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

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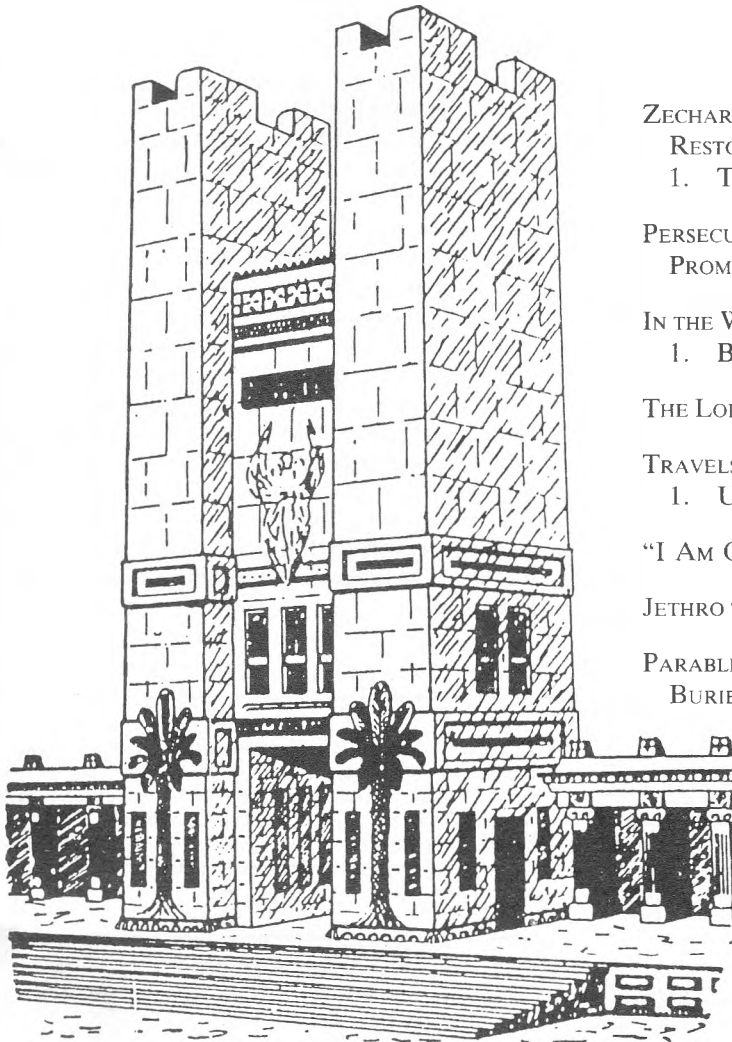
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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New Features

Back in 1968 the "Monthly" featured a series of studies in the Book of Zechariah headed "Zechariah Prophet of the Restoration" which elicited a great deal of interest at the time and in fact was later on translated into Swedish by the Swedish Bible Students and circulated there. The vivid imagery of the Book, so reminiscent of the New Testament Book of Revelation, renders this Book of absorbing interest and it is felt that many later readers, as well as those who saw it then, will find it of equal interest now. The first instalment appears in this issue.

Another perhaps rather unusual series, "In the World that Was", also appears in this issue, endeavouring to analyse what little is said about the antediluvian Era on the basis of regarding the first eleven chapters of Genesis as the work of a man or men who lived at the time of the earliest writing at present known, about 2500 B.C., which in Biblical terms is about the time of the patriarchs

Eber and Peleg, some five hundred years before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. Contrary to 19th century ideas that Moses was the original writer of Genesis, the wealth of Sumerian and Akkadian words in the first eleven chapters makes it plain nowadays that they originated at a much earlier date and Moses was the editor of these when in due time he came to compile his famous "Five Books". Someone in days of those earlier patriarchs must have compiled these chapters from perhaps pre-existing records unknown to the world nowadays, so that the stories of Eden and the Flood are set in terms of the geography of the land as known at that time. Although of necessity the conclusions drawn must be regarded as only approximately valid, they are based on logical deductions from what little is said in Genesis and might at least offer a general picture of that earlier but fascinating era of human history.

Notices

Recent delays. It is hoped that by the time this issue is published all omissions and delays due to our recent transfer of the stockroom and of circulation records to Nottingham will have been discovered and rectified. If however anyone is still waiting for missed issues of the Monthly or of literature requested, please do notify us and amends will be made speedily. The new arrangements will, it is hoped, make possible a considerable extension of our facilities in the direction of free literature and further announcements may be expected shortly.

A personal note. So many expressions of concern have reached the Editor in respect of the recent bout of ill-health that it has been impossible to reply to them personally, but sincere appreciation of the thoughtfulness is expressed here nevertheless and all who were thus concerned will be gratified to know that the interlude appears to be over and with what amounts to a full recovery it is hoped that all will go well for the foreseeable future.

