 3) and then, beyond that still, a far-off time when amidst the rejoicings of all, Israel’s Messiah would come in glory and power to bring life eternal to a dying world. And if, in fact, He did one day stand aloof and watch the multitudes wailing and lamenting the death of Adonis, that memory might well have been in his mind when at a later date He said to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24. 26).

“*And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David . . . the house of Nathan . . . the house of Levi . . . the house of Simeon*” (see margin) (vs. 12-14). This passage is eloquently expressive of the universal character of this mourning. Every family in the whole land shall mourn, and that nation-wide sorrow, ascending to Heaven, will unlock the doors of Heaven’s blessings. The prophet seems to have introduced four well-known names as representative of the nation; David the symbol of the ruling powers “in that day”, leading the lamentation: Nathan, as symbolic of the prophetic fraternity, the seers (Nathan was the prophet of King David’s time); Levi, the progenitor of Israel’s priesthood, and head of the tribe which throughout Israel’s history served in the things of God; Simeon, the materialistic, ruthless man of the world, an apt representative of “the people”. King, prophets, priests and people, all will join together in this great mourning which at the last is turned into joy when restored, delivered, converted Israel realise that the long looked for Kingdom has indeed come and that the law of the Lord is about to go forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2. 3). It is then that the concluding verse of this vision has its fulfilment

(chap. 13. 1). *"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness."* That fountain is the beginning of the flowing of the river of water of life (Ezek. 47. 1-12; 1-12; Rev. 22. 1-2) and its blessings come first to the earthly missionary nation, gathered in the Holy Land, and from thence stream out into all the earth.

That is the climax of this great mourning. Just as, in the mourning for Adonis, the people cast away their sackcloth, ceased their lamentation, and came together with singing and rejoicing because the time of life had come, so "in that day", will it be true, in the words of Isaiah, that *"the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away"* (Isa. 51. 11). The day of eternal life shall have come, and *"the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning*

*shall be ended"*. (Isa. 60. 20).

This, then is what Zechariah saw, and was inspired to write. In his day, the fulfilment of the golden words was still in the far distant future; nevertheless he knew that it would surely come. The mourning for Adonis has passed with the worship of Adonis into the place of forgotten things. But the purposes of God are working themselves out, and to-day we can see the beginnings of those events which shall culminate in the spectacle of a nation, conscious of a great peril but conscious also of a great destiny, having its blindness turned away and turning to seek the Lord in sincerity and truth. And in that day there shall be a great mourning in the land, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, but that mourning shall be turned into joy, and in that joy shall all families of the earth have their share, and, like Israel, come to join themselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

### A Note on the "Times of the Gentiles"

*"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the Times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21. 24).

This expression occurs only this once in the Bible. Jesus used it in connection with his foreview of the troubles soon to come upon the Jewish nation. *"... there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the Times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"* (Luke 21. 23-24). The succeeding verses make it clear that the ending of these "times" coincides with the events of the Second Advent so that at the least they span the period between the First and Second Advents. But Jerusalem was "trodden down of the Gentiles" for several centuries before that, and since the expression evidently refers to the domination not only of Jerusalem but of the land and people by "Gentile" nations, the fairest definition of these "times" is that they commenced when the old Hebrew monarchy came to an end in the 6th century B.C. at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and continue until the Israel people are again in full possession of their ancient land and capital, and—this is important—completely independent of the Gentile nations.

In 586 B.C. the last shreds of independence were wrested from Israel and Jerusalem was destroyed. Since that day no king has reigned on the "throne of the Lord" in Jerusalem and—apart from about a hundred years in the Maccabean period—no independent Jewish State existed until the year 1948. It has been argued that 1948 thus marked the end of

the Times of the Gentiles, but a goodly part of Biblical Jerusalem remained in non-Jewish hands. The occupation of East Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities in 1967 renewed the claim that the Times of the Gentiles had now ended, but the fact is ignored that Jesus' words imply much more than the mere question of who administers affairs in the city itself. Until Israel is completely independent of the remainder of the world and no longer subject to any kind of restraint or control from outside influence the Times of the Gentiles must be held to continue. It must not be forgotten that these "times" were imposed upon Israel because of their faithlessness to the Divine Covenant; it can hardly be expected that they will end until that faithlessness has been replaced by faith. The condemnation which ushered in this period, passed upon the last monarch to sit upon David's throne, is conclusive as to this. *"And thou, profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end; thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown... I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him"* (Ezek. 21. 25). It might well be that the full end of the Times of the Gentiles will coincide with the revelation of our Lord in power for the deliverance of all men at the full end of the Age; that is the time when Israel will turn to God in full faith and repudiate the unbelief of the past. Contemporary events in the land of Israel may well indicate the close proximity of that great climax in human history so that it might be logically concluded that the end of the Times of the Gentiles is imminent, but not that they have actually, as yet, fully ended.



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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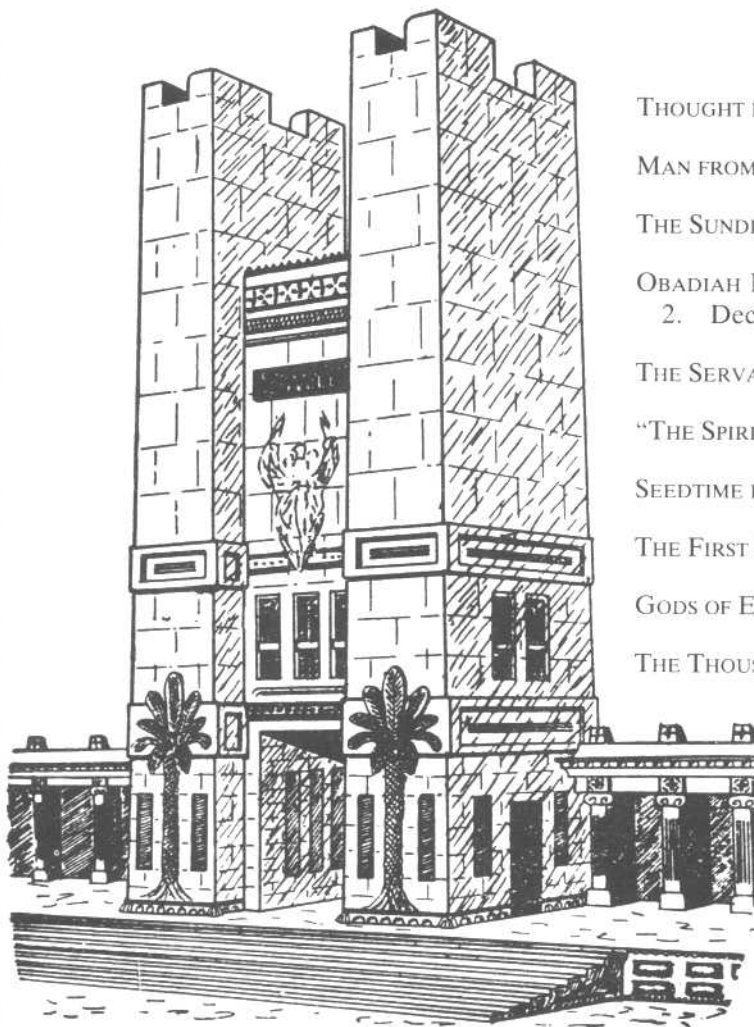
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"You know nothing, you understand nothing, you walk in the dark, while earth's foundations are giving way" (Psa. 82.5 NEB).*

Here in this 82nd Psalm there is a short and terse indictment of the men who are ruining this good earth which the Lord has made for the life and wellbeing of men. He tells them that despite their boasted wisdom and learning they know nothing, understand nothing, walk in darkness, while the very fabric of the earth they are despoiling is falling to pieces; "tottering to its fall" is the literal meaning of the Hebrew. There are so many ways in which the crass ignorance of scientists and the insatiate greed of commercial interests can bring this about in our own generation. Nuclear war is fast being outdated as the expected end of life on earth. The combined effect of uncontrolled drugs and uncontrolled pestilence could succeed in eliminating the human race before either of the super-Powers gets to the point of pressing the button. As possible alternatives we have the saturation of the earth's atmosphere with excessive carbon dioxide from the vastly increased, and increasing, burning of fossil fuel—coal, oil, gas—by world industry, and, too, by the thousands of super-jets continually winging their way through the air, leading to temperature and climatic changes inimical to life; pollution of the soil by sulphur dioxide from the same sources and the immoderate use of chemical fertilisers, destroying its capacity to produce food for man; the progressive decline in Nature's production of oxygen, essential to every form of organic life, by reason of the destruction of forests and loss of seaborne vegetation in consequence of the polluted oceans; and now for good measure the realisation that the spent gases from the enormous quantities of aerosols being used are rising to the upper atmosphere and destroying the ozone layer which from the time of creation has intercepted incoming cosmic rays which, falling upon unprotected humans, condemns them to premature death. There are so many ways in which

man in his folly can bring about the end of the world and it does seem that in his selfish heedlessness he is bent on trying them all.

But take heart. The destroyers of the earth will not be permitted to go too far. The Lord has no intention of allowing his plans for human happiness to be thwarted or even delayed by the misdeeds of men. Talking of this same day, Jesus said (Matt. 24.22) *"Except those days should be shortened"* (cut short) *"there should no flesh be saved,"*—but, He went on to say, God has cut short the days. Divine intervention in the form of the revelation of our Lord from heaven and the establishment of direct Divine rule on earth will in one moment halt the disruptive influences which are destroying the earth. It is foretold that under that righteous administration *"nothing shall hurt nor destroy"*. Nature has marvellous powers of recuperation and with the cessation of the corrupting processes it can be expected that the earth will be progressively restored to its original pristine condition. It can be expected that the outlook will be completely reversed and men be able to look forward to a future unclouded by the fears which are gripping so many at present.

Chesham Convention Sunday June 12, Malt House, Elgiva Lane. Details F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks.

## Gone from us



Sis. P. Bowman (Shrewsbury)  
Sis. A. Laqin (Duquesne, USA)  
Sis. J. Nadal (London)  
Bro. W. J. Siekman (Batavia, USA)  
Sis. P. Wall (Gloucester)



*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

## MAN FROM MACEDONIA

*A story of the  
Apostle Paul*

It could hardly have been more than twelve months after the momentous Jerusalem conference, recorded in Acts 15 that Paul felt the old urge to be up and away again on a missionary expedition. Since returning from Jerusalem both he and Barnabas had resumed their normal places of ministry in the Antioch Church, fortified and assisted by the devotion of Silas, who had now apparently decided to sever his connection with Jerusalem and make Antioch his home town and church. Perhaps there was more activity there and greater openings for the service he wanted to render. Acts 15. 35 makes it clear that the church continued in a spiritually healthy state; "*Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also*". There must have been a considerable work of evangelical witness carried on in the surrounding territory, not recorded in Acts because not directly associated with the wider work of Paul himself, nevertheless work in which he must have collaborated with his fellow-elders. Now the time had come, he probably thought, when he could leave that work to the others and go again over the ground he and Barnabas had traversed some eight years before—Cyprus, Perga, Iconium, Lystra—and satisfy themselves as to the spiritual condition of the converts they had made and the churches they had formed, and confirm them in the faith.

So Paul put the matter to his colleague. Barnabas was very willing. He, too, evidently felt the need and desirability of such an expedition. In all good faith, and not anticipating any demur, he proposed that John Mark should accompany them as general assistant. Probably to his complete surprise, Paul violently opposed the suggestion. Mark, he pointed out, had deserted them halfway through the previous journey and gone home to Jerusalem. He was not going to risk anything like that again. Regrettable though it may be to admit the fact, there is no doubt that this difference of opinion led to a violent quarrel between the two. "*The contention was so sharp between them . . .*" is Luke's expression, where the word is "*paroxysmos*", indicating a short and sharp but very extreme outburst of feeling. There is certainly no indication that the guidance of the Holy Spirit was sought or obtained on the matter, no record that resource was had to prayer that the will of the Lord might be discerned. Just for the moment, saints though they were, the old nature came to the top and neither would give way. Barnabas was determined that Mark should go; Paul equally determined that he should not.

It is difficult at this end of the Age, with only the

brief account in Acts before us, to arrive at any conclusion as to who was in the right. John Mark was now a mature man of about thirty four. He was evidently in full fellowship and service with the Antioch Church. The reason for his earlier defection is unknown, but the fact that he returned to Jerusalem and not Antioch, and that afterwards he is found again at Antioch, does point to the likelihood that his object was to be with his mother Mary at a time when the Jerusalem Christians were undergoing severe persecution. If that is the true hypothesis then it would seem that Paul was being a bit hard on the younger man on this occasion. In later years he did reconsider his attitude and expressed his appreciation and esteem for Mark, asking Timothy to bring him to Rome "*for he is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Tim. 4. 11). At this moment, however, Paul would have none of him, and Barnabas proving obdurate, the friends parted, each to undertake a missionary journey on his own account.

Probably by agreement, Barnabas, accompanied by Mark, went to Cyprus, where the first missionary journey had commenced. The Book of Acts is silent as to their labours after this, but from one or two scattered allusions in other New Testament books it seems possible that after visiting Cyprus they went on into Bithynia, Pontus, Cappadocia—all provinces of Asia, and territory in which later on the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to minister. Paul took the remainder of the territory they had covered eight years earlier.

Bereft of his erstwhile co-worker and travelling companion, Paul looked around for a successor. His choice fell upon Silas, a man who had by now proved himself at Antioch. Viewed in the light of later events, the entire episode perhaps was Divinely overruled, for Silas, like Paul himself but unlike Barnabas, was a Roman citizen. That was an advantage on this journey, for although at this moment Paul was unaware of the fact, he was destined this time to leave Asia and cross over into Greece, where the influence of Rome was stronger, and the fact of citizenship more important.

So Paul set out on his second missionary journey. He was now about fifty years of age; already two-thirds of his Christian life was over. He intended this expedition to cover more ground than the previous one; perhaps the hope of one day seeing Rome itself and preaching the Gospel in the capital city of the empire was already taking root in his mind. The two men struck out northward, visiting and confirming the companies of Christians scattered throughout Syria and Cilicia. All this was

home territory; here the Antioch church had sown the seed and was ministering continually. It was after Paul had passed through his own native city of Tarsus in Cilicia and crossed the high mountains behind the city that his journey began in earnest.

Approaching the Asiatic provinces from this direction he came upon the scenes of his former labours in reverse, arriving first at Derbe, the last call of his first journey, and next at Lystra. And here an occasion of great joy was experienced by the Apostle. Eight years previously he had left a few new converts in this place to form their own little assembly and continue as best they could in the faith he had so little time to expound to them. Now he found a thriving Christian community and among them a young man named Timothy who was to become one of the most devoted of Paul's fellow-labourers, as personally dear to him as though in fact his own son. "*My son Timothy . . .*" How often the Apostle's pen lingered over the beloved name when he wrote his epistles to the churches. The last words we have, written in the shadow of death, were to this young convert, expressive of his own faith and conviction after a lifetime of service. "*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand . . . I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded . . .*" So Timothy, at the older man's earnest request, threw in his lot with Paul and set out with him and with Silas when they resumed their travels.

No one really knows the truth about the next stage of the journey. They must have passed through Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia and visited the believers who had been converted on the first journey; then comes that rather obscure statement in Acts 16. 6 "*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not*". Here is a record of apparent frustration, of an attempt to preach which was prevented by the closing of the door of opportunity. No names of towns are given, no indication that in this long trek of at least seven hundred miles through the central districts of Rome's Asiatic empire the missionaries found any hearing ear or left behind them any converts. So far as the record in the Book of Acts is concerned, the trip through Phrygia and Galatia was unproductive of any good work. But there is one clue elsewhere. When Paul sat down one day in Corinth, some five or six years later, to write his Epistle to the Galatians he referred to the time he first came among them and to some sickness or malady with which he was then afflicted. "*Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first, and my trial which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ*

*. . . I bear you record that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me*". (Gal. 4. 13-15). Now this could only have taken place during this second missionary journey of St. Paul. Although unrecorded in Acts, it seems clear that Paul and Silas did meet with considerable success in Galatia, and that Paul was stricken with some kind of severe illness—the reference to the Galatians "plucking out their own eyes" seems to point to an acute attack of the glaucoma from which it is believed the Apostle suffered—and that some very exceptional manifestations of love and care were displayed by the new converts whilst he was in their midst. The warmth of affection which Paul displayed for the Galatian brethren does seem to indicate that he cherished very happy recollections of his ministry among them.

But the Spirit was hasting him on. Great events were ahead; a new field of labour was to be opened up and the Apostle to the Gentiles must linger no longer in Asia. Travelling westwards through Mysia they tried to turn southward into the province known to the Romans as Asia proper, the district where very soon now were to be established the famous "seven churches of Asia" of the Book of Revelation. The Spirit restrained them; "were forbidden" is the expression, where "forbidden" is the word "*kolasin*", meaning a restraint as a horse is pulled up by his bridle. Baulked at this, the travellers turned northward toward Bithynia on the Black Sea coast; the Spirit "*suffered them not*", where the words have the meaning of "permitted them not". There was only one way left to go; they must continue in a westerly direction and that would bring them to the coast of the Aegean Sea and the seaport of Troas; and on the other side of that sea lay the land of Greece and the continent of Europe.

Perhaps they remained at Troas for a little while, waiting the leading of the Spirit. Certain it is that they found a number of hearing ears in this busy mercantile town, for when Paul came back to Troas some four years later he preached to a gathering of the believers. At this present time he also met the man who was to be his constant companion and friend, destined to become the historian of the Apostolic Church, the Greek physician Luke.

It has been surmised that Luke was a native of Paul's own city, Antioch, and that the two men had met before. This is not definitely known. What is certain is that at this time Luke made open profession of Christianity and attached himself to the little party of missionaries. He was not an evangelist and not a preacher; his talent lay in writing. The fruit of his flair for noticing events and eliciting facts, and his masterly style in putting them together in vividly dramatic style, remains

with us in the Book of Acts and the Gospel according to St. Luke. The New Testament has been immeasurably enriched by the labours of this Gentile convert who so willingly sacrificed the honours and profits his undoubted talents could have won him in the world of men, and gave himself freely and spontaneously to the cause of Christ.

The party was now complete. Two zealous missionaries, one enthusiastic youth, and one middle aged professional man, consciously associated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ready for whatever work the Spirit might direct. Almost certainly there must have been much earnest discussion and prayer, and a conviction that very soon the obstacles and frustration of effort would be at an end and one clearly defined pathway revealed along which they must go.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that Paul saw a vision, or it might have been a dream; it matters not. It was during the night, perhaps after a day of discussion and prayer for guidance. He saw a man, a Greek, a man of Macedonia, the district of Greece which lay immediately opposite Troas, two hundred miles or so across the sea. He heard the man speak. It was an appeal. *"Come over into Macedonia and help us."* Paul came back to the waking world with the impact of that appeal still upon him. Was this the leading of the Spirit, the guidance for which they all had been waiting. It is evident that he must have lost no time in talking the thing over with Silas and Timothy and Luke, and equally obvious that none of them entertained any doubt about the matter. *"Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them"* (Acts 16. 10).

The next few verses tell how, loosing from Troas, they sailed by the little island of Samothrace and a day later arrived at the Greek port of Neapolis. From thence it was only a few miles to Philippi and before long the four men were treading the streets of that important centre and doubtless wondering how best to commence their mission. There does not seem to have been a Jewish synagogue in the city; adherents of the Jewish faith appear to have been few, so that it was not until the next Sabbath that Paul and his companions tracked down a few of like mind who were in the habit of meeting by the side of the river outside the city for prayer. Even so a Gentile was the first notable convert. Lydia, a woman of Thyatira on the opposite mainland, apparently resident in Philippi for business reasons, one "which worshipped God"—a phrase normally indicating a non-Jewish believer—was probably Greek, perhaps Roman. Evidently a woman of decisive character and natural nobility she quickly accepted the faith, was baptised, and promptly offered the hospitality of her home to the missionaries. There they stayed

whilst in Philippi and there the Christian community which was the first fruit of the Apostle's labours in Greece began to meet in fellowship.

It was at Philippi, probably after several weeks residence and ministry, that there occurred the incident of the demon obsessed slave girl, an affair which landed Paul and Silas in jail and led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer. This unfortunate girl was *"possessed with a spirit of Python"* (A.V. Margin *"pneuma pythonos"*). In the city of Delphi, not far from Athens, there stood the Temple of Apollo, within the precincts of which was a famous Oracle. The priestess of Apollo, known as the Pythia, presided over the Oracle and upon being approached by an enquirer after the future would fall into a frenzy of demon obsession and with foaming at the mouth, shrieks and gesticulations give a cryptic reply within which was contained the alleged answer to the question. The reference to this slave girl being possessed by a Pythian spirit is evidence that she attracted attention by displaying a similar kind of behaviour in public and thereby gained notoriety by reason of her declarations. As a slave girl her earnings were the property of her owners and a very lucrative business they evidently found it to be, judging by their chagrin when Paul put a peremptory stop to the whole thing. *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."* That was the cry which fell upon the ears of Paul and Silas every time they encountered this poor demented girl in the street. It was a witness to the cause of Christ, but from a source which Paul could not allow. The Christian Gospel was not to be associated with the frenzied ravings and distraught acts characteristic of pagan idolatry. Turning abruptly upon the girl and owners, and in full sight of the gaping crowd, Paul sternly commanded the obsessing spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. *"And he came out immediately."* Never again was this slave girl to mystify and entertain the thoughtless crowds of Philippi with her cryptic utterances. Whether or not she became a disciple after this experience is not known: suffice it that once again the saving and healing power of Jesus Christ was made manifest in a spectacular fashion to those who as yet knew him not. The handful of believers in Philippi must have had their faith strengthened in consequence, and rendered praise to God. But the owners of the slave did not. The source of their profit was gone. The value of their slave was destroyed in a moment by these interfering Jews. Determined to have their revenge, they laid hold on Paul and Silas and hurried them before the civil authorities. The episode of the Philippian jailer was the result.

*(To be continued)*



## THE SUNDIAL OF AHAZ

*The story of a  
Divine sign*

*"Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down." (Isa. 38. 8).*

This is another of those Old Testament incidents which seem to set at defiance the known laws of Nature and hence receive more than the usual meed of criticism from sceptics and "modern" Bible scholars. In reaction to this, many studious Christians of the traditional school have sought to explain the account along lines of scientific explanations of the miracle, always on the basis of the Authorised Version translation.

It was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign that the apparently fatal illness gripped him, and the word of the prophet Isaiah came to him "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isa. 39, 1). And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, for he was a devout man, and he had worked hard for the good of his people of Judah, and his work was not yet finished. There was more in Hezekiah's grief than appears on the surface, too, for as yet he had no son, and the promised seed, Christ, could come only through his line. It seemed as though God intended to abandon his own purpose and the glory of Israel never come at all. So Hezekiah prayed that he might live.

His prayer was answered. He heard that fifteen years were to be added to his life. Isaiah was commissioned to give him a sign that the Lord would both heal his sickness and deliver the city from the army of Sennacherib, which was at the time threatening Judah, for this was before the celebrated destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem. (Isa. 38, 6-7 and 36, 1 and 37, 36). According to the parallel account in 2 Kings 20, 8-11, Hezekiah was given the choice of two signs. Either the shadow of the "sundial of Ahaz" was to go down ten degrees, or it was to return back ten degrees. Hezekiah chose the latter. It was a light thing, said he, for it to go down ten degrees; it did that every day anyway; "nay, let the shadow return back ten degrees."

And the shadow went back!

This sounds like a most amazing happening. It would seem to the ordinary man that the only way in which the shadow on a sundial could return would be for the sun to reverse its course and appear to traverse the sky from west to east, which, since it is the earth that moves, and not the sun, would imply that the earth had changed its direction of rotation and was turning backwards. On this basis the commentators of the nineteenth century endeavoured to demonstrate that such a thing did actually happen in the days of Hezekiah. A

distinguished astronomer, E. W. Maunder, in the early years of this century produced elaborate calculations to support this view.

Before discussing the nature of the miracle, however, let us examine the story itself, and particularly the language used, and let us try to reconstruct for ourselves the scene of which Hezekiah's sick-bed formed the centre-piece on that memorable day.

Hezekiah lay sick in his palace. There is still much that is not known about the Jerusalem of his day, but the position of the palace of the Kings of Judah is definitely established. It lay a little to the south of the Temple, facing the Mount of Olives, which rises from the opposite side of the deep valley of the Kedron. From where Hezekiah reclined he could see the Mount directly before him and the Temple towards his left. Somewhere nearby, near enough for him to witness the "sign," was the "sundial of Ahaz."

Nowhere else in the Bible is there any mention of an instrument for measuring time. Until the days of Daniel, over a century later, there are no indications that the children of Israel divided the day into hours. One is justified therefore in looking a little more carefully at this expression "the sundial of Ahaz."

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a great admirer of foreign innovations, as is evidenced by the account in 2 Kings 16, and he might very well have acquired a sundial for his palace grounds were such things in existence in his day. The earliest known sundials are of Greek manufacture and date back only so far as the sixth century B.C., two hundred years later than the time of Ahaz. The Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius, the author of a celebrated work on architecture and mechanical inventions, written in the time of Augustus Caesar, a few years before Jesus was born, says that the sundial was invented by Berosus, the Chaldean priest (*Arch.* 9. 9); and Berosus lived only about 250 B.C. Herodotus, the Greek historian (440 B.C.), states that the sundial was invented by the Babylonians (*Hist.* 2, 109), whilst in Homer's "*Odyssey*" (900 B.C.) there is an obscure reference to a means of observing the revolutions of the sun in use in Syria (*Odys.* 15, 402). It is just possible therefore that Ahaz could have possessed a sundial.

It is when the word "sundial" is examined that a totally different complexion is put upon the account. The Hebrew is *maalah*, which denotes an ascent by means of steps or stages, and is used for "steps" or "stairs" in the Old Testament. The steps of the altar in Exod. 20, 26, and of Solomon's throne in 1 Kings 10, 19 and 20, and the stairs of

2 Kings 9. 13 and Ezek. 40, 6 are "*maalah*." So, likewise, are the majestic words in Amos. 9, 6. "It is he that buildeth his *stories* in the heavens" where "stories" refer to the stages or terraces of the Babylonian *ziggurats* or temple towers, reared up into the heavens. And this word "*maalah*" is also translated *degrees* in the accounts of the miracle. The A.V. translators are guilty of an inconsistency here, for both "*degrees*" and "*sundial*" are from the same Hebrew word. Rotherham translates 2 Kings 20, 11, "*And he caused the shadow on the steps, by which it had gone down the steps of Ahaz, to go back ten steps*" and Isa. 28, 8, "*Behold me; causing the shadow on the steps, which hath come down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, to return backwards ten steps.*"

Nehemiah (3, 15 and 12, 37) speaks of "stairs that go down from the city of David." Jerusalem was built on several hills with two deep valleys—those of the Kedron, and Gay-Hinnom (Gehenna), intersecting them, and there were various flights of stone steps built up the sides of these valleys. It is known that one such staircase descended the slope from the King's Palace eastward down to the Horse Gate in the city wall (Neh. 3, 28; 2 Chron. 23, 15; Jer. 31, 40) and another ascended from the Horse Gate up to the south side of the Temple. By means of these two stairways the King possessed what amounted to a private way to the Temple, and there is one rather obscure passage in 2 Kings, 16, 18 which indicates that Ahaz made some alteration to one of these stairways. It seems then that the stairs leading down from the Palace to the Horse Gate are those to which reference is made in Isaiah.

Now these steps, running roughly eastward down the slope, with the lofty buildings of the Palace at the top between them and the afternoon sun, were shrouded in shadow every afternoon. As soon as the sun had passed the zenith at midday, the shadow of the Palace roof would fall upon the topmost step, and thereafter as the sun sank towards the west, so the shadow would grow longer and creep down the stairs to the end. That is the shadow that had gone down ten of the steps ("*degrees*" in the A.V.) at the time of the sign. It must have been about the middle of the afternoon. Hezekiah had lain there many afternoons watching the shadow of his father's house creep down those stairs until at length, as it reached the Horse Gate at the bottom, the sun sank below the horizon behind his palace, the daylight rapidly faded and the short Palestinian twilight gave way to black night. So is the fate of my father's house, he must have thought bitterly; I am to die childless; there will be none of my line to reign after me on the throne of the Lord in Judah; all the promises made to the fathers will fail; there can never be a son of David to become David's Lord. God hath for-

gotten to be gracious.

And then he saw the sign! Josephus makes it plain in his account of the circumstances (*Ant*, 10, 2, 1) that the shadow had gone down ten steps of the staircase and then returned. What had happened? What was it in this inexplicable phenomenon that convinced Hezekiah that God was with him and would heal him?

It is not necessary to suppose that God interfered so much with the normal course of Nature as to halt and reverse the onward progression of the sun through the sky. Less spectacular and unlikely causes would have produced the effect. Under certain climatic conditions clouds of minute ice crystals can form at a great height in the upper reaches of the air; the apparent result as seen from the earth is the appearance of a band of light passing through the sun, and two additional suns, one on either side of the true sun. This effect, which is known as *parhelia*, or "mock sun" is due to the refraction of the sun's light as it passes through the prismatic ice crystals on its way to the earth. If now a cloud, at a much lower altitude, should obscure real sun and the western "mock sun" over a certain district, the only light reaching that district is from the eastern "mock sun," and the effect is as if the sun had receded eastwards by a certain fixed amount (always equal to one and a half hours of our time). Two occasions when this actually happened are on record; one was on 27th March, 1703, at Metz, in France, when the shadow on the sundial of the Prior of Metz was displaced by one and a half hours. The other occasion was on the 28th March, 1848, over parts of Hampshire when the same effect was observed.

Now this is a perfectly logical scientific explanation and the miracle could very well have been due to this cause, except for one consideration. Hezekiah had been at great pains to put down Baal worship, the constant curse of Israel, and to restore the worship of Jehovah. The sun was the visible symbol of Baal. Such a phenomenon as is described above would be probably interpreted by those who witnessed it as a manifestation of the power and interest Baal. The credit for the sign, and consequently for the cure of Hezekiah's sickness, would have been given, not to the God of Israel, but to Baal. Much of Hezekiah's own good work would have been undone. For this reason it is unlikely that God would use the sun as an instrument for effecting the "sign."

Is there then another possible means by which the miracle could have been performed, more in keeping with the majesty and power of God and more indisputably attributable to Him? The fact that as Hezekiah looked down his staircase the Temple of the Lord was in full view upon his left, at the summit of Mount Moriah, suggests that there is.

The shadow of the palace lay ten steps down the staircase. Only the return of the sunlight could remove it—or a light brighter than sunlight! Every Israelite knew that there was such a light; the holy "*Shekinah*," that supernatural light that shone from between the cherubim in the Most Holy, that had been the guide of Israel in the wilderness in those long ago Exodus days, a "fire by night," one that had been seen on rare occasions when God had caused to manifest his majesty and power in visible form. That fierce light, brighter than the sun at noonday, had flashed out from the Tabernacle to slay Nadab and Abihu when they offered "strange fire" before the Lord (Lev. 10, 2); it had flooded the camp at the time of Korah's rebellion (Num. 16, 42—45); it had filled Solomon's Temple at its dedication. Isaiah saw it once in vision when he received his commission of service (Isa. 6, 1). Is it possible that as Hezekiah gazed still upon the staircase, waiting for the sign that the Lord had promised him, the wondrous glory of the *Shekinah* did indeed blaze out from that sanctuary on the hill, blotting out the brightness of the sun itself, lighting all Jerusalem with its radiance? The shadow on the steps would have vanished in an instant, and the whole scene, the Palace Gardens, the stairs themselves, the city wall and the Horse Gate far below, the Mount of Olives on the opposite side of the valley, stand out in sharp relief vividly delineated in that blinding white light. If this is indeed what happened on that memorable day, what possible

doubt could remain in Hezekiah's mind? More convincing by far than any natural celestial phenomenon, this message from the sanctuary was as the appearance of God himself.

All Jerusalem must have seen it. All Jerusalem must have interpreted it aright. The *Shekinah* came forth only for destruction or blessing. Hezekiah was a good king, a God-fearing man. It could only mean that he would recover, that he would live to play his part in the fulfilment of Divine promise, that there would yet be a son to sit upon the throne of the Lord after him, that the destiny of Israel would yet be achieved. The news would travel quickly, and before long all Judea would know what had happened, and that the king's life had been prolonged for fifteen years.

So the wonderful story concludes with Hezekiah going up to the Temple to sing his songs of praise to the stringed instruments, all the days of his life, for his deliverance and for the marvellous happenings (Isa. 38, 20). Fifteen songs did he compose and named them "songs of the steps." They appear today in the Book of Psalms as Psalms 120 to 134, and they are headed "songs of degrees" by the A.V. translators. (The ascription of some of them to David is incorrect). For ever afterwards they were used in the Temple ceremonies, and to-day we use them still, a memorial of that day when the Lord turned back the shadow that was over the house of Israel, and his glory was seen in Jerusalem.

## A MILLENNIAL PROMISE

The thirty-second chapter of Isaiah has long been recognised to comprise a prophecy of Millennial conditions. "*Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment*" is how it opens. The Septuagint rendering of verses 6-8, which describe the attitude of the obstinately wicked in that glorious day, is so much more clear and vivid than is the Authorised that it is well worth reproducing.

*"For the fool shall speak foolish words,  
And his heart shall meditate vanities,  
And to perform lawless deeds,  
And to speak error against the Lord;  
To scatter hungry souls,  
And he will cause the thirsty souls to be empty.  
For the counsel of the wicked will devise  
iniquity,*

*To destroy the poor with unjust words,  
And ruin the cause of the poor in judgment.  
But the godly have devised wise measures,  
AND THIS COUNSEL SHALL STAND."*

That final sentence is a wonderful assurance of the certitude of God's promises. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" is the declaration. Here in Isaiah 32 we have an eloquent pen-picture of the determination with which some may seek to perpetuate the bad old ways of this "present evil world"; but all their plans and schemes will come to nought, for "*the godly have devised wise measures, AND THIS COUNSEL SHALL STAND*".

God's children, are most triumphant when most tempted; most glorious when most afflicted; most in the favour of God when least in man's and their

own. As their tribulation, such their triumphs. They live best in the furnace of persecution.

# OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

*An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah*

## 2. Declaration of War

*"The Vision of Obadiah".*

It is a simple and unpretentious beginning. Appearing as it does in our Bibles, as the opening sentence of the first verse, much of its force is lost. It is really the heading of the prophecy, the title of the book. Were the writings of Obadiah to be printed by themselves, these four words would stand upon the front cover, limned in letters of gold. There is no attempt at anonymity but at the same time no self laudation nor obtrusion of the man's own personality. Obadiah has the courage of his convictions and is not afraid to attach his name to the message he proclaims and for which he stands. It is not his own message and he does not pretend that it is. It is a vision, something that he has seen and which he wants others to see also. So, simply, he pinpoints the whole of what he has to say and stands in the background, the servant who saw the vision and played the part, first of the scribe who wrote it down and then the herald who proclaimed it abroad.

Good it were for us if we could capture this same simplicity. Sometimes we make our own names and personalities too prominent in the work we are privileged to do for the Lord, sometimes we tend to retire into obscurity and leave the work altogether nameless. There was a well-known and well-loved disciple of the Master, long since finished his course—Benjamin Barton—who used to say "Humility is not *thinking too much of oneself*; humility is not *thinking too little of oneself*; humility is not *thinking of oneself at all*." There is a world of truth in that simple observation. Obadiah came to his commission with mind and heart so full of the revelation that had been made to him that he had no thought for himself at all; he just announced in quiet sincerity and warm-hearted zeal "the vision of Obadiah" and proceeded to say what had been laid upon his heart.

*"Thus says the Lord God about Edom."*

Another simple statement. The message is from God and it concerns Edom. The reverence of the prophet is revealed in his use of the term "the Lord God". To him, God is supreme and there can be no other object of worship and adoration. Obadiah himself is but a voice, to declare what the Lord has said. The message is not man-made. It is not born of the prophet's own wisdom or intellectual acumen, nor yet of any insight he may have into the affairs of the nations. It is a message from the Most High God, the one who ruleth among the children of men, and as such it must be respected.

We must not leave this simple and reverent use of the expression "the Lord God" without recalling the example Israel has set us in this connection. The sacred Name was never pronounced by them;

they used a substitute. Christians generally have followed that example and use the expressions "the Lord" or "God" when referring to the Deity. A still more reverent because more truly expressive term is "the Father", and this is one that is in the highest degree appropriate on the lips of those who by reason of full consecration to his service have become "sons of God". An enthusiasm verging on fanaticism in the case of one Christian group has led to the widespread use of the Anglicised form of the Name—Jehovah—as an appellation for the Deity to be used on every possible occasion; the very frequency of its use begets a familiarity which is the antithesis of that reverence which we should seek to preserve when speaking of the Most High. The translators of the Authorised Version were rightly guided when they decided to translate the Hebrew YHWH—the Hebrew word for the sacred Name—by "LORD" in practically all cases, and we in our day do well to follow some such example as that of Dr. Moffat who renders it "the Eternal". We cannot be too careful when we take upon ourselves to speak and write of the great Creator and Father of all. It is the height of irreverence to address him as one would address an immediate superior upon earth with whom one is on terms of easy familiarity. Obadiah possessed an intense consciousness of the overwhelming might and majesty of the One who had spoken to him, and it must have been in tones that we can be sure were hushed with awe that he declared his message "Thus says the Lord God".

The message is about Edom. In Obadiah's own day such reference to Israel's brother-nation, the children of Esau, would be quite enough to arouse interest and command attention. We today must associate Edom with all in this world who together form the worldly-minded kinsmen of the true disciples of Jesus, all who claim a degree of kinship with Christ but have no share in his Spirit. This Age has produced many spiritual Edomites and they have been and are scattered among all the denominations of Christendom. This word of the Lord God is for them and it is a word of judgment. In this end of the Age the fact that spiritual Israelites are to be gathered together into the "general assembly of the Church of the Firstborn" implies that spiritual Edomites are to suffer the judgment that puts an end to their pretensions for ever. In the new Age there will be no Edomites.

*"I have received a declaration from the Lord, and He has sent forth a message to the nations, to rise and make war upon her."*

There are two important factors in this opening announcement. One concerns the Church in the flesh and the other concerns the world in general.



Obadiah is the Lord's servant and he has received intimation of the Lord's command and intention. To no one else but his own servants does the Father reveal his will, at this or any time. "The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets and them that trust him." In every age has God had his witnesses, who, because of whole-hearted consecration and complete dedication of life are able to interpret, by reason of the indwelling Spirit, that which He will tell them. So when judgment is to come upon the world or any part of it in consequence of sin, the servants of God are the ones to whom are entrusted the knowledge of what is impending and the duty of proclaiming it.

This does not include the duty of executing it! Christians are not empowered to act as executors of judgment whilst they are still in the flesh. Some there are who exultantly chant together "let the saints be joyful in glory . . . to bind their kings with chains, their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgments written. This honour have all his saints." (Psa. 149). They claim the right by virtue of that text to arrogate to themselves powers that belong of right only to the Lord the Head, and in thus exceeding the commission given to the disciples of Christ at the first they stray into grievous error to their own spiritual hurt. There is more than a suspicion of the desire to exact revenge for past indifference or opposition when Christians conceive it their solemn duty to inflict Divinely approved chastisement upon those whom they esteem fitting subjects for judgment.

Here in this verse the implication is plain. The other nations, not Israel, are to rise and make war upon Edom. Obadiah's mission was to proclaim the inevitability of judgment but the execution of that judgment was to be left to the nations round about. So it was in fact. Although in later days Israel did absorb the Edomites into themselves and extinguish Edom as a nation, the fulfilment of the prophecy really belongs to the Babylonians who forced the Edomites out of their mountain fortress not long after Obadiah's day, and after them the Nabatheans, another Arab people, who completed the work and occupied the Edomites' land until in the early centuries of the Christian era they in turn were dispossessed by the Saracens. The nations did indeed rise and make war upon Edom, and fulfilled every word of Obadiah to the letter.

So too in the larger fulfilment. Spiritual Edom is destroyed by the very nations of the world whose favours she solicited and for whose sake she denied and ignored, and oftentimes persecuted, spiritual Israel. Hear the Divine sentence expressed in words directly applicable to the Edom of this Age, "The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." (Rev. 17. 16). That is not an

isolated instance of the Divine revelation as to God's intentions, John gave but a brief word but what he saw took its inspiration from a far more detailed prophecy spoken by the prophet Ezekiel and recorded in his 16th chapter. The picture there is of apostate Jerusalem, meeting at last the penalty of her unfaithfulness to her God. Referring to those whom she had preferred to God, He says "I will give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places . . . they shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords, and they shall burn thine house with fire, and execute judgments upon thee . . ." (Ezek. 16. 39-41). There is a Divine law of retribution which we might call, in the language of men, "poetic justice", which decrees that those who are apostates from God, unfaithful to their profession for the sake of worldly honour and interests or the approval of men, shall receive judgment at the very hands of those for whose sake they rejected God. The nations of this world will, at the last, in Obadiah's language, "rise and make war upon" spiritual Edom, and at their hands will the Edom of this Age suffer, and fall, and be no more.

*"Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you will be completely dishonoured."* (vs. 2).

Small among the nations! That is a very apt description of the true Church in the flesh, the disciples of Jesus. It is also an apt description of "spiritual Edom", the nominal professors of Christianity, but for a different reason. True Christianity is at a discount because the nations of the world "will not have this man to reign over us". They do not want Christ and they are not prepared to pay the price that consecration to his service demands. So they treat the appeal of the Gospel with indifference. The Edomites know that, and they have endeavoured to compromise with the world by rejecting all there is in Christianity that runs counter to the world. For a time, in past ages, that course of action brought results. Organised Christianity was a very useful ally to kings with turbulent subjects. State and Church found many common interests and between them they ruled the common people with a rod of iron. To-day all is different. Men and women are no longer driven by fear; the State has found other and more effective means of keeping the masses in check, or at least, in these days when the masses themselves wield much power, of making those same masses serve the interests of the State. The former assistance is no longer needed.

*"The pride of your hearts has deceived you, living as you do in the fastnesses of the rocks, building your home on high, and saying in your heart 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'"* (vs. 3).

How like is this expression to the word in Rev. 18. 7 "She saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow". The pride of the Edomites was in their lofty dwellings high up among the pinnacles and crags of their mountain city. They were supremely confident that no enemy would ever be able to dislodge them, and they sat there in arrogant pride. So with all in this Age who have had any part or lot in that which is symbolised in the Book of Revelation by this woman seated upon the scarlet beast, arrogant in her pride and proud in the power she wields over the kings of the earth, never dreaming that the end of that power is shortly to come. Jeremiah the prophet saw something of this when in his splendid

vision of the fall of great Babylon he was shown by the Holy Spirit God's judgment. "Behold, I am against thee, O thou most proud, saith the Lord of Hosts: for thy day is come, the time that I will visit thee. And the most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all round about him." (Jer. 50. 31-32). Babylon was the proudest and greatest city of antiquity; with her massive walls and mighty Tower it must have seemed as if she could never be overthrown, but overthrown she was, and she lies to-day a waste of broken brickwork inhabited only by jackals and lizards.

*(To be continued)*

*This compendium of various translators of Obadiah brings out the dramatic emphasis of the narrative and can be used when reading the instalments.*

\* \* \*

I have received a declaration from the Lord, and He has sent forth a message to the nations, to rise and make war upon her.

"Behold I will make you small among the nations; you will be completely dishonoured. The pride of your heart has deceived you, living as you do in the fastnesses of the rocks, building your home on high, and saying in your heart 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down," says God.

What a downfall is yours!

"If thieves and robbers came to you by night would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings?"

But now, what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures!

Your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive."