Correspondence. To ensure the orderly handling of our various activities it is requested that all but personal correspondence is addressed to 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, in order that it may be correctly assigned to the particular district centre handling the particular matters involved. With several operating centres in various parts of the country this is very necessary to avoid delays.

Gone from us



Sis. Dorrie Chandler (*London*)

Sis. Kitty Ogden (*Manchester*)



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

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

1. The Prophet and the Book

A strange and thrilling time was the Era of the Restoration, when fifty thousand eager pioneers left Babylon and set out across the desert for the ruined country of Judea, there to build a Temple and a homeland. Few of them had seen Judea before; seventy years had elapsed since their fathers had been taken captive to Babylon, fifty-one since the Temple and city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, and most of the returning pilgrims had been born and brought up in Babylon and knew of their ancestors' homeland only by repute and description. But now Babylon was fallen, given into the power of Cyrus the Persian conqueror, and Cyrus had granted leave to all of the Jewish community in his new conquest to go back to the land of their fathers and there restore their Temple, their national worship, and some semblance of their old-time communal life, requiring only that they continue loyal to the suzerainty of Persia. So they came, bearing with them the sacred vessels of the Temple so ruthlessly despoiled by the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar half a century ago, exhibited as trophies of conquest in the Babylonish Temple of Marduk, and now destined to stand in their rightful place and serve their rightful role in the ritual of the worship of the God of Heaven. No wonder they sang, as the Psalmist says they did sing, on that arduous journey *"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing."* (Psa. 126. 1-2). No wonder they came into the desolated land camped among the ruined buildings of what had once been Jerusalem, seeing around them, by the eye of faith, the glorious land that was soon to be, and they themselves, the people of the Lord, exalting Israel once again to a place among the nations, mighty in the strength of the God of Israel.

It was not long before the golden vision faded and the old enemies of greed, indifference and moral laxity asserted themselves. Commercialism replaced sacrifice; the acquisition of property and the building of houses attracted more attention than the erection of the Temple of God. The community suffered accordingly. *"Is it time for you, O ye"* thundered Haggai the prophet *"to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this Temple lie waste? Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye*

have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled; ye clothe you, but there is none warm. Why? saith the Lord of Hosts. Because of my Temple that is waste and ye attend every man unto his own house!" (Hag. 1. 4-9). Sixteen years it was since the pioneers came to Jerusalem with such high hopes, and this was all there was to show for it! No wonder Zerubbabel, the governor of the colony, and Joshua the High Priest, were ashamed as they led the people in a great outburst of enthusiasm which sought to rectify the wrongs which had been allowed to develop.

It is at this point that Zechariah comes into the picture. A much younger man than his fellow-prophet Haggai, he had nevertheless shared in the journey from Babylon and from the nature of his prophetic visions shows that he must have known much about life in that notorious city. Like Haggai, he was possessed of a burning zeal for the establishment in Judea of a true theocratic State, and a certainty that all the Divine promises relating to the coming glory of Israel must most certainly come to pass. In this the two prophets were markedly different from the Governor and the High Priest, both of whom seem to have failed to display those qualities of leadership and foresight necessary for so great a purpose.

Zerubbabel had been appointed Governor of the colony by Cyrus, responsible to him for maintaining its loyalty to Persia. The appointment was obviously a diplomatic move. Zerubbabel was the legal heir and successor to Jehoiachin the deposed King of Judah. He was probably in his early thirties and does not seem to have been particularly distinguished. Joshua the High Priest was a grandson of Seraiah, High Priest at the time of Jerusalem's destruction, who was executed by Nebuchadnezzar; he was most likely a much older man. These two figure largely in Zechariah's prophecy. Zechariah himself was of the priestly tribe. He says of himself that he was the son of Berachiah and grandson of Iddo. From Neh. 12. 15 it is evident that Zechariah was still alive in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah some seventy years after the Return, by which time he must have been of a considerable age. Tradition has it that—unusually for a Hebrew prophet—he survived and died peacefully in extreme old age and was buried beside his old friend and colleague Haggai. His prophetic

ministry must therefore have spanned at least fifty years.