"In that day," says God, "I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off. Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.

"On the day that you stood aside when aliens

carried off Jacob's possessions and foreigners entered his land, casting lots for the possession of Jerusalem, you allied yourself with them. You should not have exulted over your brother's fate in his day of misfortune or rejoice at the ruin of the people of Judah, nor have boasted yourself in the day of their distress, nor taken possession of My people's territory in the day of their calamity, nor robbed them of their goods, nor stood in the road to intercept the fugitives, nor delivered the survivors into the hands of their enemies.

"And now the day of the Lord is at hand upon all the nations. As you have done, so it shall be done unto you; your deeds will return upon your own head. As you have drunk the intoxicating cup upon My holy mountain, so shall all the nations round about drink, and stagger, and be as if they no longer exist.

"But on Mount Zion there shall be those who have escaped, and it shall be a sanctuary, and the House of Jacob shall possess it in peace.

"The House of Jacob shall be a fire, the House of Joseph a flame, and the House of Esau shall be as stubble, which they shall ignite and consume until nothing is left of the House of Esau."

That is what God has decreed!

Then the people of the southern desert shall inherit the Mount of Esau, and the people of the sea-side plain, the land of the Philistines. Ephraim shall inherit Samaria, and Benjamin shall inherit Gilead. The Israelite exiles in Halah shall inherit Phoenicia as far as Zarephath, and the Jerusalem exiles in Sepharad shall inherit the cities of the desert.

And those who have escaped shall come from Mount Zion to rule the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's.

## THE SERVANT OF THE PRIEST

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 17. 10).

The occurrence is recorded in detail by all four of the Evangelists; they appear to have invested it with some degree of importance. John even takes care to preserve the servant's name. It seems so irrelevant an addition to the story that one wonders if there is more hidden beneath the surface than appears at first sight. It was in all probability the Temple guard, under the control of the High Priests, together with a party of Roman soldiers under their own centurion, which set out to arrest Jesus, and without doubt the High Priest's personal representative would accompany them to ensure that all went according to plan. Peter the impulsive would quite naturally pick on this official as the first object of attack in his unavailing defence of his Master. The subsequent action of Jesus is the last of his miracles of which we have any record before his death. Malchus was probably the last human being to feel the kindly touch of those life-giving hands and to experience the thrill of creative vitality run through his body as the healing power flowed into him and made him whole. But would this be the only reason for the prominence given to this apparently quite trivial happening?

Did Malchus become a believer as the result of his experience? Was his name preserved by John because in later years the Christian assemblies had been familiar with the presence of a man who had once gone out to assist at the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth and had ended, like Saul of Tarsus, by becoming a devoted follower?

There is a hint in one of the early Christian writings which seems to indicate that the Christians of the First century knew more about this matter than we do to-day. Paul tells us, quietly, in 1 Cor. 15. 7, that our Lord after his resurrection "*appeared unto James*", his own natural half-brother, the one who became the head of the infant Church at Jerusalem, presided over the historic conference recorded in Acts 15, and wrote the Epistle bearing his name. Paul adds no detail of that appearance; he speaks as though it was a story already well known to his readers, as doubtless it was. But in the document known as the Gospel to the Hebrews, which is thought to have been written about seventy years after the Crucifixion and therefore about forty years after Paul's death, the story then current among the Christians as to Jesus' appearance to James is given in greater detail, and with it a casual allusion which may constitute a link with the story of Malchus.

"Now the Lord, when He had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared to him . . ." Who was this "servant of the priest" who, according to Christian tradition, was present at the tomb when the resurrection took place? It is recalled that the first witnesses of the resurrection were the members of the guard, who actually beheld the rolling away of the stone, a feat which was already completed when the women arrived on the scene. (Mark 16. 4). These keepers were not Pilate's soldiers, but were drawn from the Temple guard, as is evident by a comparison of Pilate's reply "*Ye have a watch—make it as sure as ye can*" (Matt. 27. 65) with the action of the keepers in reporting the sequel to the priests and not Pilate (Matt. 28. 11). What more likely then that Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, present at the arrest in Gethsemane, should also be present with—perhaps in charge of—the guard at the tomb? And if this is so, what must have been his feelings, when in the very early hours of that morning, the ground heaved and the rocks shook, the great stone closing the tomb rolled back, and Malchus and his men, confronted with an altogether unexpected and awe-inspiring sight "*did shake and become as dead men*"? (Matt. 28. 4).

Whether Jesus himself appeared to the keepers before their precipitate flight, and before the women arrived at the tomb, the Gospels do not say; but the incident related in the "Gospel to the Hebrews" may well enshrine a verbal testimony which has not been incorporated in the canonical books. Is it possible that this man who suffered at Peter's hands and was miraculously healed by Jesus was also a witness of the resurrection, knew in a flash that He had indeed triumphed over death, and in the wonder of that meeting became a believer?

Who was it that saw the mighty angel, glorious in appearance, roll back the stone? (Matt. 28. 2). Not the women—the stone was already rolled back when they arrived. This particular piece of testimony must have come from one of the guards or from one who was present with them, and whose testimony was afterwards accepted by the infant Church and incorporated into Matthew's Gospel.

Is it the truth of the matter then, that Malchus became a Christian and, although his testimony to the Resurrection is not preserved in the Gospels, something of the wonderful thing that happened to him on that wonderful morning has been preserved in the traditions of the early Church?

## THE SPIRIT OF POWER

*"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you."* (Acts 1. 8).

This was the promise which restored the disciples' faith just before our Lord's Ascension. For five or six weeks since his death they had been in a condition of perplexity, not quite sure what was going to happen or in which way they would continue the work they had been doing in these three years past. *"Tarry ye in Jerusalem"* He had said *"until ye be endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24. 49). That expression must have been associated in their minds with the promised coming of the Holy Spirit: *"ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence"* (Acts 1. 5), for Jesus had made it plain to them that after his departure they would experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in a manner previously unknown to them. *"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* (John 14. 26).

Now this association of the Holy Spirit of God with the idea of power or energy—the word is *dunamis* which means energy actively exerted and is the basis of our word dynamic—was a very familiar one to the disciples. They knew from their reading of the Law and the Prophets that the Holy Spirit is the power that executes the mighty works of creation, gives life and vitality to all living things, conferred upon God's warriors of olden time superhuman physical strength whereby they wrought great works in his Cause, inspired his prophets with visions and dreams and knowledge of coming things beyond the ability of men to discover unaided. They knew all this, and now, inconspicuous and untalented men that they were, they themselves became recipients of this mysterious ability to perform great and wonderful works which patently they could never have done in their own natural strength. *"Ye shall receive power"*; the reality of that experience is attested by the manner in which this group of untutored and inexperienced men set out after Pentecost to preach Christ and his Kingdom against the formidable opposition mounted against them. By the power of the Spirit they spoke in many tongues to men of many nations, withstood the threatenings of the authorities who sought to suppress their work, and in no uncertain fashion gave witness to the fact of the Resurrection. A few weeks earlier they had all been in hiding in fear for their lives; now they stood before the people preaching the new faith and defying the authorities to stop them. *"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4.

19-10). That was the reaction of Peter and John to those who sat in judgment upon them, and there was nothing their judges could do about it.

This is the Holy Spirit. Invisible but all-powerful, it effects the stupendous works of creation, bringing all things into existence. If the astronomers are right, throughout the regions of space new worlds are continually being born in the mighty crucibles of the stars. Across the vast distances which separate star from star there constantly flow streams of radiant energy which eventually reach their destinations and accomplish some great work in the processes of Nature. So is the Holy Spirit, giving light amid darkness, illumining the minds of men and making them to understand things which could not otherwise take shape in human thought. The vehicle of all life, this power initiates new life in the hearts of believers, sustaining them in the vicissitudes of earthly existence, bringing them through the transition of death into a new environment, conferring upon them new bodies in which life is renewed and continues. There is nothing in space and nothing in time but is controlled and determined by this supreme and all-embracing power, the Holy Spirit of God.

This is the true doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The power of God, operating to create and sustain all things, living and non-living, to convey his commands and fulfil his Will, this is the Holy Spirit. The ultimate source of the Holy Spirit in God the Eternal no man can understand. How it is that God is, and that we exist, and know that we exist, that external to our own being and personality there is a material universe which we can see and hear and feel, we do not know. The mysteries of God and of existence are too great to comprehend. But we must accept and believe in this Divine energy pulsating through all that God has made and reaching out to the extremity of his creation, effective in the performance of his will, whether it be in the physical process of material creation, or the instruction and enlightenment of those to whom He has given life. That Divine energy which has its centre and source in God is the outward evidence to man that God is, that the things that happen in space and time have their origin in, and derive their reality from, Eternal Deity.

Scientific men are devoting a great deal of their time nowadays to investigating the source of the energy which drives the Universe. One fruit of their labours has been the atomic bomb, which produces and dissipates an enormous amount of energy in a fraction of time by "splitting the atom". Atoms are microscopic "piece parts" of which all material things are made and there are millions of atoms in a grain of dust, but atoms themselves are



made of even more microscopic parts and when some of those parts are separated there is a tremendous release of energy. This occurs continuously in the sun and it is from the sun that the earth derives the energy to keep it going. We feel that energy as heat, and we see it as light, but it is itself invisible. Every day the sun lifts forty thousand gallons of water from the ocean for each man, woman and child now living on the earth, carries it across the sky, and drops it as rain so that the processes of life can continue. In the centre of the sun an atom divides and sets free a quantity of energy—scientists call it radiation. That radiation travels through space at the speed of light and when it reaches the earth it is seen as light. It falls upon a head of wheat growing in the field and sets in motion a series of changes whereby the plant takes a little of the surrounding air and a little moisture from the ground and out of them produces the material substances of the wheat grain. But there is more in that grain than came from the air and the ground. That radiation which travelled from the sun has also been transformed into part of the substance of that wheat grain. The light of the sun, winging its way to earth, in a very real sense enters into man to support his life.

So is the Holy Spirit, Divine energy extending into all places of God's dominion, all-powerful in executing his will. Perhaps this is nowhere better shown than in the opening verses of Genesis. *"In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light'".* The temptation to interpret those words in terms of modern science is strong indeed. The word "moved" in this text means to flutter or undulate and "waters" is, not the seas, but "tehom", the primeval abyss. Sir James Jeans a generation ago was the first to point out how accurately this expression fits modern knowledge of the nature of light, a cyclic or undulatory series of "waves" of many frequencies. These two initial verses in Genesis might well picture the momentous happening at the dawn of time when the Holy Spirit of God began to operate in the primæval nothingness to initiate the complex system of radiation and matter which constitutes the material universe—and at that time, in an instant, there was light!

In precisely the same manner the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of life, whether upon this earth or anywhere else. The ancients knew this. Speaking of the living creatures of the earth, the Psalmist says *"Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth"*. (Psa. 104. 30). *"If he set his heart upon man"* says Elihu in Job 34. 14-15. *"If he gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust."* The power which makes life

possible in any organism, from man downwards, is the Holy Spirit. The historians of the Old Testament recognised this when they credited the possession of apparently superhuman power to the influence of the Spirit, as in the case of Samson or Jephthah or others of whom it is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them and they performed mighty deeds. Whether in Old Testament or New Testament, the idea behind the expression Holy Spirit is that of Divine power. Divine energy, operating in creation to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of our Lord during his sojourn on earth at his First Advent. The power of the Holy Spirit, which is of the Father, was possessed and exercised by the Son. Of his exalted position before coming to earth the writer to the Hebrews says that He upheld all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1. 3). In other words, creation was maintained and directed by his command in the power of the Spirit. And that power was his even during the temporary period of his humanity. Jesus himself declared that the Father *"gave not the Spirit by measure"* unto him (Jno. 3. 34); in other words, He possessed the power of the Spirit to an unlimited degree and that was manifested in one, out of many aspects, in the works of healing which he performed. *"The power of the Lord was present to heal them"* says Luke (Luke 5. 17). In the three instances when it is said that "virtue" went out of him to heal the afflicted, that word "virtue" is this same word *dunamis*, power, the same Holy Spirit by which all his works were done. This close association of the Holy Spirit with the Son is an important element of Christian doctrine and it is very plainly indicated in the Book of Revelation. In the "throne scene" of the fourth chapter there are *"seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God"* (better, the sevenfold Spirit of God). But in the fifth chapter the One like a sacrificial lamb standing before the throne has *"seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"* and this corresponds with the headstone, which is Christ, of Zech. 3. 8 to 4. 10, where likewise are the seven eyes, *"the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth"*. The "seven spirits" of course allude to the Holy Spirit's function of universal surveillance and operation "to and fro through the whole earth". The union and distinction between the Father, the Son and the Spirit is indicated in Rev. 1. 4-5 where the salutation comes from the Eternal, and from the "seven spirits", and from Jesus Christ. The unity of the Son and the Spirit is shown in Rev. 3. 1 *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"* and repeated seven times in chapters two and three. The Millennial invitation *"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come"* (Rev. 22. 17) is the

proclamation of the Lord and his Church and here again Jesus calls himself "the Spirit". As though anticipating this, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians thirty years before John saw the visions of Revelation, announced the same truth. The Lord, he says, is the Spirit, and by the power of the Spirit we are being transformed into an image of the glory of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3. 17-18).

But the greatest manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is seen in resurrection. The work of the Spirit in material creation, in the development and sustaining of life, in the illuminating of believing minds, in the transformation of imperfect, deathbound men and women to the deathless glory of Divine sonship, all this is eclipsed in the revealed Word of God by the greatest exhibition of power of all time, the resurrection of our Lord Christ from the dead. "*The surpassing greatness of his power*" says Paul "*The energising of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his own right hand in the heaven.*" (Eph. 1. 19-20). The death and resurrection of the Son of God still has elements which are difficult for us to understand, but that a mighty operation of the Holy Spirit was responsible for the empty tomb and the entry into celestial glory of him who died upon the Cross is incontrovertible. And the Apostle indicates that a similar direct action by the Father will effect the "change" to celestial conditions of those who fol-

low the Lord to the end of the way. "*God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power*"—*dunamis*—(1 Cor. 6. 14). Divine energy will go forth to translate the life that is adapted to this world into another world, into another order of existence, with a new and different body adapted to the new environment. Like all changes, this change will require energy; that energy emanates from the Holy Spirit of God.

In the final age of this world's probation God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2. 28). Isaiah saw something of this and he described the coming day when "*the Spirit is poured upon us from on high*" and the result will be peace and quietness and assurance for ever (Isa. 32. 15-18). Thus is pictured a period in human history when the power of God in active operation for world conversion and the rehabilitation of the planet will be so outwardly manifest that none can deny it. The wonders of present-day scientific achievements are as nothing to the marvels of Divine creation and the achievements of the future, to be brought within man's reach and understanding when he learns to co-operate with Divine power instead of fighting against it. The eyes of the Lord going to and fro through all the earth will find only peace and quietness and assurance for ever. For God said, long ago, in his immeasurable wisdom and foresight, "*My Spirit shall not always strive with man*".

## A question about Elijah

**Q.** *In the light of Luke 1. 78, Luke 1. 17 and Matt. 17. 10-12 is the prophecy of Mal. 4 to be considered as fulfilled at the First Advent, or is there a wider manifestation at this Age end?*

**A.** The promise that "*I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*" is one that links the First and Second Advents with each other and with the visions of Isaiah. Moses and Elijah were the two great prophets of Israel; one made them a nation and led them to the Promised Land, the other converted them from Baal worship to serve the living God. Both prophets died "supernaturally," one upon a mountain top, alone, and "*no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day*" (Deut. 34. 6) the other carried away by a whirlwind. Jesus said of John the Baptist, "*If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come*" (Matt. 11. 4), but John said of himself that he was a voice crying in the wilderness as spoken by Isaiah the prophet (Jno. 1. 23). Isaiah in turn links the "voice in the wilderness" with his

grand theme of the "suffering servant" who is destined to lead mankind to reconciliation with God. Can we see in all this a further illumination on the two-fold nature of that "servant"—a heavenly part, the Church, "sent" *before* the great Day of Trouble to witness before men and convert some, to be caught up to the spiritual realm and completed during the troublous days of the End; and an earthly part destined to become the nucleus of the Kingdom on earth, to organise mankind into one great holy nation and lead them into the greater Promised Land? Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head over both the heavenly and earthly phases of the "Servant", and is himself the fullest expression of that same "Servant". If this be so there may be a pointer here for our own future work—for how will the earthly part of the Servant Nation receive the knowledge of their opportunity and high destiny if not from those who are already, in this Gospel Age, the custodians of the oracles of God?

## SEEDTIME IN THE EVENING

*An exhortation*

*"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." (Eccl. 11. 6).*

There is wise counsel in the Book of Ecclesiastes for both the youthful Christian and the mature Christian, for the one who is setting out on life's journey and the one who is within sight of its end. "Evening" in Ecclesiastes is the second half of life, the time when youthful vigour and enthusiasm has begun to temper into the more measured pulse and the more dispassionate outlook of mature years. It is in such an evening that the activity of earlier days tends to give place to relaxation of effort; the disappointments and disillusionment that come to everyone in life lead to a cessation of missionary effort and a settling down to enjoy the social fellowship of the Church without further shouldering of its responsibilities. It is in such a time that this exhortation comes with its urgent appeal, "In the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that". There well might be work done in the end of life that shows greater and grander results for the Lord than more spectacular work undertaken in earlier days.

The same thing is true in the life of the Church. The Nineteenth Century was a period unique in the annals of Christianity. During that century were seen the signs of the End as predicted by our Lord in that discourse of his to the disciples which is recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. The Nineteenth Century was the Watcher's time of realisation. It saw the commencement of the Harvest of the Age. The time came during that century when it could truly be said that at last the gospel of the Kingdom had been preached in all the world for a witness to all nations. Christian missionaries had reached the ends of the earth and all peoples, nations, and languages had received some part of the witness. That in itself was the first sign of the End Time, the first evidence that the days of the Second Advent were commencing. At the same time came the feast of Divine revelation and Bible truths promised by Jesus in his parable of the man taking a far journey. Another evidence of the Second Presence; the servants that sat down to meat and were served by their Master. These things are in the past; they cannot be repeated. The blossoming of the fig tree in Israel's revival dating from 1897; the apostasy from the faith resultant from misapplied science and the influence of the theories of evolution, dating from 1859, when Charles Darwin published his *"Origin of Species"*; the steady breaking down of the Gentile powers, having its beginning in the Franco-

Prussian war of 1870 and the loss of Papal temporal power at the same time; all these events were signs that the end of this Age and the dawn of the next were at hand. And the message of God for those times concerned all those signs, pointed to them as evidences of what must shortly come to pass. In the power and enthusiasm of those visible happenings a great work was done and a mighty message was proclaimed. But the message was given and it has done its work. The signs have been seen and have receded into the distant years and now these things are nearly a century old. The message that depended on those signs no longer has the force that it did because we live in a new day and a new generation that knows them not. The signs inspired and supported a great work in Christendom but now the signs are finished and the work is done. What comes next?

There are some who say that nothing comes next; that the time for the cessation of all Gospel preaching has come and that the remaining members of the Church on earth have nothing left to do but to "build one another up on their most holy faith", sit down quietly and wait for the Lord to take them away to heaven and bring this wicked world and all its wicked works to an end. It is virtually suggested that Christians who think otherwise, particularly if they still persist in preaching the Gospel, are nearly as bad as the said wicked world. At any rate, they are said to be "spiritually blind", "not continuing in Present Truth", "partakers of milk and not of strong meat" and, generally speaking, in a condition greatly to be deplored. The fact that the active prosecution of the Church's age-old commission to preach the Gospel is disparaged instead of commended, in the interests of that interpretation, only goes to show how easy it is, when the years have brought their disappointments, to lose sight of the first principles of the Christian faith. The Christian group that loses its missionary zeal signs its own death-warrant and will shortly die; that fact has been exemplified many times in past centuries and it is exemplified before our eyes to-day. Christianity is a missionary faith and we cannot enjoy a healthy Church life unless in some fashion we incorporate some kind of missionary endeavour in our activities.

On the other hand we should not necessarily conclude that the precise form of activity in which the message was enshrined during the Nineteenth Century must be continued without change in the Twentieth. That is a very common mistake. There is a strong tendency to herald the Kingdom in the same manner and the same terms that were effective in 1888. They are not necessarily so appropriate in 1988. What guidance, then, may we take



from the Gospels?

"Or whether they both shall be alike good!" Is it possible that in an "End Time" dispensational sense we may reasonably expect a "morning" and an "evening" sowing—the same seed, yet distinct works, each producing its own results and each, in the end, "alike good"?

It is a fact, at any rate, that our Lord enshrined two distinct thoughts in his final instructions to his disciples respecting their life work—and therefore our life work. According to Luke and Mark he told them to *preach* repentance and remission of sins among all nations, and to preach the Gospel to the whole creation. (Luke 24. 47; Mark 16. 15). According to Matthew He also told them to *teach* all nations, "*bidding them observe whatsoever I have commanded you*". (Matt. 27. 19). There is a world of difference between the words "preach" and "teach", and there is no reason to doubt that all three Evangelists' accounts embody part only of all that Jesus said to them at his departure, and each injunction was actually spoken separately and in its own setting. We might do well, therefore, to examine more closely than we have done heretofore the differences between these several versions of his parting words.

The word "preach" is from the Greek "*evangeliso*", meaning "I tell good news", or from "*kerusso*", which means "I proclaim as a herald". "Teach," on the other hand, is from "*matheteuo*", which denotes the instruction of pupils or learners, the making of disciples. In the Christian way preaching comes first and is followed by teaching. The Apostles at Pentecost first proclaimed good news and went about as heralds, announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, and then settled down to teach their converts. In the individual Christian life it is inevitable that the early years are taken up with declaring the message, telling out the good tidings of redemption that is in Christ Jesus; only when the experiences of the way, and progress in the faith, has brought maturity of knowledge and character, can the believer begin to teach. Preaching belongs to youth and teaching to mature age; preaching is the work of the morning but teaching that of the evening.

There are two notable instances of this principle in the recorded lives of great men of God—one in the Old Testament and one in the New. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit has provided in advance for the question that must arise in the minds of those who find their life's work apparently a failure. Here we have two of the mightiest men of faith in the Biblical record, men whose early life and middle age was spent in prominent activity, and who received esteem and honour from those whom they served, ending their lives in relative insignificance and obscurity. One of those men was Samuel the Prophet and the other was Paul the Apostle.

Samuel was dedicated to the service of the Lord from childhood and, as he grew up, rapidly became the leader of the nation in things ecclesiastical and secular. Israel looked to him for guidance and for strength. At the zenith of his power he travelled the country regularly, sitting in judgment annually in three different towns, administering justice and rectifying abuses. His wisdom as an administrator was no less famed than his sanctity as a prophet. He has very truly been called the greatest of the Judges. But the last glimpse we have of the life of Samuel shows him bereft of his power and glory, living in quiet retirement at Ramah, teaching a group of young men, gathered around him to learn of his wisdom and pass it on to the next generation, all that remained of his life's work. Yet there is no indication that Samuel fretted or repined at this apparently ignominious ending to all that he had achieved for Israel. He knew—none better—that he had fulfilled the place for which his Lord had selected him, and carried out the work He had given him to do, and if for the rest of his remaining days he was to labour in a much more modest and unnoticed way than heretofore, he was well content so long as he knew it to be God's will.

The Apostle Paul was in similar case. After a lifetime spent in travelling the length and breadth of the Roman world, the acknowledged leader of the Apostles and of Christians everywhere, he settled down at the end of his days—so far as the Scriptures reveal—to teach, contentedly, in his own hired house in the city of Rome, those who came to him. The last verse of the last chapter of the Book of Acts is wonderfully eloquent. Many years had Paul preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, proclaiming it as a herald, telling it as good news, but now those days were past and done. His mission now was that of a teacher, giving quiet but none the less effective instruction to those who came to his modest lodging to learn of him. Did the stalwart old warrior, hero of a thousand battles, repine at being thus laid aside? We know that he did not; we know that he employed his powers with as keen diligence as ever to the new task his Lord had set him.

And for what purpose? What was the incentive that led Samuel quietly to remain in his house at Ramah, teaching those few young men who had gathered round him? What was in the mind of Paul as he stayed, day by day, in that house somewhere in the back streets of Rome, receiving and discoursing with those who came to him, while the busy outer world pursued its interests and the millions of the great Roman empire waited for the Gospel? It was, to use words first uttered in another connection, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". (Luke 1. 17). John the Baptist was a man of the old dispensation, the Jewish Age, and he appeared in the end of that Age to make



ready a nucleus who would take up the work of the new dispensation, the Gospel Age, and carry it forward to a glorious conclusion. John himself never entered the Gospel Age; his work finished, he was laid aside to await his destiny. The people he prepared took up the flaming torch and carried it on, passing it in turn to their successors. Paul knew that, and he devoted the last years of his life to teaching those who would guard the interests of the Christian faith in Rome and plant them firmly in the new Roman Age which was to dawn after the persecution in which Paul himself lost his life had ceased.

So it is with us now. We the members of Christ's Church still on earth, are, like John the Baptist, making ready a people prepared for the Lord. Our time on earth, like his, is limited; the end of the Age draws nigh, and with it the closing of the "High Calling of God in Christ Jesus". But when the last members of the Church have been gathered to meet their Lord, and the world is entering into the last stage of trouble that immediately precedes the Kingdom, what of the Truth? Will it be known in the earth? Of course it will! God has never left himself without witness in the earth, and in times of catastrophe and judgment such as that which will then be upon the world He will assuredly have some who know the Truth and the explanation of events and will declare them. Perhaps it is the final mission of the Church on earth, the "final witness" for which so many look, thus to "make ready" such a people, by quiet teaching and instruction in such manner as opportunity affords or opportunity can be made. Elijah, disheartened at the apparent failure of his life's work, fled to Sinai. "Take me away, O Lord," he pleaded, "for I am not better than my fathers".

But the Lord had yet a work for him to do. "Go back!" was the peremptory command—and Elijah went back, not to stand before Israel and declare his witness to the one true God in public and spectacular manner as of yore; not to stride into the presence of kings and nobles and denounce them for their apostasy while other men looked on with bated breath; but to make preparations for the continuance of God's work after his own decease! "Go, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to be prophet in thy room." The judgments of God, shortly to come upon Israel, were made sure by the anointing of Hazael the destroyer. The destruction of Israel's apostate worship was ensured by the anointing of Jehu the iconoclast. The continuance of the work of God and the knowledge of God was provided for in the anointing of Elisha; and it is significant that all Elisha's miracles are miracles that picture restitution—Millennial conditions. The healing of poisoned water and food; the increase of meal and oil, the giving of life to the dead!

So it may well be with us. The Lord calls us in our times of discouragement and slackness of effort to "GO BACK"; not necessarily to do the work that produced such good results thirty or forty or fifty years ago, but to do the work that is necessary to these present times. The Lord will not leave himself without witness in the coming years; but to us He surely extends the privilege of making arrangements, like Elijah, for the witness that is to be after our own earthly course is run. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

## Marks of Ripeness

"What are the distinguishing marks of a ripe character? One mark is beauty. Ripe fruit has its own perfect beauty; as the fruit ripens, the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colours deepen till the beauty of the fruit is equal to the beauty of the blossom, and in some respects superior. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realised sanctification, which the Word of God knows by the name of "beauty of holiness."

"Another mark of ripe fruit is tenderness. The young, green fruit is hard and stone-like. The mature Christian is noted for tenderness of spirit.

"Another mark of ripeness is sweetness. The unripe fruit is sour. As we grow in grace we are sure to grow in sympathy and love. We shall, as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness toward our fellow-Christians. Bitter spirited Christians may know a great deal; those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgment, but they are as yet immature in heart.

"Another and a very sure mark of ripeness is a loose hold of earth. Ripe fruit parts easily from the stem."

C. H. Spurgeon.

## THE FIRST PSALM *An Exposition*

The First Psalm is in the nature of an introduction to the Book of Psalms. Its subject makes it peculiarly fitted to herald the sublime thoughts of later psalms, for it speaks of righteousness and evil and Divine Law. Around these three themes is built the whole fabric of revealed truth, and a clear understanding of them is an indispensable preliminary to the intelligent consideration and reception of the "deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2. 10).

Although the Psalms are commonly accredited to David, it is clear that he was not the author of them all. Some belong to later times, up to the days of Hezekiah at least, and a few to earlier days, but David was certainly responsible for most of them, and he it was who began the collection, to which others were added from time to time in later days, resulting in the Book of Psalms as we now have it.

There is little internal evidence to suggest who wrote this First Psalm. The occurrence of the word "*luts*" for "scornful", a word which occurs only once again in the Psalms, but is of frequent occurrence in the Book of Proverbs, is thought to point to the time of Solomon, and the general tone of the Psalm is certainly reminiscent of Solomon's analytical and intellectual mind more than of the frank devotion and picturesque expressiveness of David. The authorship is not of importance, for it is the Psalm itself that is of value.

The purpose of this Psalm is the declaring of the fundamental principle upon which God has designed his creation, viz., that those things which are right, just, in harmony with his own character, shall endure for ever, and that which is evil, unjust, out of harmony with the character of God, although it may subsist for a time, must and will inevitably pass away and out of existence. Divine creation is so ordained that nothing which is inherently evil can subsist indefinitely. It contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction and must eventually come to its end. Hence we have the law propounded by Paul in Rom. 6. 23 "*The wages of sin is death*"—death being the antithesis of life, the opposite to conscious existence.

The Psalm eulogises the happy state of the righteous man, both now and hereafter, and accredits the maintenance of his righteous state to his observance of Divine Law. Against this it places in contrast the unhappy position of the sinful, and declares in no uncertain terms that the end of that way is desolation, oblivion, non-existence. The fact is that God's whole plan of development for man based upon law is stressed, and rightly stressed, here. It is when this fact is realised that we will find ready to our hands a yardstick by means of which we can measure the relative values of differing interpretations of Scripture.

"*Blessed is the man*" says verse 1 "*who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*" This word "blessed" is capable of deeper shades of meaning than the A.V. suggests. "*How happy the man . . .*" is Rotherham's rendering, and Young is even more emphatic with "*O the happiness of that one who . . .*" It is significant that "happiness" is the first quality to be mentioned in the Psalms; and characteristic of God! His eternal purpose in creation is to the promotion of happiness amongst his creatures, and that happiness is only to be achieved by complete harmony with God. Religion is not a thing to be kept apart from daily life and practised solely on Sundays; every affair and activity of every day can be woven into the fabric of one's personal communion with God and sanctified thereby. "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col. 3. 17). "*All things work together for good to them that love God*" (Rom. 8. 28). "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Neh. 8. 10). This is the normal condition of human life, from which men have fallen away, and only as they come back to this standing of absolute dedication of life and its activities to God can they find true happiness.

"*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" (vs. 2). Here is the great principle; we must be students of the ways of God and learn to understand the principles upon which He has founded creation. The term "law" here does not confine itself merely to a set of commandments with their negative prohibitions—"Thou shalt not . . ."—but extends to those basic principles of Divine creation which lie at the root of every code of laws. We must learn *why* righteousness is desirable and sin to be abhorred and eschewed; *why* God is dealing now only with the disciples of Christ, the "Church" and will turn to convert the whole world only when the next Age, the Millennial Age, has dawned; *why* there is one call to a spiritual salvation and destiny, and another to an earthly, and every individual perfectly satisfied with his eventual lot, whether in heaven or upon earth. We shall not attain to complete knowledge of these things whilst in the flesh, but we can learn sufficient to make us the efficient servants and ambassadors of our king.

"*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*" says the Psalmist in another place (Psalm 19. 7). "*O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day.*" "*Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them*" (Psa. 119. 97 and 165). In more measured cadence the Preacher says "*The law of the wise is a fountain of life, that he might depart from the snares of death*" (Prov. 13. 14).

"In the night" says the Psalmist (Psa. 42. 8) "*his song shall be with me.*" Who is there among us not familiar with the haunting pathos of Cant. 3. 1 "*By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth*"? Our faith is not for daytime only; it is a twenty-four hour a day and a seven day a week faith, and oft-times it is during the silence of the night that our deepest revelations come.

Vs. 3 "*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.*" In the first Eden there were trees of life and a river that "watered the garden" and so gave it life (Gen. 2. 9-10). In the second Eden there are to be trees of life and a river of water of life (Rev. 22. 1-2; Ezek. 47. 12) and the trees are to be for both food and medicine—sustenance and healing. The Psalmist translates the symbol into reality. Those trees of life of the Millennial Age are none other than the righteous of this Age who have measured up to the standards of the first two verses of this Psalm. *Because they have thus entered into the Divine way of life they shall become "trees of life" to give both sustenance and healing to the redeemed multitudes who will come back from the grave "in that day". True will it be of these whom Paul elsewhere calls "ministers of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5. 18) that "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (vs. 3).*

There is a peculiar fitness in the association of trees with rivers. In hot countries trees are planted on the banks of rivers and streams in order to screen the water from the solar heat and to check evaporation. The trees thrust down their roots into the moist soil and are themselves sustained by the same waters that they are conserving for the use and benefit of men. "*There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High*" (Psa. 46. 4). Every consecrated follower of the Lord Jesus during this Gospel Age is himself a "tree" nourished by that river which is the knowledge of God revealed through his Word, the holy Scriptures; and each such follower is by his Christian life and devotion helping to conserve that Word against the coming Millennial day when its benefits will be made free to all mankind. "*The Spirit and the Bride say 'come'. . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev. 22. 17).

Now we come to the other side of the picture. "*The ungodly are not so but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*" (vs. 4). This likening of the wilfully wicked man and the hopelessly evil thing to chaff which is doomed to be scattered and lost is definite in the Scriptures. "*Let them be as the chaff before the wind*" says the Psalmist in Psa. 35. 5 "*and let the angel of the Lord destroy them*". "*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever*" (Isa. 48. 8). "How

oft" says Job (21. 17-18) "*is the candle of the wicked put out! How oft cometh their destruction upon them! . . . they are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away*". David continues in the same strain (Psa. 37. 1-2) "*Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb*", and again (Psa. 5. 4-5) "*Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish (properly 'worthless') shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity*". And this, which is said of individuals, is equally true of every evil institution which cumbers the earth, this aspect being seen in vision when Daniel interpreted the king's dream and described how all the might and power of those empires which stand in the way of Messiah's Kingdom will be destroyed by the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" and how every vestige of them is to be scattered like the "chaff of the summer threshing-floors" (Dan. 2. 35).

Herein is made plain the Divine intention with regard to wilful evildoers. After the full and fair opportunity for life which is to be offered to every man under the reign of Christ in the Millennial Age, the penalty for continued and wilful sin must fall inevitably upon the sinner; withdrawal of life, the Divine gift of which the individual concerned refuses to make proper use. As final and irrevocable as the dispersing of chaff from the threshing floor, carried by the wind and utterly lost, is this, the logical and inevitable result of wilful and incorrigible sin.

"*Therefore*" says the inspired writer with conviction "*the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation (assembly) of the righteous.*" (vs. 5). There is a direct link with the New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of mankind during the Millennial Age here, for the word rendered "stand" is one that has the meaning of standing firm or being set up. The New Testament word for resurrection is "*anastasis*" which means a re-standing or standing up again. "There shall be a resurrection (*anastasis*) of the dead" said Paul (Acts 24. 15) "*both of the just and unjust*". "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment" said Jesus (Luke 11. 31-32) and again "All that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto resurrection to life (*Greek*) and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection to judgment (*eis anastasin kriseus*). This verse in Psalm 1 is clearly a reference to the fact that, although "sinners" will in fact be restored to life in the Millennial Age, no sinner will "stand" in that judgment; he will either cease to be a sinner and so enter into life, or, remaining a sinner, reap the logical consequence of that choice as expressed in the concluding words of the Psalm

*"the way of the ungodly shall perish".*

In no finer words could the Most High express his determination to root out and destroy every vestige of sin from the fair earth of his creating, and to usher all mankind—"whosoever will"—into the orderly and glorious life which is the rightful

inheritance of all who shall eventually measure up willingly to their Creator's wise and loving designs. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

## GODS OF EGYPT

*"Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him."* (Exod. 32. 1).

Man has ever been prone to make God in his own image and likeness. There are few who realise with Solomon that heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God; and much less any house that man can build. The average Israelites of Moses' day believed that God dwelt literally inside the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle, and that Aaron went in to speak with him face to face. Moses and the leaders of the nation knew better, but they could not impart that knowledge to the people, for the people would have none of it. A visible leader, a mighty man of valour to go before them and smite their enemies, they could follow; a popular preacher, arousing their feelings and enthusiasm for a new crusade and a great awakening to this opportunity of attaining a land flowing with milk and honey they could heed; but this mystic who remained alone on the mountain to no apparent purpose for days on end, coming down only to define and order their communal life together for a purpose still imperfectly comprehended, had ceased to fire their imagination. They did not understand what he was doing and they looked about for more tangible things upon which to fix their interest. So it was that they tired of the high mission to which they had been called; shrank from the hardships of the journey that lay before them, and magnified the obstacles which lay in the way. The fair vision of a land in which their children could grow up and the family of Israel live as a free people paled away and in their hearts the vivid colours of Egypt, its gaudy temples, its green fields and its blue river, exercised an appeal the more potent because in spirit they had never really left Egypt. The cruel slavery was forgotten, the distress and sore labour faded from their minds, and they said to one another "Go to let us return into Egypt, for the former days were better than these". Whilst Moses wrestled with God on the mountain, the people in the plain sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play. The tremendous significance of their deliverance from Egypt no longer meant anything to them, and the enthusiasm which had led them to shout exultantly "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient" had spent itself and they were left

only with an awareness of those things that appealed to the gross materialism of their natures. That expressions "to play" indicates a free indulgence in unholy rites and practices which were expressly condemned in the law Moses had so recently given them. For a short time they had caught a vision of heaven, and in the wonder of that vision had given themselves wholeheartedly to God for his service—but the vision had faded and they had turned once again to the more tangible if less exalted things of this world.

We must, nevertheless, impute to these unfortunate Israelites a certain measure of sincerity. They did not turn back to the gods of Egypt solely because the worship of those gods pandered to depraved desires which could not be satisfied in the purer worship of the Most High. Their reversion to the religion of Egypt was largely because that religion was expressed in terms they could understand; they had been brought up in its atmosphere, under the shadow of its temples, indoctrinated in all its lore and traditions. Those marvellous manifestations of Divine power, the ten plagues, the Red Sea crossing, and the waters of Marah, had for a time turned their thoughts and devotions to the hitherto unknown God whom Moses preached, and the rosy promises of a land in which they might live free from Egyptian bondage spurred them on to a new zeal and service fired by that expectation; but with the magnetism of Moses' personal presence withdrawn and his own prolonged absence on the mountain top the old arguments and ideas began to reassert themselves. Feeling themselves to be in need of leadership and guidance, and fearing that both Moses and the God whom he represented had forgotten and deserted them, the people stretched out longing hands to the gods which they had previously served. Dreading to be left without a shepherd, they were willing to accept as shepherds even those that would lead them back into the intolerable bondage from which they had so recently escaped.

This is the test that comes upon each one who hears and accepts the Divine call to complete dedication of life. Sometimes it comes to communities of believers, sometimes to the individual, but to each and all, at some time in life, comes the insistent question "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Are you prepared to maintain your high ideals,



your continual seeking the things of the Spirit, the things which are above, even although Moses has disappeared into the mists of the mountain top and the magic of his voice, the thrill of his presence, is yours no more? Can you finish your journey to the Kingdom under the guidance and in the strength of an invisible leader now that the visible one who led you in the early days has passed out of your ken, or must you set up for yourself things of earth to which you will give your allegiance? True, these gods of Egypt will appeal more readily to the senses and give you a feeling of earthly satisfaction. There is music, and dancing, and rich viands, and exhilarating drink, and good company, for those who espouse the gods of Egypt, and for a while these things will seem to be more worthwhile than that stern, selfless devotion to a cause which seems on the surface to be a lost cause. But you are not really in tune with these things, and in your heart of hearts you know it. The turning away from the high spiritual standards of your calling may give temporary relief to eyes tired with "straining . . . for the tarrying day" and cause them to rest more easily upon the pleasant things of this world, but it will bring leanness into your soul, and your heart will become sick for the days when "*we walked to the house of God in company*". No one, having once sincerely and intelligently appreciated the conditions of our calling and caught a glimpse of the creation that shall be can ever be really satisfied with earthly arrangements, institutions and interests again. "*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; all things have become new.*" And "*Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour*".

We do not necessarily formally reject the faith that is in us when we turn to follow gods of Egypt. We can set them up in our own midst and worship them thinking that we are worshipping the Most High more acceptably. We, no less than others, can make God after our own image and likeness. And it is so fatally easy because, like Israel of old, we want to see results. This waiting period is a time of severe strain. There is so much to be done in the execution of the Divine Plan, and we want to play our part in it. Israel was anxious to inherit and build the Promised Land and could not understand the wilderness experiences which had to come first. We are like that. We want to see our Father's Name vindicated and his praise and worship established throughout the earth. We know that we are called to witness to his truth and his Plan through all our days on earth, to be witnesses unto Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. We know that this witness is a necessary part of our spiritual development and training for the future work, but because it can be made to produce results of a more visible and tangible nature than the fruits of the Holy Spirit's

work in our own hearts and lives we tend—so akin are we to those Israelites in the wilderness—to give the greater attention to that which is the means to the end, and to forget the end itself. The world will not be converted through our preaching now; we hold that as a basic principle of the Truth. We are called and commissioned nevertheless to preach the Gospel at all times, in all places, in every manner that we can, as a witness to all nations, right up to the end of the Age, until the end come. That is a basic principle of the Truth also. But unless we are so guided in all our ways and activities by the power of the Holy Spirit, and transformed measurably into the likeness of our Lord, then we shall not be counted worthy of inclusion in the company that is to be entrusted with the task of reconciling men to God in the next Age. That is so fundamental an article of our faith that all else must centre on that. "*Give diligence, brethren, to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fail, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*". There follows an enumeration of the graces of the Christian character, fruits of the Spirit which we must acquire in their fulness if we are to be well-pleasing to our God.

We must learn to look, then, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, and in the power of that vision lay our hands to the opportunities of outward service that come our way. Our witness must be as a people, a compact body of believers, a family in Christ, witnessing not only by word of mouth, not only from the public platform, but also by demonstration of the manner in which our faith works out in our own fellowship and reveals itself in our own meetings. The one that hears our message must be able to look at us in our assemblies and see what this faith has done for us, and seeing, "*fall down on his face and worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth*" (1 Cor. 14. 25). No witness is really effective unless it eventually leads to this.

We go toward, then, not behind the panoply of gods of Egypt, borne each upon their bearers' shoulders, as Isaiah so caustically remarked "*because they cannot go*", but behind the guiding cloud which rises aloft and goes always in front of the host, leading onward, away from Egypt and all its materialism, away from the standards and methods of this earth, away from the mechanistic organisations of men, on, ever on, towards the Promised Land and the realisation of all the golden promises made to our fathers and inherited by us. If we can only transform our fellowship into a compact family, held together, not by creeds and regulations, rules of faith, synods and presbyteries, but by the vital power of the Holy Spirit, operating in each heart and mind, leading to a spontaneous

co-operation together in every good work, then, and only then, will our witness go forth so effectively that men, even in this day of intellectualism

and science, will stop, and take heed, and say one to another "They are ignorant, and unlearned, men, but—whence have they *this* knowledge?"

## THE THOUSAND YEARS

The Book of Revelation, a record of visions and voices made apparent to the Apostle John by the Holy Spirit, on the little island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, contains many dramatic passages, but few so dramatic as that in which the seer beheld an angel descending from heaven with a great chain in his hand, by means of which he proceeded to bind Satan, the Devil, cast him into the abyss, and shut him up so that he could deceive the nations no more until the thousand years of the Millennial Age should be fulfilled. The correct understanding of this twentieth chapter of Revelation is the key to a right view of the Millennial Age. The Divine restraint which is to be put upon the Devil and the power of evil is the essential preliminary to the evangelical work of that Age, and culminates in the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will", their entrance into everlasting life, and the end of any who may be incorrigibly wicked.

This chapter presents that aspect of the Millennial Age which has to do with the moving of Divine power against Satan for the overthrow of his rule, the restraint of the outward practice of evil in the world, and the exaltation of the true Church, the faithful Christians of this present time, to association with Jesus Christ in the governmental work of the Age. It includes the time at the end of the Age when the restraint on the practice of evil is relaxed in order to permit mankind, after their period of Divine education and evangelisation, to make their choice between good and evil. Satan attempts to regain his former power; he is unrepentant. He, and all who follow him, are destroyed as being incapable of reformation, and with their destruction the last shadow of evil flees away, and the Age comes to an end, being merged into the everlasting kingdom of the Father.

It is well known that only in this chapter does the Bible state the duration of the Millennial Age—one thousand years. There is no doubt, however, that the belief is well founded, and that the figure is intended to be taken literally. It was the fixed opinion of antiquity that the Messianic Age was to endure for one thousand years, and that the Divine Plan would then reach its consummation so far as this earth was concerned. When John used the term—and he uses it six times in this chapter—it was as an expression well known to, and understood by, both Jews and the early Christian believers. In fact the Greek term is the equivalent of our word "Millennium" and the passages would be equally accurate if translated to read "... and bound him for the duration of the Millennium", "... and they lived and reigned with Christ through-

out the Millennium" and so on. Its duration is also given as one thousand years in various apocalyptic books, notably the Book of Jubilees, written about 100 B.C. (Jub. 23; 27) and 2 Enoch, written about the time of Jesus (2 Enoch 22-23). These books reflected the Jewish belief of their own times, it is known that the Jews back so far as 300 B.C. believed in the thousand year reign of righteousness, and the most reasonable conclusion to which we can come, on the basis of John's use of the term in the Book of Revelation, is that this understanding originated with one of the Hebrew prophets speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and although not incorporated in any of the written prophecies which remain to us in the Old Testament, was nevertheless preserved through the centuries until, again under supervision of the Holy Spirit, it was included in John's record to serve as a definite declaration for all time. It is on this basis that belief in the thousand years is built.

What is meant by the "binding of Satan"? The Old Testament promises, relating to this time, that "*nothing shall hurt or destroy*" (Isa. 11. 9; 65. 25), "*God will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations*" (Isa. 25. 7) indicates that the practice of outward evil is to be restrained, and that Satan—who, despite all modern views to the contrary, is a very real, powerful and malignant personality—will be rendered incapable of deceiving and enslaving humanity. Through the ages of human history he has been permitted to work his fell designs on earth, and the world has in consequence become a world of suffering. Now, in the heyday of his power, he will find himself suddenly unable to influence so much as one single human being, and for the whole duration of the Millennium he will be alone—with his evil.

There has been much confusion of thought in Christian circles regarding this chapter, but the difficulties disappear when it is seen that the Millennial Age itself is the *great Day of Judgment*, that the true Church, the Christians of the present time, are exalted to "reign with Christ" at the *beginning* of the thousand years, and that the rest of the dead are restored to earthly life *during* the thousand years for the completion of their probationary term of life's experience. Appropriately enough, therefore, the First Resurrection, that of the Church, takes place when Satan is bound and the Millennial Kingdom inaugurated. "*And I saw thrones—and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*" (Rev. 20. 4). The next thing in

order is the General Resurrection, and here verse 5 has for fourteen centuries been responsible for a serious departure from the Apostolic teaching. The verse runs "*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*" On the authority of this text, it has been widely held since the Fifth Century that the resurrection, and, therefore, the final judgment, takes place, not at the beginning, but at the end of the Millennium. This leads in turn to further confusion, for if the dead are not to return until the Millennium is ended, it follows that only the living nations at the time of Christ's Advent can share in the glories of this Millennial reign, and there can be no question of an opportunity of conversion for all men—only to those who happen to be living when the Kingdom is established, or who may be born subsequently; and this is the general view of those evangelical Christians who do believe in the Millennium. It seems clear, however, that this clause has no rightful place in the Scriptures. It first appeared in the 5th century, and is not to be found in any earlier manuscript. The Vatican 1160 and the Sinaitic, both of the 4th century, omit the clause, and so does the Syriac Peshito (2nd century). The best authorities on the Greek text reject it as an interpolation, pointing out that its construction and metre are different from the rest of the text, and that it breaks the sense and symmetry of the passage. The reason for its apparent insertion in the text of the Alexandrian manuscript in the 5th century is not difficult to perceive. It had been a feature of Jewish belief for centuries that there was to be a "resurrection of the just" at the beginning of the Messianic Age, and a resurrection of the wicked, which generally meant the Gentile nations, at its end, for their condemnation and punishment. This belief was carried over into Christianity, and although not authorised by Apostolic teaching, lingered in the minds of many. It is very probable that this clause was originally a marginal comment made by some reader, who thought it necessary to add this item of popular belief to John's account of the First Resurrection, and was afterwards copied into the text by a later transcriber who failed to distinguish between the text and the comment. It seems evident, then, that this clause should be rejected, and with this deletion the passage becomes clear. Verses 1-6 constitute a description of the overthrow of Satan and the exaltation to glory of the Church. The following four verses, 7-10, go on to explain that this is not the last phase of the Devil's activities. At the

end of the Millennium he is loosed from his restraints, attempts to stage another rebellion against God, and goes out to deceive the nations. His time is short; the rebellion fails, and utter destruction overtakes rebels and leader.

This is the end of the Millennial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the Age, evil having been restrained, men have had opportunity to appreciate and enter into heart harmony with the Divine principles of life. By its end there will no longer be any excuse for ignorance or failure to measure up to the standards of life required by God, for all will have had abundant opportunity to come to Christ in true conversion, and to attain that state of mental, moral and physical perfection which will enable them to keep the Divine laws without failure. The removal of the Divine restraint on evil must come, for God will have men living righteous lives on a completely voluntary and willing basis, not because they have no power or ability to do otherwise, and this will at once constitute a test of loyalty. Those who turn again to sin thereby demonstrate that they are unworthy of life, and that further prolonging of life is useless in their case; so God leaves the sinner to his way, and the end of that way is death. This is the principle which is symbolised by the allusion in these verses to the rebels going up against the citadel of God, and meeting with sudden and utter destruction.

Verses 11-15 take us back to the beginning of the Age. The prophet now has his mind turned to the Millennial throne of the Messiah, familiar to all Jews from the descriptions in the Book of Enoch, and to all Christians by the parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25. 31). The basis of both pictures is the 7th chapter of Daniel, where the throne of judgment is set, and the nations gathered before it for judgment, the later Jews realising that although Daniel saw God himself upon that throne, the executive power on earth is actually to be wielded by God's Messiah. The dead are brought back from the grave to participate in this judgment, and at its end death and *Hades*—the death state—are cast into the fiery lake, *Gehenna*, destruction. This corresponds to Paul's statement in 1 Col. 15 to the effect that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, and that then Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father, that "God may be all in all". This passage, then, is a strong argument for the fact that the judgment is to take place during the entire Age, and that final sentence is pronounced at its end.

This is the grand expression of the Bible—God is Love, the key note of Christianity. It is the foundation of the Plan of creation and redemption, and the underlying principle in the Word of God.

Stars shine brightest in the darkest night, spices smell best when bruised, young trees root the faster for being shaken and gold looks the brighter for scouring.



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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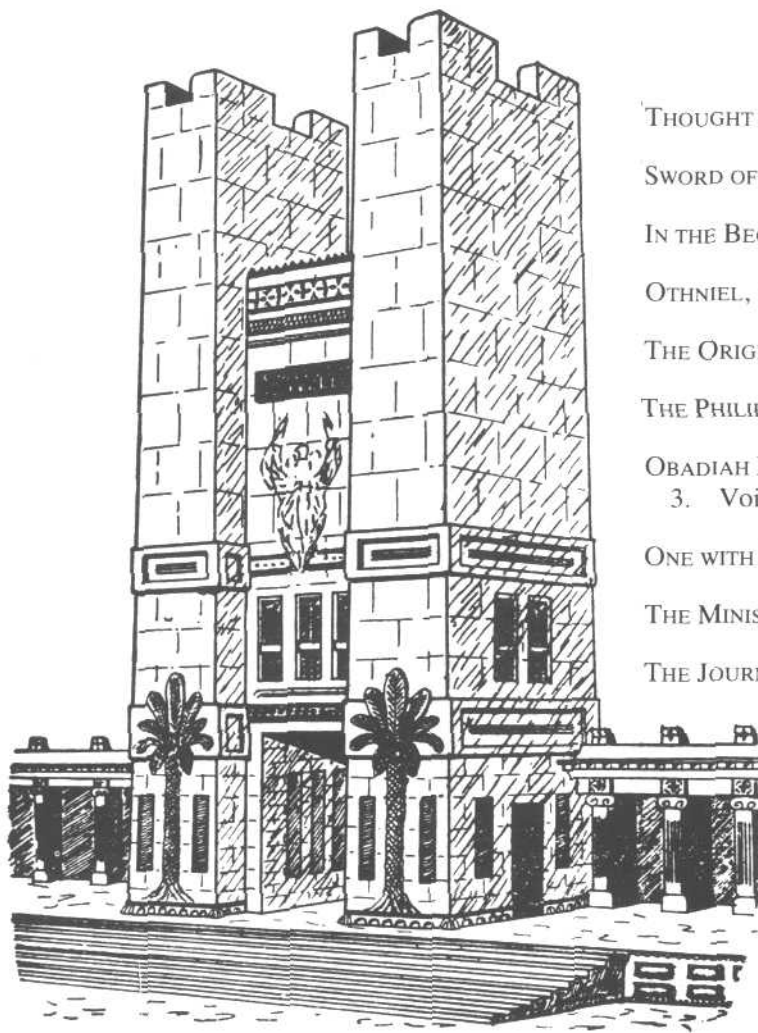
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### Thought for the Month

*"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth!" (Rom. 14. 4).*

It is so fatally easy to value another brother's or sister's service by one's own bushel measure. We all desire very earnestly to serve our Lord and the interests of his Kingdom. We generally take delight in speaking of him and of the Divine Plan to any who will listen. And we all have our own ideas of how best the Gospel may be preached. Is it the very intensity of our own earnestness in this direction that makes us want every other bondsman of Jesus Christ to serve in just the same manner that seems good to us? Is it the measure of our own personal talent and success in one particular field of ministry that blinds us to the possibility of effective service being rendered in another manner, in other hands?

*"There are diversities of gifts . . . there are differences of administrations . . . but it is the same God that worketh" (1 Cor. 12. 4-6). When will we learn that the grandest characteristic of all God's handiwork is variety, and that He has ordained the accomplishment of his service in such a fashion that "every joint" supplieth a contribution fitted to its place in the body?*

Says one, loftily, secure in his ability and privilege to address the assemblies as befits the office of an elder in the Church, "there is no doubt that the preaching of the Word is the great means the Lord has ordained for the spiritual growth of his people." All very well—but what discouragement to the brother who is temperamentally quite unable to stand before an audience and deliver a prepared discourse, but in his own quiet way can lead a study circle in leisured discussion of the Scriptures to the very real edification of his fellows . . . ?

It was teacher's birthday. For weeks beforehand her pupils had been busy making pretty aprons and tending little plants in pots to give her on the day, for this teacher was greatly beloved. At length les-

son time was over and they crowded round with their offerings, stepping back with gratified smiles as the teacher expressed her surprise and delight at each successive gift. Last of all came the "black sheep" of the class, grubby and untidy, half hesitating and half defiant, avoiding the amused looks of his classmates as he extended a tightly clenched fist and deposited into teacher's hand—a hot and sticky piece of butterscotch and three marbles.

But that teacher was wise—wiser than many who have attained eldership in the assemblies. "Oh, how lovely" she cried, smiling down at the anxious little face below her. "It's years since anybody gave me marbles for my birthday; and I just adore butterscotch."

The grubby one made his way back to his desk, head held high and face radiant. He loved his teacher, and he had so feared his gift would be rejected, but she had understood. He had done what he could . . . .

Brethren in the Lord! Be very careful how you disparage the service another is trying to render, just because you "cannot see what good it will do". You may be the means of dashing the enthusiasm of one who will never be able to serve in the big things, as you are privileged to serve, but is nevertheless trying to contribute some small mite to the work of the Master Whom we all love. *"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones."*

#### NOTICE

This is the first opportunity we have had to explain and apologise for the very considerable delay in answering letters and despatching requested literature during the period March-May. An unprecedented collection of circumstances forced the virtual shutdown of the Hounslow office and the complete shutdown of the publishing and literature centre at Milborne Port for more than two months. At time of going to press (April/May) the emergency still persists at Milborne Port but readers are assured that all letters will eventually be answered and we hope to "catch up" by the middle of July.

## SWORD OF THE LORD, AWAKE!

*"O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, and be still . . . . How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge?" (Jer. 47.6).*

Jeremiah of the 6th century B.C. was a politician as well as a prophet (thus giving the lie to the modern cynical assertion that there are no honest politicians!) and his able grasp of the contemporary political arena of his day was on a par with his understanding as a prophet of the ways of God. In both fields he was clear-sighted, outspoken and fearless; both king and priests stood in awe of his forthright denunciations and warnings of troubles and disasters soon to come. Divine judgment was about to fall upon the nation in consequence of its violation of the principles of truth and justice. The priests were heedless of the paganism of the people; the king and his advisers relied on worldly wisdom in their dealings with hostile nations, repudiating the counsels of the Lord. Caught between the two contending military powers, Babylon and Egypt, both priests and king were oblivious to the danger that threatened, and they scorned the advice and admonitions of the only honest politician, Jeremiah the prophet, the only one who perceived plainly what must be the inevitable end of their course.

So Jeremiah became the sword of the Lord, the man appointed both to pronounce judgment upon the guilty nation and to witness its execution. No better man could be found; he was ready and fitted both by knowledge and desire. He said of himself "his word was as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay". He saw clearly the relation of personal faith and the worship of God to the trend of political events in Israel; he saw clearly his country's destiny in terms of the Plan of God. He knew that Israel would one day become a light to the nations but not until it had become a cleansed instrument in the hand of God. He knew too that it was at this present time corrupt and apostate and no fitting instrument for the Lord's work. He knew that judgment must surely come, judgment swift and relentless, and that only after the judgment had done its work could there be a blessing. But the blessing would surely come, for blessing always follows judgment for those who are rightly exercised by it.

So Jeremiah was a scourge to the godless of his own nation as well as a denouncer of other nations. Israelite or *goyim*—Gentiles—were all the same to him. Injustice, oppression, apostasy from God, he denounced wherever it was found, and fearlessly proclaimed the dire consequences that would result. His fellows feared him and hated him, con-

spired against him and sought to destroy him, but always he stood erect in their midst, denouncing them in the name of God. He was to that generation the apostle of judgment; the Sword of the Lord.

The Sword of the Lord at any time in history is his instrument at that time for driving home his message, for executing his judgments, for separating the evil from the good. Particularly is it his agency for proclaiming to the particular generation the significance of the times in which that generation lives. "Ye can discern the face of the sky" said Jesus to the orthodox righteous of his day "but ye cannot discern the signs of the times". And in consequence it had to be said of them, sadly but firmly "the kingdom of God is taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof". In pre-Christian times Israel was the Sword of the Lord when they were loyal to him and to the Covenant. This was their battle cry when they followed Gideon to the rout of Midian. "The Sword of the Lord and Gideon". At the fervour of that shout and in that confidence the enemy panicked and fled. But when Israel relapsed into faithlessness the role was changed and Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, in turn became the Sword of the Lord and God's executors of judgment upon Israel. "Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger" He said, referring to Sennacherib, (Isa. 10.5) "and the staff in his hand, my indignation, I will send him against a hypocritical nation, against the people of my wrath". And so they suffered, both in the days of Hezekiah and the days of Jesus, because of their unbelief and heedlessness.

In Christian times the Church in the flesh is the Sword of the Lord, to declare and lay down in the ears of all men the standards of God's righteousness and to pronounce in no uncertain voice the certainty of Divine judgment when those standards are violated, it is to make known with all possible emphasis the full scope of the Divine Plan for human happiness and the reason and place in that Plan of the present reign of sin and death, and after that the Messianic Age of righteousness when all men, dead and living, will stand before the Lord Jesus to be brought to a full knowledge of him and, if they will, be fully reconciled to God and thus ushered into everlasting life. And when, as in our own time, the evidences come thick and fast that the change of the dispensation is upon us, that the world is nearing its end to be replaced by that promised Age of blessing, the Sword of the Lord must be drawn, aware of the significance of the times, proclaiming with the confidence of certain knowledge and the enthusiasm begotten of the inward vision, the Baptist cry "*The Kingdom of*

*Heaven is at hand".*

Today, we are the Sword of the Lord. We are to this generation what Jeremiah was to his. But the sword is blunt; it has lost its keenness; it has put itself up into its scabbard and is still. Three generations ago it was wielded to good effect and many heard the message of the Kingdom and rejoiced. Many were weaned away from the mediæval conception of a vengeful God of anger and were taught that God is Love and wills not that any man die but rather that he turn from his evil ways and live; "*for why will ye die, O house of Israel*" He pleads. But now the world has changed, and there is more unbelief and indifference, and perhaps we are a little uncertain whether we really are quite so near the end of the Age as we had thought or had been taught, and old age is creeping on for the stalwarts of the old days, and the younger ones are not so certain about it anyway, and so the sword gets put back into its scabbard and there remains, rusting away.

"How can it be still" cries the prophet "*seeing the Lord hath given it a charge?*" If, with us, his word truly is as a burning fire shut up within our bones, how can the sword be still? How can we desist from the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to a world which is manifestly so much nearer its end, so much more in process of disintegration, than it was three generations ago, whether they hear or forbear? When Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation He also said that this gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations and then would the end come. He stipulated no time limit. The preaching was go to on until the end has come. Even then it will not stop, for with the advent of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth the preaching will be immeasurably amplified and extended to reach every man and the challenge of Christ be faced by all. Rather illogical, when one comes to think of it, to desist from preaching just when that unprecedented expansion of our preaching is about to start.

The only real excuse for the existence of Christians is for them to make non-Christians into Christians, and Christians into better Christians. That will be as true in the Millennial Age as it is in this Gospel Age. And one does not make real Christians by offering them pie in the sky all the time. Christianity is not just a matter of having a pleasant time sitting round a camp fire and singing a few songs together. There was once a church in a London suburb with a large placard outside inviting the reader to come in for "pleasant Christian fellowship". That church is not there anymore. Not far away, there was a Salvation Army Hall full of wholly devoted and sacrificing Christians continually going out to preach their conception of the

faith with drum and trumpet. It is still there and they still do it. The weakness of some creeds is the tendency to stress the good time that is coming and ignoring the bad time now present; to tell people how good and happy they are going to be in the future Age and overlook how bad and miserable they are now; how the desert will bloom and blossom as the rose then, without admitting how increasingly polluted the earth is becoming now. There are two aspects to our message; one is blessing and the other is judgment. Because the world of man is as it is, judgment has to come. After that the blessing. But we must tell them about both; that is only fair. John the Baptist was the greatest herald could do that and get away with it; we live started by calling his hearers a generation of vipers, and exhorted them to repentance if they would avoid the wrath to come. Not every modern heralds could do that and get away with it; we live in a more prosaic age but we can at least tell people that the time has come for the axe to be laid at the root of the tree and all that is bad and corrupt is about to be cast into the fire and this world must be destroyed before the new one can be built and what there is of ungodliness in their natures has to be rooted out before godliness can be planted. Our message has to include a cool and dispassionate view of the world as it now is and relate that to the world to come. We have to tell men how far short they have come from that which they could be and then how they can, if they will, attain that which could be, through Christ. And this is where we strike the first snag. In this modern world of ours, money mad and pleasure hungry, living only for the present, and heedless as well as ignorant of the finer things in life, those who need the message do not understand the language. Sin, death, the Fall, redemption, eternal salvation—these terms are as Greek to them. Talk about Jesus and his death on the cross—some do not even know who Jesus was. "Back to the Bible and to God" has no appeal to people who have never been there. Paul had a better chance with the pagans. They did at least worship some gods even though false ones; today's pagans worship no gods at all. The Greeks and the Romans did in the main believe that there would be a heavenly life with the gods for the righteous; modern man believes in no heaven at all and only one hell—the hell he has created for himself upon this earth. And that is where we have to start.

It is this separation of evil from good in our own time and lives that we have to face. Zechariah saw the position in his vision of the flying roll (Zech. 5). A giant roll of parchment or goatskin, thirty feet long by twenty across, written inside and out with the Divine law, rolling over the ground and entering into every house to destroy the evil in that house by its recapitulation of the laws of right



doing, bringing these things to the notice of every individual in the house and challenging them to renounce the evil and embrace the good—the vision changes, and now all that evil is segregated into a large earthenware jar and sealed up so that it can never escape, and taken far away to Babylon from whence it can never return. Thus the world is to be cleansed, and every man is to be cleansed, by the removal of evil and its substitution by good both in the hearts of men and in the world which they inhabit.

This is the message. Mankind will be redeemed and the world cleansed by the removal of evil. The way is open for all men by virtue of the death of Christ on the Cross, Christ who “gave himself a Ransom for All” and by that one act nullified the power of death over the human race introduced by the sin of their first parents. So they return, all the generations, back to the beginning, in the power of that Ransom. But sin has yet to be removed; as the man dies, so does he rise again. The Millennial Age is appointed for that removal, the reign of Christ over the earth and all the multitudes for whom He died, teaching, encouraging, converting, reconciling, “whosoever will” until at the last the final traces of evil will have been winnowed away and the whole human creation stand erect before God. Jeremiah in his description of the New Covenant (Jer. 31: 31-34) speaks of a work which can never be done in this present Age because it needs a power in control which has not yet taken effective control. But though the “ephah”, the earthenware jar containing all the world’s evil, has yet to be removed to Babylon, the flying roll can be and should be doing its work, entering into the houses and witnessing, like Paul before Felix, of

“righteousness, temperance and judgment to come” and beginning to effect that separation which will receive its greatest impetus in the work of the Age to come.

We need not fear to bring down the sword of the Lord in judgment. To those who know the Truth judgment is not so terrible a word as it used to be in the days of the old theology, when the organ pealed forth and the choir sung lustily “that day of wrath, that dreadful day; when heaven and earth shall pass away. When louder still, and still more dread, sounds the shrill note that wakes the dead”. Many Christians still think of it in those terms; it is the mission and duty of those who know the Truth to tell them of the better understanding. “When God arises to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth, surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain (Psa. 76: 9-10). “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth. Rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with harp and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet, make a joyful noise unto the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell within. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; FOR HE COMETH TO JUDGE THE EARTH. With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity” (Psa. 98: 4-9). Does not sound much like a “dreadful day of wrath”, does it? And that is the message we should be proclaiming in whatever fashion we individually can proclaim a message. Judgment—blessing. Evil turned into good. Godlessness turned into godliness. Death turned into life. The tunnel may be dark and long—and it is dark and long. But at the end there is the sunlight.

## IN THE BEGINNING

*When God created*

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

Those are the opening words of the Bible. They speak of a time earlier than the seven creative days which picture the development of the earth into a habitation suitable for man. There are several beginnings mentioned in the Bible. Jesus spoke of one beginning when, talking of the institution of marriage, He said “He which made them at the beginning made them male and female” (Matt. 19: 4. Mark 10: 4). That was the beginning of the human race and of human history upon earth. Satan, said Jesus on another occasion “was a liar and a murderer from the beginning” (John 8: 44) and this clearly refers to the same time—that of the Eden story. The One presented as the personifica-

tion of Divine Wisdom in Prov. 8: 23 says “I was set up from of old, from the beginning, before the earth was”; of him again it is said in John 1: 1-2 “In the beginning was the Word . . . and was in the beginning with God”. This beginning “before the earth was” must obviously be earlier in time than that of Gen. 1: 1 in which God is said to have created the earth. It has to be concluded therefore that Gen. 1: 1 does not refer to the beginning of Divine creative work but it does refer to the time when what we call this material universe was created and our sun with its attendant worlds came into existence. The account then has to be read as though given from the standpoint of an observer upon this planet, and tells of a time when the primitive earth appeared in the midst of the surrounding heavens.

The word for “heavens”—*shamayim*—means “the heights”, and comes from a Hebrew root “*shamah*”, to be high. (Some expositors make it



refer to a belief in the existence of waters above the heavens by prefixing *mayim*—"waters" with the adverb *sham*—"there"—so manufacturing a rather clumsy word "there-waters" for *shamayim*, but there is no warrant for this). Genesis 1. 1 tells us that in the beginning of things God made the heights above and the earth beneath, without any reference to what had gone before. It is certain that the spiritual or celestial world had already come into being, for Job 38. 7 tells that at the foundation of this earth "*the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy*". It is impossible to deny that somewhere away in another sphere of Divine creation there were intelligent beings witnessing the processes which brought our universe into being.

Science is still uncertain precisely how the solar system—the sun with its planets—came into existence; several theories compete for acceptance but it is agreed that at a time between two and five thousand million years ago a vast cloud of gaseous material existing in space consolidated to form a star—our sun—and a number of smaller bodies, the planets, of which our earth is one. The earth was most probably mainly in a molten condition and much of the metals and other solid substances with which we are now familiar vapourised and forming a kind of thick and heavy atmosphere around the central core. All water was in the form of steam and there was no free oxygen and no breathable air. Because of this state no sunlight could reach the surface and the planet was swathed in impenetrable darkness. That condition of things is aptly described by the next words. "*And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep*". This expression "without form" denotes a waste or desert condition, and is translated elsewhere in the O.T. by words such as waste, wilderness, confusion, vanity, and so on. "Void" is a word meaning emptiness, so that the phrase really means that the earth, although existing, was a desolate, empty waste. There was no life and no growing thing; just a mass of dead material suspended in space. Another example of the same expression in the Old Testament serves to illumine its use. Jeremiah, seeing in prophetic vision the desolation that was to come upon Judah in consequence of the imminent Babylonian invasion, expressed himself thus "*I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light . . . I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of heaven were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger*" (Jer. 4. 23-26). In this lament

Jeremiah likened the state of his homeland to the desolate and waste condition of the earth before God created man.

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

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

Energy and life; these are the twin principles of the universe as we know it, emanating from God. Many intellectual men are trying hard to discover the source and nature of both but they are still very much in the dark.

The first two verses of Genesis give us the answer; they both come from God and therefore they are, to man, forever unknowable. But God is not only life and energy; He is also Love and Wisdom, and One with whom his children can enter into personal relationship and have communion. He is not only the Creator, He is also the Father; we are not only the work of his hands, we are also his children. We are still in the formative time, not yet grown up, just as the earth we inhabit has not yet attained the fulness of perfection it will know eventually. Nevertheless the day will come when men shall be called the Sons of God because they will have, at last, attained the ideal which God had in mind in that far off day when "In the beginning". He created the heavens and earth.

## OTHNIEL, CHAMPION OF ISRAEL

The rugged old warrior stood on the eminence gazing at the little Canaanite town in the valley. The hero of a thousand fights, he was the idol of his men and at eighty-seven years of age boasted that his strength was as it had been forty years earlier. A twin key figure with Joshua in the conquest of Canaan after the entry of Israel into the Promised Land, he believed that he was wielding the sword of the Lord and therefore was invincible. He had just led his men to the capture of the town of Hebron but there was still more fighting to be done. His eyes fell upon his own trusted followers, hardened campaigners all, and at the crowd of younger men, not so experienced as yet in the arts of war, but eager to test their mettle and demonstrate their valour in the wars of the Lord. Caleb looked again at the town in the valley and came to a sudden decision. *"He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it"* came his stentorian voice *"to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife"* (Jud. 1. 12).

The eighteen-year-old girl standing behind him looked up in sudden alarm. Her eyes met those of her cousin, Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, and not many years, perhaps six or seven, older than herself. Othniel's eyes were already seeking hers; he flashed a reassuring half smile, hardening quickly into a look of determination. Wheeling round to face his own detachment of men, he shouted *"To Kirjath-sepher. Come"* and in a moment they were plunging down the rocky declivity towards their goal. Caleb watched them go, a grim smile on his face; then, to his own men. *"Come, we have work to do"* and the dry dust rose from the ground as they tramped in the opposite direction.

*"And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife"*.

And so Kirjath-sepher, afterwards known as Debir, became an Israelite stronghold and its luckless inhabitants, those of them who were not able to get away in time, were mercilessly put to the sword, for these were barbaric days, and for all the romance and euphoria that has been associated with Israel's occupation of the Promised Land, Joshua and his followers were in no wise different from the barbaric invaders which have repeated the process in every land and in every generation since. They believed they were doing the work of the Lord, but so have professed Christians in similar circumstances in later times. And it has to be remembered that the Lord had already told these Israelites that they had no need to fight to obtain the land. If they would exercise faith in him and just march in, He would see that they could settle and the decadent and immoral Canaanites who

possessed it would melt away. *"By little and little"* He told them, obviously by natural decrease as the generations passed; they had no need to fight. The Lord told them how they could obtain the land peaceably, but they chose to fight.

So Kirjath-sepher fell, and with it the literary treasures of the Canaanite civilisation, for the name means "the city of books" and this was the place where all the knowledge and learning and history of the Canaanites was stored. Despite their decadence and their immorality, the Canaanites were a civilised people and stemmed from the older civilisations of the Euphrates plains, more civilised by far than these Israelite invaders. So the books were all destroyed and no trace of them has ever been found, to the lasting loss of later generations who would fain know more about these peoples who lived when the world was young.

So Othniel returned triumphant and his uncle was as good as his word and the young conqueror claimed his bride.

*"And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field; and she lighted from off her ass. And Caleb said unto her, 'What wilt thou?' And she said unto him 'Give me a blessing; for thou hast given me a desert land. Give me also springs of water'. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs"* (Jud. 1. 14).

This young lady appears to have known her own mind. These men around her, her father and her new husband and others, were soldiers, having known no other trade in their lives. Caleb, who had endured the rigours of the Exodus for forty years, had only experienced "living off the land" as his people journeyed towards their goal. Othniel was only in his teens when they entered the land. They had probably given little thought to what would happen when the fighting was over. But Achsah had. She knew that eventually her husband would have to lay down his arms and commence earning a living. And in that land and at that time the only possibility was farming. Her father had given her, as dowry, an area of land, but it was hot and arid (the expression "south" land in the A.V. really means desert land; it was the territory now known in modern Israel as the "Negev", dry and waterless). *"Give me also springs of water"* she entreated. Caleb apparently had overlooked that essential. So he re-drew the boundaries to include suitable springs or streams and the lady was content. Although the Scripture does not give any details of their future married life it is evident that they did settle down happily for I Chron. 4. 13-14 does give the names of their two children, Hathath and Meonothai and their grandchildren, Joab and Ophrah.

After that, nothing, for some thirty years, dur-

ing which the family must have lived, and prospered sufficiently well, and enjoyed the time of relative peace which ensued after the land had been won and settled. Joshua, and Caleb, and Eleazar the High Priest, who came into Canaan with them, had long since gone the way of all flesh. But things were not going well in Israel. "And Joshua, the son of Nun, died, an hundred and ten years old, and also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers, and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord". Othniel and Achsah were of that younger generation but they were of the minority who remained loyal to God. They must have viewed with apprehension the lapsing into idolatry and the violation of the Covenant with God which guaranteed prosperity and peace whilst the nation remained loyal, and promised adversity and invasion by enemies as the penalty for disloyalty. And now the rain was ceasing to come, the crops were failing, the cattle dying off, and the threat of invasion becoming more real; but still the people in the main went on worshipping Baal as had the Canaanites before them. All this became a test of faith, for the temptation to leave the famine-stricken land of Israel for a greener land across Jordan among the unbelievers, and forsake the land the Lord had given them, was strong and some among Israel yielded to that temptation. Only thirty miles away at the village of Bethlehem lived at this same time another couple whom Othniel and Achsah must have known quite well, Elimelech and Naomi, but they had forsaken the land and gone over Jordan to live in Moab. Related by blood to Salmon the prince of the tribe of Judah, Elimelech should have set a better example, but to Moab he went in fear of what was coming although his cousin Boaz, loyal to God, remained. So the story of Boaz and Ruth is intertwined with that of Othniel and Achsah, for they all experienced the disaster that came upon the land.

*"Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chusan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, and the children of Israel served Chusan-rishathaim eight years"* (Jud. 3.8).

Invasion—servitude—oppression; these were to be the lot of the unfaithful people. Eight years long were they to reflect upon the consequence of their folly and, perchance, then begin to take some heed to the exhortations of the few faithful souls among them like Othniel and Boaz and others, who endured the judgment with patience, knowing that the Lord would lift his hand if and when the people repented. But in the meantime they groaned under the iron hand of the alien king.

This Chushan-rishathaim, the longest king's name in the Bible! No commentator has ever been able to suggest who he was, and of course there are not wanting those who suggest that he never lived and that the whole story is a fiction without foundation. But Twentieth century discovery can perhaps furnish a clue. The word Mesopotamia is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Aram-naharaim, meaning Aram of the two rivers, and this denoted the territory between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates which at a much later date became the land of Assyria. At this time, however, it was the seat of the empire of Mitanni—a name unknown until quite recent times. The Mitannians were an Indo-Aryan people from the north and were at the peak of their power in the days of Joshua; soon afterwards they were overcome by the Hittites. Their king at the time of Joshua was Tushratta and his sister was married to Pharaoh Amen-hotep III who was the reigning Pharaoh of Egypt when Israel was invading Canaan. And he oppressed Israel eight years.

But even the longest lane has a turning. In the story of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1.6) it describes how Naomi determined to return to the land of Israel because she had "heard that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread". Now this can mean only one thing, that Israel had repented and turned to the Lord and in consequence He had removed the oppressor and sent the rains, and the crops had grown, and all was well again. So this marked the end of the eight years' oppression. In the parallel story, that of Othniel, it is recorded (Jud. 3.9-11) "and when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel and went out to war; and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia into his hand, and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim. And the land had rest forty years".

So Naomi and Ruth came back from Moab to find a worthy successor to Joshua as the accepted ruler of the nation. Othniel, the victorious warrior, the champion of Israel, fresh from his victory over the Mitannians, leading a people chastened by their first experience of the penalty of the broken Covenant, resolved now to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth. It was in the power of that national mood that the men of Israel followed Othniel into battle against their oppressor and triumphed.

The Mitannians were a vigorous and warlike people. For a century past Egypt had been hard put to it to hold them back on the northern frontier with Syria. Now, with Egypt weakened and



impoverished on account of losses suffered by the Plagues and the Exodus, Mitanni was moving in to fill the vacuum, hence the eight years oppression. But their rule was short-lived. Another power further away still, the Hittites, was attacking Mitanni from the rear. Caught between two fires, Hittites in the north and Othniel with his Israelites in the south, the Mitannians retreated and a year later, under Tushratta's son Mattiwaza, were no more. This event has been dated at 1370 BC; an analysis of the data afforded by the first few chapters of Judges and the Book of Ruth gives the onslaught of Othniel lying between the years 1360 and 1380, a witness to the accuracy of Bible history.

So the followers of Othniel went out to battle as they had done in the days of Kirjath-sepher thirty years earlier. They had been young men then, as had been their leader, with life opening out before them. Now they were in their fifties, with the sobering knowledge of their years of disloyalty to God and the Covenant and the hardships that had brought them. But they had come back, and God had received them, like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, and, they would not fail again. Perhaps the best part of the story is at the end, when they returned triumphant to find Israel a free nation again and the sincere worship of the Lord restored in the towns and villages of Israel.

For forty years thereafter Othniel ruled Israel in justice and righteousness. His personal influence, as a champion for God, must have been tremendous, for during all that time the nation was free from enemies. The Egyptians in the south were quiet; the Hittites in the north were busy consolidating their hold on Mitanni. The nation increased and prospered accordingly. The High Priest, Phinehas, son of Eleazar, performed his

sacred office and all seemed well. There must have been lapses; the threat of idolatry was always there and Jonathan the renegade grandson of Moses had already set up his idol shrine in the territory of Dan in the far north (Jud. 13) but these were minority events in the otherwise orderly and God-fearing life of the nation.

*"And Othniel the son of Kenaz died"*. He would have been a little over a hundred years of age. A champion for the Lord, like his predecessors Moses and Joshua, he was the third in a line of great leaders who endeavoured to keep the nation on the straight and narrow way. Each of them illustrated the influence an upright and high-souled leader can exert over the people he leads and serves—and how quickly that influence can be dissipated when the magic of his presence is removed. After the notice of his death the narrative continues *"and the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord . . ."* All the old troubles returned, and once again the penalty of the Covenant. One might be pardoned for asking whether it had all been worth while in the efforts to restore the nation to its rightful place before God. So soon did they relapse. The answer is that of course it was all worth while. The light which burned so brightly during that forty years of Othniel's rule was never completely extinguished during the time of darkness which followed. Some there were who remained loyal, and when at last the people repented again and the Lord raised up another deliverer it blazed into brightness once more. One day it will blaze up for the last time and will not be extinguished. As said Isaiah seven centuries later *"Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee . . . for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended"*.

### The Way of Suffering

*"Yet hath the king devised means, that his banished be not expelled from him"* (2 Sam. 14. 14).

This is the principle upon which God has been working from the dawn of history. He is no ruthless autocrat, exercising grim sovereignty over a mass of helpless subjects, choosing some for everlasting bliss and dooming all the remainder to everlasting misery. Neither is He an unapproachable Deity to whom the sufferings and shortcomings of humanity make no appeal. And neither is He a Creator Whose creation has got beyond his control. For

reasons too unfathomable for us to understand as yet, God knows the way of suffering can be made a means to the execution of his ultimate ideal; and although it is not true to say that God is responsible for the world's sin and suffering—for it was man, in the exercise of his own free will and in the light of knowledge of the Divine command who brought evil into the world—yet God has at all times had the situation firmly in hand and is working steadily to bring back to himself those who, because of sin, have been banished from him for a season.



## THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS

In some circles it is sometimes suggested that Christmas is a pagan festival and should not be celebrated or perpetuated by Christians. The established fact that Jesus was not born on December 25, but within a few days of September 30, would appear to justify that position—although there would be little hope of removing the usual festivities and Church celebrations to the alternative date. Perhaps an examination of the traditional feast back into past ages will help towards a clear view of the subject.

The annual celebration, associated now with the Christian faith and in former times with pagan worship, and usually with the birth of a god at the winter solstice when the ending of the year gives place to the new, with its promise of spring in the northern hemisphere, can be traced back through European and Roman times to Greece, Egypt, Syria, Persia and eventually to ancient Babylon—and does not stop even there. The theme is always the same; there is the birth of a god who is going to bring new life to a dying world. No wonder the early Christians took over a tradition thousands of years old and adapted it to their faith. The modernists of the 19th century looked at it and declared it to be no more than a solar myth marking the end of a dying year and the birth of the new—but they were ignorant of the antiquity of the custom and its true origin back in the mists of time.

A basic principle runs through the successive forms of the tradition right back through the ages. There is the ceremonial burning of a mature tree—the “Yule log”—on the day preceding the solstice, Dec. 24, illustrating the death of the powers of life in the world, followed by the planting of a young tree—the traditional “Christmas Tree”—on the following day, Dec. 25, picturing the birth of new life for the salvation of the world. In the most ancient forms of the ritual the ceremonies were extended into the springtime, when the new life was fully manifested, this therefore connecting with the Christian Easter.

So far as the festival was observed in the early centuries of the present era it centred around the religion known as Mithraism which was widespread in the Roman Empire. Mithras was the Persian deity of light, wisdom and moral purity and his worship goes back several centuries before Christ. Originally one of the three principal Persian deities, his attributes were later absorbed by the supreme deity Ahura-Mazda. His birthday was held to be at the winter solstice, December 25, when his advent signalled light to the world and by means of a somewhat vague vicarious sacrifice of himself ensured the salvation of the world. Hence its attraction for the rising Christian system in later

times, and the adoption of December 25 for the birth of Jesus.

Mithraism was introduced into Rome at the time of Pompey, thirty years before the birth of Christ. It flourished from the end of the First century to the end of the Fourth, being then suppressed by the rising power of the Christian priesthood. Associated with the Mithraic festival in the earlier years were the two Roman celebrations of Brumalia, in honour of the winter solstice, and Saturnalia, a time of pleasure and unbridled licence when slaves could take liberties with their masters and all kinds of excesses were tolerated, in honour of the Roman god Saturn. The first move toward associating Christians with all this was taken by the virtuous emperor Antoninus Pius between AD 130 and 160, who ordered Divine service to be celebrated the night before the Nativity, Christmas Eve, which seems to show that even before that early date Dec. 25 was associated with the birth of Christ. Later emperors, Lucius Commodus about AD 180, Aurelianus in 270, and Diocletian in 290, put a stop to this, the last-named going so far as to give orders that churches celebrating Christmas were to be set on fire with the worshippers inside. Aurelianus endeavoured to revive the decaying Mithras festival by identifying Mithras with the Sun-god and so combining the faith with the theme of approaching spring-time. But with the accession of Constantine the Great, in the Fourth century, and his making Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire, the old pagan associations with Christmas were swept away, and it became a purely Christian festival. Roman paganism was no more.

The later traditional customs have been added as the years went by. Some have a pagan background and some not. The “Christmas tree” was introduced into Europe in the 17th century and into England as late as 1840. Always a fir tree, because it was evergreen, it symbolised the new life that was then born; its gifts pictured the “gifts to men” resulting from the coming of that new life. The “Yule log” and its ceremonial burning came from Russia in the Middle Ages—in Scotland it was the central feature of the feast of Yule, lasting from Dec. 18 to Jan. 7, the latter being called “Uphalle Day” denoting the end of the “holy days”. All this came from a source far older than Rome. The evergreen decorations, usually ivy, is a survival of customs connected with the Greek god Bacchus, god of wine and revelry, but originally a manifestation of the sun-god, and so again a symbol of life-giving power. This entered British festivities from Germany in the 18th century. The misletoe appeared in many countries from remote

ages as a symbol of new life arising from the dead—its ability to propagate and flourish on the trunks of old and decaying trees (in England the oak and the apple) suggested this meaning and in Britain before the Romans came it was used by the Druids in rituals symbolising that principle with attendant customs which in mediæval times were less innocent than they are today. Christmas games and revelry originated from the Roman Saturnalia feast of the First AD century; they had no place in the more ancient ceremonies which were purely religious. The most picturesque modern symbol, Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas) has its origin in the person of Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia, Roman Asia, in AD 336, who became the patron saint of Russia in mediæval times and was afterwards imported into other countries as the patron of children.