The Book of Zechariah consists of three main divisions, and the style and subject matter of the third is of a vastly different nature from that of the other two. The first division, occupying chapters 1 to 6, dated in the second year of Darius (520 B.C.) the year in which the building of the Temple was resumed, comprises a series of visions the subject of which is the restoration of Jerusalem and of Judah as a nation, leading onward in time to the consummation of Israel's history in the Millennial Kingdom and accepted Divine rule over all the earth. These visions are highly symbolic and the imagery is taken from the writings of the prophets who preceded Zechariah; to understand their meaning to any extent even today requires a reasonably detailed knowledge of the Old Testament. Thus in the first vision the prophet sees Israel in captivity to the great nations of then current history—Assyria, Babylon, Persia—and the time come for God to redeem his promise of deliverance for Jerusalem. From that the scene changes to the preparation of the Promised Land for the returning multitudes and a hint that the complete fulfilment of this must extend into a then far future day. Next comes the preparation of the royal Priest-King who is to rule “in that day” accompanied by the Divine instrument of salvation forged from amongst men—the “servant” of Isaiah, to be a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Following that comes the promulgation of Divine Law which will root out all evil and establish everlasting righteousness, and finally the regathering of all from the many dispersions which have afflicted God's people during the course of history, and the full establishment of the Millennial order of things. In these visions Zechariah takes his stand in the land of Judah of his own day and looks forward to the end of time, describing what he realises are the principles of the Divine purpose yet to be worked out. In all of this he gives evidence of a clear-sighted understanding of the basic laws of God and the road which, not only Israel, but all men, must traverse to reach the objective God has set.

The second division, given two years later, whilst the rebuilding of the Temple was actively proceeding, covers chapters 7 and 8 and consists of two “oracles”, or messages from Heaven to be declared to those of the people in Zechariah's day directly concerned. Although at first sight these chapters appear to be of purely local application

to events in the time of Zechariah, closer examination reveals that here is enshrined a statement of the essential principles upon which God ultimately bases his acceptance of Israel at the end of the Age and the manner in which He will use Israel in the work of his Kingdom. The entire picture is presented in the form of what, in mediæval England, was called a masquerade, a kind of play in which the actors take their places, asking and answering questions in which the message to be given is contained. In this instance representatives from the religious fraternity of Israel come to Zechariah to enquire as to the propriety of certain ceremonial observances; the prophet tells them, in effect, that since their past observances have been characterised by ritualism rather than sincerity, God is not interested in their offerings anyway. This gives opportunity for a stirring exhortation to sincere repentance and reformation of life that they might be truly fitted for the Divine purpose; that purpose is then revealed to be nothing less than the exaltation of Israel and the Israel land as the centre of Divine administration on earth when the due time should come, but all this is dependent upon faith and sincerity. So the terminal point of the oracles is the same as that of the visions of chapters 1-6, the glory and blessing of the Millennial Kingdom. In the visions the necessity as well as the certainty of Divine power and action to establish the “new heavens and earth” is shown; in the two oracles the necessity of repentance and willing subservience to the Divine will on the part of Israel before the new heavens and earth can become a reality is pictured. With both these factors established the groundwork is laid for the final division of the Book. This tells of events more closely associated with the actual passing of the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. This third division, chapters 9 to 14, is of a fundamentally different style and nature from the earlier parts. Where chapters 1 to 6 comprise a succession of symbolic pictures based on past Old Testament literature, and 7 to 8 are hortatory, enshrining principles of Divine Law applicable to any Age and generation, these last chapters 9 to 14 are frankly prophetic, foreseeing the shape of things to come in the logical outworking of events determined on a basis of cause and effect. It is easy, and it is true, to say that the revelation of happenings yet in the future is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, but it has also to be remembered that the Spirit-filled mind of a man like Zechariah, attuned in a very real sense to the mind of God, was of itself

empowered to foresee the outcome, in future history, of events and forces belonging to his own time. The prophet clearly comprehended the ultimate purpose of God; he understood the manner in which, and the extent to which, the unbelief and the belief, the opposition and the concurrence, of men in his own day and in future times would influence and modify the road by which that goal would eventually be reached, and by that means the Spirit was able to guide him to an appreciation of "things which shall be hereafter" in so definite a fashion that he was able to set down in these chapters so detailed a description of things which had not yet—and in great degree have not yet—transpired.

The striking difference between the two earlier divisions of the Book and this one has led a number of scholars of the "Critical" school to claim that chapters 9 to 14 are not by the Zechariah of the Restoration era but by an unknown writer of much later times. In point of fact, this difference in style is logically to be expected. The first two divisions, written in the second and fourth years of King Darius, are the product of Zechariah's youthful years; he was a man of round about thirty. Chapters 9 to 14 are not dated, but the general background and a certain amount of internal evidence would point to a time nearly half a century later, at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It may reasonably be taken that the prophet had reached the maturity and insight of old age after a lifetime spent "in tune" with God and this in itself amply accounts for the difference in style and the rich colouring of his prophetic vision.