Behind Roman and Greek mythology lies that of Egypt, Syria and finally Babylon. The same theme, the birth of a world Saviour, appears in them all and they all trace back to Babylon and then earlier still. In Egypt the saviour-god Horus was born to the goddess Isis, slain by the enemy Seti, and resurrected from the dead. In Greece Bacchus was similarly slain and raised again; in Syria Adonis—in this case in mid-July. But it is in Babylon, where idolatry and paganism commenced, that the story is most complete. The Babylonian empire had its rise about the time of Jacob in the 18th century BC and endured until the 5th in the days of Daniel. During all that time it exalted Marduk to the position of chief of gods and the saviour of men. Marduk had usurped all the prerogatives and titles of the older gods, Enki, lord of the earth, and An, the Most High God, and he was held out to be the embodiment of the Divine Word and Wisdom, the manifestation of God to man. As such, he was the *"creative Word, the Divine Wisdom which governs the world"* *"the leader of the gods"* *"the lord of the Divine Plan"*. He was born to save mankind, and rose again from the dead for that purpose, and so became known as Marduk the Redeemer. An elaborate ritual commencing at the end of December and concluding during the first half of April pictured the entire process. First came the ceremonial cutting down and burning of a date palm, symbolising death coming into the world; then the planting of a young date sapling, Marduk the babe born to redeem, child of Enki god of the earth and his consort Ninmah, queen of earth. He was baptised by his mother and grew to manhood, but the Most High had lost control of the world and the world went in fear of the chaos-dragon. Marduk in the strength of his manhood fought and slew the dragon but then died also, and the world mourned for their champion. But the Most High intervened and he

was raised from the dead and exalted to the highest place among the gods, after which he distributed blessings to all mankind. The ceremonies ended in April when an image of the god was taken out of his temple in Babylon and on a journey round the city whilst an epic describing all these things was recited to all the people.

But even this was not the beginning. Long before Marduk was exalted god of Babylon, long before there was any idolatry or paganism, the Christmas ritual was known and practised. Back in the days before any false god had been conceived in the minds of men and worshipped, when all men honoured and served the one whom they knew as "the Most High God", the God of Adam and Enoch and Noah and his sons, there was this ceremony of the burning date palm and the planted date sapling enacted at the end of each year. An ancient epic, very fragmentary and still only imperfectly understood, speaks of the Sumerian city of Eridu, one of the first cities, founded at a time which can be placed just before the death of Shem, and talks of a fertile parkland in Eridu in which God planted a date palm which grew and flourished exceedingly, so that it gave shelter and protection to the "great earth-mother". Sadly, it withered and died, but in its place there grew up a date sapling which became the man and god Dumu-zi, a word that means the Divine seed, at the beginning of the sun passing over the sky, i.e., at the beginning of the year. Here the epic becomes unintelligible, but another well-known and much later epic-legend known as the Inanna-Dumuzi myth tells of the god Dumuzi who was slain by his enemies and went down into Arallu, the nether-world, the grave. At his death the world went dark, the cattle and crops languished, and there was universal mourning. Then his affianced bride Inanna, daughter of the Most High God, besought her father that Dumuzi might be released from the grave and come back to the world of men. But the answer was that she must first go down to Arallu herself and then could come back with him. So Inanna took the long journey to Arallu, the death state, but on her arrival the guardians of Arallu refused to let her return. Thereupon An the Most High God commanded the god of the nether-world to release them both and so they came back to the world of men together, the sun came out and the fields became green again and there was great rejoicing.

It is impossible not to see in this ancient ritual of nearly five thousand years ago some resemblance to the Divine Plan of salvation. Could it be that here is a story, getting more and more distorted as it passed from generation to generation, of the first Divine revelation to Mother Eve that her seed would one day undo the evil that had been done?

There are clay tablets in existence showing a young date palm standing beside the stump of a cut-down tree round which is coiled a serpent. Is it possible that this old legend enshrines the story of Eden—Adam the tree in all its perfection and luxuriance, Eve the earth-mother under its protection, the tree withering and dying due to the onset of sin, the outcome the Divine seed which later on was to bless all families of the earth; that "seed" cut down in death and seen no more in this world until his bride shall have followed him into death and then by the mighty power of the Most High together appear to the world for their blessing?

Could it be that the Lord said much more to Eve

then is recorded in Gen. 3. 15, that early man did have some outline knowledge of the Divine Plan of redemption centred in Christ and his Church, and that this was celebrated in picture-ritual year by year ever after at the most appropriate time, the end of the old year with its failures and the beginning of the new with its promise, much as the Memorial of our Lord's death is celebrated annually now?

In which case the celebration of Christmas does not derive initially from pagan practices but from a Divine revelation of a time long before there were any pagans. Perhaps Christians can celebrate the feast with good heart on that basis;

### "GOOD IF HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN"

There sometimes arises a question as to the real implication of Jesus' words in Matt. 26. 24 "*The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born*". Did Jesus mean by this that there can be no possible future hope for Judas, that the enormity of his sin has precluded him from any further opportunity of repentance and reconciliation with God? It would seem hard to reconcile such view with the fact of Judas' evident remorse; "*I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood*": a remorse that led him in despair to go away and hang himself. If Caiaphas, who betrayed no sign of remorse, is to see the Lord again "at his appearing and his kingdom" (Matt. 26. 64), it would seem logical to think that Judas, whose guilt, on a sober appraisal of the position, was certainly of lesser degree than that of the High Priest, should at least enjoy the same opportunity and perhaps translate his remorse into repentance and consequent reconciliation. He must have been one of those for whom the Lord prayed "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*", if those words mean anything they must imply a future opportunity for repentance.

The writer, reading in the "*Book of Enoch*" the other day, came across this same expression, and remembering that a number of our Lord's sayings, and those of some of the Apostles, reveal that they were intimately familiar with this book, which was in general use at the time of the First Advent, a clue to a possible reason for our Lord's allusion presented itself. The passage in question is in 1 Enoch 38, where the appearance of Christ at his Second Advent for the judgment of the wicked is

described. The Book of Enoch consistently refers to the Messiah as the "Son of Man" or the "Righteous One" and in this remark of Jesus at the Last Supper, he too used the expression "Son of Man". The Enoch passage is as follows:—"*And when the Righteous One shall appear before the eyes of the righteous, whose elect works hang upon the Lord of Spirits, and light shall appear to the righteous and the elect who dwell on the earth; where then will be the dwelling of the sinners, and where the resting-place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits? It had been good for them if they had not been born.*"

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

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



## THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

*A story of St. Paul*

No one really knew what had happened. The two Jews were being dragged through the streets toward the *Agora*, the place where the *Duumvirii*, dispensers of justice and custodians of law and order, administered the duties of their office. Alert for any opportunity of creating a tumult, especially against the hated Jews, all the riff-raff of Philippi followed hard behind. Something to do with a slave girl, someone had said. By means of magical arts these Jews had deprived her of her gift of prophecy and now her masters were laying a complaint at court. Should be worth seeing, this affair! Philippi was a Roman military centre; much of the population was descended from Roman soldiers settled here after a disastrous battle fought near by between Imperial and Republican forces during the civil war half a century earlier. The *duumvirii* themselves were ex-military men who had assumed without any authority the Roman military title *Praetor*—which is why St. Luke used the equivalent Greek term *strategos*, rendered in the A.V. “magistrates”—and they could be relied on to see that these interfering Jews were taught a good sharp lesson for their pains. So the yelling mob surged on, crowding round the aggrieved complainants and their prisoners, as the *aediles* in the forecourt of the buildings listened impassively to the story.

Paul and Silas were probably taken by surprise at this sudden outburst of animosity. It is probable that Paul performed this act of healing in a sudden accession of pity for the unfortunate girl who for so many days past had been calling after him as he moved about the city “*These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.*” He had so far experienced no opposition to his message; the citizens of Philippi either listened to him or ignored him but they did not oppose him. The few Jews who were resident in the city appeared to appreciate his ministry and there had been no opposition from that direction either. It seemed almost as if here, at last, he had found a place where he could preach Christ undisturbed. His healing of the lame man at Lystra had evoked the unrestrained admiration of the people there so that he even had to restrain them from worshipping him as a god. He probably expected now that his dispossessing of the demoniac spirit from this girl would at the very least create increased interest in his message and the Lord by whose power he had performed this act. He under-estimated the measure of the forces against him. It was almost as if the evil spirit, having been cast out of the slave girl, had entered into her owners and turned them into furious, raving beasts. Almost before they realised what was happening, the two apostles

found themselves arraigned before the bar of Roman justice. The *aediles*—rendered “rulers” in Acts 16. 19, were a kind of civil police, responsible for the maintenance of order in temples, public buildings, streets and open spaces, and for the apprehension of offenders against the law. The *duumvirii*—“magistrates” of 16. 20—always two in number, corresponded roughly to our own Justices of the Peace with rather more authority than Britain’s local magistrates usually enjoy, more like that of a Criminal Court Judge at the County Assizes. In accordance with Roman custom, the proceedings were held in public, probably in the open air, with the unruly crowd pressing close on all sides and only with difficulty held back by the attendant guards. In the normal case a Roman trial was conducted with dignity and some semblance of justice; the presiding judge would enquire the nature of the charge and the complainant was then free to state his case. The impression one gets here is that the aggrieved slave owners poured out their story before the usual opening formalities could be gone through, and it is significant that the charge they brought bore no relation whatever to the incident which inspired it. The reason is not difficult to discern. It was no crime under Roman law to exorcise a demon or to heal a mentally sick person. The accused men had not deprived the owners of possession of the slave; they had committed no violent act nor disturbed public law and order. They had, in fact, done nothing of which they could justly be accused before the court. The complainants, however, felt that they would have the sympathy of their rulers, for Philippi did not like Jews; with malevolent insolence they trumped up a charge which, if sustained, would bring the accused within the reach of the law. The charge was that of preaching and making converts to an illegal religion. “*These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to observe, neither to receive, being Romans.*” It should be noticed that Judaism was a tolerated religion, not an illegal religion, and Christianity at this early time was considered by Rome as the same thing as Judaism; no difference was recognised and it was not the alleged teaching of either Christ or Moses which was the charge. Illegal religions were mainly certain Eastern philosophies which Rome refused to tolerate and the Apostles certainly had not been preaching those. The charge was false. Had Paul and Silas been given any opportunity of defending themselves they could easily have refuted the accusation—but they were not given the opportunity. The words had hardly been spoken before the mob was yelling itself hoarse and the magistrates, with



callous disregard for justice, conscious only that here was an opportunity to shew their contempt and hatred for anything Jewish, and to satisfy the citizens with an exhibition of sadistic cruelty, commanded that the prisoners be summarily flogged.

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. A law known as the Lex Porcia, dating from 247 B.C., exempted all Romans citizens from the punishment of scourging, and in at least one notable case in Roman history a judge who flouted that law was himself very severely dealt with. It is obvious that in the tumult and haste of the proceedings and their inability to make any defence, the Apostles had no opportunity to state their claim to citizenship, or if they did, their plea was ignored. With all the brutality invariably associated with such occasions, the lictors stripped them of their clothes, tied them to the public whipping posts and beat them unmercifully with their rods, until the gloating crowd was somewhat appeased and the half-fainting victims were dragged away to the city prison and handed over to the jailer, evidently to be incarcerated for an unspecified period and not improbably with the intention that in the secrecy of the prison they would be put to death and their bodies flung into the river.

The jailer, charged to keep his prisoners safely, put them in the stocks—*xylon*, a structure similar to the mediæval British stocks, having holes for head, hands and feet. In this case they seem to have been secured by the feet only and left for the night in a cramped and painful position on the hard and probably foul floor of the prison, bleeding and in agony from the flogging to which they had been subjected.

And they sang! They sang psalms and hymns! Psalms and hymns of praise unto God. They praised God and they prayed! In all that searing pain, in stress of body cruelly bruised and torn by the rods, and the aching agony of cramped and fettered limbs, their spirits soared above their circumstances and surroundings. Their voices rose upon the night air in that prison, "*and the prisoners heard them*"! Other men, perhaps women too, were incarcerated in that evil place, in just as much physical torment perhaps, possessed by terrors and fears for the future, and they heard the singing of those two men whose spirits were so much greater than their suffering bodies. The prisoners listened.

What did they sing? It must have been something from the psalms of David, words from that glorious treasury of faith and confidence. "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*" "*In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid what man can do unto me*". Strange words, the other prisoners must have thought, to be heard in a prison like this. Closely secured,

injured and helpless, probably appointed to death; what God was He that could possibly deliver these men from this prison and from the power of Rome? Now listen to them! "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*". Who is this Lord of whom they sing and to whom they pray. How can He possibly break down this prison and command these gates and doors to open? "*In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried unto my God; He heard my voice out of his temple and my cry came before him. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills moved and were shaken . . .*" The triumphant voices reached a pinnacle of strength; it was as if the very walls themselves were vibrating in unison with those heaven-ascending tones, as if the very doors were rattling against their bolts and bars in the endeavour to open before that God to whom these men were offering worship. But what was this? These walls were vibrating; these doors were shaking loose. The other prisoners must have strained at their bonds in terror as the grim walls shuddered and cracked, as the floor heaved and the doors groaned open, the iron staples securing their chains came out of the walls and first one and then another found himself free. The earthquake which was shaking Philippi made of no avail all the restraints of that prison, and its occupants huddled together in one group, terrified, but free.

The jailer, asleep in his own apartment, wakened suddenly as the room rocked about him. Governor of a fairly important city prison, he was probably an old army man of wide experience and recognised the happening for what it was. An earthquake was no new thing to him. But when his professional look took in the fact that all the dungeon doors stood open his attitude underwent a quick change. Open doors meant escaped prisoners; by now they were probably well away making good use of this sudden turn of fortune. Rome had only one treatment for jailers who lost their prisoners—death. The reason for the escape was of no interest to the superior powers. This jailer knew better than to expect mercy and he determined to anticipate the inevitable. He drew his sword with the intention of ending his life by his own hand. Paul must have seen the impulsive action and cried out at once to save the man. "*Do thyself no harm; for we are all here*". Why the other prisoners had not made good their escape does not readily appear. It may have been fear of the earthquake; it may have been the impression produced by the singing of the Apostles and some superstitious idea that perhaps they would be safer in the company of these who evidently had the gods on their side. There is not much doubt that the jailer quickly con-

nected the inexplicable releasing of the prisoners' bonds and the earthquake which had effected that release with some greater power than that of Nature. This was no ordinary earthquake, he must have reasoned, and in a swift revulsion of feeling he abandoned the whole of his Roman arrogance and prostrated himself before Paul and Silas with the trenchant question which has been asked—and answered—so many times in the world's history. "What must I do to be saved?"

To that question there was—and is—only one possible answer. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved*". But let no one think that merely academic assent to the truth of Christ's coming, the rightness of his message, and the fact of his death on behalf of fallen man, is all that is intended. Salvation is a word that is often used very loosely, as though it merely indicates the receipt of a ticket entitling one to entrance into Heaven when life on earth shall end, or the bestowment of an abiding peace and confidence during this life which removes all worry and apprehension because Christ has become Master and Leader. There is much more to salvation than this. Fallen man is deprived of life, the true life which is God-given and can only be the portion of those who are in union with God; without that life the man is out of tune with God's creation and must eventually lose his place in that creation. And the life which God gives can only come to man through Christ, who is the channel of life. The jailer must needs be joined in living union with Christ before he can receive salvation, and this is what Paul meant by believing on him. So it came about that "*they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*" It says much for the sincerity and eagerness of this Philippian jailer that in the short space of a few hours—the earthquake was at midnight and by daylight the prison had official visitors—he was able to receive enough of the word of the Lord intelligently to make a complete consecration of himself to God and be baptised in symbol of his being thus "dead with Christ". It is even more surprising to find that all his household shared with him in this new-found faith and in this baptism. The story reads as though everything happened on the spur of the moment, but such conversions are rarely like that. It is much more likely that this Philippian jailer—Roman or Greek, we know not—and his family had been disturbed in mind for a great while past, longing and searching for something better than they had, although it has to be admitted that the treatment of Paul and Silas when admitted to the prison does not appear easily reconcilable with a man in whom such sentiments and yearnings for better things were struggling for expression. Perhaps, after all, this was genuinely a case where people who walked

in darkness saw a great light (Isa. 9. 2), and that the earthquake and its strange consequences revealed in a flash to this unbelieving man the truth to which hitherto he had been completely blind. Even so great is the power of God in Christ's redeeming love when the one concerned is ready to respond.

The earthquake may have been responsible for another effect also. The two jacks-in-office who had so summarily condemned the Apostles on the previous day were now in somewhat chastened mood. They sent the lictors ("serjeants" in 16. 35) to the prison with instructions for immediate release of the two prisoners. Whether they felt uneasy at their irregular handling of the matter or superstitiously connected the earthquake with their action and feared the wrath of the gods, does not appear, but they evidently hoped to wash their hands of the whole affair by permitting the Apostles to depart unhindered. The jailer, doubtless overjoyed, passed the news to Paul expecting him to accept the dismissal with alacrity. But not so Paul. He intended the illegality of the case to be openly admitted in the sight of all men. "*They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans (Roman citizens) and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out*".

The lictors' message created considerable consternation when it was transmitted to the magistrates. The possibility that the two Jews they had treated so viciously might be entitled to the honour of Roman citizenship—a privilege not often accorded to Jews—had not occurred to them. And now "*they feared, when they heard that they were Romans*". In the expressive jargon of today, they were scared stiff, and with good reason. Paul and Silas had only to lay a complaint before the Pro-Consul, the supreme Governor of the Senatorial Province of Macedonia, in which territory Philippi lay, and the two offending officials would find themselves in serious trouble with attached penalties too terrible to contemplate. It is an incidental fact that the Emperor Claudius, who was the ruler of the Roman Empire at the time of this incident, was a stickler for the proprieties in the administration of the law, and any Roman holding an official position of any kind had to be more than usually careful in discharging the duties of his office. All in all, the two would-be dictators of Philippi felt they were in a difficulty which could be resolved in only one way. Most humiliating it would be, for without doubt the citizens of Philippi would learn of the circumstances and their pomp and dignity would inevitably suffer; better that, they must certainly have reasoned, than an appearance before the Pro-Consul with no excuse for their conduct. So the two officials came to Paul and Silas and humbly begged them graciously to accept freedom, and

depart as speedily as they would from Philippi.

They did not go at once. There was an assembly at the house of Lydia, the first convert, and there, doubtless, they counselled and exhorted the infant Church to steadfastness and Christian growth. Then they departed—at least Paul and Silas. It seems that Luke remained at Philippi, and rejoined Paul only when the latter came again to Philippi several years later (between 16, 19 and 20). The “we” gives place to “they” in the narrative indicating that the writer, Luke, was not with them). It might well be that much of the building up of this Philippian church, which afterwards came to mean so much to the Apostle of the Gentiles, was due to the quiet labours of the “beloved

physician”.

The name of the converted jailer is not given; without much doubt he joined himself to the newly-formed church and was found in fellowship with Lydia and the other converts. What eventually happened to him we do not know but he could hardly have remained in the prison service. Perhaps he devoted his time to setting free prisoners from a greater bondage than he had known before, leading men out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Meanwhile the two stout-hearted fellow labourers, Paul and Silas, were stepping out steadily on the road which led southwards to Thessalonica.

*(To be continued)*

## ON HERESIES

Our all-wise Head made a most choice selection in the word he used to foretell that the spirit that says “I am of Paul, I am of Apollos” would manifest itself in the midst of the true Church—as it did do even under the ministration of such powerful leaders as Paul, and Peter, and John. On this word, “*heresis*”, found in the King James Version, E. P. Gould writes in the American Commentary: “*‘Heresis’* is a transliteration (the Greek word spelled with English letters), but not a translation of the Greek word, which has come over into English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning. It means, originally, a taking; then, introducing the idea of selection, the taking what one desires and leaving the rest, election, choice; then, a chosen way of living or thinking; then, a body of men choosing the same way of thinking or living; and finally, dissensions between different bodies of this kind. Its use in the New Testament is divided between the last two meanings—sects and their dissensions. In this sense, it is classed by Paul among the works of the flesh. (Gal. 5, 20.). This writer gives also what we believe is the correct explanation of the last clause of this text, “that they which are approved may be made manifest among you”. He writes: “Those who stand the test and receive the Divine approval; here those who show an unpartisan and loving spirit. ‘May be made manifest’—viz., by the contrast between them and the dissentient”. How simply and how skilfully our Heavenly Judge shows up the selfishness, the wilfulness, the lovelessness of the unfaithful!

This is the grand expression of the Bible—God is Love, the key note of Christianity. It is the foundation of the Plan of creation and redemption, and the underlying principle in the Word of God.

## FORGETTING THE THINGS BEHIND

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

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

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



## OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah

### 3. Voice of the Watchman

"*Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down,*" says God. *What a downfall is yours!* (vs. 4-5). The supreme example of this overweening ambition is that of Lucifer, the Morning Star, related in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah. The coming downfall of the king of Babylon is made the symbol of the splendid vision of Lucifer's doom. One who aspired to share the throne of God is cast down to the lowermost hell. "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High." That was Lucifer's aim and intent. But he refused to believe that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he pleaseth." The One who was exalted above all and made to sit at the right hand of God was One who humbled himself, became of no reputation, and was obedient to the Father's Will, even unto death. Here is a contrast which the Edomites of this Age have utterly failed to grasp. They have followed the way of Lucifer rather than the way of Christ. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel of old time, they have sought to build their own edifice and storm the gates of heaven, entering the presence of God in the might of their own power, knowing not that against the restraining hand of God the whole of their puny efforts are as nothing. There is only one way into the celestial realm and only one avenue of approach to the throne of God; it is by the strait gate, and narrow way, that leadeth unto life. Jesus said "Few there be that find it". He knew men, and He knew that so many would attempt the way of Lucifer; few would understand the depths of his own teaching.

One is led to wonder if our Lord's foreview of the powers of the heavens being shaken, (Matt. 24. 29) has not something to do with this threatened "pulling down" of Obadiah 4. During this present Age the "powers of the heavens", the principalities and authorities of the merely nominally Christian institutions and systems, have had matters very much their own way. One of their number, one of the most infamous of Popes, is reported to have said on one occasion "*This Christianity, how profitable a farce it has been to us.*" That is the type of man from which these "powers of the heavens" have been built up. The ecclesiastical leader whose faith has been truly in Christ, who has endeavoured, however imperfectly, to lead his flock in the way of the Lord, and has honoured his Master above himself, has never been part of these "powers of the heavens". There have been many such throughout the Age and they have exercised a spiritually beneficent influence and in many cases left their mark on history. But many in high posi-

tions have sooner or later yielded to the seductive influences of the world around them and forsaken the narrow way for one that offered greater ease and more of the plaudits of men. And in so doing they have incurred the Divine sentence "From there will I pull thee down, says God".

It is a noticeable thing in this present time, when the powers of the heavens are being shaken, that the pronouncements of ecclesiastical leaders on world affairs are given less and less attention by secular leaders, politicians, and the masses whom they lead. If a dignitary of the Church does venture to express an opinion on a political or social matter he is as often as not told, by the Press or otherwise, to confine his remarks to religion and leave other matters to people who understand them. Such treatment would have been unthinkable in earlier generations. Nothing can be more obvious than that the day of earthly power of "princes of the Church" is past.

Though they attempted to exalt themselves as the stars—the stars have fallen from heaven. "What a downfall is yours!" says the prophet, wondering, as he contemplates the ruin of what was once a mighty power. So it is in this Age when the great ones of the earth cry out "Alas, alas, that great city . . . for in one hour so great riches is come to naught." (Rev. 18. 17).

"*If thieves and robbers came to you by night, would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings? But now what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures! Your very allies have betrayed and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive.*" (vs. 5-7).

In these words Obadiah shows the futility of that trust which Edom has placed in her worldly allies. Notwithstanding many services rendered to the kings of this world and her allegiance to them in opposition to God, they have no hesitation whatever in discarding her completely when she has served their purposes and can be of no further use. Not only so, but they have no scruples about taking from her such possessions as she holds, leaving her poor and naked. If ordinary thieves enter a house by night, says Obadiah, they take what they want and leave the rest. The hapless householder does not waken in the morning to find himself bereft of all his possessions; he still has something left. When the vineyard labourers gather in the grape harvest, they do not strip the vines completely bare; they leave some of the grapes for the gleaners. But not



so with Edom's erstwhile friends when they become her enemies. They rifle as they will and pillage her treasures. Sorry indeed is the condition of those who have forsaken God and trusted to Mammon, whilst retaining the name of God on their lips. They finish up by being miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3. 17). "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help" said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. All through the Gospel Age there have been those who have gone down to Egypt for help, putting their trust in the arm of the flesh, and although for a time they have appeared to prosper in the things of this material world, it has been at the expense of their standing before God. When it has been a so-called Christian institution that has so allied itself with the world, then sooner or later the word is fulfilled "your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground".

"In that day" says God "I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off. Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever." (vs. 8-10). The men of Teman were renowned for their wisdom. It is not clear from the Scriptures just why; there is a cryptic note in Jer. 49. 7 in which the Lord asks "Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?" and the prophet goes on very evidently to quote from Obadiah's prophecy. This alleged wisdom of Teman is that which is to be destroyed when the Lord executes judgment against Edom, for Teman and Edom were intimately connected and from the prophetic point of view are taken as one. Teman was the grandson of Esau, and even in his natural descent affords a picture of the worldly wisdom which is thus to perish, for the father and mother of Teman were Eliphaz the son of Esau, descended thus from Abraham the faithful, and Timna the daughter of Seir the aboriginal inhabitant of the land and the one who gave his name to "Mount Seir". Thus Teman was the fruit of an alliance between the favoured line of Abraham which held the promise and the truth of God, and the earthly line of Seir having nothing in common with the promise and no share in the purposes of God. What more apt picture could we have of this alliance between the apostate ones described in this prophecy under the general title of "Edom" and the powers of this world with which they have allied themselves? Very truly Teman is a symbol of the worldly wisdom which is foolishness with God and which will be revealed at the end to be without firm foundation and doomed to be swept away as God arises to put the last great phase of his Plan into effect. "I will destroy the wise men

out of Edom and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off."

It is in this verse that we are brought back to the vision of Isaiah where he saw a mighty conqueror coming from afar, bearing the signs of a great conflict upon his person. "Who is this that cometh from Edom" asks the prophet wonderingly "with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" Swift and confident comes the answer "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?" Again the strong reply "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." (Isa. 63. 1-4). The glowing passage goes on to describe how the victorious Lord in his own power and by the might of his own right hand overcomes his enemies and crushes all opposition to his incoming Kingdom. That is a prophecy of the end of the Age, the time when all that is opposed to the Kingdom of light and peace is to be scattered, as the vision of Daniel shows it to be, like the chaff upon the summer threshing floors. This passage alone is sufficient to assure us how completely and thoroughly the Lord will banish false religion from the earth at the time of his Kingdom, how the men of hypocrisy and deceit will find themselves, like their prototypes in the days of the First Advent, thrust out of the Kingdom in which Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets and the faithful of Gospel Age times too, will have entered. Isaiah shows this work as an accomplished thing. Obadiah takes an earlier view and depicts the Lord as viewing Edom and decreeing its eventual and early destruction.

If we want further assurance of the intensity of God's determination to make an end of false worship and set the true faith of Jesus supreme in the earth we have it in Isaiah's 21st chapter, where we have additional indication that the end of the Age, when the faithful are watching with ardour for their returning Lord, is the time when these things take place. In that vision the prophet is bidden to set a watchman and tell him to declare what he sees. The watchman has his eyes fixed on the great desert which lies between Judah and Babylonia, and in the vision he sees, crossing that desert and advancing in the direction of Judah, and therefore coming away from Babylon, a strange procession. He sees, first, a horse-drawn chariot, followed by one drawn by asses and finally one drawn by

camels. That is symbolic. The horse-drawn chariot is indicative of the military conqueror returning in triumph from the scene of his conquest; the chariot drawn by asses contains the captives who have been taken prisoner and are being transported to a strange land, and the chariot or waggon drawn by camels contains the spoil and booty that has been plundered from the defeated city. The whole tableau, for that is what it is, tells of a great and overwhelming defeat inflicted upon the city of Babylon by the victorious forces of Judah, and how the watchman sees the triumphant soldiery returning with their captives and booty.

Needless to say no such thing ever occurred in history. At no time did Judah ever overthrow Babylon. So the watchman's triumphant shout must refer to something of which these things are but figures. It is the downfall of symbolic Babylon at the hands of the returned Christ that is pictured in Isaiah 21, and the watchman who discerns these things pictures the Church in the flesh, living at the time they are imminent and fully aware of their significance. To the watchman's cry comes an answer from heaven "Babylon is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground." That is a cry which has already gone out but has yet to be justified to the full; the fall of great Babylon is not completed and will not be until the final cataclysm of this present Time of the End. But in the meantime the message has been given to a people able to understand it. There has been a Harvest of the Age and those who have been subjects of that Harvest realise these things. "O my threshing, and the corn of my floor" cries the watchman "that which I have heard of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you." In this end of the Age those who can rightfully be described as the watchman's "threshing," the "corn of his floor" have had this message given to them in no uncertain terms and are in consequence "not in darkness" that the day should overtake them as a thief.

There is a passage in Isaiah 21, a charming picture of the earnest watcher for the Lord's coming and his kingdom, imprisoned still among the Edomites, but longing for enlightenment and the means of escape. "*The burden (message) of Dumah*" (Idumea, Edom) cries the prophet (vs. 11) "*Unto me is one crying out of Seir (Edom) 'Watchman! how far gone is the night?'*" That is Rotherham's rendering and it is most eloquent in its appeal. Here is one, imprisoned in the darkness and worldliness of modern Edom, longing for the morning when the Kingdom of light and love shall take control and the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, calling to the Watchman for enlightenment and comfort. "*Said the watchman 'There cometh a morning, but also a night. If*

*ye will enquire, enquire ye—come again'.*" Truly, says the watchman, the Millennial morning is at hand but there must first be the dark night of trouble which closes this Age. But if you will know more, says the Watchman, keep on enquiring. Come again and learn of the gracious Plan of God which is to bring blessing to all families of the earth. Come out of Edom and rejoice in the light of the Truth. Separate yourself from the worldliness and hypocrisy and Christlessness of the Edomites and be joined to those who are truly one in Christ Jesus.

This is a theme on which we can speedily find ourselves in error. It is all too customary to assume that the "coming out" is the separating from one body of Christians where the Divine light has burned low and joining another body where at the moment it burns more brightly. So very many thus placed have later found that in the fellowship of their choice the light has in its turn burned low again and they have had to make another move, and the Christian lives of some have been characterised by a succession of such changes. In point of fact the call to come out of Edom is one to relinquish the last vestiges of the spirit of Edom and to live in that maturity of Christian character which recognises the true servants of Christ happily and faithfully in just that sphere to which He may guide. Many have taken up fellowship and service within a new circle of Christians under claim of having thus "come out of Edom" but without relinquishing the spirit of Edom, and their influence has tended toward disunity and the degrading of spiritual experience rather than the opposite. What we need to do above all other things is to see to it that we do not come under the condemnation of this tenth verse of Obadiah "*Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.*"

That is what it means. If we have failed to partake of the spirit of Christ and treat his brethren as He treated them; if we, like the unfaithful steward in the parable, begin to smite our fellow-servants, then we shall be cut off from future participation in the glories of the glorified New Creation, and that without remedy. That "cutting off for ever" does not mean eternal death or anything like that—such thought is absurd—but it does mean that, having failed to attain the high degree of character-likeness to our Lord which is necessary before we can be afforded the "abundant entrance", we shall be like the unworthy of so many parables, found unfit for the high responsibility of association with Christ in his work for humanity in the next Age.

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

(To be continued)

## ONE WITH CHRIST AND EACH OTHER

*"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jno: 17. 21).*

No doubt it was with rather mixed feelings, dear brother or sister, that you surveyed the world just prior to consecration, counting the cost. Here and there were peaceful, easy-flowing, interesting little streams of life; perhaps yonder you could see a strongly moving river inviting you to plunge in and be taken up with its erratic, eddying progress. But you loved your Lord, because He first loved you, and you sought unity with him in word, deed and character; as you progressed up to higher planes you could see that the little stream led to the strong river, which relentlessly, following out a natural law, flowed down to the sea, a sea in which tempests were imminent, a sea which was now a thunderous, raging maelstrom.

We might frequently be distressed by the fact, although not of the world, we are still very much in it, the natural man being what he is; so we look up with great encouragement at the experiences of today tend to make us feel more and more our separateness from the world. At first our allegiance to Christ and the pursuing of his principles of loving self-sacrifice only affected our home and social life; now it is affecting our civil and business life, insofar that in many cases we must choose to plough a comparatively lonely furrow rather than follow the line of least resistance with the crowd. This is separating . . . separating . . . separating . . . and a good thing too. How much more eagerly we turn to the Lord in prayer; how much tighter we grasp his outstretched hand; how much more we understand and reciprocate the warmth of the brethren's love. And does not the Father rejoice with us as He sees us easing away from the earthly materialism around us? What awe-inspiring wonder there is in our calling! What a high, what a glorious, lofty calling is ours!

So, as we separate from the things that do not matter, we find a wholesome, satisfying peace in our unity with each other and with Jesus. As we, as a Church, gravitate to him as our Head, let us do what we can to draw the bonds of love a little closer round each other. The Apostle Paul, that apt channel of the Holy Spirit, teaches us on this point in Ephesians 4.

*"I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace . . ."*

It is not difficult to walk with all lowliness and meekness when we consider the vocation wherewith we are called. The gentle, patient, forbearing brother or sister is an invaluable asset in the preservation of unity between each other. *"Forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace."* Just as Jesus did! How our thoughts rise in leaps and bounds as we remember his forbearance in love, his great, earnest desire for us to be one in him, and the bond of perfect peace which He left us as a legacy.

It is clear from Paul's words that our unity does not find its roots in form, activity or even thought. Our unity is in the body (the Church), spirit, hope, in our Lord, our faith and our baptism, and in the one omnipotent Father. In fact, the Apostle would seem to show us that our unity as a Church to some extent depends upon each individual fitting in to that part of the Lord's service for which he is most fitted. *"He gave some, apostles . . ."* etc. Let us be frank with ourselves. Am I trying to do too much in activities for which I am not suited? What talents have I? Are any being used in worldly affairs which could be turned to the perfecting of the saints? It is an important matter; it is for the edifying of the body of Christ. We must think very prayerfully and carefully along lines of the Holy Spirit's guidance before we act in such holy service. A sincere prayer for a weak brother is more effective than trying to work out a line of procedure by natural means. Our consecrated time is valuable.

The inspired words of the beloved Apostle teach us to forbear in love, speak the truth in love, unto the edifying of the body in love. He would have us see that these are all aspects incidental to our "unfeigned love" one to another, and we know in practice that our mutual love is our unity. Our Lord's great love for us, and our devoted love for him, makes our unity, and, as Paul points out in another epistle, what can separate us?

Whilst at a convention once I heard the chairman use the expression "Let us unite in prayer". I was profoundly moved as about a hundred of us quietly and simply united in the one desire to commune with the Father. It meant that all those sincere minds were concentrated on the one high purpose, and coming as it were from a world where man's hand was turned against his neighbour the thought was impressively beautiful. We were children together, at home with each other, speaking reverently to our Father, and the spirit of peace and love prevailed.

This much we gain this side of the Veil. *What of the other?*



## THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

A study

Belief in the ministry of "guardian angels" was unchallenged in past generations; to-day it is for the most part quietly ignored or considered a survival from more credulous ages. Like most Scriptural theses, it cannot be so summarily dismissed. To what extent do the Scriptures, logically interpreted, sustain the idea?

There is at least one passage of which the wording appears to offer solid foundation for the belief. Having called a small child to himself to illustrate the necessity of childlikeness in innocence and sincerity as a prerequisite for entry into his Kingdom, Jesus went on to say "see that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18. 10 RSV). It has been generally thought that our Lord meant every child has an especially appointed guardian angel having constant access to the presence of God. That is not absolutely demanded by the construction of the sentence; grammatically it would be equally satisfied by considering that a body of angels was entrusted with the watch-care over all children generally. The sequel to our Lord's words here would appear to bear that out, for He went on to speak of the man who lost one sheep out of a hundred and rested not until he had found it, commenting "Even so it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (vs. 14). If there is indeed an angelic guardianship, therefore, it would seem to be directly connected with the ultimate object of the Divine Plan, the recovery of humankind from present evil and its consequence in death, and the reconciliation to God of those who will.

Perhaps a word as to the reality of the angelic hosts will not be amiss before enquiring further into this subject. Like anything that is not discernible by one or another of the five physical senses, that reality is questioned or denied by some. In our Lord's day there was a powerful body of opinion, represented by the Sadducees, which repudiated belief in the existence of the supernatural, of angelic or spirit beings (Acts 23. 8). Modern secular thought moves increasingly towards the same position. But the Bible is written against a background of which an unseen world, peopled by unseen beings, is an essential part. Christians, at least, realise that our five physical senses, adapted to the sphere in which we live, cannot possibly discern all that there is in God's entire creation. An integral part of the Christian faith is the understanding that there is an order of life beyond, and superior to, the human, and that on occasion citizens of that sphere have made sensory contact with humans. The Old Testament and the New both

afford examples. The fact that there are celestial beings, popularly and Scripturally called angels, carrying out the purposes of God in just the same way as will men one day, has to be accepted as beyond question.

The fact that such beings must be always actively participating in the affairs of, and contributing something to the progress of, Divine creation follows from the very fact of their existence, for this is the whole purpose of God in creating living intelligences. An eloquent word in Psalms 103. 20-21 confirms this. "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his will" (RSV). Here is a picture of a community engaged in the discharge of duties laid upon them by God. There is nothing illogical or even improbable in expecting that some of those duties may have connection with the affairs of men upon earth. There is certainly definite assurance of the live interest in the affairs of earth displayed by the celestials. From the days of the formation of this planet, in which, as recorded in Job 38. 7 "all the sons of God" (i.e., the angels) "shouted for joy", to the time of the First Advent when, according to St. Peter, the angels desired to understand more of the things being preached by the Apostles (1 Pet. 1. 12), there is this interest. Sympathy with the distresses of humanity is revealed by our Lord's assurance that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15. 10).

From the realisation of this evident sympathy with and interest in humanity, it is only a step to discern a very literal meaning to such texts as Psalm 34. 7 "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" or Psalm 91. 11 "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways". It might be argued that these and similar phrases are poetry framed to express the all-embracing power of God protecting his people and this may well be true; nevertheless the power of God is exerted through instruments, agents, and just as on occasion men are used as such agents so, and probably in considerably greater measure, we can expect angels so to be used. It is significant that both the Hebrew *malak* and Greek *aggelos*, both translated "angel", really means a messenger, and in fact are rendered messenger upon occasion, referring sometimes to human and, more often, to celestial messengers.

Perhaps the clearest view of the subject is gained by considering some of the actual examples of celestial missions to earth related in the Scriptures. Hagar the bondmaid, fleeing from the unjust oppression of her mistress, unknowingly destined for an important role in the outworking purpose of



God, was met by an angel in the wilderness and sent back to her mistress with an assurance of future blessing. Her reverential words following the encounter leave no doubt that she knew the identity of her informant and that he was from the celestial world (Gen. 21. 17-19). Joshua, meditating the conquest of Canaan, encountered a heavenly visitant in the trappings of a soldier, with a drawn sword in his hand, and from him received the instruction necessary to the salvation of Israel (Josh. 5. 13-115; 6. 2-5). Elisha's servant, fearful at the threat posed by the Syrian invaders, had his eyes miraculously opened and he saw the hosts of heaven surrounding his master and himself. In the New Testament, Joseph was visited by an angel warning him to take the young child Jesus and his mother and escape into Egypt from the evil designs of King Herod. St. Peter, in prison, was released by an angel sent for the purpose. These and other similar examples record definite historical events which actually happened, in each case illustrating the intervention of Heaven upon this physical earthly plane by the instrumentality of a celestial messenger to produce a tangible physical effect leading to the protection or deliverance of one of God's children. So many other such examples there must have been in history, unrecorded and unrealised because the heavenly agent was unseen!

It might well be said therefore that the doctrine of guardian angels is well founded in Scripture; not necessarily that each individual upon earth has a special angel assigned him as personal protector, but more likely that all the hosts of Heaven are instantly available for service in the guardianship of those on earth who have put their trust in God. It has to be accepted that this does not necessarily imply a kind of blanket protection against all conceivable human ills and accidents; the Divine scheme for man does not work in just that way. What it does imply is that the powers of Heaven are instantly and continuously available so to modify and divert circumstances having a direct bearing upon our Christian life and progress that *"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom. 8. 28). The whole point and end of angelic guardianship is that those whose hearts and

lives are given in complete dedication to God may be so guided and strengthened that they will eventually "finish their course with joy" and attain the Divine ideal. We do not fight the battle alone; on the other side of the Vail, unseen by our natural eyes but close by our sides nevertheless, stand the mighty hosts of Heaven, each of those glorious ones commissioned to carry out some operation of Divine power which is to have a definite influence upon the Christian life of one or another of the Lord's disciples here on earth. It must have been some such thought which was in the great Apostle's mind when he penned the stirring words *"Greater is he that is for us than all they that can be against us"*. *"There stood by me this night"* said St. Paul to the sailors in the storm-wracked ship *"the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island"* (Acts 27. 23-26). How did Paul know that their lives would be saved by shipwreck upon an island? And who guided the crippled ship through that fearful storm so that out of all the possible points in its westward drift across the six hundred miles line between Italy and Africa it should strike exactly on the hundred yards wide passage between the island of Malta and its outlying rock of Salomonetta, the only point in all that six hundred miles where Paul's words could come true, the ship's crew be saved, and Paul continue his journey to Rome, in accordance with the angel's prediction? Was it only the vagaries of wind and wave that sent the vessel on the last stage of its journey or was there a celestial hand steering it steadily to that sandbar which still exists, seven miles from Valetta, and brought the ship to rest less than fifty yards from shore so that, as the historian Luke so graphically describes, *"we escaped all safely to land"*?

There are so many examples like that in the Scripture story that it is hard not to see evidence of the interaction of celestial powers with human affairs in the interests of God's purposes and the highest welfare of those who are his.

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Let us serve him faithfully as Master, obey him loyally as King, study his teaching as Prophet, walk diligently after him as Example, look anxiously for him as redeemer. Above all, let us prize him as our Sacrifice, and rest our whole weight on his death as an atonement for sin . . . Whatever else we glory in about Christ, let us never fail to glory in his Cross.

Consecration brings the heart of a willing child into alignment with the Will of God. That act of submission brings that eternal Will into that little life to direct and use it for God's own ends, Consecration has brought that life into alignment with an eternal purpose.

## THE JOURNEY HOME

Reminiscence is considered the privilege, if not the symptom, of old age. Few have leisure to sit down and take stock, to look around, during their working years; most are so busy doing things or getting on, that they have little inclination to pause in their activities. Christian maturity might be considered the youth of eternity. The years are rich with the fruits of experience and ripe with memories of loving-kindness. One may look back across retreating years with profit. Evidences of loving-kindness lie so thick about the way that a recollection of mercies here, of help there, of strength supplied and comfort given, renews vigour and deepens confidence in He who loves with an everlasting love.

A traveller to a foreign land watches the fading coastline of his native shore with that affection peculiar to familiar scenes. But as the journey proceeds new experiences begin to claim attention. When at last the journey nears its end there is a mounting excitement, a quickened interest in the new country, in the life to be lived there. All that imagination has long envisaged will soon become reality. As the new land appears on the horizon, steadily getting closer, assuming the solid proportions of a new world and a new life, the mind will flash back to the day of leaving the old home, to all that has befallen by the way, to find that realisation surpasses anticipation. Christian life is the greatest journey of all. From the analogies of an ocean voyage, an adventurous land journey, a hazardous mountain ascent, the Christian pilgrim has drawn inspiration. No one travels alone. They who leave the world to climb the heavenly steepers are always in good company, for as one of our finest pilgrims said out of the fullness of his own experience: *"Those who delight in the Lord's way have blessed communion and fellowship with him. They live on a higher plane, breathe a purer atmosphere and enjoy a holier, sweeter friendship than the world could ever offer"*.

During the long era set aside for the gathering together of God's family, they have been on the road together. Circumstances have differed, time and miles have divided them, but in experience, in aim, in love, they have been one band, on the march to the City of God. Now as the sun sets over the world and the evening star beckons the wayfarers up the last hard slope, it may be good to halt while we look back across the chequered experiences of the road, drawing new courage for the final mile that will lodge us safely in the Father's house. All that has passed has brought us to his hour. None of it may be lived again. Time pushes us forward. We must go farther on. We will not go reluctantly nor with unseemly haste, but with firm

and steady foot, watchful, meek and reverent as those commanded to appear before a royal presence. How long ago it seems since first we lifted eyes towards our Father's home, yet memories fresh as yesterday, bittersweet with pain and joy, come crowding back, bright as shimmering dew drops and the eager, questioning eyes of youth. How remarkable has been the journey! There are those early days like basking in the summer meadows. In poem and picture lay the celestial mountain, distant, mysterious; strangely attractive with its wordless invitation so readily accepted. By what strange power are hearts drawn and feet wooed to take that road where they may sit with Christ! *"With loving kindness have I drawn thee"*. It was not the rod of force or fear driving us where we would not go, but love, wondrous love, yearning, drawing, winning as a parent wins a child to take its first steps. *"We love him because he first loved us"*; realising the power of his love at work in our mind and heart, we could not choose but go.

It is never easy, for the world raises its voice in protest, the ties of flesh stretch out restraining hands, and the sceptic tongue lets fall its acid words of doubt and thinly veiled contempt. To the worldly-wise it seems a fool's errand. The abandoning of the certain and the seen for the ethereal uncertainties of the unseen, for a kingdom which cannot be entered upon by flesh and blood or without struggle of mind and sacrifice of self, appears to the natural mind an unreasonable throwing away of all that is best in life. But the Christian traveller is encouraged in the experiences of those who have gone before.

Abraham, the father of all faithful pilgrims, left the known and familiar, content to journey he knew not where, led, supported, and blessed by the loving kindness which drew him from pagan Ur to the promised land. Rebekah readily left home and kindred, drawn by love to a new land and a wonderful destiny. Meditating upon that journey of his great ancestress, the Psalmist saw a greater Bride, setting out upon a longer, more hazardous journey and left his vision in words for our inspiration: *"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord: and worship thou him"*. Paul, counting his all an easy loss, that he might win Christ, his real treasure; counting the perils and pains of the way a light affliction, not worthy to be compared with the journey's end and the crown of life. Yes, we are in good company. The Lord of pilgrims himself left the heavenly glory, was made flesh and for our sakes became poor, leaving us an example that we should follow

in his steps.

So the journey begins without misgivings, without backward look, though not without sorrow. *"When love meets truth and truth must ride above"*, the heart knows a widening gulf which may never be crossed again. It meets its first heroic test *"when love can leave love though the heart may bleed"*. The gulf was crossed at that Jordan of baptismal waters and separation from the old ways. Feet were firmly set upon the narrow, holy ground that leads to heavenly life. Confidence lent vigour to the energetic striding, to the heart eager to be active, to be off, to mount the paths of grace and knowledge, but consternation puts many a damper on the ardent traveller, expecting to see round every bend the golden land of promise. With what dismay we read on each signpost "a little farther on" and view the next hill with a lesser sense of conquest, realising by now that beyond that lies another and yet another.

Looking back we can but smile over those fond hopes that the kingdom of heaven lay around every corner, that with brash certitude we could, in a few swift mountings, stand boldly before its gates, take it by storm as it were, the privileged, knowledgeable, favoured few, for whom all heaven waited before there could begin a work of blessing the multitudes of men upon this little planet Earth. Only as the road lengthened, as Time took its toll of hasty conclusions did we look from many a vantage point and see as God sees. Time is no mean element. It took time to frame the world and it takes time to make a saint. God is in no hurry. With patience and certainty the Lord of Eternity works out his sovereign will, taking hold of human material, shaping and moulding it to his own heart's desire. This is one of the hard lessons of the pilgrim way. The great Forerunner had to learn obedience, quiescence, by the things which He suffered. The servant, lower than the Master, learns the same lessons in the same way, shares the same school and the same suffering. *"As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth"*. It is more than a wordless acceptance of reproach, more than a silent resignation to the hand of God. It is love in unquestioning repose. Meditating on that last rise before the heavenly portals reveals that this is the real meaning and purpose of life. Factions parties, creeds and dogmas fade away into nothingness before the one abiding, eternal

grace. The steps by which we have risen, the road on which we have travelled, the books by which we have learned, even the very conflicts in which we have engaged in what we took to be truth and error, right and wrong, fall away like autumn leaves before the certainty that nothing but God-like, benevolent love will gain admittance to the glorious courts of the Most High. The pilgrim must stand alone at the last step, stripped of all earthly trappings, deprived of all human support, freed from all natural pretensions. If the earthen vessel has at last become the container of the spikenard, refined and scaled of all its dross and roughness into the lustrous beauty of the spirit, then the labour and the journey have not been in vain.

At journey's end there will be nothing left but that. The old faraway beginning will be lost to sight; the flower strewn pastures far behind. All the hazards and storms of the journey will be over. Only the quiet resting-places will remain in memory to refresh the last lap of the road. Even the very road itself, zigzagging up and around the Mount of God will itself be lost in the mist of the years that are gone. Now the eye must be constant to the peak, the step firmly forward. With staff in hand and robe tightly girdled, the wayfarer must go as Moses went to meet his God, to put himself finally and forever into his keeping.

David saw his Lord leaving the ivory palaces, his garments fragrant with healing essences as he passed among men. The Revelator saw the Bride of Christ, the new Jerusalem, descending from heaven adorned in all the glory and beauty of life-giving power. And a great voice proclaimed the event, as the time for the wiping away of all human miseries, the drying of tears, and the water of life flowing freely to every thirsty soul. It is the grand culmination of the pilgrim way, the event for which heaven and earth have waited long. The light afflictions of earth will not begin to compare with that weight of glory allotted to those who hold on in faith through thick and thin, through rough weather and awesome solitudes, to the very throne of God. There at last the load, the cross and the trophies will all be laid down, replaced by the crown of life and victory, to the accompaniment of the heavenly choirs chanting their glory songs to the Most High.

*(The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom")*

### Angel's Food

*"Man did eat angel's food"*. This expression occurs in Psa. 78. 25 and refers to the manna sent as food for the Israelites in the wilderness. In the past, some thought that manna was indeed the food of angels, on the strength of this verse. The word here translated "angel", however, is *"abbir"* which is nowhere else rendered "angel" but is rendered "bull" four times "strong" or "strong

one" (referring to bulls) four times, and "chiefest" "mighty" "mighty one" and "valiant". The verse in Psa. 78 appears to mean that man ate mighty or strength-giving food—the food of the mighty; thus contrasting the Divine provision for Israel with the poor provision they would have to depend upon if the power of God had not been exerted on their behalf.



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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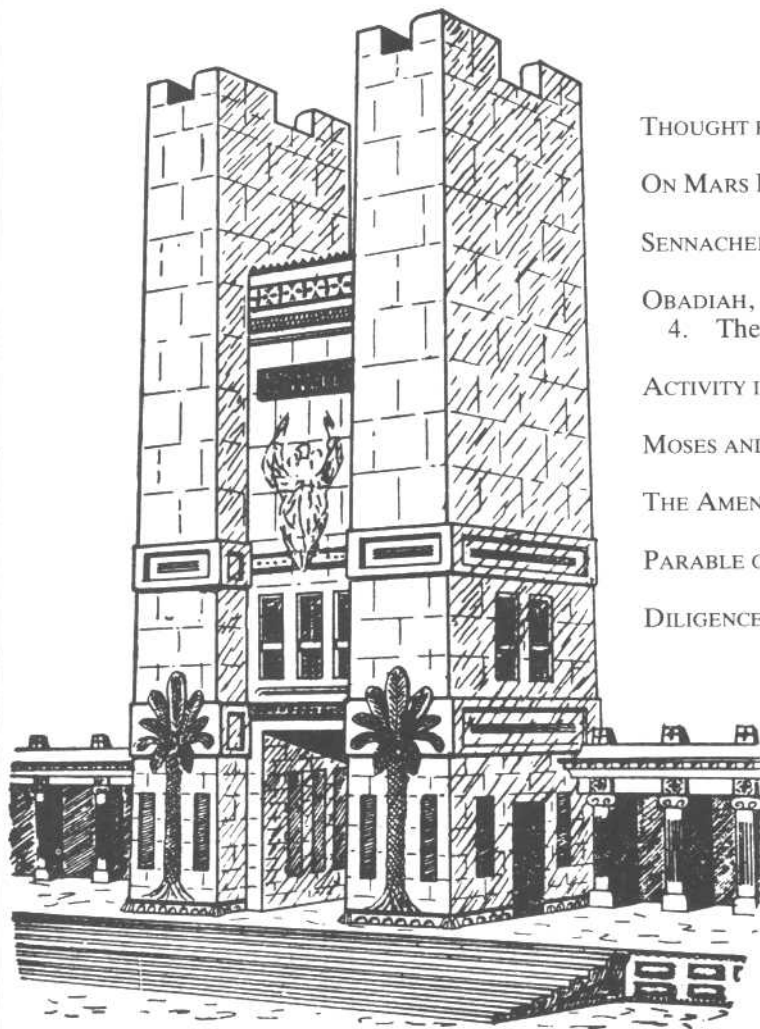
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*



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## Thought for the Month

Some three years ago the President of the United States posed a question which he repeated more recently during his discussions with his Russian counterpart. What would happen, he asked, if there was a sudden threat to this world by some alien species from somewhere else in space? He provided his own answer. We all would forget our differences, he said, and combine together to oppose the threat, realising that we are all human beings.

Of course the President was envisaging some other race of terrestrial beings from some other planet, imbued with the same spirit of hostility and destruction characterised by earth's present warring factions and maybe only the astronomical experts and science fiction writers can hazard any opinion as to the immediate likelihood of such a happening. The best estimates at present put it at many millions to one so it may be the powers of earth can rest easy for the moment. But there is a real threat pending from outer space where the odds are much closer.

That threat lies in the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is at hand, and the powers of earth will soon be called upon to give their allegiance to the King of Kings. A power which is not from some other part of the terrestrial creation having the same passions and vices as those of this, but from the celestial world, inherently good and beneficent, coming not to destroy but to build, not to bring death and destruction but life and restoration. And the battle is not between differing political ideologies or opposing military powers, but between good and evil; and the good will prevail.

The position is set out in symbol in the Book of Revelation, chapter 19. A Rider on a white horse, his followers behind him, comes forth from Heaven, to make war upon all evil forces upon earth. The kings of the earth and their armies coalesce together, just as the President said they would, to resist this apparent threat to their interests but since the only weapons they have are things like nuclear missiles and the as yet undeveloped "star wars" devices, and these are of no avail against celestial powers, the issue is not long in doubt. The King of Kings and his faithful ones with him are victorious, and, wonder of wonders, it is revealed that they come not with hostile intent but to put the world right and bring peace to the nations. Without any doubt there will be a swift revulsion of sentiment and all men, high and low, king, priest or peasant, will acclaim to the heavens the immortal words of Isaiah long ago "*Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him, and he will save us. We will rejoice and be glad in his salvation*".

## Gone from us

— ❁ —

Sis. M. Grey-Rees (Neath)

Bro. H. Pateman (Milborne Port)

Sis. O. Pilgrim (Burton-on-Trent)

— ❁ —

*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

## ON MARS HILL

*A story of the  
Apostle Paul*

He stood in the middle of the market place, watching the busy crowds milling around him. There was evidently something very special going on, he thought to himself; judging by the garlands and flowers decorating the many statues of gods and goddesses surrounding him; it must be connected with their idolatrous religion. He turned and looked up towards the summit of the Acropolis, where the forty-foot gold and bronze figure of Pallas Athene, the virgin goddess of Athens, gleamed and flashed in the sunlight. His gaze took in the breath-taking loveliness of the Parthenon behind the statue. Jew that he was, he shunned the beauty of buildings and images and despised the Athenians for their idolatry and their worship of the creations of men's hands. His spirit was stirred within him; a paroxysm of revulsion shook his inner being. The silver trumpets sounded on the still air and the shouting concourse formed itself into an orderly procession, climbing the ascent to the Parthenon where they would pay their respects to Athene the beautiful goddess of wisdom and of war, protectress of the city which bore her name and which she had made her own.

He looked round the now deserted marketplace, averting his eyes quickly from the exquisite flower-crowned figure of Irene, nymph of springtime; resting them for a moment with distaste upon the grim visage of Pluto, god of death and the underworld, turning then to meet the cold austere stare of the bearded and venerable Zeus, father of the gods and goddesses, ruler of the Universe. And his soul within him rebelled at the idolatry of Athens. The hardships of the past few weeks were forgotten and again the zeal of his God burned in his heart, that he might turn these people from the darkness of their ignorance and bring them into sonship with the living God.

Paul had been in Athens, alone, for about a week. He was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him so that they might resume their missionary work. It was only about five weeks previously that the little party had left Philippi, following the events of the earthquake and the conversion of the Philippian jailer. From Philippi they had travelled, with brief stops at Amphipolis and Apollonia, a hundred miles to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. Three weeks in this city had been productive of good results; a number of responsible Jews and a considerable company of Gentiles accepted the faith, including at least three men, Aristarchus, Secundus and Jason, who later on were to figure in evangelical work far removed from Thessalonica—Aristarchus, in fact, ultimately to become a fellow-prisoner with Paul at Rome (Col. 4. 10). But the unbelieving Jews had

raised a riot and brought Paul's activities to the notice of the civil authorities under the false accusation of sedition, that Paul was preaching another king, other than Caesar, "*one Jesus*"; although the city magistrates here manifested a more justly impartial attitude than had their counterparts at Philippi, the brethren judged it expedient to smuggle Paul out of the city before harm befell him. So the little party had trudged fifty miles to the small out-of-the-way town of Berea where they had found a band of earnest Jews and pagans manifesting so exceptional a degree of readiness to listen, and care to verify Paul's message by the written word of God, that their name has been proverbial for true Bible study ever since. They "*received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*" (Acts 17. 11). One of those converted at this time in this little town was Sopater, who later on served with Paul in the wider field. But again the relentless animosity of Paul's enemies followed him; the Jews of Thessalonica tracked him down to Berea and so, leaving Silas and Timothy to care for the newly formed community there, Paul was hurried to the sea coast and put on board ship for Athens.

Standing now in the *agora*, the market square or central place of concourse of the city, he was in the very midst of the "wisdom of this age". Rome was the political capital of the world, but Athens was its cultural centre. Here foregathered the wise men, the philosophers, the scientists, all who had something to contribute to the sum of human knowledge. This was the city, of all cities, where Paul might expect to use his education and his gifts of logic and argument to the best advantage in debate with the most intellectual men he was ever likely to meet. He had already had some discussions with the Jews in the synagogue and with others in the market place. Every day of that short week had been spent in some such activity but so far little or nothing had been gained. Now he turned his attention to the upper crust of Athenian society, those who, living upon the labours of their slaves, "*spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing*," so finding himself entangled with "*certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks*" (17. 18-21).

Of the many schools of thought claiming adherents in Greece perhaps these two were the most prominent. They partook somewhat of the nature of religious sects but they were more like modern rationalist societies than believers in a form of religious faith. The Epicureans were the adherents of Epicurus, a materialistic philosopher who lived in Athens in the early part of the fourth

century B.C. Whilst not actually denying the existence of the gods, he claimed that no god existed who was concerned with the welfare or happiness of mankind. The universe, he taught, had come into existence by chance and subsisted without any controlling hand. Pleasure was the chief good and pain the chief evil; men should do good for the sake of good and not because there was any Divine purpose at work in their lives. It is easy to perceive how Paul resisted this hopeless creed. He would be *no less tolerant of the Stoics. Stoicism was founded in the fourth century B.C. by a Greek thinker, Zeno, who established a school in Athens where the tenets of his system were inculcated. The philosophy he propounded represented God as an impersonal driving force pervading all the universe and keeping it in operation. The soul of man at death is absorbed into a kind of universal mind which is really the mind of God so that there is no personal future life. The duty of man is to live as righteous and upright a life as possible but he has to do this in his own strength for there is no Supreme Being working to help him. Here again the message Paul had to proclaim brought him into violent conflict with the surmises of such philosophies.*

The result was that the Epicureans and Stoics brought Paul to the court of the Areopagites to have an orderly presentation of his doctrines put forward for their consideration, and this was the highlight of the Apostle's experience in Athens. *"Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears",* they said, *"We would know therefore what these things mean".* This was not just a question of finding a suitable rostrum from which St. Paul could deliver his discourse. The Areopagites were the supreme judges in Athens of all matters affecting public order and moral issues, with especial emphasis upon religious matters and any open blasphemy against the gods of Greece. The judges had power to order very severe punishments should those arraigned before them be adjudged offenders against the moral or religious code. It is very possible therefore that Paul was, at least in part, on trial for his preaching and if what he had to say was ruled offensive to the Athenian code the least he could expect was summary expulsion from the city.

The nine judges—the wisest and most venerable men in Athens—took their seats, prepared to give close and serious attention to the discourse about to be given. The philosophers who had invited Paul to court—for nothing was of compulsion; all was done in a courteous and dignified manner—gathered together near the speaker. Behind them, and surrounding the central group, a number of curious professors, students, priests and priestesses, a few soldiers, and a crowd of Greek and

Jewish city-dwellers, all ready to give quiet attention to what the stranger had to say. Nothing less like the tumultuous riots and prejudiced magistrates Paul had experienced in the provincial towns of Greece could be imagined. This was an orderly concourse and the speaker was to get a fair hearing.

The Court of the Areopagites was held in the open air, on the summit of a rocky eminence known as the Areopagus, or "Mars' Hill". As Paul stood up to commence his exposition, he found that his position afforded a superb view of almost the entire city of Athens. In front of him, across a shallow valley, rose the commanding height of the Acropolis with the gigantic statue of Pallas Athene in the forefront as though challenging him. Paul was about to deny the reality of the goddess. A little to the left rose the magnificent Temple of Zeus the supreme god of Greece. Paul was to say that Zeus was no god at all. Just below him, on the lower slopes of the Acropolis, he looked upon the marble walls and cedar roof of the Odeon, the theatre of Athens, where five thousand spectators at a time could watch the actors presenting the plays of the great dramatists and tragedians of the past—plays which survive and are still presented in our own day. Paul was going to demonstrate something far nearer to truth than the themes of many of those plays. Away in the distance, far to the right, he could just discern the bare rock face which in modern times has become known as the "prison of Socrates". Well-read man that he was, Paul could hardly have failed at that moment to reflect that in this same place, five centuries previously, Socrates, the greatest of the Greek philosophers, was condemned to death by the judges for preaching strange gods and a new moral code, and allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens with his teachings. Now Paul himself was going to preach a strange God and a new moral code, and brand all the gods of Greece as the imaginations and creations of men's minds and hands. Would he too be condemned and rejected? He must have wondered for a moment.

*"Ye men of Athens"* the clear voice rang out over the heads of the attentive multitude. *"I perceive that in every respect ye are unusually religious".* The A. V. *"too superstitious"* is a wildly inaccurate translation. The word means much given to piety or religious observance. That opening statement was a courteous acknowledgment of an evident fact, the devotion of the Greeks to their gods. In St. Paul's day most Romans were cynical about their religion in the extreme and the worship of the gods in Rome was perfunctory and a mere formality. In Greece it was different; Paul found an attitude here much more closely resembling the

devotion to religious worship with which he was familiar among his own people and he gave his hearers full credit for that.

*"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I beheld an altar with this inscription, 'To the Unknown God.'"* The Greek text does not have the definite article here although in many such cases the article is to be understood. It is rather uncertain therefore whether the inscription was "to the unknown God" or "to an unknown god". No such altar has been discovered among the antiquities of ancient Athens but several plaques inscribed "To unknown gods", in the plural, have been found. The precise inscription matters little; it is the use Paul made of it which is significant. *"Whom therefore ye worship unknowingly, him declare I unto you."* In that masterly statement Paul absolved himself from the possible charge of preaching strange gods in Athens by shewing that they themselves already admitted the existence of a God unknown to them; that same God was now to be declared to them. One can imagine the grave judges leaning forward, their attention caught and held by this unexpected approach. *"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life, and breath, and all things"*. This is basic Christian doctrine, the supremacy of God from whom life and all things proceed. The universe did not just happen by chance; neither was it always in existence. Our own scientists now tell us that it had a beginning; there was a time when the universe did not exist. God made it, said Paul, and because He began to create at a time when not one particle of the universe had come into existence He himself is of necessity outside that creation. He does not dwell in any place men can reach or observe. The Greeks believed that the gods dwelt on the top of Mount Olympus, just across the bay from Thessalonica. In later ages men have pictured God as dwelling somewhere in the starry heavens or in a golden land far away in the recesses of outer space. We know now that God cannot be thought of as dwelling anywhere within this material order of things. The world in which the angels stand in the Divine Presence and carry out their duties and activities is on another plane of being, another "wavelength", as we might say. Paul must have known that, when he told the Corinthians that they could attain that world and that resurrection only by means of a "change", an instantaneous transition from one world to another; flesh and blood, the animal man, he wrote, can never as such enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

*"Hath made out of one blood"* (not just "of one blood" as in the A.V.) *"all nations of men for to*

*dwell upon the face of the earth, having fixed their appointed times and the fixed limits of their habitation"*. This was strong meat indeed for the cultured Greeks. They prided themselves on being a superior race to the rest of mankind; the gods had especially favoured them and they stood on a higher plane than the barbarians of other nations around them. Not so, says Paul, all men are from one source. It is impossible not to realise that he was referring to the Biblical story of the first human pair. Paul believed in the story of Eden and the Fall with all his heart, and his whole understanding of the Divine purpose for man was based upon that story. God made all men out of one, from one, and He has fixed both the time span of history and the limits beyond which man cannot go in his constant seeking for fresh fields to explore. It is commonly considered that Paul intended here to indicate that God is responsible for the territorial boundaries of nations; it is questionable whether the expression really does mean that, for those boundaries are by no means "fixed limits" in the sense demanded by this verse. Perhaps Paul rather meant that man by his nature is confined within a particular part of God's whole creation, that part which we know as, and have called, the material universe. No matter how far man may yet range in his space craft and rocket ships he will never, as man, get outside this material universe. The Greeks believed they could under certain conditions pass into the presence of the gods in their fleshly bodies; Paul makes it plain that only by the clothing of the identity, the real man, with a new and spiritual body, a *"house from heaven"*, adapted to the conditions of that other world, may we cross the boundary and enter into the presence of God.

*"That they should seek the Lord . . . though he be not far from any one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring'."* This was a new thought to his hearers. They had never thought of God as being near and accessible to them. Zeus was a remote and unapproachable deity; when he did deign to visit the earth there was usually trouble rather than blessing. Not that the Greeks were alone in this conception of God; in much later times too many Christians have looked upon the Most High as a God of wrath and vengeance, one to be feared and propitiated rather than loved and served. St. Paul saw deeper than that. He knew God as one seeking by all means possible to recover his erring children to himself, even to the extent of giving "his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life". The believing is necessary if the everlasting life is to be given, for life comes only from God and it is in him that we live and have



our being. Paul explained that also; all life is of God and all life depends upon God. Therefore, says Paul, we are the children, the offspring of God, and with another of his strokes of genius he quoted them their own poets to support his point. The two Greek writers to whom Paul referred at this time are Aratus and Cleanthes. Aratus a native of Cilicia, Paul's own country, Cleanthes a leading member of the Stoics in Athens, both three centuries earlier. It is true that they referred to men as being the offspring of Zeus their own god, but Paul was able to use their writings to demonstrate that the idea of men looking to God as to a Father was not unknown even among themselves. *"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Deity is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."* The word translated Godhead in the A.V. was used in Greek to denote the Divine nature generally and is better rendered Deity or Divinity. Because we are living, intelligent beings, and God, being our father, is greater than we are, it is absurd to liken him to images made by the hands of man.

*"And the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

This was the climax of Paul's discourse. In the execution of his purpose God had in ages past suffered men to go their own ways and make to themselves gods in their own image and likeness as they chose. Now there was to be a change. With the appearance of Jesus Christ the Light of the world there opened a new phase of the Divine purpose. The way to reconciliation with God was manifest through faith in Christ. A "people for God's name" was to be called and chosen from among the nations and prepared for use as the Divine instrument in the conversion of men in the final age of human history, the age of the Second Advent. So, said Paul, in appointing that day in which He will judge the world in righteousness He has also appointed its ruler, Who lived, and died, and whom God raised from the dead, thus giving assurance to all who believe that his promise will be fulfilled. "Repent and be converted; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That was the point to which Paul was working; whether he ever got thus far is perhaps problematical for at the mention of a resurrection from the dead the spell was broken. The wise men of Greece could listen thoughtfully whilst Paul debated the nature of God, but when it came to future life by a resurrection from the dead most of them dismissed the whole thing as fantastic nonsense. Some mocked;

some, more serious perhaps, offered somewhat half-heartedly to have another session on the matter, but for the present the audition was at an end. The Aeropagites, the nine judges, evidently ruled that there was nothing in the new doctrine to which Athenians could reasonably take offence, and Paul was free to go where he liked and prosecute his mission as he pleased.

The Apostle must have been bitterly disappointed. Of all the apostles he was the one best fitted by education and natural talent for this opportunity of preaching Christ to the wise men of this world in the intellectual centre of world learning. He had been fully equal to the occasion, speaking to them in the manner to which they were accustomed and shewing himself their equal in learning and in eloquence. He had demonstrated to them how they themselves, unknowingly, had been feeling towards some such understanding of God as he now expounded. Whilst he kept to the well-tried paths of human reasoning and logical argument they listened; when he introduced the realm of faith they turned away. *"For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone."* Small wonder that Paul left Athens for Corinth determined, as he told the Corinthians later on, *"to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"*. *"We preach Christ crucified"* he said, *"unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God"*.

The effort was not altogether in vain. One of the judges, Dionysius the Areopagite, was sufficiently impressed with Paul's preaching to accept his message and become a believer. There was a woman named Damaris—who she was and what position she held in public life is not stated, but she believed—and a few others. What happened to them afterwards is not known, for they are not mentioned again in the New Testament. No local church was formed, or if it was, no mention was made of that either. Paul never went back to Athens. He revisited, in after years, the other scenes of his ministry in Greece but never Athens. How strange that the very city where no open opposition to his work and message was aroused, where the highest levels of local society were prepared to give him serious consideration, where by all the rules of human reasoning he should have experienced notable success, proved to be the place which appears to have yielded least.

So, without waiting any longer for Silas and Timothy, Paul left Athens and took his journey to Corinth.

*(To be continued)*

## SENNACHERIB IN PROPHECY

*Coming events prefigured  
in past history*

Recognition of the historical basis upon which most Old Testament prophecies of the "end of the Age" are framed is very necessary to their correct interpretation. It is a truism that history repeats itself; throughout the Bible story similar causes produce similar effects; the principles and forces which will eventually lead the world into the final conflict have already, on a smaller scale and in a more limited area, resulted in similar conflicts in the past. Those events, recorded in Biblical history, have been used by the prophets as models on which to base their pen pictures of the things that shall be hereafter "*That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God inquires into that which follows after*" said Solomon (Ecc. 3. 15). In those words he enshrined this principle. The visions of the prophets are best interpreted by discerning the model, and realising that it is by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the prophet has used a particular historical event as background to his vision. On that basis similar aspects to those contained within that event, but on a greater scale, can be looked for in the fulfilment.

One of the most noteworthy examples of this principle in prophecy is the use made by Daniel and Zechariah of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in the days of Hezekiah. That invasion is famous in Old Testament history on account of its sequel; Hezekiah and his adviser, the statesman-prophet Isaiah, led the people of Jerusalem in reliance upon God for deliverance, and the Assyrian army was miraculously destroyed in the night and the threat lifted. This one prominent feature of the event is analogous to the Divine deliverance of the people of God in the end of this Age but it is when the details of Daniel's and Zechariah's visions are compared with the details of Sennacherib's invasion that the force of the correspondency becomes obvious and clues to the interpretation of the prophecies are offered.

"Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" says Isaiah (ch. 36. 1) "*that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them*". This was the start of the campaign; Isa. 36 and 37, 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chron. 32 record the details. These narratives are confirmed and amplified by Sennacherib's own account, recorded on clay cylinders which have survived and now repose, one in the British Museum and one in America. Between the Biblical and the Assyrian records the story is fairly complete.

The real quarrel was between Assyria and Egypt, Judah at the time being allied with the latter. Sennacherib set out to subdue Egypt and

Judah but first he had to secure his line of march by ensuring the loyalty of the Phoenician cities Tyre and Sidon on the seacoast, and the people of Syria. This he achieved by the simple expedient of siege and conquest. News of the ruthless invader spread rapidly through the land, and the kings of Edom, Moab and Ammon, in the south-east, hastened to the conqueror's camp with protestations of loyalty, in consequence of which these three nations escaped the horrors of warfare. The Assyrian king next proceeded along the Palestine coast, capturing the cities of the seaside plain, defeating the Egyptian army and laying siege to Lachish, the last important stronghold barring his road to Egypt. Whilst here he demanded tribute from Hezekiah as proof of allegiance, and Hezekiah complied. Sennacherib took a great deal of spoil—gold, silver, valuables of all kinds, and two hundred thousand captives, all of which he sent back to Assyria. Then news came to him of a fresh Egyptian attack and in his fury he sent one detachment against the Egyptians and with the other surrounded Jerusalem, calling upon Hezekiah to surrender the city. It was this second demand that Hezekiah laid before the Lord in the Temple and in consequence of which the Assyrian army investing Jerusalem was destroyed. Sennacherib called off his attack upon Egypt and with what was left of his forces in the country made his way back to Assyria, where his attention was urgently needed to deal with hostile action in Babylonia to the east and Armenia to the north. He came to a violent end, murdered by two of his sons.

Now the remarkable thing about this campaign is that it is almost completely mirrored by the prophetic vision of the latter part of Daniel's 11th chapter and certainly alluded to by Zechariah in his 14th chapter. It would seem as though the prophets were indicating that the events of the end of the Age are to bear a marked resemblance to the happenings of this memorable campaign. No attempt to suggest an interpretation is to be made here but the correspondencies will be noted as an aid to the study and understanding of those chapters.

It is fairly obvious that Daniel 11 and 12 enshrines a synopsis of history, in rather veiled terms, from Daniel's own day to the introduction of the Messianic Kingdom. The latter event as the terminus is demanded by virtue of the fact that the resurrection of the dead is indicated in chapter 12. 2. Ignoring differences of thought as to the precise application of much of chapter 11 it is generally agreed that verse 36 introduces the final conflict at the Age's end under symbol of one usually known as the "wilful king". This part of the chapter, from

verse 36 to the end, very accurately reflects Sennacherib's campaign but puts the fulfilment of the words into the future. Daniel, of course, wrote some hundred and sixty years after that campaign but he must have been very familiar with its details.

The description in verse 36 "*the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods*" is well suited to Sennacherib, who was one of the most boastful and arrogant kings of antiquity. His commander-in-chief's scornful words to the defenders of Jerusalem "*Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria . . . that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?*" (Isa. 36. 18) well illustrate his character. "*Let not thy God in whom thou trusteth, deceive thee saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria*" (Isa. 37. 10) was his last arrogant ultimatum before disaster came upon him. "*But in his place*" says Daniel in verse 38 "*shall he honour the god of fortresses*". Says one historian of Sennacherib "*Renowned over the earth in his days as the great destroyer, he knew no higher policy than force . . . lust of power, cruelty, pride and arrogance were developed in excess in his case*". Daniel goes on in verse 39 "*He shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain*". This is a true reflection of the Assyrian king's policy. Each country or city he conquered was placed under the control of a puppet ruler selected for his loyalty and under pledge of exacting and sending an annual tribute of goods and slaves to Nineveh. Sennacherib's destruction of Sidon at this time had the effect of diverting Phoenician commerce to Assyria; he controlled trade with Cyprus, and his victories in Media and Babylonia brought the commercial activity of the east and the south into his hands. This "god of fortresses" of verse 38 was truly "*honoured with gold, and silver, and precious stones, and desirable things*".

Verse 40 introduces action. "*At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him*". The campaign which ended in disaster was undertaken in consequence of the Egyptian threat to Assyrian expansion, and Sennacherib marched south to render Egypt powerless. "*The king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and horsemen, and with many ships: and we shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over*". This well describes the Assyrian advance into Syria and Phoenicia; his progress was marked by complete and utter conquest and devastation. The one item not mentioned either in the Bible or the conqueror's own inscriptions is the use of ships. Assyria was an inland country and not accustomed to naval warfare. Sennacherib and his father

Sargon, however, did make use of ships in their wars. Sargon had at his disposal sixty Phoenician galleys and eight thousand oarsmen for the siege of Tyre some twenty years earlier, and Sennacherib built a fleet for use in the Persian Gulf in his wars with the Elamites. It is quite likely therefore that part of his plan of attack upon Egypt involved the use of Phoenician ships.

"*He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many shall be overthrown, but these shall escape out of his hand, Edom and Moab and . . . Ammon*" (verse 41). Here is well depicted the invader's onward progress into the land of Israel and Judah proper, and its neighbour state, the confederacy of Philistine cities on the coast, Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Joppa. Sennacherib himself says of this entry into Judah and the many overthrown "*I besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke and I captured forty-six of his fenced cities and innumerable villages . . . I drove into captivity two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty people, young and old, male and female, and horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep, counted as spoil. Hezekiah himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up in Jerusalem his royal city, and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city . . . He . . . sent tribute and to make submission with . . . gold . . . silver, precious stones . . . ivory couches, ivory chairs . . . ebonywood, boxwood and all kinds of valuable treasures, together with his daughters, his wives and male and female musicians*". He says nothing of his defeat and the destruction of his army; only of the spoil which by then was well on its way to Nineveh.

During these happenings and whilst Sennacherib was still dealing with the people of Sidon and Syria, three kings, Melech-ram of Edom, Chemosh-nadab of Moab, and Pedael of Ammon, hastened to him with tribute and protestations of loyalty, in consequence of which their lands were saved from invasion. This is a remarkable parallel to verse 41 in Daniel 11, for these were the only three to escape devastation and plunder.

This same boastful account of the spoil Sennacherib took just before his signal defeat seems to find an echo in the words of Zechariah. This prophet's 14th chapter commences by describing the gathering of all nations to besiege Jerusalem at the end of the Age, and says that the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, the women ravished, and half the city go into exile. The Lord does not deliver until these things have taken place. The likeness of this to Sennacherib's experience is significant. "*The city shall be taken*" says Zechariah. "Taken" here does not mean "captured" but rather "surrounded". It is a word meaning to enclose as in a net, derived from the snare or net used by fowlers. This is the very simile used by the



Assyrian himself. "*Like a bird in a cage*" he says "*I shut him up in Jerusalem his royal city*". He never opened the cage. "*The houses rifled*", goes on Zechariah. The list of spoil, largely consisting of treasures from the Temple, according to 2 Kings 32, and obviously also from the houses of the well-to-do citizens, is a clear parallel to that. "*The women ravished*"; Sennacherib declares gloatingly that he took the daughters and wives of Hezekiah and sent them to Nineveh, evidently, as was the custom, to become inmates of his own harem, and the female musicians to be his slaves. For the rest of their lives these unfortunates were at the mercy of the Assyrians. "*And half of the city shall go forth into captivity*". This does not necessarily mean that exactly fifty per cent of the citizens are to suffer this fate; the word rendered "half" means primarily a portion separated, from the root word meaning "to divide". Whereas in the main a division into two portions is implied, quite a few instances in the Old Testament require three, four or more portions; all that need be stressed here is that part of the city will thus go forth. Since the background of Zech. 13 and 14 is the faith of the people in God and salvation in consequence, it is a logical conclusion that those who "*go forth into captivity*" are destitute of that saving faith. This at any rate was the case in the days of Hezekiah. Although most of the people shared Hezekiah's and Isaiah's faith and obeyed the injunction to ignore the Assyrian threats (Isa. 36. 21), there was an element which did not have that faith and endeavoured to escape from the besieged city and trust for mercy to the besiegers—a trust which was sadly misplaced. A terse sentence in Sennacherib's account of the siege is eloquent enough; "*all who came outside the great gate of the city were captured and led off*". They shared the fate of the other captives who had already been sent to Nineveh. Then Zechariah comes to the climax. "*The residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations*". This is the climax which Sennacherib did not record in his account. The clay cylinders, which with them), Sennacherib heavily defeated these Jerusalem, and how the Jewish king was shut up like a bird in a cage, but it does not say anything about the outcome, which was an unusual thing for Sennacherib—but then defeat, utter and overwhelming defeat, was also an unusual thing for him.

Daniel 11 is not so concerned with the activities around Jerusalem as with those on the larger country scene. Verses 42-43 say of the "King of the North" that he will prevail over the Egyptians, the Libyans and the Ethiopians and take great spoil of gold and silver and valuable treasures. This is true of Sennacherib. Egypt at the time was ruled by a

powerful Ethiopian dynasty and the forces facing the Assyrian were from combined Egyptian and Ethiopian sources. (The Libyans were descended from the Egyptians and usually in active alliance still exist for anyone to see, record the siege of forces twice, once before he besieged Jerusalem and again whilst the siege was proceeding. His own account lists the spoil he took after the capture and destruction of the city of Lachish, which left Egypt open and defenceless before him.

A strange and rather obscure word in verse 45 is illuminated by one of Sennacherib's boastful assertions. "*He shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain*" says Daniel. "*Palatial tents*" is the R.S.V. rendering; the word means the king's royal pavilion erected in the midst of his camp. The "*glorious holy mountain*" is obviously in reference to the kingdom of Judah in the Promised Land and "*between the seas*" can only mean between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean. Now Sennacherib's own account says that he did set his pavilion at Lachish where his main army was gathered, and Lachish was geographically between the two seas. He did, in fact, boast that he would set that pavilion inside Jerusalem and profane its palace gardens but that boast was unfulfilled. He planted his pavilion at Lachish in the arrogant belief that Hezekiah would be brought before him there as captive, to be dealt with as he dealt with all his defeated enemies; "*yet*" says Daniel "*he shall come to his end, and none shall help him*". His ornate pavilion was hurriedly taken down and packed for retreat; he himself, bereft of his army and perhaps with only a handful of personal attendants left to him, travelled the seven hundred miles back to Nineveh with the bitter knowledge of defeat in his heart, defeat at the hands of the God he had defied.

So far as Jerusalem and Judah was concerned, that was his end, for Sennacherib never returned. Whilst engaged on this campaign, tidings reached him of renewed rebellion in other parts of his far-flung empire, Babylon in the east and Armenia in the north. That is what Daniel said too. "*Tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go forth with great fury to destroy.*" Immediately following his retreat from Jerusalem he fought a campaign in Babylonia which left the countryside devastated. For two years after that he warred in Armenia, reducing the hardy mountain tribes of that land to subjection, and then again another year against Babylon and Elam. Thirty thousand Babylonians and untold numbers of Armenian mountaineers were carried off into slavery, their towns burned and their lands devastated. Daniel's words fitly mirror what the Assyrian king had done.



Sennacherib lived nineteen years after his defeat at Jerusalem, of which ten were spent in unremitting warfare against Babylon, Media, Elam, Armenia and Cilicia, but never again against Judah. In that time he more than earned his title of "the Destroyer". After his conquest of Cilicia he founded a city in that land which was to become famous in after years—Tarsus, the birthplace of the Apostle Paul. Then came the end; he was assassinated by two of his own sons, and a third son reigned in his stead. The might and the magnificence of Sennacherib, the fear and terror his name inspired amongst countless multitudes, vanished in an instant. Truly, as Daniel predicts of the greater oppressor whom he prefigured "*he shall come to*

*his end, and none shall help him*".

Whatever be the interpretation of Daniel 11 and Zechariah 14 it would seem that the remarkable correspondence between those prophecies and this historical record of the seventh century B.C. is intended to provide a guide to the detailed nature of the events which will terminate this Age and lead on to the time when "*Michael shall stand up*" to use Daniel's phrase, or Zechariah's "*then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations*". Sennacherib's campaign in Judah and his crushing defeat at Jerusalem by Divine intervention is a preview, in miniature, of "*things which must shortly come to pass*".

## In the Crucible

"John in Patmos knew that all was not well with the inner life of the churches. Failures in love, readiness to listen to false teaching, low standards of conduct and character, luke-warmness and self-complacency—such were the fallings away from the true marks of their high calling in Christ Jesus of which he had to write. The first century was no golden age; nor was the Church then a Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Church militant has never been a Church without fault. It has been a tempted Church, a struggling Church, a Church that has fallen again and again; and yet through it all a Church that learns how to conquer, how to overcome. For, then and always, what is needed in the Church is the spirit of the victor. The true Christian spirit is not that of mere endurance and resignation; it is the spirit of victory. And so it is that although the story has to tell of disappointments, shortcomings, of compromise with the world, of faltering, of unworthy discipleship, and of evil in high places, the torch of victory has never burnt itself out. From generation to generation of the Church's life it has been passed on, and there have always been some to receive it. The kingdoms of the world come and go; they may play their part in the development of civilisation, but they possess not the power to never grow old. The Gospel of Christ is ever renewing the freshness and triumphs of days that may seem far off, but are linked by an unbroken chain to the Church of today. There is far more of permanent victory in Augustine landing in the Isle of Thanet than in Julius Caesar disembarking his forces near to the cliffs of Dover, and a Christian village in Africa or India is a truer symbol of the eternal things that cannot be shaken than the earth-shaking armies of the greatest of this world's conquerors from Nebuchadnezzar to Napoleon. In those armies of destruction we find but the witness to some man who strives to be a superman; in the peaceful village we find a living testimony to the victorious power of God." (Selected)

## The Word of Truth

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.* We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. *Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it; For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not tarry.* Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day!"

(*"2 Tim. 3 16-17; Psalms. 19. 7-10; 2 Pet. 1. 19; Heb. 2. 1; Heb. 4. 12; Hab. 2. 2-3; Psalm. 119.*)

## OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

*An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah*

### 4. The Day of the Lord

*"On the day that you stood aside when aliens carried off Jacob's possessions and foreigners entered his land, casting lots for the possession of Jerusalem, you allied yourself with them. You should not have exulted over your brother's fate in the day of misfortune, or rejoiced at the ruin of the people of Judah, nor have boasted yourself in the day of their distress, nor taken possession of my people's territory in the day of their calamity, nor robbed them of their goods, nor stood in the road to intercept the fugitives, nor delivered the survivors into the hands of their enemies" (Vss. 11-14).*

"He that is not with me is against me" said Jesus (Matt. 12. 30). Here is an example of that truth. The sin of Edom at the first was not that they manifested open and active hostility to the children of Israel but that they stood aside when their brethren were attacked by the alien and did nothing to help. Not the active doing of wrong, but the abstaining from doing right. That in itself is sin in God's sight. The Edomites could have rendered assistance to Israel at the time of the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar; instead they preferred to stand aside and witness the agony of Jacob, waiting until the tragedy was over so that they might have some share in the spoils.

This, perhaps, is the explanation of the apparent contradiction between the words of Jesus above quoted and that other saying of his, "*He that is not against us is for us*" (Luke 9. 50). In this latter case He was talking about those who were found casting out demons in his Name yet not outwardly or professedly following him. They were actively doing good works in the name of the Author of all good works, and Jesus gave them credit for their sincerity and good intentions. So that in the sight of God it is better to do good without acknowledging God than it is to stand aside from doing good works whilst professing a shew of righteousness. Jesus gave a parable of two sons, each of whom received an instruction from their father. One said "I go", but went not; the other, "I will not go", but he went. Which one did the will of the father? We all know the answer. So the Edomites, no doubt smug in their own self-righteousness, and reflecting, with good reason, that the Israelites had brought all their troubles upon themselves by their apostasy and unbelief, were condemned in the sight of God because they had failed to remember one very important point; Israel and Edom were brothers.

Much the same has been true with spiritual Edom in this Gospel Age. There has never been a century since the death of the Apostles when some, professed followers of the Master, have not

stood by and seen their more earnest and Christ-like brethren hounded and persecuted and done nothing to help them. "*Perils from false brethren*" said Paul; yea, and false brethren there have been ever since. The "spoils" that could be gained by standing aloof and in the end becoming allied with the ravening wolves who have despoiled the true Church has so often tempted the cupidity of spiritual Edom and led them to betray their brethren.

All these verses, up to verse 14, together comprise a vivid picture of base betrayal. "*The brother shall deliver the brother to death*" said Jesus, speaking precisely of those same things in this Age. And it can be brought very near home to us. Not all the spiritual Edomites are to be found in what some are pleased to call "the systems". How many of us find cause to dissent from our brother or brethren on some matter of doctrine, of activity or of conduct, and allow that dissent to lead us into a condition of active or passive hostility? How many of us exult over our brother's fate in his day of misfortune, or boast ourselves and our superior position in his day of distress, or take possession of that which is rightly his when he is in no position to defend himself, or even hinder and obstruct him in his efforts to deliver himself from his calamities? If in any way we have been guilty of such things, whether materially, or much more likely, spiritually, then the condemnation of these verses is upon us and this is how God views us.

This gives a new viewpoint on the searching question "Who shall be able to stand in the evil day?" Obadiah's prophecy goes straight on from this point to announce the advent of the day of the Lord upon all the nations. The Edomites are to receive retribution in that day for all the wrongs they have committed. In the literal history that day came when Nebuchadnezzar, having completed his ravaging of Judea, turned his attention to the other nations round about and made them tributary also. That was the beginning of the end for Edom as a nation. In this Gospel Age it comes when at the end the great Time of Trouble breaks upon the nations, "*and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble*" (Mal. 4. 1). It is in his final destruction of the powers of this world that spiritual Edoms suffers. If then any who in the past have been blessed with the light of Truth have allowed themselves to become spiritual Edomites then they will share in this judgment, and fall, and lose the great reward. Who will stand in the evil day? Only those who with clean hands and a pure heart have maintained their consciousness of kinship and affinity with those who in sincerity and

truth have maintained their consecration to God and their standing as true sons in his sight.

*"And now the Day of the Lord is at hand upon all the nations. As you have done, so shall it be done unto you; your deeds will return upon your own head. As you have drunk the intoxicating cup upon my holy mountain, so shall all the nations round about drink and stagger, and be as if they no longer exist."* (vs. 15-16).

This is the grand climax to the book of Obadiah. All the pretensions and all the schemings of the Edomites have availed them nothing. The day of retribution comes at length when Divine judgment sweeps away all that is out of accord with God's holiness and leaves only his own true people standing approved. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." Long, weary centuries have had to run their course before this final vindication could be, but now it has come and all the ends of the earth see the salvation of God.

There is a tendency, at times, to think of this Divine judgment in the Day of the Lord as an arbitrary infliction of punishment upon the world for all their sins, as though God had at length lost patience and summarily cut short the reign of evil by a series of catastrophic visitations emanating directly and solely from his own Almighty power. "The Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity" is the kind of text that would form the theme of such a sermon. But we have to look deeper into the nature of things before we can accurately understand the underlying causes of this Day of judgment. *"Your deeds shall return upon your own head."* There is a law of creation at work here which is at the same time, as are all the laws of creation, the Law of God. Natural retribution, or what men now call "poetic justice", overtakes the world at the last. The judgments of the Last Day are nothing more or less than the inevitable consequences and harvest of mankind's course in history through the ages. As men have sown, so shall they reap, and there is no escape from that destiny. It is not that God *would* not relent. It is that God *could* not relent. The coming of the Day of the Lord, with all its attendant judgments, was made inevitable on the day that Adam sinned, and as the gates of Eden closed behind the guilty pair it became only a question of time before that Day should dawn.

So all the vivid language describing the impact of this Day of the Lord upon the nations is but the poetic expression of God's own attitude toward the sin and evil which the Day of the Lord will bring to an end. The catastrophic ending of the power of man in a Time of Trouble such as was not since there was a nation is an outward and visible witness

to God's abhorrence of sin and the determination that it shall be banished forever from his creation. So we have the vivid metaphor in Isa. 34. *"The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter . . . For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment . . . for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea . . . For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion."* (Isa. 34. 2-8). The final and absolute character of this last judgment upon "this present evil world" can hardly be described more eloquently than in this picture of the Divine sword sweeping the heavens as it flashes over and down upon the guilty earth waiting to receive the death-stroke. But although it is thus described, the world has brought its trouble upon itself, and no other end is possible.

*"As you have drunk the intoxicating cup upon my holy mountain."* The idea behind this phrase is that after the children of Israel had been taken into captivity and Jerusalem itself left ruined and desolate, the Edomites took possession of the land, entered into the city—the "holy mountain"—and gave themselves over to all kinds of excesses on the site where Israel had formerly worshipped God. In the larger fulfilment this pictures false professors of Christianity usurping the place which ought to have been occupied by the true Church in the sight of the nations, and indulging in a riot of false doctrines and blasphemous representations of the Divine character. *"He, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God"* is St. Paul's definition of one such aspect of this usurpation. *"Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand that made all the earth drunken."* (Jer. 51. 7). How true it is that many who do believe in Christ hold a miserably distorted conception of the Christian faith and the character of God. How true it is that the golden cup of stupefying liquor with which Babylon has intoxicated not only herself but all around her is responsible for that conception. Men are stupefied, bemused, unable properly to comprehend what God is saying to them at the hand of his ambassadors, and it is all because of the stupefying cup. So it is very true, as God says by the mouth of Obadiah, that the nations round about "drink, and stagger, and be as if they no longer exist"—not "be as though they had not been" as in the Authorised Version. This verse does not teach, as some would make it teach, that those therein spoken of are condemned in the moment of drinking the cup to eternal annihilation, the Second Death. The verse is not talking about the ultimate penalty for sin at all. It is talking



about the condition of the world, both professing Christendom and everyday paganism, at the Time of the End. The expression "they shall be as if they no longer exist" is merely the definition of extreme intoxication. They drink, they stagger, and they lose consciousness altogether—a drunken sleep. Thank God it is a sleep from which they are to be awakened in God's good time, when they will be introduced to a world in which no golden cup of intoxication is found any more, when Babylon has fallen and vanished away, when the Edomites are

no longer in possession of God's holy mountain. They will come forth to a world in which saviours have come up upon Mount Zion and the Kingdom has become the Lord's. That is the final sunlit scene of Obadiah's prophecy, a scene which is illumined by the Sun of righteousness shining down upon a vast concourse of liberated captives returning to take possession of their heritage. After judgment comes conversion, reconciliation to God, and the establishment of everlasting righteousness. (To be concluded)

## ACTIVITY IN THE AFTER LIFE

"It strikes me as very curious" said the well-known astronomer, Prof. Fred Hoyle, in one of his books (*"The Nature of the Universe"*), "that the Christians have so little to say how they propose eternity should be spent". There is some justification for the criticism; orthodox theology has a lot to say about the nature of God and the nature of man and the philosophy of the Atonement but it does tend to stop short at the entrance to the heavenly land and shrink from any plain statement of thought as to what goes on inside. A great deal is said, especially nowadays, about the obligations and activities incumbent upon Christians in this life but very little as to what might be expected of us in the next. To a great extent the mediæval idea of Heaven as a place of eternal rest and idleness, relieved only by the alternatives of playing harps or blowing trumpets to the glory of God, has been allowed to remain without up-dating in the light of modern understanding. The ideas of occupation, activity, progress, achievement, have not very often been associated with the life of the future. No wonder Prof. Hoyle says, farther on in his book, "*What the Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration!*"

Christians, perhaps; Christianity, no! Serious study of the purpose of God as it is expounded in the Bible reveals a very different picture, eloquent enough even though by no means clear or sharply defined. When we think of the celestial sphere we are thinking of another world whose conditions of life, existence and activity are so fundamentally different from those of terrestrial creation that language and similes in which they may be expressed just do not exist. The Apostle Paul discovered that, when, after his memorable glimpse of sights and sounds belonging to the other world, he found that by no means could he impart to others what he had perceived and could remember. He had "*heard indescribable things spoken, which it is not possible for a man to relate*" (2 Cor. 14. 4). The basic fact we have to realise and accept is that life in what we

call, by way of distinction," the celestial world," whilst as real as ours and in just the same way created by and dependent upon the Supreme Being, is not capable of discernment by any of our senses, or description by any of the words or objects with which we are familiar. That was understood by several of the Scripture writers; Isaiah, for instance, declared "*From the beginning of the world they have not heard, nor perceived with the ears, the eye hath not seen, O God, what things thou hast prepared for them that wait for thee*" (Isa. 64. 4). The Apostle Paul, quoting these words rather loosely, told the Corinthians "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*". Jesus, about to leave his disciples, said to them "*I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am ye may be also*" (Jno. 14. 3). Now all this implies that there is something being done, activities of a kind, even creative activity, progressing "beyond the veil", pending the time that we, erstwhile terrestrial creatures, gain entry to that other world. Its present citizens are neither idle nor frustrated; they too must be busily engaged in the multifarious activities appropriate to their environment. Psalm 103 implies that much, when it speaks of them as carrying out the Deity's commandments, hearkening to the voice of his Word, executing his purpose.

By analogy also we must say that just as this world of ours is one of change and development, initiative and achievement, enquiry and progress, so is that. Both orders of existence—all orders of existence, if needs be, for we have no mandate to limit the possible orders of existence to two—owe their being to the Supreme One. Both are called into being to perform a function in his creation and to be the recipients and agents of his wisdom and benevolence. St. Paul speaks of the time to come when God will "*exhibit the surpassing wealth of his benevolence*"; an expression like that implies some



concrete factors in the future life which makes that life a real and progressive one in the light of Divine benevolence. *There must be something there to "exhibit", something which justifies the term "surpassing wealth of his benevolence".*

*The Christian has much the same difficulty as the scientific investigator, each in his respective field. He is called upon to accept evidence pointing to the reality of something he cannot see. The scientist bases his evidence on the indications given him by man-made instruments which supplement his senses; because those instruments cannot indicate the reality of another world he has no evidence for the existence of such. The Christian bases his evidence on an instructed faith which supplements his senses and by that faith he does see the other world and accepts the fact of its existence. But he is still unable to visualise what it is like, although he can form in his own mind an impression of its moral qualities. The New Testament faces up to this position by declaring quite bluntly and unequivocally, that no human being, as such, can enter the other world. St. Paul explains the matter as a "change" from one kind of body to another. And when one realises that the body we have and know is essentially the means by which the life that is within us interacts with its environment and knows itself for what it is, it should be possible to understand that if we are to enter another world—the celestial—of a different nature, then we need another kind of body, one that is adapted to that order of being and in which we can interact with that environment, with whatever enhanced or different powers and sense perception that is appropriate, and still know ourselves for who we are. There is a terrestrial body, and there is a celestial body, says Paul, and the terrestrial body, flesh and blood, cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Hence we must be "changed". Continuing this theme, he tells us in 2 Cor. 5 that the "house of earth" in which we now live, this human body, must be rejected eventually in order that we can be "clothed upon" with our "house from heaven". 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5 should be equally interesting in this connection to both Christian and agnostic if the point at issue is the reality of the unseen world.*

Perhaps it is an unseen world only because it is not on our "wave-length". Our eyes and ears respond to light and sound in our atmosphere, our fingers feel the solid objects of our earth, because our bodies are made of the same kinds of atoms and we respond. The Lord God created man "*of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*". Not long ago a space scientist suggested that man might, eventually, come in contact with some alien form of life in some remote part of space and not be

able to recognise it as life, because, he thinks, man's senses might be unable to discern some possible forms of life. *The tremendous increase in man's knowledge of the nature of matter characteristic of recent years has led other investigators to feel that there can be some forms of atomic structure incapable of reacting upon terrestrial matter; some "primary particles", as they term them, which can pass through all earthly materials unperceived just as light passes through glass, so making possible the existence of other worlds interpenetrating but not inter-acting with ours and so not known to us, yet just as real as our own. However this may be, Christians know that there is such a world, that it is real, and that our hope and expectation is to be citizens of such a world in time to come.*

So far as can be deduced from Scripture, that world existed before this; its citizens, the "angels" of the Bible, were created before man, and its inhabitants represent a higher order of intelligence, having greater powers and abilities than man. The fact that God is depicted as saying, at the beginning, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" must imply that in some degree or in some sense this world is modelled after the likeness of that, even though on a lower or inferior plane. Therefore, that world also must exhibit processes of learning and achievement, the arts and sciences of life, those occupations and pursuits which give glory to God and happiness in life, that mutual intercourse and co-operation which must characterise a society which is always and altogether fulfilling the Divine purpose in its creation.

There is one great difference. This world of ours is marred by sin and cruelty, injustice and unhappiness, disease and death. That world is one in which these things have no place. There is an apparent dualism in the Divine purpose as revealed in the Scriptures which seems to point in the first place to the celestial world as the eternal home of the Christian Church of this Age, and a terrestrial destiny for a great portion of the human race who do not become dedicated disciples of Christ during this Age. This latter requires the abolition of sin and the conversion of the human society on earth to the same sinless condition as now obtains in heaven. Such an abolition and conversion is the object of the Messianic reign of Christ over the earth in the next, the Millennial Age. But whether an individual's final destiny be in the celestial or the terrestrial he will be equally a citizen of God's creation and in either case there will always be effort and progress, new vistas of knowledge to explore and new heights of achievement to scale. To all of that there will never be an end. So far from being idle or frustrated, men will, says God through the prophet "*long enjoy the work of their hands*".

## MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

The opening of Exodus 3 marks the end of the forty years in Midian. Moses was now eighty years old, virile and active in his work of supervising the stock-rearing interests of his father-in-law Jethro, who was probably not far off a hundred and twenty years of age. To all intents and purposes Moses would seem to have settled for life in Midian with no likelihood of return to Egypt although he may not have been altogether cut off from his own family. The allusion, in chapter 4, 14, to Aaron coming to meet him seems to indicate that his elder brother knew where to find him and the fact that there was a constant coming and going of Egyptian officials and others between Egypt and the Midian copper mines renders it by no means unreasonable to think that despite his long residence in the wilderness Moses had been kept in touch with the condition of things back home.

Chapter 3, 1 tells how Moses led his flocks "to the back side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb". This is the first of many geographical allusions in the Book of Exodus which, when understood, prove how intimately the writer of Exodus knew his territory. These indications form one of the strongest links in the chain of evidences demonstrating the Mosaic authorship of Exodus. The Midianites inhabited the southern part, particularly the south eastern portion, of the Sinai peninsula. Mount Sinai, in the centre of the southern half, lay in their territory, and the famous copper mines of Serabit al Khadim, from which the Egyptians obtained much of their copper and precious stones, about forty miles north of Sinai. The word rendered "desert" is *midbar*. Of each of the twenty-two different Hebrew words descriptive of the earth's surface in its various aspects, *midbar*, usually translated wilderness, denotes the wild open spaces, grass grown and bush covered, the type of land normally wandered over by nomadic tribes as distinct from the settled lands of agricultural people. The word therefore accurately describes the enclosed acacia covered valleys of southern Sinai and the word "backside" which in Hebrew idiom means the west, points unerringly to that part of Midianite territory which lay around "Horeb the mountain of God", part of the Sinai range only three miles away from Mount Sinai itself, and overlooking a long curved plain, some ten miles long, by one mile wide where ample pasturage for Moses' flocks could be found.

Here it was, one day, that Moses, busy about his duties with the flocks of sheep and goats which were his care, saw the Burning Bush. "*The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not con-*

*sumed*" (3. 2). Moses turned aside to examine this wonder at closer quarters—and heard the voice of God speaking to him out of the midst of the bush.

The Old Testament story of the Burning Bush is often regarded as a miracle, but there is no statement to that effect in Exodus. We have just the plain unvarnished statement that Moses' attention was attracted by a flaming bush which appeared to continue burning without being consumed, and upon staying to view the strange sight became conscious of the voice of God commissioning him to return to Egypt and deliver the people of Israel. The Hebrew word here rendered "bush" is the one for acacia. In ancient times—and until the middle of the nineteenth century—the peninsula of Sinai was thickly covered with acacias, so that this part of the story rings true. As to the nature of the phenomenon, the account is silent, but an incident witnessed by the modern author, Louis Golding, and related in his book "*In the steps of Moses the Lawgiver*" might very well explain what happened to Moses. Golding was in this very district, in one of the wadis or dry water-courses on the slopes of Mount Sinai. It was the evening of a hot day . . . but let Golding relate the story in his own words . . .

"I am at this point compelled to quote the apparition of a Burning Bush which was so exact a rendering of the strange and lovely marvel described in the Bible, that I quite literally was afraid to trust my eyes. The apparition lasted several seconds, and though I was aware of its exact rationale while it endured, I still said to myself it was mirage or inward fancy. The thing happened "in the back of the wilderness" in one of the wadis under the flank of Sinai. It was the evening of a hot and windy day. As we approached the arena where two or three wadis debouched, the winds met, and, joining forces, became a cyclone, a tall pillar of air violently rotating on its axis, its whole length defined by the sand it sucked up from the dry wadi bed. In the centre of this arena was a large thorny acacia, the only tree which grows in these regions. The sun had for some minutes been hidden behind a long bank of cloud. It remained hidden until the cyclone reached the acacia. Then in the moment the cyclone possessed itself of the tree, the sun hurled its rays obliquely upon their embrace. The whole tree went up in flame. The smoke of it soared in gusts. Every thorn was a spit of fire.

"It continued so for several seconds. It seemed as if the cyclone was impaled on the sharp spikes of the branches. It thrust and thrust and thrust again. The bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. Then at last the cyclone freed itself, and went hurtling along one of the wadis. The tree was no more than a thorny acacia again, arid and lonely in

the centre of the hills."

Perhaps for a short time Golding and his companions witnessed something which might easily have been the same thing that was seen and recorded by their illustrious forerunner more than three thousand years previously.

It is more than likely that what Moses saw was some natural phenomenon of this kind; nothing in the account contradicts such a conclusion. What is of greater importance is the fact that very evidently Moses heard the voice of God speaking to him at this time. Whether it was in fact an audible voice on the air appearing to emanate from the burning bush, or an impression produced upon the mind of Moses in so clear-cut a manner that to him it was as a voice speaking, is of no real consequence. The point to stress is that this was no psychological experience or hallucination, in which Moses might interpret a subconscious urge to go back to Egypt and deliver Israel as the voice of God speaking. This was definite Divine intervention. As the account says, it was the angel of the Lord speaking to Moses. The whole tenor of chapter 3. 1-5 shows that. Moses did not want to go to Egypt; he neither believed he was the man to deliver Israel, nor did he believe that if he went Israel would take any notice of him. The fire and zeal of earlier years had burned low; forty years a nomad shepherd in Midian had taught him many things but it had also blunted the edge of his perception of Israel's parlous condition. His desire for Israel's deliverance was probably as keen as ever but he now believed that God must do the work by another man. His life was two thirds gone, he was more a Midianite man than a Hebrew, more a nomad shepherd than a city dweller, and the leadership of so great a project, attractive as it may have been in earlier years, was now a prospect from which he shrank. "*Who am I?*" he said to God "*that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?*" (3. 11).

Perhaps Moses had to be brought to this point where he must set his hand to the plough, if he set it at all, solely in the power of God. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was to be entirely and altogether the work of God, and Moses was to be only the instrument. Perhaps Moses had to be convinced that whereas he had no confidence in his own adequacy he could have complete confidence in the power of God. It is noteworthy in chapter 3 that God tells Moses of His intentions in terms which leave no room for any power save His own. "*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of my people. I am come down to deliver them, and to bring them into a good land. I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppressed them. I will send thee unto Pharaoh.*" (3. 6-10). It was the last

declaration which jolted Moses and called forth his expostulation of unworthiness, and God abruptly cast his words aside with "*Since I will be with thee*" (v. 12—not "certainly" as in the A.V.). Since God will be with him why will he either doubt or dissent? Since God will be with him what possible weakness or failure could there be? This was the first hurdle Moses had to cross, his own lack of self-confidence, the consciousness of his own weakness and insufficiency. So far from that being a drawback, said God, it is really an advantage. My strength will be made perfect in your weakness. Moses' objection fell to the ground.

He was ready with another. If he was not to go to Israel in his own name and claim leadership in his own strength, in whose name should he go. "*When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?*" (3. 13). That question throws a flood of light upon the condition of Israel as to their conception of God. National tradition must have preserved the knowledge of God who called their forefather Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, preserved their fathers in their generations and brought Jacob and his sons into Egypt. But all that was a long time ago and the gods of Egypt were probably much more real to them now—and these gods were all known by name. Which of the many gods was He that would deliver them from Egypt. How would they know Him and how could they picture Him. Was He after all some strange god of the desert who they had not known heretofore? What guarantee could there be, if they trusted themselves to Him at the word of Moses, that He could indeed prove greater in power than all the gods of Egypt and lead them assuredly into the Land of Promise? Moses foresaw a sceptical reception if he turned up in Egypt with this story of a God who had spoken to him in the wilderness and commanded him to go back to Egypt and bring the people of Israel out from under the hand of Pharaoh.

The Divine reply to Moses gives us one of the most sublime passages in the whole Bible. "*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM . . . . . say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you.*" In those words, rightly understood, God asserts His own eternity and in fact removes himself from association with any question of designating names. The word used there is *hayah*, which is the present tense of the substantive verb "to be" in the first person. The substitution of the third person for the first gives *yahweh* which has become transliterated, clumsily, into the English word *Jehovah* and used in some circles as a proper name for God. It is in fact nothing of the kind. The word should always be rendered as in fact Dr.



Moffatt usually renders it, "*the Eternal*". That is the only possible manner of referring to, or describing, God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, having no beginning and no ending, who is, and was, and shall be, the Almighty. That is the only way of differentiating God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, from all the false gods of the nations, all of whom had their own names and characteristics and none of whom are eternal. To give God a name, as men and false gods have names, is to bring him down to the level of those false gods and make him one among them. A little thought will usually be sufficient to show how meaningless must be a proper name applied to God, who is himself the maker and sustainer and container of all things. The idea frequently encountered that God intended Moses to understand this term as a proper name—the "name" of God, probably comes from the Lord's word in 3. 15 "*This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations*" but the word for "name" here—*Shem*—is based on the idea of renown or fame, as when we say "he made himself a name", and "memorial"—*zeker*—is remembrance or memory. "For ever"—*leolam*—extends the name and the memorial, the fame and the memory, into the illimitable future, into a continuance without a stipulated or visible ending. In what clearer terms could there be conveyed to mortal man the realisation that in all his endeavours to know or visualise or define God, the Creator, the Almighty, the Heavenly Father, call him what we will, the one simple expression "*the Eternal*" includes all and sets him for ever apart from every other object of veneration and every other form of authority that has existed or can arise amongst man.

So Moses received his answer, to go to Israel and tell them that the Eternal, who in ages past had led Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, was moving now to lead them, and because He is the Eternal, all that He decrees must surely come to pass and all that stands against his Will must surely in the fulness of time be broken. That is a truth we may do well to take to ourselves to-day when so much that is in the world of men seems to be destructive of the things of God with little outward sign that matters will ever change.

Moses was to go into Egypt, to gather the elders of Israel, to tell them of his experience and conversation with God, and with them to go before Pharaoh and demand the liberty of the people. And Moses listened and his heart failed him and he replied dejectedly "*they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee*" (4. 1). And the gracious Lord gave him two signs, two miracles, to strengthen his wavering faith.

It is at this point we enter the realm of the

miraculous in the Book of Exodus. It is of little use attempting to whittle away the apparently incredibility of these things by finding natural explanations. There are many wonderful happenings or unusual happenings recorded in the Scriptures and popularly believed to be miracles which are nothing of the sort and not claimed by Scripture to be anything of the sort. Sooner or later an understanding of the true nature of the apparently incredible story is attained. But equally there are accounts of happenings which must rightly be classed as examples of Divine manipulation of natural forces, not necessarily because no other explanation meets the case, but because there existed a need for manifest Divine intervention in the matter in hand. So it was here. Moses stood in need of some definite outward evidence of the reality of the Divine power in which he believed but which he had never seen in operation. The demonstration must of necessity be allied with an act of faith in order to make it a vital factor in the developing resolution of Moses. God told him to cast his shepherd's staff on the ground. He did so, and it became a living serpent, from which Moses backed in alarm. That was the miracle. Now came the act of faith. He was told to pick it up by the tail. That is the wrong way to pick up a poisonous serpent and invites trouble. Moses knew the only way to capture or kill a serpent without risk of being bitten was to grasp it immediately behind the head. But faith was developing. He picked it up by the tail, and it became a staff again.

The other sign followed quickly. Obedient to the command, Moses thrust his hand into his clothes. When he withdrew it the flesh was covered with leprosy. Again as instructed, he replaced his hand and upon again withdrawing it the leprosy was gone.

These were the evidences Moses was to offer to a primitive and untutored people to prove his commission from God. Such signs to-day would not convince sophisticated man—but they are not offered to-day. They were designed for an age when they could be of use. And as to the likelihood of such things having actually happened, Moses is the narrator and he was alone when the occurrences were said to have taken place. The power which manipulated natural elements to turn water into wine at Cana of Galilee, and to restore whole flesh to the decaying body of Lazarus after he had been dead for four days, could be just as effective in transforming the carbo-hydrates of a wooden staff into those comprising an animal body and infusing it with temporary life, or first corrupting and then restoring the healthy flesh of Moses' hand in a few moments of time. One hypothesis explaining the narrative of chapter 4 is that Moses, in the ecstasy of spirit evoked by the apparition of the



burning bush, imagined it all and really believed it when he told the story afterwards. That does not explain how his brother Aaron was able to repeat the wonder in the sight of Pharaoh and his court later on. It is a much more likely conclusion that the wonder actually happened just as Moses recorded it and that it was a manifestation of the power of God, for it then takes its place in the whole procession of Divine interventions by means of which Pharaoh was at last induced to let the people go and they reached, at length, their Promised Land.

Moses was not yet convinced. He thought up a new objection. He was not eloquent; he was slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. How could he be expected to persuade either the people or Pharaoh? The answer reads short and abrupt—a human touch, almost as if the Lord was losing patience with his reluctant ambassador. *“Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Eternal? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say”*. (4. 12). Those few words incidentally place the commission of Moses on the same miraculous basis as the signs he had just witnessed. The same Divine power could just as easily take a tongue that by nature could not speak, and make it speak. Just as miraculously because just as much a manipulation of Nature.

Moses capitulated, but with, it is to be feared, somewhat of bad grace. The expression in 4. 13 *“Send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou*

*will send”* can only mean a somewhat reluctant admission that if God will not send anybody else, well then, Moses is his servant and must accept the commission but really God would be much better advised to find somebody else. And at that God lost patience with him—at least that is how it seemed to Moses and how he put it in his narrative although in fact we know that God never loses patience—and told him that he would be taken at his word and the commission to deliver Israel would be shared with his brother Aaron. God would speak to Moses but Aaron should be the spokesman to the people and to Pharaoh.

That was the end of the interview. The voice from heaven spoke no more; the radiance of the burning bush died away; Moses stood alone beside that solitary acacia with the beetling crags of Mount Horeb towering above him and no sound in his ears but the cries of the goats as they straggled across the green plain. He must have realised, as he looked upon the peaceful scene, that the quiet and settled life he had led for forty years was ended, that now he had received the call to action. Henceforth life was to be filled with labour and sacrifice and suffering, but at the end of it all the realisation that the dreams of his early life had been fulfilled and the Lord by his hand had delivered Israel. Like the young maiden Mary, at a time then still far distant in futurity, he might have breathed to the heavens beyond those high peaks of Sinai *“Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”*.

*(To be continued)*

## Earth’s new Monarch

“With all my heart and soul I believe that the only effective rule for humanity is an absolute monarchy; but the trouble is that we have never yet found the Monarch.

“For a little while the heavens have received Christ, the only One worthy of unlimited rule; but the King of men is coming back, in infinite compassion for the world which drove him out. For his coming, not only the Church but all creation waits.

“The Revised Version gives a wider meaning and greater force than the Authorised to Paul’s words in Romans 8. 19, *“The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God”*. Today the sons of God, as such, are unknown, or despised and persecuted; but when the Master comes they will be revealed with him.

“Following upon the end of Gentile power comes restoration of God’s ancient people Israel to their true position among the nations. I do not say

the restoration of the Jew only, that is not comprehensive enough, but of the whole Israel of God.

“The Ten Tribes, lost for centuries, shall be found and restored to their land, for the fulfilment of God’s purpose for Israel, and through Israel for the race.

“I know that some doubt this truth, and say that Israel as a nation has been finally cast off. Can God desert those to whom He has made oath? Absolutely impossible! Never! God’s purpose may be thwarted and hindered; but despite all human failure and folly, they must eventually be realised.

*“The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning God’s ancient people have never been wholly fulfilled; and it cannot be that the inspired Word of the Living God should prove a failure.”*

*Rev. G. Campbell Morgan.*

## THE AMEN

In most Christian communities it is usually the custom, at the close of some fervent prayer, or at the end of some impassioned exhortation, for the congregation (or at least the greater part of it) to give expression to their appreciation and approval thereof by the exclamation of a deeply-emphasised "Amen". There may be differences in the volume of the vocal sound expressing this approval and endorsement, according to the nature of the occasion, or to the canonical laws governing the character of Divine Worship, but, almost everywhere, we may safely say, in louder or more subdued measure, the close of the fervent prayer or the intense appeal will call forth the pent-up responsive utterance of the devout "Amen" from all whose hearts are warm towards the Most High and His beloved Son.

This fervent word, in and around which such sacred associations are woven, is not a native English word, nor is it even a modern word. It dates from a distant antiquity. It is almost as old as the human race itself. It is derived from an ancient root which was common to several of the primitive Semitic languages the original meaning of which was "to prop" or "to support". As time elapsed it took on new and wider meanings. It came to carry, also, the thought of verbal support—"assent" or "endorsement" of some spoken word, as for instance, in the people's response to the Levitical adjuration recorded in Deut. 27. 15-26. Here it bears the thought "so let it be". Again, when Nehemiah made appeal to Israel to discontinue taking usury from a poorer brother in Israel, the whole people gave assent to his appeal by a mutual and national "Amen". Here it would carry the thought "so will we do". (Neh. 5. 13). And on the occasion of the homing of the Ark, when the sons of Asaph had sung the anthem of thanksgiving composed by David for the great event, the people responded by a great Amen! Here it would express the thought "So say we all".

Thus, in seasons of devoted worship, or times of national crisis, the fervent Amen of the whole nation or of the whole congregation was the response to the like fervent appeal made by the appointed servant of the Lord, to "do" what the Lord would have them do or "be" what He would have them be.

When the centralised form of worship located at the Temple gave place to the widely distributed worship of the synagogue, every appeal by the synagogue authorities was answered by the local congregation's "Amen". In this way every responsible citizen of Israel admitted and acknowledged his responsibility before the Lord, and re-affirmed his desire to live at peace with God. Having been

reminded of Israel's unique prerogatives, and of her special standing before the Most High God, every acclamation of the "Amen" was tantamount to a solemn vow, re-affirmed and renewed, by every member of the congregation. It carried with it the prayer—"so let it be", "so will we do", "so say we all".

From the Jewish synagogue this conception passed over into the Christian Ecclesia.

"It was a custom which passed over from the Synagogue into the Christian assemblies that when he who had read or discoursed had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the others in attendance responded 'Amen', and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own." (*Thayer's Lexicon*, p.32 under word *Amen*).

In this way, the Jewish ceremonial practice, epitomised by a word far older than themselves, found an entrance into the Christian communities everywhere. It is thus an ancient word heavily encrusted with reverential thought that finds expression on our modern lips when even we, ourselves, respond to the spirit of the fervent prayer or to the ardent exhortation.

In the days of the early Church the place of the "Amen" in the act of worship was a most important one. It was no mere trifling part of the ceremony to be performed or neglected at will. Even Paul himself—opposer of ceremonialism and formalism though he was—calls it "The Amen" (1 Cor. 14. 16). The mutual response, at the right moment, of every heart and voice, in unison, was accounted to be of far greater importance than the exercise of some Spirit-bestowed "gift of tongues", if that exercise, for the time being, was in an unknown tongue. Better far to have the whole audience answer with its great "Amen" because it understood—so Paul said—than have its ear regaled with incomprehensible oratory.

"How shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say 'The Amen' at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest?" asks Paul (1 Cor. 14. 16).

According to the testimony of some early Fathers in the Church, the expression of the congregational "Amen" was not by any means a weak or feebly-whispered response, but a mighty shout that made the rafters ring—a tide of sound that echoed and re-echoed, back and forth, till the very building shook. Gratitude for what the Lord had done for each and all, released the pent-up feelings of the whole personality in a great shout of such lusty magnitude, that it might well be called a "Grand Amen". If these records present a true picture of the scene, no wonder Paul, in words both simple and profound, depicts it as "saying the

Amen".

Early in the second century Elders and Bishops in the Church began to claim the right exclusively to expound the Word. Her ablest scholars—so they said—must be thus authorised to enable the Church universal to parry and withstand the assaults of her pagan foes. But, while conceding this for the common good, there was one thing the congregation would not concede. It would not relinquish the privilege of voicing its great "Amen". Call this vocal climax of the worship "formalism", if we will, but, we must not forget that the "Amen" seemed to mean much more to the early Church than it means to us to-day. To us, to-day, the force and meaning of the word "Amen" has been greatly whittled down and almost lost. It has come to mean, with passing years, little more than "so be it", or "so let it be". It expresses the assent of the audience to the spoken word—the hearer's response to the prayer, the benediction, the doxology, or the personal appeal. This definition has not the ancient force of that which inspired the early Church, nor even the Jewish Synagogue. To them the sharing of the great "Amen" was tantamount to the making of a vow, or the submission of an oath to the Lord. "*He—who says Amen*", writes one commentator, regarding both the Synagogue and the early Church "*thereby asserts that his statement is binding*".

Perhaps we may better understand what the "Amen" meant to the early Church, if we consider this forceful word as it fell from the Master's lips. Jesus used it as no other man had used it before His day. With Him, it never came as a climax to a statement or to a prayer; always, it preceded some solemn utterance. With Him, it was not used responsively to what another said, but only to emphasise what He Himself was about to say. "*Amen, Amen, I say unto you*" was His usual mode of stressing some great truth. To Him it meant, This is the Truth, this alone is Truth, and this is the whole Truth.

Among men, the teacher reasons his way from the shadow of the circumference towards the light at the centre of things—Jesus went through to the centre at one step and spake there in the full blaze of the Light. He had no "ifs" nor "buts" nor qualifying phrases to introduce. He could use the imperative, and say "it is thus and so". He spake as the Voice of Authority, infallibly, which knew the "Truth Absolute", and stated what it knew with emphasis. To Nicodemus He said "*Amen, Amen, I say unto thee, we speak what we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen*" (John 3. 11). How authoritative and awe-inspiring, therefore, were those themes to which Jesus linked this solemn affirmation. Let us recall a few. "*Amen, Amen, I say unto you, the hour cometh and now is when the dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God, and*

*they that hear shall live*" (John 5. 25). "*Amen, Amen, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep*" (John 10. 7-16). "*Amen, Amen, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life*" (John 6. 47-51). Always it is Truth Absolute, spoken by the voice of Absolute Authority.

How poor and feeble, against this weight of emphasis, is the word "verily", or our own phrase "so be it", or a more recent "indeed and indeed". Truly we have lost much of the force and meaning of the Master's Amen.

The Early Church, at least in Apostolic days, was not permitted to forget this emphasis. Of this we have an instance in 2 Cor. 1. 15-22. Paul had been charged with prevarication with saying one thing and meaning something else. He had intimated that he might call at Corinth on his journey into Macedonia (1 Cor. 4. 19), then, when his visit there was accomplished, return again to Corinth and probably winter there. (1 Cor. 16. 5-6). Circumstances had made the two visits impossible—and thus the cause of the accusation arose! In self-defence Paul says "Do I purpose according to the flesh—that is, to please myself—that with me there should be (the duplicity of the double tongue) the yea-yea, and the nay-nay?" For Paul the course of life was mapped out by the Lord ("if the Lord will", 1 Cor. 4. 19; "if the Lord permit" (1 Cor. 16. 7), and he knew it was not for him, without the Lord's approval or ordering, to take one step here or there, or bind himself to take this course or that. He may form a preference, or even express a fond desire (Acts 19. 21), but it was not within his province to bind himself by emphatic promise, or excuse himself by definite refusal to do this thing or that. All the supervision of his life was in the Lord's prerogative, and subject to His oversight.

The Corinthian complainants had not learned this truth sufficiently to bow to the Lord's control, and were blaming Paul for "running off" his word. It did not seem to have occurred to them to charge the blame up to the Lord, or up to God, who had supervised Paul's course. Taking cover under this omission of theirs he would have them know that like as they accounted God to be faithful (actuated by a singleness of purpose) so, in like manner, "our word to you is not yea and nay", and that he was not one whit more unmindful of his promise than God was of the promises He had made.

Carrying their minds to higher ground he then cites the facts of the Saviour's life to prove that the Christian life is not based on irresolution or inconstancy. "*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, . . . was not yea and nay, but in Him is (only) yea.*" Indeed, had Jesus of Nazareth, at any stage of His exacting career, been of an irresolute or inconstant disposition (the yea-yea and nay-nay attitude) He could never have won through to attain the high dignity

of "Son of God". Had there not been firm determination to do the Will of God, at all cost, and against all who would oppose, it could not have been said of Him that He had been "*declared to be the Son of God . . . by His Resurrection from the dead*" (Rom. 1. 4). With Him, in full degree, had been the "yea"—the positive—disposition, throughout His earthly life. And, surely, not less positive is the exalted Son of God than was the Man of Nazareth! There was, therefore, no ground for asserting vacillation or prevarication concerning the Supervisor of the Church, and since the oversight of Paul's little life was in that Supervisor's hands, there could be no charge of inconstancy or inconsistency laid against His "orderings". Paul wanted these meticulous brethren to understand that every promise or proposal made by one to another should be made subject to God's control, and accepted without recrimination, even if they could not be fulfilled, provided always that such non-fulfilment were in full accord with the Will of God.

Paul then moves to still higher ground, and brings to the accusing brethren's attention a universal aspect of the Word of God made certain by the unchanging constancy of the Son of God. "How many soever be the promises of God", he says, "in Him is the 'yea'." God has made many promises at various stages of His Plan. First, came the hopeful promise to Mother Eve, that her seed should bruise the serpent's head. Then, in due course, came the Oath-bound promise to Abraham, repeated and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob that in their seed all the nations should be blessed. After that the promise came to David, that, of his seed, should come forth Israel's Royal King. Meantime to Israel itself the Voice of God had made many promises, assuring them that they should yet attain their rightful place among the nations of the earth. And to the Church of Christ exceeding great and precious promises have been made. Yes! God has made many promises—but over against them all there stood for ages one effective embargo—all men were under the curse! The condemnation for Adamic sin stood in the way, and few indeed of these promises could be realised and inherited till that condemnation was taken out of the way. By His Sacrifice, consummated at Calvary, and presented at the Throne of God, that embargo was removed, and the whole wide range of promises was confirmed and made unfailingly sure. (Rom. 15. 8). Jesus Christ, the Risen Son of God, now stands for ever forth as the "Confirming Yea" to every promise of the Most High God, to whomsoever made. His glorious exalted life, following his vicarious death, is the sure pledge that all God's purposes will stand, for the constancy still prevails in Heaven as prevailed between Jordan and Calvary. Then by a few well-

chosen words Paul shows the great sequel to all this constancy. "Wherefore *also*, through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us." To-day the "Amen" rises from small upper rooms, from small, insignificant companies, but its volume will swell to the ends of the earth, as, first, the Seed of Abraham (in both its parts) enters into its inheritance, and through them, the nations of the earth find their way into the City of God. All the wide world will make the rafters of the universe echo and echo again as they volley forth the "Grand Amen".

There is one further aspect of this ancient theme in which a universal fact becomes also an incomparable Name! Jesus illustrated this extension of a fact into a Name when He said "*I am . . . the Truth . . .*" (John 14. 6). Jesus had stood forth as a Teacher of Truth, presenting to all who could hear the facts and verities of the truth; but, in reality, He was more than a teacher of truth. All the facts and verities of truth met and centred in His person. All the many-sided facts of man's alienated life pointed to their need for Him. All the many-sided facts of His spotless nature and sinless sacrifice pointed to His ability to meet man's need. All man's need, and all God's provision met in Him. In Himself He was the consummation of very fact. He was indeed the Living Truth. Through Him shall yet be the Universal Amen, to the praise of Almighty God, but He also, in Himself, is the Great "Amen". "*These things saith The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness . . .*" (Rev. 3. 14). Exactly as the Name given to Him at His birth (Jesus) was an indication of what He was come down to earth to do ("*call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins*" Matt. 1. 21), so also, the Name given Him in His exaltation is an indication of what He has done. It has a sense of finality and completeness about it. It tells of a task complete in the interests of a purpose that for ever "IS"—a purpose that knows no change or variation, worlds without end, of which every segment is certain and sure, because of what He did.

God only is competent to confer such a Name, for none but He can fully understand the greatness of the task that has been done. By the conferment of that Name, God has set forth His estimation and approval of the universal work that was achieved, and of the certainty that exists. It is as though the Eternal One, to sustain our faltering faith, has said, through the bestowment of that name "*Yea, it is so! it is sure! it cannot fail; in Him is the final word!*"



## PARABLE OF THE PADDLING POOL

It was a summer evening. Several friends sat watching two small boys busily engaged in digging themselves a paddling pool at the edge of the sea. With youthful enthusiasm they excavated a shallow depression and banked it round with walls of sand; then came the task of making a channel to lead the waters of the incoming tide to their excavation. The work was at length finished, and with excited shouts the two youngsters splashed and paddled as the sea came rushing into their pool, a swirling, muddy stream. For a while their contentment was complete, but then with alarm one noticed that the rising tide was threatening their walls. The sand was giving way—there was danger of all their work being ruined; and so with tremendous energy they sought to repair the damage with fresh shovelfuls of sand. To no avail, the remorseless sea came on. Then, with the necessity for desperate measures becoming evident, they fetched great stones, dug out of the beach, to reinforce the bulwarks. Still the waves battered down the defences, washing over the sandy rocks and leaving them clean and white, until at length, with cries of defeat, the two small boys abandoned their stronghold and made for the wider spaces of the open sea.

The watchers looked again, and now there was nothing to be seen of the fenced pool with its muddy water, but in its place a broad expanse of billowing waves sweeping ever forward and upward.

A parable in action. How many a time and oft have the angels looked down upon just such a scene as this. We who come to the feet of him to learn view the limitless expanse of the sea of Divine Truth, and in our littleness feel inspired at once to build ourselves a little enclosure where the revelation of Truth can be kept within bounds and the waters be calm and still; and in our inexperience we discern not and care not that those imprisoned waters cannot but be muddied with some effects of human tradition and misconceptions inherited from the past. And perhaps it may well be

that in such a placid and circumscribed place we are enabled as babes in Christ to learn to keep our balance in the water and become adapted to this strange new medium of life . . . It is when the onward sweep of "Truth now due" demands that the "traditions of men" be swept away and that we enter into a "cleansed sanctuary" that fear comes in to say we have not confidence or strength to receive this Divine revelation; or love for the work of our hands proves stronger than our love for the Truth which it was built to serve. And then with impetuous haste there comes that frantic effort to build up the walls in order to keep out that very life-giving influence which they were first erected to admit and retain. Even as the small boys dug rocks from the sand to reinforce their structure so do some worthy souls resurrect the partial truths of past ages to buttress their already tottering defences, not realising that the light of Present Truth sweeps over and reveals those same teachings in nobler guise.

And it is all of no avail. As soon endeavour to emulate King Canute and command the tide to come no farther than to try and stem the power of Divine Truth. All our little castles, our mediums of service and organisation, can only be used in the service of God whilst they are acting as inlets for the waters of Truth. When once that purpose has ceased, and the seas are attacking their ramparts, we but beat the air in defying the influence which is at work "*teaching all things, yea, the deep things of God*".

The scope of the Divine Plan and the depth of its teaching are, like the sea, immeasurable. We do well to build with our hands booths, temporary abiding places, where in quietness and in fellowship we can learn of each other—but we must expect the pillar of fire to be lifted up ever and again from the Tabernacle, that we may proceed stage upon stage in our journey, ever through new experiences, that we may at last appear before God in Zion.

### On doctrine

*"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained"* (1 Tim. 4.6).

Timothy was a young man, called to the ministry of an important Church at Ephesus, the capital of Roman Asia. It was needful that he be rightly instructed in the faith and capable of imparting that faith to others. The Apostle Paul in this pas-

age is solicitous that he be well grounded in the essential doctrines of what Peter at much the same time was calling "President Truth" (2 Pet. 1, 12). That is no less important to those who are called to be elders and leaders in the assemblies to-day. "*If the trumpet shall give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*". Let all such give heed to the Apostle's admonition.

## DILIGENCE

Those who strive to attain victory in the "race set before us," realise the winning of a race means effort—enthusiastic effort, diligent effort, prompted by deeprooted heart convictions. "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*" (Prov. 4. 23). In this text Solomon uses the Hebrew word *Mishmar* which refers to a guard, a deposit, a usage; an example; watch; prison ward. Cook translates this: "*Above all keeping, keep thine heart.*" Rotherham and Leeser translate it, "*Above all that must be guarded, keep thine heart.*"

The outflowing of heart promptings may be likened to the flow of water from a spring. It is the desire to keep this overflow pure, healthful, refreshing. The springs of the East, like their water-wells, were jealously guarded. A stone was frequently rolled across the entrance and the opening closed. A closed spring was called a sealed spring and thus became a type of all that must be most diligently guarded. The inner thoughts, the thoughts of the heart, are like a spring of water which must be kept pure to be effectively used by the Lord. "*Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.*" (Col. 3. 5). "*For they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*" (Gal. 5. 24).

Keeping the heart implies more than physical action. It means the putting on the mind or will of Christ in faithful performance of the will of the Father. The mind of Christ lifts us to the better things we seek. In proportion as we heed the teachings of our Lord, we grow nearer to God and his likeness. We become meek, gentle, ever increasing in the fruits of the Holy Spirit and in the character likeness of Jesus our Messiah and Example. As we apply the teachings of Divine love we find our efforts assailed by inadequacy of the flesh. Mental and spiritual vigilance, diligent, continuous effort is required if success is to be attained. The sooner we comprehend this great truth, the sooner we overcome our complacency, the better it will be for us. Perhaps this is because we wrestle not against flesh and blood alone, but against the Devil himself. (Eph. 6. 11, 12). "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.*" (1 Pet. 5. 8). Therefore, "*When thou goest with thine adversary before the magistrate—give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him*" (Luke 12. 58). Satan is the "accuser of the brethren". (Rev. 12. 10). This expression, "give diligence", is exceedingly old. It is not a Latinism, but is found in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri of the second century before Christ. It means to work hard, to do your best. Rotherham translates this text, "*Take pains to get a release from him.*" We know this can be done

through the grace given us by our Lord.

The Lord's people occupy different places in the Body of Christ. We differ in opportunity, in ability, in understanding. But whether one is a Thomas, a Peter, Paul or John, in ministry to others we are urged to exercise simplicity, diligence, cheerfulness. (Rom. 12. 8). The sixth to the tenth verses of the twelfth chapter of Romans are well worth study in this connection. Even translators differ in their understanding of the Greek. Rotherham says, "*He that ruleth with diligence,*" while the Syriac reads, "*the presider (or the one standing at the head) with dexterity.*"

The word used for diligent in the Greek is *ergasia*. The same word is used in 2 Cor. 8. 7 and is translated by Bullinger "In all diligence or in all carefulness." Rotherham gives us, "in all earnestness," but the Diaglott is still different, "but as you abound in everything, in faith, and in the Word; and in knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love also." The gift of our all to the service of our God. All brothers and sisters in Christ are designated leaders in some capacity. So many of them keep their lamps trimmed and burning. (Matt. 25).

The Apostle Paul in Heb. 6. 11 urges each one individually diligently to seek the full assurance of faith and hope that they may inherit the promises. The Syriac reads, "*and we desire, that each one of you may show this same activity, for the completion of your hope*". The warning is that if we go back to the Mosaic Law and Judaism, we cut ourselves off (Gal. 5. 4). By rejecting the Lord we put him to open shame; thus Paul's warning remains as a solemn admonition to all who profess to believe.

"*Provide in your faith, honesty, virtue, purity.*" (2 Pet. 1. 5). If you have God's gifts, prove you have them by using them. "Yea, and for this reason", God began his good work in us. We must build on, "contributing all diligence". It is only a little we can do at best. It is only by diligent culture, Christian graces can grow. It is in this diligence we make our offering, while God works in us to both will and do his good pleasure. (Phil. 2. 13). Thus it is, God's gift of faith must be evidence by our fruits of faith. Energy, diligence must be exhibited in the life of the consecrated. "*In your faith exercise virtue and in your virtue knowledge.*"

"*Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence*" because, by the constant possession and increase of God's graces we become more fruitful. Our increase in diligent zeal may be attributed to our intelligent use of the graces God has already given. As we increase our knowledge and apply our hearts to God's beneficent plans and purposes, we will be able to produce greater fruitage. Our

calling and election must be made sure. The Diaglott rendering of 2 Pet. 1. 10 is, "more earnestly endeavour to make your calling and election sure", while the Syriac reads, "be exceedingly diligent."

Again we have the admonition by the saintly Jude. Dr. Cook translates Jude 3, "*Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you and exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*" In this case the word diligence is used to translate the Greek word *spoude*, meaning dispatch, earnestness, carefulness, diligence, instant haste. Diligence here indicates the writer's chief care was to warn the Church against false teachers. The Diaglott gives it, "making all haste", while the Syriac says, "I take all pains to write".

Earnestly to contend for the faith conveys the thought of enthusiastic diligence. Stress should be laid on our sincerity, our honesty in being instant in service, both in season and out of season to us. We are to serve those needing us, not only when it is convenient, but also at times when it puts us to a lot of trouble. At all times we are to diligently and earnestly defend the Truth as given us by the Scriptures. Our contending is to be FOR the faith and not ABOUT the faith. The diligent, earnest contention which our Father will approve is prompted by a desire to have whatever the Scriptures teach, irrespective of preconceived ideas or personal preference. In all of our activities for the truth we should diligently manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit of Christ—gentleness, brotherly kindness, spiritual understanding, godly love and affection for those who are struggling to master self and progress in the narrow way of righteousness.

Again we have the urge to prompt intense effort in 2 Tim. 4. 9. Paul was nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He needed the prompt assistance of Timothy. He wrote, "Do thy diligence to come unto me." How strange we should put off for some more convenient time any service we can render to any of the Lord's people in assisting the efficiency of their ministry. The Concordant translation of this text reads, "Endeavour to come to me quickly." The Syriac reads, "Exert thyself to come quickly". The Diaglott reads, "Do thy best to come to me soon".

All of this means constructive action, prompt

action with the object of bringing praise to our God and a blessing to his people. The service of some is motivated by fear. With some it is superstition. The zeal of some is more or less ephemeral, while others are deceptive in presenting false teachings. The true servant of the Most High serves because of heart conviction and because of devout loving loyalty. He serves in the sincere hope he may be pleasing to his Lord irrespective of reward. That there is a reward is beyond question, but we do not love him because of reward. We love him because He first loved us. (1 Jno. 4. 19). We realise our Lord's work began first in ourselves, and He will finish that work.

Thus we follow our Lord's example in extending help to others. One of our most precious privileges in diligent helpfulness is that of extending a helping hand to those of like faith in their efforts to be diligent in service. Faith, fortitude, and knowledge prepare God's people to have patience with every effort put forth by others, irrespective of how weak they may be. Diligent, tactful patience is required in helping "Babes in Christ", in the task of encouraging the slow and the stupid, the excitable and the blundering, the over-confident and the sceptical.

This leads us to our own personal need. Let us be diligent in our devout service. Let us be diligent, constant, in controlling the use of our loving reverent service for our Father. Let us be diligent in bringing our all into cheerful, loving conformity to his will. No race, no battle will ever be won without diligent, enthusiastic effort. It costs something and the child of God must pay the price. If there is no cross there will be no crown. Piety and goodness spring from appreciative, grateful hearts who spontaneously delight in God's precepts and promises. In communion with God we offer our praise for every opportunity to serve him, to help our brethren, to let the light of our spiritual understanding shine forth in a world of perplexity and doubt.

At best we are but dust. We do not dare trust our own righteousness. By faith we fold about us the ample robe of Christ's righteousness and, with constant diligence, work out our own salvation knowing that holiness in service without which no man shall see the Lord. (Heb. 12. 14). Let us be diligent!

---

Eliphaz the Temanite, an Edomite Arab and a sincere worshipper of God, in his speech recorded in Job. 15.22, made a cogent remark when, talking of the typical unbeliever, he said "*he believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, although he is*

*waited for by the sword*" i.e., of death. This is the position of so many to-day as it apparently was then; men do not believe in an after-life and see nothing beyond death but oblivion. What a tragedy!



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

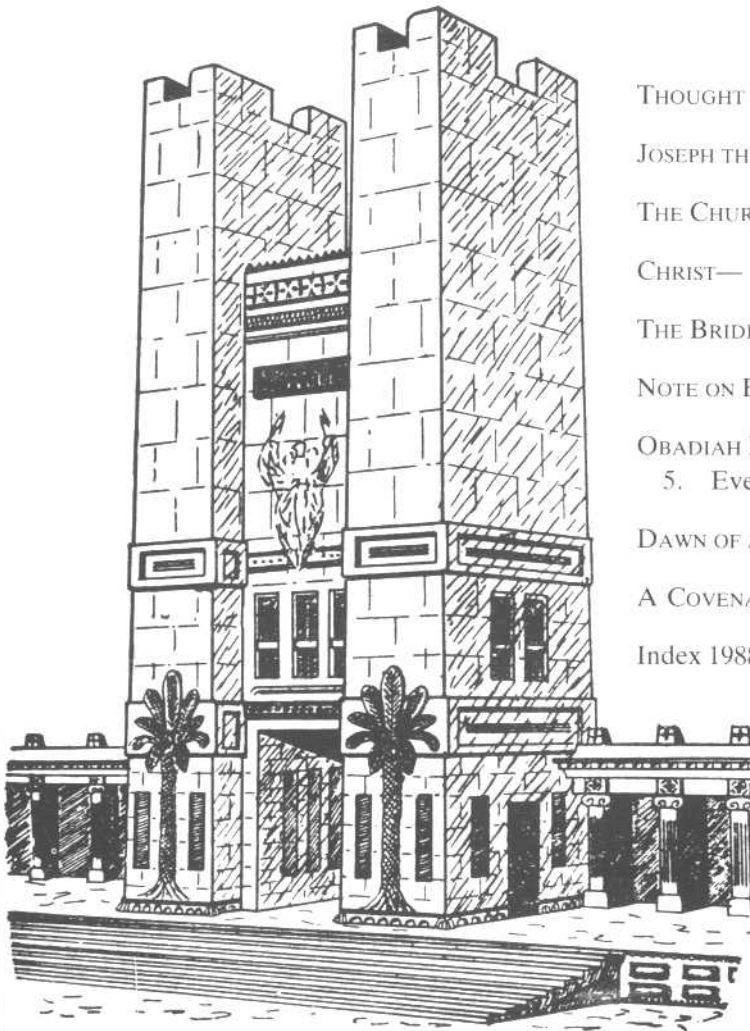
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## Thought for the Month

*"As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be . . . they knew not, until the Flood came, and took them all away" (Matt. 24. 37-39).*

In this context the words have relevance to the world of the present. The principle they enshrine is true of the politicians and the merchants of today. They are spoken of, and to, this generation. The leaders and rulers of this world seem totally oblivious to the dangers now threatening this planet on which we live, and that too because of the foolhardiness, and yes, the greed, of man. Voices are raised from lesser sources, men who by profession or vocation are qualified to speak with authority on the perils inherent in what is happening, but these men have no powers of direction or control; those who have, either do not care or are blinded by their own self-interest or, worst of all, see no way out of the dilemma into which they have plunged mankind.

Jesus saw this coming from his vantage point of two thousand years ago, and He said of the day He foresaw, a day which is now upon us, that there would be *"upon earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth, for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken"* (Luke 21. 25-26). Although He doubtless used the analogy metaphorically, there is a terrible significance in the words He used. "Roaring" is *exeo*, to sound as a signal or a warning (as in 1 Cor. 13.1—"sounding brass") and "shaken" is *saleuo*, to agitate, primarily of the motion caused by winds, storms, waves, and so on. Did Jesus know that in the day of which He was speaking the world would be in deadly peril from the effect of winds and waters, so much so that men's hearts would fail them for fear, as in fact they are now failing in face of the threatened "greenhouse effect" on world climate induced by man's own pollution of the environment—an effect brought on by winds and waters?

The danger is the excessive and continuing modern increase in the burning of coal, oil and natural gas on the one hand, and the cutting down of the world's forests on the other. The burning of these fuels produces carbon dioxide gas which in Nature is absorbed by plants and trees and induces their growth—but the trees are not there any more. Building up in the atmosphere, the carbon dioxide traps the sun's heat so that the world is "warming up". This in turn induces more evaporation from the oceans, so there is more rain, and the wind pattern changes; so there are floods in some places and droughts in others. Either way people die, either by drowning or starvation. The same burning of fuel also produces sulphur dioxide which falls to the ground and has the property of inhibiting photo-synthesis, the process by which sunlight causes trees and plants to grow, so that what is left after all the trees have been cut down also begins to go out of business. So the seas and waves are sounding their warning and the winds and waters add their agitation but no one does anything about it because no one knows what to do. No wonder Jesus said what He did.

But He did add one word and that makes all the difference, *"And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory"* (vs. 27). He intervenes in this world's affairs at the crucial moment to establish his universal kingdom and put things right.

## NOTICES

**An acknowledgment.** The Secretary of Gainsborough House has requested us to acknowledge in these columns, with sincere appreciation, the receipt of an anonymous donation to that enterprise from one who signs himself or herself simply "A servant", from one of the southern States of U.S.A. The kindly thoughtfulness is greatly esteemed.

**For readers in the 9000 series.** Have you returned your pink renewal form indicating desire to continue receiving the Monthly? If not, please do so at once to avoid having your name deleted from the list.

## JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

Tantalising in its brevity is that which the Gospels have to say about Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus. Responsible for the care and nurture of our Lord from birth to manhood, practically nothing concerning him has survived on record. The little that is said is confined to Jesus' infancy and boyhood, and the later life and the death of Joseph are veiled in obscurity. It is almost as if the writers of the four Gospels realised that the human family into which Jesus was born was nothing more than a means to an end, the avenue by which, coming from God, He entered the world of men. That purpose achieved, the affairs of the family were of no relevance to the object of the Gospel story and were allowed to lapse into oblivion. Just a few brief glimpses of his character are vouchsafed, almost like asides in the narrative, and it is worthwhile putting these together to form some kind of picture of the man to whose paternal care Jesus must have owed a great deal. He appears as a man of quiet faith and implicit trust in God and there is not much doubt that he was a chosen vessel just as much as was Mary for the great purpose which so soon overspread their young lives.

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

Mary must have been very young at the time, probably no more than eighteen. This is implied by

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

Despite his poverty, Joseph, like Mary his wife, was of royal lineage, descended from David the famous king of Israel. Their pedigrees merged together in Zerubbabel, the representative of the kingly line at the Return from Babylon, but Zerubbabel was the son of a "Levirate marriage" and although legally he was counted as the grandson of Jehoiachin the king, his blood descent was not from the kings of Judah through Solomon, but from Nathan, another son of David. Legally and officially, though, Joseph was of the royal line through Solomon and Jehoiachin on this account, and this is the genealogy of Joseph given by Matthew; literally both were of David through Nathan and Neri, and this is the genealogy of Mary given by Luke. It would appear that Joseph's line was senior to that of Mary from the time of Zerubbabel's grandsons, so that the royal rights of Jesus came to him through Joseph. This is why the angel addressed Joseph in Matt. 1. 20 as "*thou son of David*" and Luke referred to him as "*Joseph, of the house of David*" (Luke 1. 27).

The first sidelight on Joseph's character is revealed when he discovers that his affianced wife is to become a mother. Jewish custom of the time required an espousal period of twelve months preceding the actual marriage, but the espousal was an equally binding contract; Matt. 1. 18 shows that it was during this period that Joseph made the discovery. His first impulse was to have the contract

of marriage annulled on the ground of unfaithfulness, but quietly and privately to avoid public scandal out of consideration for his intended wife. Mary must have told him the truth of the matter as it is related by St. Luke (Luke 1. 26-36), that an angel had visited her and told her that she was to become the mother of the Messiah by an act of God without human aid or intervention. Whether Joseph believed her is another matter. Many Jewish women hoped they would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah but no one ever expected him to be born in any other than the customary manner; the Divine promise that He would be the lawful heir of David's throne demanded that in some valid way He must derive his descent from David. It is stated that Joseph was a righteous man; he was evidently devout and well grounded in the Faith and he was not going to take a decision until he had given the matter careful thought (Matt. 1. 20). He might not have been altogether surprised therefore when the angel of the Lord appeared to him also and confirmed Mary's story, telling him to name the coming child Jesus (Saviour or deliverer) "*for he shall save his people from their sins*". Joseph hesitated no longer; the decisiveness which seems to have been an element of his character came to the top, and apparently without further delay he completed the marriage formalities—which included the wedding feast—and with his newly-married wife settled down to await the coming event.

All this of course pre-supposes the truth of what is called by theologians "the doctrine of the Virgin birth". All kinds of objections to this are raised nowadays, and there is increasing disbelief that Jesus of Nazareth entered this world in any other than the usual manner. The only authority on the subject of Jesus' birth, however, is the New Testament and that is perfectly clear on the matter. And so was Joseph; much more so than many in later times who take leave to know better than those who were there. Joseph is presented in the narrative as knowing that the coming child was not his; he accepted the heavenly assurance that no human father was involved and that here was an instance of the operation of the Holy Spirit. He knew that such things could be so, because God was all-powerful, and he was content as well as believing. It is noteworthy that in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus on only three occasions is Joseph referred to as the father of Jesus, twice by the villagers and once by Mary (Jno. 6. 42, Luke 4. 22, Luke 2. 48) where the apparent earthly relationship would make it the natural thing to say. Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his father; He did use the expression "my Father" in reference to God some hundred times. Mary is described as the mother of Jesus some twenty-three times. The phrase

"Joseph and his mother" occurs twice. This quite evident exclusion of Joseph from the intrinsic fatherhood of Jesus is all the more noteworthy when it is realised that Jesus' legal right to the throne of David, a fundamental factor in his Messiahship, came to him through Joseph; had these narratives been fictional or in any way "dressed up" to prove Jesus the Messiah the writers would surely have made Joseph his natural father.

There was probably very little time for philosophical reflections, however, for Joseph had his living to earn and the responsibilities of married life. Whether he was a carpenter in timber or a metal worker or blacksmith—the Greek *tekton* means any of these although it is most often used for a carpenter in timber—is immaterial; he probably did all such work for the village and his living, although modest, was secure. But within a few weeks of settling down he was uprooted; by reason of a decree of Augustus Cæsar, the current Emperor, there was to be a general census of the people, and the effect of this upon Joseph and his wife was that they must appear before the enrolment officials in the recognised family district of their fathers. That district was Bethlehem, the birthplace of David their ancestor and of his fathers back to Boaz and Salmon of the time Israel settled the land. So Joseph and Mary set out on the eighty mile journey and almost immediately upon their arrival Jesus was born.

The details of that event are well known. The first visitors to the child were the shepherds from nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night just as David his illustrious ancestor had done a thousand years previously. Joseph was there but in the background; he is mentioned, but only just mentioned. This was true humility; he, as the surviving member of David's line, could surely expect some acknowledgement of seniority, at least until the child should have attained its majority. But no; Joseph knew that here he was standing face to face with the workings of God, that the child thus placed in his paternal care was not only David's son but also David's Lord (Matt. 22. 42-46). He was content to play the part allotted to him and discharge the duty assigned to him. In him resided the spirit of true consecration; "*I come . . . to do thy will, O God*".

The shepherds went their way and a month later the child was taken to the Temple and formally dedicated to the service of God. Again Joseph played a passive part. He was there, but that is all we know about it. He, together with Mary, "*wondered*" at the glowing words of Simeon the aged prophet foretelling the future glories to come by means of the child; "*light to lighten the nations, and the glory of thy people Israel*" (Luke 2. 32). A great honour for a humble village carpenter, Joseph



must have thought as they made their way out of the Temple courts and home to Nazareth (Luke 2. 39). But he was not even then to be left in peace to ply his craft. Before long King Herod had heard of the wondrous event and was sending his soldiers to find and slay this one who in his ignorance he feared as a threat to his own position. The child was a year old by now; the family's presence at Bethlehem shows that the time was one of the periodic feasts at which pious folk like Joseph and Mary would "go up to Jerusalem" for the occasion, and since their ancestral home was Bethlehem it is understandable that there they would lodge. Instructed by the angel, Joseph took his wife and child out of the town and made his way two hundred miles to Egypt where they would be beyond the King's jurisdiction; "*and was there until the death of Herod*" (Matt. 2. 15). Herod died early in the following year so the stay in Egypt was less than six months, during which time no doubt Joseph supported the family by his trade; then the voice of the angel came again, telling of the king's death and instructing him to return to the land of Israel. It seems that his intention was to settle in Bethlehem; he probably felt that the future mission of Jesus would demand close proximity to the capital city Jerusalem and he was prepared to subordinate his own life's plans and wishes to what appeared to be the Divine will, but he found that Herod's son Archelaus was now reigning and he was nearly as much a menace as the old king. Again, it seems, he sought Divine guidance, and, following the response he sought, went on into Galilee and settled in his old home town of Nazareth, outside Archelaus' jurisdiction. So, for a few years at least, he found peace and quietness in which to nurture his wife's firstborn son.

Only one recorded incident breaks the silence of the next thirty years. Every year Joseph and Mary travelled to Jerusalem—in common with many others—to observe the Feast of the Passover. In Jesus' twelfth year, as they set out to return to Nazareth, somehow they lost him. A day out on the journey they discovered that He was not with the company and they returned to Jerusalem to find him. After three days search He was discovered in the Temple courts, listening to and questioning the venerable Doctors of the Law, the theologians of the day. Said Mary to him, probably reproachfully, "*thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing*" but already the active mind of the lad was reaching out towards his life's mission. "*Do you not understand?*" He told them gently "*that I must be in my Father's courts?*" But they did not understand; "*they understood not the saying which he spake unto them*" (Luke 2. 50). They were already beginning to lose him, as was ordained. He remained a dutiful son; "*he went down with them*

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

We hear no more of Joseph. We know from the Gospels that he and Mary had four sons—James, Joses, Jude, Simon—and at least two daughters, all younger than Jesus, so that they must have had a reasonably long married life together. His death is not recorded; from the fact that Jesus commended his mother to the care of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, at the Crucifixion, it would appear that he died before that event. The casual remarks of the villagers in Luke 4. 22 and Jno. 6. 42 "*Is not this Joseph's son?*" and "*Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*" would seem to infer that he was alive at those times, approximately summer of A.D. 30 and spring of A.D. 31 respectively. Matt. 13. 55 might imply the same conclusion as to the autumn of A.D. 30. There are some indications that Mary and the family at least made their home in Capernaum during the early part of our Lord's ministry. He himself never went back to Nazareth after the villagers' rejection of him at the beginning—and Jesus did visit Capernaum some ten times during the first two years, but never after the summer of A.D. 31. Soon after that time comes his first recorded visit to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary at Bethany, which seems to have been the nearest approach to a home He possessed towards the end. From all of this it might be inferred that Joseph died, perhaps at Capernaum, about the middle of A.D. 31, nearly two years before the Crucifixion, at which time he might well have been sixty years of age, a not uncommon life span in those days. The rest of the family would have been young men and women, some already married, but from Jno. 7. 5 it is known that none of them were in sympathy with Jesus, so that after Joseph's death Mary might have attached herself to the other women, her sister Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary of Magdala, Salome and Joanna, who were disciples of Jesus, instead of making her home with any of her own children. That would



explain why Jesus, on the Cross, placed her in John's care although she had children living. Later on, after the Resurrection, James and Jude became converts; possibly one or more of the others did also. At any rate Acts 1. 14 makes it clear that at the first complete assembly of believers after the Ascension both Mary and either some or else all of his brothers were present. Among the arguments for the truth of the Resurrection that are advanced it is not often remarked that Jesus' brothers, who had formerly disbelieved, became believers in the light of the things that had happened; where they had failed to be convinced by his life they were convinced by his death and resurrection.

Joseph, his life's work done, passed quietly and silently from the scene. It may seem a hard and somewhat callous way in which to treat a faithful servant of God who had discharged his commission faithfully throughout life but it is not really so, and Joseph was not the only one. Moses, the greatest man in Israel's history, died alone and unseen amid the fastnesses of Mount Nebo *"and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day"*; Samuel, whose wise administration and sterling worth converted an undisciplined rabble of warring tribes into a God-fearing nation, died an old man, bereft of power and authority, in a country village sur-

rounded only by a few student lads; Elijah, who challenged and overthrew idolatry in Israel, went out alone into the wilderness beyond Jordan and was caught away by a whirlwind and never seen again; Daniel, who for more than seventy years held up the banner of the faith in idolatrous Babylon and kept alive the national hope of eventual deliverance, saw the fulfilment of the promise and the triumphant departure of the people of Judah, but was too old to share in the deliverance himself, and he died unrecorded in Babylon. God attaches no importance to the earthly body and the earthly life once his purpose with the individual is achieved. The body goes to the dust; that which is preserved in the strong hands of God comes forth to a new life in a new environment, resplendent in a glory which is enhanced by the merit of the former life's work well done.

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

## TRIALS

It is for this very purpose that the Lord permits us to be subject to the various vicissitudes of the present life, and that those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven suffer violence at the hands of an unfriendly world. There are lessons of immense value to be learned in his hard school of experience—lessons of faith, of fortitude, of heroism, of courage, of endurance, of meekness, of patience, of sympathy, and of loving helpfulness to others. There are works of grace to be wrought out in us which only the hard experiences of life can accomplish. We might be inclined to lean too much to our own understanding, if we were not at times brought face to face with problems that baffle our skill. It is when we are "afraid to touch things that involves so much," that in our perplexity we come to him who has said, *"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee,"* and ask him to undertake for us. Or we might be inclined to trust too much in the arm of flesh, if the arm of flesh had never failed us, and the disappointment driven us to the Lord to seek the shelter of his wing. Or we

might learn to trust in uncertain riches, if moth and rust had never corrupted nor thieves stolen the little or much of our earthly possessions. Or we might have been satisfied with earthly friendships and earthly loves, had not their loss sometimes left us alone with God to prove the sweetness of his consolation. Or we might be weak and feeble, had not the storms of life swept over us and the very emergencies of our case nerved us to courage, endurance and Christian fortitude. In view of all these necessities to the development of character, the Christian can truly feel that whatever the Lord permits to come upon him will be made to work together for his good; and in this confidence he can peacefully sing:—

*"If on a quiet sea toward home I calmly sail,  
With grateful heart, O God, to thee, I'll own  
the favouring gale.  
But should the surges rise, and rest delay  
to come,  
Blest be the tempest, kind the storm, which  
drives me nearer home."*

Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold

them because they do not suffer themselves to think.

J. S. Mill.

## THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

*A story of  
St. Paul*

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

Yet it was to Corinth that the Lord Christ, appearing in vision to Paul, referred when He bade him remain and continue his work in confidence "*for I have much people in this city.*" To the human observer the evidence was all to the contrary; no reasonable man would expect anything in the nature of a religious revival here. But the Divine viewpoint is different. "Man seeth not as God seeth, for man looketh upon the outward appear-

ance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart." God looked upon the mass of corruption that was Corinth and knew that out of that unpromising material He could fashion vessels fitted to honour, men and women drawn from the morass of iniquity and depravity to become upright, clear thinking servants of righteousness, worthy citizens of the world that is to be. "Miracles of grace" someone has called them. Perhaps only St. Paul, working in the midst of that darkness and hopelessness, could rightly assess the wonder of that miracle.

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

Following his usual practice, Paul started by seeking out the local synagogue. Here at least he could be sure of finding men and women of his own race and his own religion. And here he met with an unexpected encouragement and commenced a personal friendship which was to have far-reaching consequences in later years. For the first time in his travels he met a couple who were already adherents of the Christian faith. Aquila was an Asiatic Jew, recently resident in Rome, married to a Roman wife, Priscilla. They had been affected by the decree of Claudius Cæsar banishing all Jews from Rome. According to the Roman historian

Suetonius this decree was issued in consequence of continued tumults and riots among the Jews in Rome instigated by one Chrestus. There is much debate among scholars as to whether this was the name of an otherwise unknown individual or, corrupted from Christus, is a reference to Jewish opposition to the introduction of Christianity in Rome, but no one really knows. But these circumstances, coupled with the fact that nothing is said about their conversion or baptism and the evident close association with them into which Paul entered at once makes it a reasonable conclusion that they were Christians already. It is fairly certain that the Christian faith arrived in Rome—by what means or by whom is entirely unknown—within a few years of the crucifixion and by now there was a substantial Christian community in the capital of the Empire. From these two, therefore, Paul must have had his first information about the city to which his thoughts so often turned and where at last he was to suffer martyrdom.

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

It was thus that Silas and Timothy caught up with him at last, having chased him almost the entire length, north to south, of Greece. Luke remained at Philippi still. Dissolute Corinth as yet had heard nothing of the message; probably no one outside the Jewish community so much as knew of Paul's existence. All his efforts at the moment were directed to the conversion of his fellow Jews. Comparison of Acts 18.4 with verses 5-6 appears to infer that at the first his message was received, if not with enthusiastic support, at least with a measure of acceptance, sufficient to give hope of good results. The advent of Silas and Timothy, however, together with an evident intensification of the practical implications of Christianity, evoked strong opposition even to the extent of blasphemy. Perhaps some of the permanent officials of the synagogue felt that this apparent continuing influx of Christian missionaries was carrying things too far and threatened to disturb the security of their

own position. Paul realised that he was going to get no farther with these stubborn co-religionists of his; he had seen the same thing so many times before. "*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean*" he exclaimed. "*From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*".

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

Despite this apparently unpropitious start, the work of the Apostle Paul at Corinth was the most gloriously successful of his entire missionary journey. Neither in Asia nor in Greece did he achieve



such results at any other place. By the time he left Corinth eighteen months later there was a large and flourishing community which, for all its faults—and they were many and have become proverbial in later Christian thought and homily—was for ever after very dear to Paul's own heart. The two Epistles to the Corinthians reflect so much of the frailties and weaknesses of human nature that the figures which move through their pages are real and personal to all of us; they are so like real men and women—even Christian men and women, beset by shortcomings and mistakes like all people—that we cannot but feel quick sympathy with them. Time and time again they fell into grievous error; time and time again their father in God admonished them, sternly and judicially, yet with love and tenderness. In so many ways the church at Corinth prefigured in miniature just what the church of Christ in the world was to be like in later days.

In the meantime the members of the synagogue next door were not idle. They were biding their time. That time came when the Roman Pro-Consul ("deputy" in Acts 18.12) retired and was replaced by a successor. Now is the time, the synagogue Jews must have thought, while the new man is feeling his way and will not want to risk upsetting established officials or institutions, for an attempt to get rid of Paul and his evangelising. So they laid their plans and somehow had Paul arrested and arraigned before the new governor. "*When Gallio was deputy*" (became pro-consul) "*of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying 'this fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law'*".

Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio was a refined, cultured, genial member of a distinguished Roman family, popular among his contemporaries at Rome and celebrated for his kindly disposition. His brother, the philosopher Seneca, wrote of him "No mortal man is so sweet to any person as he is to all mankind." He represented the best type of Roman administrator, just and impartial in upholding the law and not influenced by either the praise or the threats of those with whom he had to do. He certainly gave the complainants in this case short shrift. Without waiting to hear Paul's defence he brusquely quashed the proceedings. Had it been an accusation of crime against property or person, of flagrant immorality or an offence against the laws of the State "*reason would that I should bear with you*" he said. It does not seem that Gallio rated the sincerity of these Jews very highly. He was perhaps better briefed than they had imagined. "*But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law*" (the law of Moses) "*look ye to it, for I will be no judge of such matters.*" It is

clear that Gallio saw through their subterfuge at once, and made it crystal clear at the outset that they were not going to use Roman jurisprudence to serve their own sectarian ends; not while he was Pro-Consul, anyway. "*And he drove them from the judgment seat.*" The word indicates a forcible expulsion; it is evident that at his signal the Roman lictors (guards) hurried their exit by the indiscriminate use of their staves, and the discomfited schemers found themselves in the street with nothing achieved, and a few painful bruises to boot.

Popular feeling in Corinth was evidently with Paul, for by way of sequel to these ineffective court proceedings a number of Greek citizens laid hold on Sosthenes, who had evidently succeeded Crispus as ruler of the synagogue, carried him to a position in the street immediately in front of the court where Paul had been arraigned, and administered a sound beating in full view of the representatives of law and order. The proceeding was undoubtedly altogether illegal, and carried out at the place constituted somewhat of a slight upon the dignity of Roman rule, but "*Gallio cared for none of those things.*" Despite his customary good nature and courtliness, it is apparent that on this occasion he was thoroughly disgusted with the machinations of Paul's enemies and decided that one salutary lesson at the outset might save him a lot of trouble in the future. It would only need a hint to the centurion to ensure that the lictors on guard would watch the administering of the beating impassively and abstain from interference; without much doubt Sosthenes and his supporters would "get the message" as it is said today, and be more careful in future. Certain it is that the Christian community in Corinth had no further trouble with their Jewish antagonists. Paul remained at Corinth for eighteen months, probably evangelising much of the district round about in addition to his work in the city. Before he left, a companion church existed at Cenchrea, eight miles away. The magnitude of the work achieved, compared with that at other centres, is indicated by the fact that the New Testament records the names of some seventeen notable converts originating from Corinth. At least five of them—Aquila, Priscilla, Erastus who held the important official office of City Treasurer, Gaius, and Phoebe the deaconess of Cenchrea—in after days travelled the world serving the interests of the developing faith. Paul sailed away at last, accompanied by his co-labourers Silas and Timothy, and his more recently acquired friends Aquila and Priscilla, doubtless feeling that this experience was the highlight of his journey. The most unpromising soil had yielded the richest harvest.

From Cenchrea the little party sailed to Ephesus



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

So ended the second missionary journey. Paul and Silas had been away from home for some two years of which eighteen months had been spent at Corinth. It had been an eventful two years. They had met and enrolled St. Luke at Troas and left him to work at Philippi. They had taken the youthful Timothy from Lystra and brought him to Antioch; found Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth and left them to serve at Ephesus. Half a dozen other converts, made during this journey, were later to join the Apostle in his further works; Aristarchus

and Secundus of Thessalonica, Sopater of Berea, Phoebe of Cenchrea, Erastus and Tertius of Corinth, all figure later on in the history. The two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written during this sojourn in Corinth; they were the first of the present books of the New Testament to be written. The stalwart form of the Apostle was probably a little bent; he must have shewn some outward evidence of the appalling physical sufferings he had endured during that two years but his spirit was as unconquerable as ever. He was still and for all time God's man, commissioned to plant the Gospel in regions where it had never yet been preached and to lay the foundations of the worldwide Christian church. Both he and Silas were bound to be glad of a rest and respite under the ministrations of their own brethren at Antioch, rehearsing in the assembly the triumphs and achievements of this notable mission which had its real beginning when Paul in his dream at night saw that Greek stranger reaching out appealing hands across the sea and heard his urgent plea "*come over into Macedonia and help us.*" (To be continued)

## NOT FORSAKEN

"He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13.5). These words were first spoken to Joshua when he was about to lead Israel into the Promised Land (Josh. 1.5). There was a corollary, for the Lord went on to say "*Be strong and of a good courage.*" Joshua had to play his part also. It was in the strength of that assurance that he went in, and conquered.

But does the Lord forsake his people at times? The Psalmist certainly thought so upon occasion. "*How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?*" he implored on one occasion (Psa. 34), "*For ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*". His enemies seemed to be getting the better of him and all seemed lost. God had forgotten to be gracious. But he soon plucked up courage and was strong. "*I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.*" Like Joshua of old, he put his fears from him and went forward in confidence in the strength of the Lord. He knew the secret; "*I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*" (Psa. 34.4). Even the mighty Apostle Paul went through this experience at times, as witness the occasion of his leaving Roman Asia to go into Greece (Acts 16.19). Luke's narrative reads as though he seized the opportunity with alacrity and went into Greece without any misgiving. But later on when writing to the Corinthians Paul reveals another side to the story. "*When we were come into Macedonia the flesh had no rest, but*

*we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears*" (2 Cor. 7.5). What was the tumult in his mind which gave rise to feelings so alien to the sturdy spirit so usually presented to us in the history? Was it the mysterious illness from which he suffered when in Galatia just previously? (Gal. 4), and did he shrink somewhat from the unknown rigours he might suffer in a strange country? Roman Asia he knew well—he was born there—but Greece and Rome, these were strange lands and strange peoples. Whatever it was, he remembered that God would never leave nor forsake him, and like Joshua, he took courage as he went into the unknown, so that he was able to say "*Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us*". So he was able to pen the immortal words of 2 Cor. 4.8-9, "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Cast down, but not destroyed*". In that power he completed his work of evangelising Greece with the Gospel.

So it can be with us. The same Apostle told us "*Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*" (*phobos*—terror) "*but ye have received the spirit of sonship*" (Rom. 8.15) "*There is no fear*" (*phobos*—terror) "*in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment*" says John (1 John 4.18). And the writer to the Hebrews crowns the exhortation with his triumphant "*so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man can do unto me*".

It had all been said before. King David of old time passed through many harrowing experiences before he became king. He never forgot them but he had triumphed. Years later he put them into song and they are preserved to this day in Psalm 27. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom

*shall I be afraid? . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, to this will I be confident . . . I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."*

## CHRIST — A KING

From the dawn of history men have clamoured for kings to reign over them. The pomp and circumstances of government, the pride of leadership, and the desire of men to organise together for the carrying out of agreed purposes has made the office of a leader an essential factor in human society. Whether the man occupying such a position be called a king, a president or a dictator, the difference is but one of name. He is the head of the nation, and the director of his people's destinies. Men demand leadership, and men will follow a leader for good or for evil. All of earth's kings have been imperfect men. They have strutted here and there upon their tiny stage and then passed out of sight. Some have been good, but in the main they have caused misery and suffering. Their recorded actions have to do chiefly with wars and oppression, self-indulgence and self-aggrandisement. The best-known names are those associated with unusual cruelty, vice or ruthlessness—Nero, Herod, Napoleon, our own King John. The world's experience of kings has been a sad one indeed.

Man-made government is on the wane. Humanity is facing the abyss. There have been many forms of rulership tried in the past. They have all failed. Not one has achieved peace and happiness, true liberty and nobility. In our day contending systems are struggling for supremacy and whatever the issue of the immediate struggle there can be no doubt that eventually during the course of this Time of Trouble, they will all fail. Men have their ideals, but the ability to translate them into practice is lacking. With the best intentions in the world, statesmen cannot construct a system which can maintain world peace. And so the cry rises up from every quarter: "Where is the superman who can restore order by building society anew on right principles? Where is the inspired leader who can attain to so complete a control of this disintegrating world that he will guide humanity with sure hand into the ways of peace?"

That man must possess unusual and far-reaching qualifications. He must command the respect and confidence of all men. He must be able to exact implicit obedience during the transition stage, and have effective power to restrain the aggressor against law and order without in his turn doing

injustice to that aggressor. He must understand the principles upon which society must be built if it is to endure. He must succeed in abolishing poverty, disease, selfishness and crime, dealing with it, not by punishment, but by conversion and regeneration. He must be able to guarantee man's happiness by destroying death and giving all men life under ideally happy conditions. The world would soon accept such an one, if he could be found—but where is he?

He is Christ—the King!

Hear his own testimony!

*"I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world."*

There was a time when the people would have accepted him as King. They hailed him the Son of David when He rode into Jerusalem on that eventful morning. There was an occasion when they would "take him by force, to make him a King" (John 6, 15), and He withdrew himself into a solitary place to defeat their intention. From time immemorial had Israel looked for just such a king to fulfil the glowing prophecies of Isaiah—one who could heal the sick and raise the dead, one possessed of powers against which mortal man could not stand, one who could at a word destroy all the enemies of Israel, and restore the Kingdom of the Lord to the glory it enjoyed in the days of David and Solomon. Many among those people must have remembered the stories they had heard in their youth. This man was the subject and the hero of those stories. The angel Gabriel, the chief messenger of God, had appeared to his mother Mary, and told her of the coming child, that "*He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David*" (Luke 1. 32). The angels of heaven had sung at his birth in the hearing of men still living, "*Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2. 11). The aged Simeon, long since gathered to his fathers, had been known to proclaim this one, when a babe in arms, as one that would be a "*light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel*" (Luke 2. 32). Even the famous prophet, John the Baptist, had hailed him as the Coming One Who would take away the sin of the world. Surely, surely, He would accept the position so

clearly marked out for him in the purposes of God, and assert his right to reign as King in Jerusalem, to the joy and exaltation of God's people Israel!

But it was not to be! The time was not yet! He was born to be King; but his crown then was of thorns, his throne then was a cross, his raiment then was parted amongst soldiery. His followers then were dispersed and scattered. A most unlikely commencement for a King!

It was left to the Apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesian Christians long afterwards, to declare the marvellous triumph behind that apparent tragedy. "*When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men*" (Eph. 4. 8). The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is the foundation upon which the whole Christian faith is built. Without that supreme sequel to his life on earth his Kingship could never become a reality and men would be quite without hope. It is because He rose from the dead that we proclaim confidently sin and death will be abolished, because the way is clear for Jesus to fulfil the promise He made before his death—"If I go . . . I will come again" (John 14. 3).

He promised to come again—in due time. The angels who spoke to those disciples, gazing into the heavens which had just received him out of their sight, said to them: "*This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1. 11). When the passion and greed of men reaches its inevitable climax and plunges the world into a maelstrom of destruction from which there is no human way out—*He returns*. When men's power to rule and control the world has utterly failed, He comes to restore order out of chaos.

That time is here. To-day there is no help in man. Like Israel of old, described so vividly in Psalms 107. 27, the world's institutions "reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm . . . so He bringeth them to their desired haven." It is because Christ has ascended into the heavens and death no more has dominion over him that we hail his return—Christ, our King.

What will his return accomplish?

First, the raising of the dead. He does not return to conduct a Day of Judgment of the kind pictured in mediæval theology. There will be no falling mountains and shrill trumpet blasts to terrify multitudes of trembling sinners. It will certainly be a day of judgment, a day which God has "appointed . . . to judge the world by that man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17. 31)—but it is to be a judgment in which education and evangelism are to play their parts before the final and irrevocable choice is

offered to man. All shall return. "*All that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth*" (Jno. 5. 28).

Secondly, there will be a great restraint of evil. The arch-enemy of mankind, Satan, is to be "bound" for the whole duration of the Millennium, and will be quite unable during all that time to deceive and ensnare men. Moreover, the power of earth's new king will be extended in some at present inexplicable manner so that no man will be able to do harm or injury to another. "*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain*" (Isa. 11. 9). Men will die for their own sins if after full and fair opportunity to repent it is manifest that they are irrevocably set against all righteousness, but no one will either die or suffer in any way on account of the sin of others. There will be a benevolent restraining force in operation to prevent anyone from being hindered or thwarted in their own personal endeavours to come into harmony with God and his righteousness. So will men gradually learn the underlying principles upon which God's creation is founded and by which it must endure, preparatory to making their own choice between good and evil, life and death.

There will thus be a steady progression in righteousness in the earth inspired by the educational influences controlled by earth's new King. "*Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Isa. 2. 3). There will be those in the earth who will "turn many to righteousness" (Dan. 12. 3), teachers, already trained and fitted for their work by past experiences, those who in long ages past had served God faithfully amidst discouragement and persecution, enduring "as seeing him Who is invisible" (Heb. 11. 27). Together with this goes the development of the earth and its resources. Man's original commission was to possess the earth and subdue it, making use of all its wealth and possibilities for the general good and happiness (Gen. 1. 26). Under earth's new King there will be progress in invention and knowledge, the study of art and science for its own sake, on a scale never before known. The results of all that study and progress will be used for the betterment and the wellbeing of humanity and not for its misery and destruction, as is so often the case at present.

Then comes the operation of the Divine decree: "*It shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from amongst the people*" (Acts 3. 23). There can be no such thing as eternal life allied with sin, as Paul realised when he said so plainly in Rom. 6. 23, "*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" It is not revenge on God's part; neither is it an arbitrary and unreasoning punishment. It is the inevitable and only possible

consequence of an intelligent being's refusal to order his life by the standards which God has ordained to ensure the happiness of his creatures. So it is true that by the end of the Millennium there will be none but pure, upright, supremely happy beings upon earth. The last shadow of evil and its allies, sin and death, will have vanished for ever. The Kingship of Christ on earth will have achieved

its purpose, the abolition of evil, sin and death, and the reconciliation of mankind to God. The human race will be conducting its affairs in complete accord with God and the laws of righteousness. Every man will be a king in his own right, the equal of every other, and the world enter upon an era of peace and happiness which shall never end.

## THE BRIDE'S ADORNING

*An exhortation*

*"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying: Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."*

Thus does the inspired Apostle, being in the Spirit on the Lord's day, give account of the tremendous ovation which is called forth from the heavenly hosts upon this, the greatest occasion in the history of heaven and earth.

*"The Lord God reigneth."* Prophets of old have foretold the wondrous events which will accompany this great occasion; and the more we consider their utterances, the more do we long for the time when this cry shall go forth throughout heaven and earth.

*"The marriage of the Lamb is come."* What visions of rapture appear before the eyes of all who hope to be present at this great event, as they await that mystic union with their beloved Lord and Head.

*"His Bride hath made herself ready."* What are the thoughts and emotions of the remaining members of this select company as they wait patiently for the call to take their appointed place in this, the most privileged and honoured assemblage of all time?

The first and second phrase of this passage cannot be fulfilled until the third is accomplished, so, as we await with eager expectation for these cries to go forth, we do well to turn our attention to the more immediate matter of the preparation of the bride.

In the natural picture, we see that much preparation and labour of love is necessary before the actual marriage ceremony takes place.

In modern times, both the prospective bride and bridegroom prepare the home together, while the preparation of the wedding garment is the portion of the bride-to-be.

In Israel, in John's day, the matter was a little different. The bridegroom prepared the new home, to which he would later invite his betrothed, while the prospective bride remained with her parents and prepared her wedding garment. When

all was ready, all business was suspended, and the bridegroom travelled to the bride's home, heralded by the singing and playing of accompanying musicians. Later, escorted by the festal crowd, the two would make their way to the bridegroom's house, where the bride, veiled, perfumed and adorned, would be formally received.

Here we have a real picture of the Heavenly Bride and Bridegroom. How many details bring to our minds the various passages in the Word which tell of the journeyings of the Bridegroom, of the cry which greets him as He returns, and of the presentation of his beloved Bride to his Heavenly Father.

Way back in the beginning of the Age, the Master told his disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them, and that when He had prepared this heavenly home, He would come and fetch them, that they might dwell with him there (John 14. 2-3).

Whilst the Bridegroom has been preparing the heavenly home, how has the Bride been occupied these many years? Surely she has been making herself ready for the promised union.

John continues in his record of the vision, *"And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."*

We note that, whilst it is customary in this country for the bride to be clothed in white, in Israel it was, and still is, the custom for the bride to be clothed in a white garment richly embroidered in bright colours. So in Rev. 19 the bride is described as being clothed in fine linen, clean and "bright" (*margin*)—bright with embroidery, as portrayed in Psa. 45. 14-15 (*Leeser*). *"All gloriously attired awaiteth the King's daughter in the inner chamber; of wrought gold is her garment. In embroidered clothes will she be brought unto the King."*

Much time and labour is spent in preparing this heavily embroidered robe and veil, for it is worked with symmetrical designs of traditional pattern, traced in silk stitching of brilliant colours.

The picture of the prospective bride applying herself diligently and continuously to this work of richly embroidering her wedding garment, working the hundreds of tiny stitches which make up the



whole, can be used to portray the Church as she labours to perfect that beauty of character with which she will be perfumed and adorned upon her wedding day.

The Bride of the heavens will be composed of many members, so each one can only contribute a very small portion of that "embroidery" which will adorn the bridal robe; therefore, as each member accepts, by faith, the covering of Christ's righteousness, they receive, as it were, a small portion of this robe, and it becomes their life's work to embroider it according to the Divine instructions.

The essentials for embroidery are few and simple, yet when used with industry and care can produce truly beautiful results.

First of all, a piece of material is required as a basis for the work; next a pattern traced thereon; then, a good supply of silk threads of various colours.

If we are to make the best use of these materials, it is essential that we have clean hands, a good light, good eyesight, and a large capacity for patient and persevering effort.

In applying this spiritually, we have already seen that the piece of material may be likened to a portion of the covering robe of Christ's righteousness, but we need a pattern traced thereon. This, too, is provided for us in the example which Jesus left as recorded in the Gospels, and amplified in the Epistles. This, and this alone, is the only pattern acceptable to him who designed the whole; should we attempt any pattern other than this, it would not merge with the other portions, and would be discarded as useless.

The threads of various colours are the many precepts and teachings of the Bible which we gather when we meet together in fellowship, or study the Word in private.

Because of our human limitations, we can only obtain a few strands at a time, so we need to come often to the store, remembering that, unlike earthly stores, there are no closing hours; whether we come by day or night, we are sure to obtain enough to carry on with until we can come again.

All these materials are supplied by our Heavenly Father at no cost to ourselves, but we must come to him day by day to ask and seek for them, thus showing our eagerness to accomplish the work set before us.

To make the best use of these materials, and execute creditable work, we must have "clean hands". Although we have been cleansed in the precious blood of Jesus, constant contact with the world results in our becoming contaminated, and we need continually to come to the cleansing stream to wash away the earth-stains, lest we should mar our little portion.

We need also a good light to carry out our life's

work, but darkness still hangs over the world like a shroud, so we must seek at all times to dwell in that marvellous light into which all the saints are called. This light, shining out from the inner courts of heaven, is that same light which led, guided and comforted our Lord as He traced, through sorrow and suffering, the pattern of holiness and sanctification which is set before us.

This supernatural light would be of little use, however, if we had not eyes to see; but the eyes of our understanding have been enlightened that we may know what is the hope which his call to us inspires, and having this hope before us, and beholding the riches of our inheritance, we need to exercise this same spiritual sight in applying ourselves to the work of preparing to receive the same, when this wonderful hope becomes a glorious reality.

All these essentials too, clean hands, a good light and clear sight, are provided by the Giver of every good and perfect gift, but it is our part to keep our hands clean, to remain in the light of heaven, and to keep our spiritual vision clear, developing more and more a capacity for patient and persevering effort, not lapsing into the lukewarmness which brought blindness to the Laodiceans, for should our eyesight fail, all the other gifts would be of no avail.

As we toil on through life, we find both helps and hindrance to our work of character development. Not only have we the pattern traced upon our little portion, but we have the example of other imperfect men who have succeeded in completing their allotted portions. Peter, the unstable and impetuous, became calm and immovable; James and John, who would have called down fire from heaven to destroy those who rejected their Master, became true followers of his teachings; Philip, the slow-witted; Thomas, the sceptic; Matthew, the despised tax-collector; Simon, the fanatic, and, later, Paul, the destroyer, all overcame their natural disabilities, and worked out in their lives the desired pattern.

But, someone may say, I have not the same opportunities as they; my little patch seems to consist of just one straight line; how I would like to work out a little more spectacular portion. We should remember that the straight lines are just as essential to the beauty of the pattern as are the more intricate parts, also that, even as in the natural picture, a straight line requires more care and attention, and is more difficult to execute than the more fancy parts. We should remember, too, that the Lord has designed the pattern, and has given us the portion best suited to us.

On the other hand, some may feel that their portion seems to be more like a series of short lines continually running out to the edge; they may be

just getting along nicely when they have to break off and start all over again, and may feel that they would rather have as their pattern one of the long straight lines which others seem to work out; but here again we must remember that the design is the Lord's, and that He knows what is best for us.

One day, to our great surprise and joy, we shall find that our broken lines link up with some other portion of the pattern, and will thus contribute to the glory of the robe.

*We'll catch the broken threads again,  
And finish what we here began;  
Heaven will the mysteries explain,  
And then, oh then, we'll understand.*

Sometimes we may feel that our surroundings are a hindrance to us in our endeavours to prepare for the future life; we may find our elbows constantly jogged, as it were, as we try to form the tiny stitches which make up the pattern. It is, of course, those nearest to us who do this, and we may be inclined to remonstrate, or even retaliate, but we must remember that they too may be struggling just as hard as we are, and we should look the other way, just to make sure that we are not jogging the elbow of the one next to us the other side.

On the other hand, we may have to work out our portion alone in the wilderness; that peculiar yet painful paradox of loneliness while surrounded by friends, relatives or brethren may be our experience. We may be in difficulty with our little patch, yet no one is at hand to help us, and we may become weary and discouraged, and wonder why we should be thus placed.

Surely it is in such experiences that we learn our utter dependence upon God, and learn to tap the vast resources of power which are stored up in heaven.

*Sometimes we need companionship,  
Sometimes "the wilderness,"  
How sweet to feel He'll know and give  
The state that most will bless.*

Another factor which may seem to hinder us is that the light by which we work is not diffused all around, but only illuminates just the portion immediately before us. This is not really a hindrance, but rather the wise provision of a loving Father. He kindly veils our eyes lest we should look ahead and see what lies before us; if we could see, we should probably lay down our work in despair; as it is, we need only to fix our attention upon that which is immediately before us, having no time to worry about the unseen future.

So the work must go on day by day; in joy or in sorrow, through pain or pleasure, in the company of others, or with Jesus alone, until each tiny stitch is rightly placed and correctly formed, and worthy to be a part of the glorious robe of the Bride of Heaven. Then, and not before, shall we be able to

lay down our needle.

In the natural picture, constant application to fine needlework brings on a strain; eyes become red, the sight dimmed; the head aches, the fingers become cramped, and the limbs become tired. So, in the spiritual picture, constant application to this work of character development brings on a strain, and sometimes we may feel tempted to lay down our work for a while, but, as we saw at the beginning, if we are to execute really good work which will be acceptable to our beloved Bridegroom, we shall need a large capacity for patient and persevering effort.

Even so, as we approach that part of the pattern which the Lord traced, we may feel the strain becoming greater. Feeling weary and exhausted, our eyes dimmed with tears, so that the pattern is but dimly seen, we must struggle on, remembering that it was at the cost of his own life that our Bridegroom was able to complete the perfect pattern, of which such a tiny portion is ours.

When, at last, our work is complete, it may seem to us of very little use, indeed of itself it will be poor indeed, but when in the hands of the Master it is skilfully joined to the other portions, each so shapeless and incomplete, the glory of the Church will be made manifest, and she will be ready to be presented, spotless and without blemish, before the Lord of Heaven, clothed in the robes of glory and beauty in the preparation of which we have been privileged to have a tiny share.

On her wedding day, the old-time Palestinian bride was further adorned with a head-dress ornamented with gold pieces of high value. This reminds us again of Psalm 45. 14, "*All gloriously attired awaiteth the King's daughter in the inner chamber; of wrought gold is her garment.*"

This fitly pictures the crowning glory which will be the portion of the Bride of heaven. When the Church has finally made herself ready, she will have proved herself worthy of the greatest of all honours—the golden crown of life immortal.

Then, when all the toil is over, all the shadows dispelled, all the loneliness and weariness forgotten, the Church, resplendent in all the graces of the Spirit, will rise from poverty to untold riches, from the darkness of earth to the blazing glory of heaven, from a dying earthly existence to undying and immortal life. Thus, united for all eternity to her beloved Lord and Bridegroom, shall she be ushered into the very presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Then the heavens will resound with the pæons of praise which the faithful John heard ringing down the ages so long ago—"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready".

## A NOTE ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

A statement often provocative of perplexity or misunderstanding is the concluding verse of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25. 46) "*and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*". Some of the facts relating to the word here translated "punishment" may be of interest.

"Eternal punishment" in this verse is from the Greek "*aionian kolasis*". "*Kolasis*" is a word which comes in the first place from "*kolos*", to lop or prune, and the meaning of the word as defined by Thayer, Liddell and Scott, and others, is to check, curb, restrain or correct. Its usage in the time of the Lord was twofold (a) punishment in the sense of restraint of the offender's power to continue his offence, and (b) disciplinary correction, or as we would say, chastisement. In classical Greek usage, Aristotle (350 B.C.) distinguished it from the other Greek word, used in Heb. 10. 29, for punishment, "*timoria*", by saying that *kolasis* is disciplinary, referring to the correction of the offender, whilst *timoria* is penal, referring to the satisfaction of the judge. *Kolasis* is used only in three other instances, these being:

2 Pet. 2. 9 "The Lord knoweth how to reserve the ungodly unto the day of judgment to be punished".

Acts 4. 22 "Finding nothing how they might punish them".

1 John 4. 18 "Perfect love casteth out fear; for fear hath torment" (has a curbing or restraining influence).

"*Timoria*" is used only in Heb. 10. 29 "Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God . . ." In this verse the type of punishment carries with it the thought of penal infliction, whereas in the former Scripture it is the fact that the evildoer is put under restraint so that his evil doing is suppressed that is in view. It is often urged that since "*kolasis*" does carry the thought of disciplinary correction equally with that of restraint or cutting off, it is equally logical to argue that the "everlasting punishment" of Matt. 25. 46 is, not "age-enduring cutting-off", but "age-enduring correction", and might very well refer to the "resurrection into judgment" of the Millennial Age itself (John 5). This suggestion is logical but the term is used so infrequently in the New Testa-

ment that it does not seem wise to build too much upon its strict dictionary meaning when there are so few instances from which to discern in what sense the New Testament speakers and writers actually used it. It is better in such cases to interpret the word in the light of the context and adopt the particular shade of meaning which best fits that context. In verse 41 these same "goats" have addressed to them the words "*Depart from me, ye cursed (separated or cut-off ones) into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*". Rev. 20. 10-15 shows that this is the same thing as the "Second Death", the final end of sinners and of all that proves to be incapable of reconciliation with God and amenable to the laws of his creation. Nowhere does the Scripture warrant the thought that those who come forth to the disciplinary judgment of the Millennial Age are regarded by Jesus as "cursed"; rather are they the "other sheep" of his fold which are eventually to be brought within the circle of the Father's family, if they will. The "cursed" must surely be those who reject all endeavours for their elevation to human perfection, and dying in their sin, become as though they had never been (Psa. 37. 10). We may consider ourselves justified therefore in interpreting this text "everlasting cutting-off" or "everlasting restraint" in the sense that those thus cut off are thereby permanently restrained from continuing to mar God's creation with their sin. "*Aionian*" may mean everlasting in the sense of a long period of either definite or indefinite duration, or everlasting in the sense of being perpetual. A good example of both meanings appearing side by side in the same text is afforded by the Greek (Septuagint) version of Hab. 3. 6 where the prophet says "the everlasting (*aionian*) mountains were scattered . . . his ways are everlasting (*aionian*). The mountains are everlasting in a limited sense only; change and decay will remove them eventually even though the time be thousands or millions of years. God's ways are perpetual; they can never be removed. In this light the text is perfectly logical and in harmony with Jesus' teaching. The one class go into everlasting life, the other into everlasting cutting-off; as Jesus said in another place "*He that hath the Son hath life: but he that hath not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*".

Full surrender is not passivity; it is the deliberate, volitional act of the regenerated Christian giving the Lord Jesus Christ the place of Lordship. This Lordship becomes meaningful by the diligent study of God's Word; by earnest importunate

prayer; by the exercise of wholehearted faith, and by unquestioning and absolute obedience. For such there is Divine help, and that help is the Lord Jesus Christ himself—for He is our victory.

(Forest Gate Bible Monthly)



# OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

*An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah*

## 5. Everlasting Righteousness

*"But on Mount Zion there shall be those who have escaped, and it shall be a sanctuary, and the House of Jacob shall possess it in peace" (vs. 17).*

The Authorised Version renders this verse "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance" but the thought behind both renderings is the same. After all the tribulation and trouble that has been brought upon the people of the Lord by the evil machinations of the Edomites, the Lord has opened a way of escape and delivered his people into the calm and security of the Holy City. Despite all the assaults of the enemy and the vicissitudes which befall Jerusalem, the time comes at length when God ushers into "an afterward of peace" all those who have demonstrated their sterling faith and stood firm. They have escaped the designs of the Evil One and have won the heavenly crown. Mount Zion is exalted in the top of the mountains and all nations are ready to flow into it. Edom has been finally overthrown and destroyed, and Jerusalem "is inhabited again in her own place, in Jerusalem".

Just for a moment, at this point, it might be desirable to take a backward glance to the literal fulfilment of the prophecy. We have been talking of spiritual Israel and her treatment at the hands of those we have called spiritual Edomites, and set all this against the background of the Gospel Age. Now all this, although a legitimate and true application, and moreover the interpretation that is of the deepest significance to us to-day, is not the only interpretation. The prophecy is equally applicable in a more literal sense to Obadiah's own time and people, and their own ultimate triumph when at last literal Edom is laid in ruins. But the important thing to notice is that although the two interpretations have their commencement at different points of time—the literal fleshly Israel one, in Obadiah's own time, six hundred years before Christ, and the spiritual Israel one at Pentecost and onward into this Gospel Age, yet they both reach their culmination at the same time, the Time of Trouble which ends "this present evil world". So in considering this seventeenth verse we may well see two classes of people pictured, each entering upon its reward after tribulation, but in different spheres or aspects of God's plan, and both at the same time, the end of this Age.

"Those who have escaped," therefore, in this verse may well refer, first to the Church, who at the end of this Age enter upon the eternity of fellowship and service with our Lord which is the goal of all their hopes, and second, to the earthly representatives of the New Kingdom, raised from the dead to take up the administration of the new

Millennial order of things. These, too, have been "perfected through suffering" even although it has perforce been that, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us at the end of his eleventh chapter, *"they without us should not be made perfect"*. And following these, regathered and purified Israel takes up its position in the Divine scheme of things. *"The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions"*.

At this point, therefore, we are carried into the opening scenes of the Millennial Age. The Time of Trouble is over, the powers of evil have been restrained, the people will no longer be deceived by the pretensions and false doctrines of oppressive State and apostate Church. *"Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"*. That is the ideal combination of secular and sacred control which is to be so characteristic of that glorious Age; a time when the Ruler will be a Royal Priest—a priest upon his throne. Just as Melchisedek of old ruled his people in both the things of man and the things of God, so will it be in that great day when the saviours have ascended Mount Zion and the House of Jacob has taken control of its rightful possession.

*"The House of Jacob shall be a fire, the House of Joseph a flame, and the House of Esau shall be as stubble, which they shall ignite and consume until nothing is left of the House of Esau."*

*That is what God has decreed!" (vs. 18).*

There are two Scriptural themes which have a direct bearing on that verse and serve to illuminate and explain it. Logically enough, one has to do with those spiritual rulers, the Church, and the other with the earthly rulers. The one is found in Matt. 13 and is enshrined in the well-known parable of the wheat and tares. When the end of this Age comes, those who are represented by the wheat, the true and faithful Church, are taken away to *"shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father"* but the tares are consumed in a great furnace of fire. Those tares are precisely the same as the ones we have in this series of studies been likening to spiritual Edom, which, in this verse 18, are to be as stubble, which is ignited and consumed until nothing is left. So here we have a vivid picture of the final warfare when the Lord Jesus *"shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God"*. The Revelation picture of a Rider upon a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, descending to earth to wage victorious battle with the kings of the earth and their armies, allied with the Beast and the False Prophet, is but another presentation of the same thing. This intervention of spiritual forces at the culmination of the Age to overthrow man's



final resistance to the incoming Kingdom is a very real thing and the prophetic pictures are not one bit too extravagant in their portrayal.

The other theme, having to do, not with the spiritual rulers of the new earth, but the earthly rulers, is expressed best in Zech. 12. 6 *"In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf, and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left, and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem"*. It is impossible not to perceive the resemblance between these words and those of Obadiah's eighteenth verse. Here again the enemies of Israel are to be consumed as by fire, a fire which emanates from those "governors of Judah" who are the "saviours" or "those that escaped" of Obadiah's prophecy. In some way analogous to the descent of the Rider on the White Horse—perhaps in some way as part of the same process—they will play their part in consuming, as by an all-devouring fire, every trace of resistance to the new Kingdom, every shred of antagonism to the people who have put their trust in God, and eventually, every relic of evil itself. *"As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory."*

It may well be that in verse 18 the dual reference to the "House of Jacob" and the "House of Joseph" may be an oblique hint that there are two victorious peoples here involved, the natural rulers (Jacob) and the spiritual rulers (Joseph) working together in harmonious unity. The Church is sprung from natural Israel just as Joseph was sprung from Jacob, but the Church becomes the life-preserver of Israel just as in history Joseph was to Jacob.

*"Then the people of the southern desert shall inherit the Mount of Esau, and the people of the seaside plain, the land of the Philistines. Ephraim shall inherit Samaria and Benjamin shall inherit Gilead. The Israelite exiles in Halah shall inherit Phoenicia as far as Zarephath, and the Jerusalem exiles in Sepharad shall inherit the cities of the desert."* (vs. 19-20).

All this reads much like a geographical medley and really it is necessary to put geography and history together to make much out of it. The whole

passage is intended to convey the absolute nature of God's victory over his enemies and restoration of peace and righteousness. The various place-names and allusions are intended to suggest ideas. Thus those who lived barren, desert lives because of the oppressions of their Edomite enemies will now come into their own—they will inherit their enemies' land. Those who had been oppressed by the people of the world, the Philistines, who had felt the persecution of men fall heavily upon them, will move into the places of prosperity formerly appropriated by the world. *"Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, sit down in the Kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out."* Ephraim, for long unable to move into her rightful possession in Samaria because of the resistance of "the people of the land", will at length achieve her desire, and so will Benjamin in Gilead. The Israelites taken captive by the Assyrian hosts and removed far away to Halah will come back to a greatly enlarged and extended home-land in northern Israel, even embracing Phoenicia, and likewise the Jerusalem exiles taken away by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon will return to the wide open spaces of Judah where they can settle in peace and flourish. The passage can well bear a natural and a spiritual application and in either case teaches the "gathering home" and abiding prosperity of those faithful souls who, *"hungry and thirsty, their soul fainting in them, cried unto the Lord, and he heard them, and delivered them out of their distresses, and led them by a right way, and brought them into a city of habitation"*. That is the great lesson of the Book of Obadiah, one that should bring us confidence as well as cheer in this day when it seems as though the power of evil is being prolonged so much beyond its appointed time.

*"And those who have escaped shall come from Mount Zion to rule the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's."* (vs. 21).

The victory is complete! What more is there to say? The way of the righteous has been triumphantly vindicated, the judgment of God has done its work, and henceforth there is only glory—a glory that is eventually to enshroud all the world of men in its radiance. *(The end)*

### Postgate on Sumerian Genesis

The "Monthly" occasionally refers to the fact that, contrary to generally received opinion among scholars, the first eleven chapters of Genesis were originally written in Sumer, the birthplace of Abraham, five centuries or so before his birth, preserved and eventually translated by Moses to form the Book as we have it now. Modern confirmation comes from the introduction to a recent book, *"The First Empires"* (1977) by J. N. Postgate, a

present-day eminent archaeologist who is at present excavating in Iraq. Says Mr. Postgate *"It is no surprise to find that the Book of Genesis retells stories written down in Sumerian before the days of Abraham"*. The origin of the Old Testament goes back much farther than the days of Moses, in fact as far as the beginning of history itself, and no one really knows how much further. It may be that the story of the Flood was in the first place written by Noah himself.

## DAWN OF A NEW ERA

In the beginning God made man; God made him suited to the earth so that he could live everlastingly upon it. God provided for the natural increase of the human race so that the earth could be populated and quite evidently for the cessation of the powers of increase when that object has been attained, so that the earth can continue to all eternity like a well-built house inhabited by a happy and contented family. Physically, mentally and morally perfect, man and woman could look forward to everlasting life under ideal conditions.

We do not understand the nature of life, only that it comes from God and that the life of all living things is sustained by God. We do not know how the first human beings came into existence, only that *"the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2. 7). What we do know is that they rejected the way of life ordained for them by their Creator, a way of life which would have assured them and their posterity lasting well-being and happiness, and at the instigation of the Devil chose the way of disobedience. So it was that sin entered the world, and with it, selfishness, cruelty, disease and death. Men, drifting farther and farther from God, degenerated physically, mentally and morally, more and more, until at last . . . .

*"God looked upon the earth, and behold, every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil, and that continually."*

It was in mercy that God took them away, for left to themselves they would have eventually become hopelessly depraved and incapable of reformation. God did not intend that to happen, and so it was that He brought into operation his own plans for persuading fallen men to turn from their evil ways and live. But they were long-term plans. Evil was not yet overthrown.

So that first world came to an end with a great flood which swept away all that civilisation.

*"Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."* (2 Pet. 3. 6.)

\* \* \* \*

The terrible disaster of the Flood had no lasting effect upon succeeding generations. Human history, which begins at this point, tells of increasing selfishness and sin, violence and misery, disease and pain. Some there were who served God, and strove for better things, but the majority lived without hope and without God. Thus did the years pass, until after many generations, a Light came into the world . . . .

*"I am come" said Jesus "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly".* (John 10. 10.)

The coming of Jesus was an event unique in history. He had been with the Father from before all created things. He laid aside his glory, to be born of a virgin, so becoming man, living among men, sharing their joys and sorrows, teaching them the way of life God wanted them to follow. Because men then in power would not have his teaching, they took him and put him to death, little realising that He had thus become the means of their own ransom from the power of death. For three days He lay in the grave, and then God raised him from the dead.

He was not raised a man, for his humanity had been given a "Ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2. 5-6) when He died upon the cross. He was raised to the heavenly nature which had been his before He came to earth, and exalted to the "right hand of the Majesty on high". And the Divine Plan provides for his return to this earth, in the full glory of his spiritual being, that He might teach men to renounce evil and establish everlasting righteousness.

The period between these two Advents is devoted to the calling and selection of believers who come to him by the successive steps of repentance, conversion, justification by faith, and full consecration of life and talents to the service of God. They are brought under the spiritually transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, which is the power, the influence of God working in the world. This calling closes with the end of this present Age or "world", and those who have been faithful throughout life to the conditions of their calling receive a change of nature from earthly to heavenly, and the high honour of association with the Lord Jesus in his future work, commencing with the conversion of mankind, which is the object of the coming Age.

In the meantime the human race continues on its downward course. The majority are heedless—heedless of the Gospel, heedless of their own best interests, heedless of the danger that threatens. Once again does God look down upon the earth and decree a great change. This world—the second world—is to pass away and a third world take its place, and in that third world Christ will rule, justly and wisely. Men are fast destroying this second world now, and the earth with it; but God will not allow them to waste the earth beyond repair. The discovery of atomic energy has introduced a new and terrible menace. No responsible thinkers expect this power to be confined to good and constructive use; for the most part they apprehend havoc and destruction on a gigantic scale, and perhaps the end of civilisation . . . .

*"The heavens and earth which are now . . . ."*

*are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition (destruction) of ungodly men . . . wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat . . . the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"* (2 Pet. 3. 7-12).

And at Hiroshima, on August 6th, 1945, the world was shown how terribly prophetic were those words.

\* \* \* \*

Now these things are signs that the old world has nearly reached its end and that the third world, the Golden Age, is at hand. The warring nations, still striving each after their own selfish interests, holding Peace Conference after Peace Conference and failing every time to secure peace, will presently find that a new and quite unexplainable power has suddenly taken control of world affairs and that all powers, governments and rulers are required to conform their national policies and activities to the standards laid down by the visible representatives of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2. 3). Although the new government will not be backed by armed force resistance to its requirements will be useless, for the same spiritual power that at the outset will have caused "wars to cease unto the ends of the earth" (Psa. 46. 9) will render it impossible for men to continue in any work of evil which injures a fellow man. During the entire period of the Millennial Age, set aside for mankind's training and instruction in righteousness, the liberty to do evil and inflict evil upon others, at present enjoyed by man, and permitted by God, will be withdrawn, and law-abiding men may go about their business and engage in all the manifold activities of life without any fear of harm or evil befalling them at the hands of malicious persons or interests. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11. 9).

There will be no death in that Age, except in the case of those who, after full opportunity and encouragement, refuse to accept Jesus Christ and come into harmony with his ways. As soon as society has been sufficiently re-organised on this new and most desirable basis, and men begin to make the earth productive and fruitful as it has never been in history, the dead will begin to be raised, and eventually all will have returned to earth to share in this universal opportunity for everlasting life. Their education to right-doing will be the mission and work of the Church, which then will be reigning with Christ in the heavens to make all men

see what is the true Gospel and to help them back to reconciliation with God. But God will not coerce any man's will, and so the freedom of choosing sin and its consequences remains; but the inevitable consequence of sin is death. That fate must befall any who, after full and fair opportunity refuse to profit by the provisions of the Messianic Kingdom.

This exquisite foreview of this coming Day was written a century ago:—

*"Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be, and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realise the resurrection work complete.*

And this is a more recent description:—

*"So will the centuries pass, whilst the earth grows ever fairer and more beautiful and mankind attains to a better and more complete understanding of the message of Jesus Christ and the goodness of God. The days of evil will slip away into the background—never forgotten, always remaining an imperishable recollection of the terrible consequences of sin but no longer having the power to hurt or destroy. The song of the angels 'Peace on earth—goodwill among men' will have become an accomplished fact at last. Human beings will be fair of form and virile of body, magnificent examples of the creative power of God, and with consciousness of that eternity of supremely happy life which is before them will rise at every dawn to pursue with unflurried minds the occupations and pursuits to which they have set themselves. The world's work will go on—men will till the soil and reap the fruits of their labour; they will foregather for the study and practice of arts and sciences which will always have something new to reveal; they will travel and rejoice in the varied glories of nature, and live their lives in absolute peace and harmony with each other and with God."*

"Seeing that we are all ordained to be citizens of the one Everlasting City, let us begin to enter into

that way here already by mutual love."—*Old Elizabethan prayer.*



## A COVENANT BY SACRIFICE

*A Talk about  
Consecration*

It is only as we reach the higher ground of the New Testament that the true nature of the consecrated life comes to view. All standards and forms of consecration preceding the life and death of Jesus had been formal and ceremonial only, introduced to last only until the times of reformation which followed Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven. With Jesus came the beginning of the "better" things—which better things will not be complete till, through a new Covenant, Israel first, and then the whole world, has been brought into conformity with the Will of God.

But when we have reached that higher New Testament ground, even then it will be only as we understand and appreciate the nature of the fundamental opposing moral qualities of holiness and sin, and the way these principles work out in daily life, that we shall realise to the full what consecration actually means. We shall find every thought, word, and deed involved in that act of dedication which is described by the word "consecration". It could be an easy matter to make a grievously uncharitable mistake on the question of "consecration". Differences of temperament as well as of Christian growth and attainment could easily dispose one to think that those of lesser stature in Christ were not consecrated at all, or were inattentive to their covenant vows. We might be too ready to measure another by our own standards, and expect him to "toe" our own line. A deeper appreciation of what is involved in consecration will show that it may mean more to some than to others, and that more is required of some than of others.

The dictionary defines "consecration" to mean *"the act of setting apart to a holy use—to hallow; to devote"*. This definition may be understood readily enough of a building or a plot of land set apart for religious purposes, or even of a man who withdraws himself from all secular callings, and applies himself exclusively to a religious life. This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the New Testament usage, for every true believer in the Lord, whether in "holy orders" or not is exhorted by the Lord and his Apostles not only to offer himself in consecration, but also to maintain that attitude of devotedness so long as life shall last. The unordained "lay" believer is not less exhorted to consecration than his clerical brother—and that exhortation applies while he follows his ordinary secular calling in life. Hence, New Testament usage is wider in its meaning than the dictionary definition.

The employment of the words "consecrate" and "consecration" brings into use another set of terms, derived from Latin sources, to supplement

the Anglo-Saxon and Greek terms already used. There are thus three sets of synonymous words by which one may describe the act of full surrender to God, and the life of obedience which should follow. The word "consecrate" corresponds to the Anglo-Saxon "*Hallow*" (or holify) and the Greek "*sanctify*" while "consecration" is equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon "*holy*" and the Greek "*sanctification*". Thus a "consecrated life" is the same thing as a "holy life" or a "saintly life".

Now it is quite proper to ask "To what or whom is the consecrated object devoted, and to what degree is it devoted?" The reply might be that the follower of the Lord is devoted to the Will of God, to live or to die, according to his good pleasure. That is a good answer and in every way correct so far as it goes. But it needs further amplification and definition. What is the Will of God? Is it something that may be known with precision?

The Will of God has many phases or manifestation ranging from its local application in the small sphere of a single life to the vast universal plan that embraces the whole Creation. The Will of God provided for Calvary and all that is associated with that sublime sacrifice. But it did not begin with Calvary, nor with Sinai, nor with Abraham's call, nor yet in Eden, but far back along the highway of time, when God purposed that all things in heaven and earth should for all time be made subject to Christ (Col. 1. 20; Eph. 1. 10). This is an expression of his Will, comprehensive and absolute—towards which all succeeding Ages are contributing their quota—hence the call of Abraham with its unalterable Promise, the thunders and Covenant of Sinai, and even the tragedy of Calvary, are but outstanding steps by the way to that "*far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves*". From those distant days the eternal God made known that He had found One in whom Divine wisdom could have everlasting confidence to "head-up" both righteous beings and righteous principles. That in its largest sense is the Will of God; but every stage of the development to that distant end is also accomplished according to the same overruling Will.

In consecration we behold a new and proper relationship of that sovereign Will to the small circle of an individual life. It brings the heart of a thenceforth willing child into alignment with its Father's good pleasure. The Will of God existed and pre-dated that little life by many ages but that act of submission brings that eternal Will into that life to direct and use it for God's own ends. Consecration has brought that life into alignment and harmony with an eternal purpose.

It is here that the fundamental moral issues



underlying the whole Divine programme come into view, and give to the "act" and "life" of consecration their proper setting and value. It is very necessary to realise that consecration relates the surrendered being to one side of the most intense antagonism which the whole wide universe, and the whole round of time, has ever witnessed or can ever witness, between the fundamental principles of sin and holiness. God's Will is no "hole-in-the-corner" matter—it is no parochial affair. It is universal in its sphere, and will ultimately involve everyone and everything.

Lucifer's rebellion in the heavenly realms sent waves of disaffection universe-wide. It divided into two parts those bright sons of the morning who sang for joy at Creation's early dawn—who thenceforth took their places on this side or that of the contending forces. And as they then took their place, so have they continued to stand. Some of them are now called "*spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*" (Eph. 6. 11-12); others are the "*ministering spirits who are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation*" (Heb. 1. 14). From Lucifer the spirit of rebellion spread to the earth and "*sin entered into the world*".

This spirit of conflict lies at the very heart of the universe and involves every thing or principle that is of good or ill to every intelligent being in heaven or earth. It is not enough to think of Satan and his rebellion in a loose indefinite sort of way, as though the frequent hindering or thwarting of God's saints, or his temptation of weak unstable souls, were the full scope of his activities. These are only incidentals—more in the nature of side issues to a far greater and more fundamental issue. Satan is a powerful rebel against Divine authority, and is fighting might and main for a kingdom. Driven forth from heaven, he is fighting with desperate determination to keep the kingdom which he and his evil minions have built up. Every evil device, every strategem in iniquity is in his hand to be employed to that end. And, so far, he has every reason to think his rebellion a success, for he won over to his banners angelic beings in the very course of heaven itself, and extended his empire also to the habitations of men.

It is this universal situation that lies behind God's invitation to his people to consecrate themselves to his Will. God has purposed, and pledged himself on the inviolability of his holy name that all the earth shall yet be filled with his glory, and that no trace of sin or rebellion shall be tolerated beyond a predetermined time. To that end God has been calling all who hate iniquity and love righteousness to enlist beneath his banners, and share with him in the great task of cleansing both heaven and earth from their defiling stains. "Consecration" implies voluntary enlistment into the

ranks of the armies of God in order to be trained and prepared for the great Battle of the Day of God Almighty. It implies the full acceptance of the Will of God as the supreme authority in life, and the full and complete repudiation of the claims of all other men or angels to have any control over the actions or desires.

Hitherto the antagonism between sin and holiness, between Lucifer and God, has been more like the "pull" of two opposing magnets rather than the clash of open hostilities. Each man throughout the whole world has been like the compass-needle, possessed of some free swing but swinging towards this or that magnet, according to the power of its pull, and the degree of affinity between the magnet and the needle. Satanic power has exerted all its magnetism; Divine power has not, hence the "Sin Magnet" has drawn and still draws by far the greater number within its "field". The record of human existence tells of an almost unrestricted permission for Satan to work his way. He poisoned and tainted the affections of almost every human heart and made it difficult for men to live amicably with his fellows. Man, under Satan's influence became more selfish and self-centred—imbued with the idea of self-possession. To obtain and acquire this self-centred, self-satisfying possession of the earth's bounties men stooped to lying, stealing, and other means of taking what they wanted. The strong man subjugated and exploited his weaker brother, or slew him out of the way. In this way arose the first primitive kingdoms of antiquity, and the primal orders of society, from which the huge aggressive organisations and the present world order have been evolved.

Concurrently with these have grown modes of life—customs, institutions and practices which hold the souls of men in thrall. The power of Satan over man is defined as tending to "*adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*". Thus, response to the Satanic magnet resolves itself down to acts of wickedness and darkness—the practical level of a sinful life. The world to-day is covetousness and selfishness writ large; the outgrowth of those smaller ancient systems which embodied, for ill, the principles of defiance and rebellion which Satan transplanted from heaven to earth in Eden days. And the whole system of Satanic control reduces itself to constant repetition, from generation to generation, of those various acts of wickedness which man has been taught to love and prefer by his Satanic master. Satan's "magnet" is over the whole gentile system—it is his "world" and his "kingdom". It is of his building and is permeated with his spirit and his principles.

Into this predominantly Satanic "field" every son of Adam has been born. He has the taint of sin in his blood. The force of heredity and the power of environment constrain each one to run in its grooves. Into this predominating Satanic "field" of evil, God sent his Word and his messengers to "draw" to himself such men and women as have regard for righteousness in their hearts. Enoch and Noah were the choicest products of "the world that was". Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and all the prophets were men drawn to the service of God. Since Pentecost God has been drawing those whose hearts have shown appreciation for righteousness. God has drawn them by the power enshrined in his Word, and by his Spirit, and, as men have willingly yielded themselves to his Will, his holy power has permeated their lives, and led them to a purer and nobler form of life. Self-centredness has given place to self-denial; love of self has been displaced by love for one's brother. It is to the point to note that the Apostles set this purer life as the standard of rectitude for the consecrated followers of the Lord. Note particularly the words of Paul in Eph. 4. 17, and onwards to chap. 5. 20. The good actions required in the saints are set over against the evil deeds of the Gentiles, and the believer is exhorted to eschew the deeds of darkness. This also is the purport of the Apostle's appeal to the Romans (chap. 6) to present their members unto God as instruments of righteousness, leading unto holiness—so that they shall not henceforth serve sin.

Consecration to God begins by turning one's back upon sin—that is, upon sinful acts—and seeking with all one's power to do those purer things which have God's approval. This means that the Satanic magnet is attracting less strongly than heretofore, and that the Divine "pull" is getting stronger as the days go by. The reformed drunkard, the converted criminal, are standing on the threshold of the consecrated life, and as they seek to walk in the ways of truth and rectitude, they become more aligned with God on the great fundamental issues of the Ages.

Consecration, therefore, means the voluntary

enlistment of a life which already has or is finding some affinity with righteousness in the ranks which Almighty God is assembling and preparing in readiness for the ultimate conflict—the actual clash of hostilities—with which the reign of sin will be brought to an end. It matters not where one's ultimate destiny will be found, whether among the Church of the Firstborns, or among restored and purified Israel, or among the "whosoever will" of the wider call of Rev. 22. 17. The general principle involved in consecration will remain the same. It will imply the acceptance of the sovereign Will of God as the supreme law of heart and life. It will imply the taking of a vow to withstand the enticing power of sin in every word, thought and act. It implies a pledge to pursue uprightness and transparent honesty in the daily round of life. It means that one would not withhold so little as one hayseed from the equitable balance, nor one drop from the lawful measure, nor one hairs-breadth from the mete-yard. It means that no inaccurate or untruthful word would willingly be spoken that no man's character shall ever be in jeopardy or danger from our hand.

Thus in the practical matter-of-fact sphere of the daily life, various actions which are described as "*fruit of the Spirit*" (Gal. 5. 22-23) are set forth as the approved opposites of the evil modes of life peculiar to the world of the flesh and Satan. (Gal. 5. 1-21). This mode of countering the evil act by the good, of the untruthful word by the true, of the evil thought by the pure, is but bringing the arena of the eternal conflict down to its lowest practical level; and it is on this level that consecration to the good and true, to the Will of God, must begin. Whatever else may be involved in consecration in its higher phases, this lowlier phase carries right through for every man, no matter what his ultimate destiny comes to be. Call it conversion if we will, or describe it by other term, consecration begins by turning away from the path of sin, into the path of virtue and righteousness. It is the voluntary choice of sides in the eternal conflict—choosing the banners of the Lord instead of the service of Satan.

### "The hairs of your head"

"More and more our Lord taught of the particular care God has for every living individual: '*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings and not one of them is forgotten before God? Yes, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*' Thus He emphasised the uniqueness of the individual, and they (the disciples) loved it, though little comprehending the literal import of his words. But two thousand years later, in the laboratories of modern criminologists, the spectrograph and spectrophotometer show us that the hair on every mor-

tal head is different from others; and more, that each individual hair is 'numbered', is different from any other hair on the same head! Not only are there no two thumbs or finger-prints alike in all humanity, but even the lines and whorls and loops and corrugations on the hoofs of cows and bulls and the feet of dogs and cats are all unparalleled. It is science today that shows individuality to be persistent uniqueness in God's world, just as Jesus taught it." (Fulton Oursler in "*The Greatest Story ever told*")

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