This section commences with an outline sketch of the forces that were to affect Israel after the then present Persian domination had passed away. A new ruling power was to come upon the stage, one that we now know to have been the Greek power, which overthrew Persia. In this crisis Jerusalem was to be preserved, for the good work of the Restoration was still bearing some fruit. Hope of the climax to Israel's expectation would come to the front; the promised King would be manifested and offer himself to the people. But despite Divine assurance that He would indeed ultimately reign, a

darker hue is drawn over the scene. Israel apostasises and rejects the King who is also their Shepherd, and for an Age that rejection endures whilst God as it were turns his back upon the unrepentant people. But He has not done so for ever nor even in reality; in the fulness of time and when some through the generations have shewn themselves ready to serve him, God arouses to action. There is a regathering of his ancient people to their ancient land, a time of opening of eyes and of repentance, and a great cleansing, preparatory to the coming of Messiah and the Millennial Kingdom. Simultaneously there is a moving of powers of evil in the world in opposition, seeking to destroy what seems to be the incipient establishment of the new and righteous world order. The consequence is a further test of faith, a second apostasy and a second rejection of the Shepherd; but a remnant preserves faith and to this remnant the Lord comes in complete and permanent deliverance. So transpires the great event to which all human history has been tending, the revelation of the Lord from Heaven to all mankind, the overthrow of all evil dominating power and the establishment of Divine sovereignty on earth. The glorious vision closes in the spectacle of, not only Israel, but the whole of humankind, delivered from the darkness of sin and death, fully entered at last into the eternal light and life of the illimitable future.

The Book of Zechariah is a remarkable book; remarkable because of its unshakeable confidence in the ultimate execution of the Divine purpose despite the shortcomings and frailty of man. The prophet lived his life in an age that of itself provided a picture in miniature of the glories he foresaw in prophetic vision, but it was an age that, after Zechariah's death, belied its early promise and the light faded into darkness again. He himself in full confidence of faith looked toward a day when the darkness would not return, and in so doing coined, at the close of his book, a phrase which has become immortal; "*At evening time it shall be light*".

To be continued

Cold or Hot

"To the church of the Laodiceans write, I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3.14-15).

Salter, travelling through Turkey a few years ago, visited Laodicea ("*Introducing Turkey*" 1961). From before the First Advent, he says, Laodicea was the principal market in the Roman world for the exchange of western and oriental monies, retaining its importance in banking busi-

ness and remaining "rich and increased with goods" until the time of the Crusades. Near the town there is a hundred feet high cliff down which a hot mineralised stream flows into a pool, built more than two thousand years ago, where the water, at a temperature of 99 deg. F, was a place of resort for the cure of various ailments. But often there is snow on the surrounding ground. Here possibly is the source of the allusion in Rev. 3.

PERSECUTION OF THE SEED OF PROMISE

"We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." (Gal. 4. 28-29).

The favourite exposition of this verse is to the effect that Ishmael "persecuted" Isaac at the weaning feast recorded in Gen. 21. 8-11. The incongruity of a fifteen-year-old lad "persecuting" a young child is not easily realised when a theological implication lies behind the situation and requires to be justified. In fact the word "mocking", in the Genesis account, which gave rise to the idea, has the meaning of light-hearted play or "larking about", as we would say, and this much better fits the case of a teen-age lad and his baby brother.

The word *tsachaq* occurs about a dozen times and means lighthearted play or familiarity, delighted laughter, sporting, jesting or levity with companions. Thus "Isaac was *sporting* with his wife Rebecca" (Gen. 26.8); Samson's captors were *making sport* at his expense (Jud. 16.25); Sarah "*laughed*" at the promise of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21.6); Israel "*rose up to play* before the golden calf (Exod. 32.6); Lot "*seemed as one that mocked*" when he told his sons-in-law of the coming doom of Sodom; Potiphar's wife complained that Joseph "*came in to me to mock me*" (Gen. 39. 37). The idea of "persecution" is absent.

Abraham had already expressed his preference for the older lad. "*Oh that Ishmael might live before thee*" he had said when the Lord told him that Isaac was to be the heir. Sarah, jealous for her own son, said scornfully "*the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac*" (Gen. 21. 10). She claimed the advantage of the laws of Sumer, the land of their birth, which gave the priority to the son of the first wife, even though born later than the son of the second, and the Lord supported her.

In fact two much more momentous themes are contained within this remark by St. Paul. In the first place it should be noticed that in verse 24 he says the story of Hagar and Sarah, of Ishmael and Isaac, is, for his then immediate purpose, an allegory; what he goes on to talk about is obviously an allegorical application of the story. There are two spheres in which the relation of Ishmael to

Isaac in the allegorical field enshrine this idea of "persecuting".

In the first place, although all the O.T. evidence, such as it is, goes to show that the literal Ishmael and Isaac lived their lives apart without interfering with each other and came together in friendly fashion at the burial of their father, the same was not true of their descendants. The tribes sprung from Ishmael were often found amongst Israel's foes and at this very day their descendants as represented by various Arab peoples are Israel's bitter enemies. This is one sense in which he that was born after the flesh (Ishmael) persecutes him that was born after the Spirit. This will not always be so; God told Abraham that He has a purpose for the sons of Ishmael also, and would make of them a great nation dwelling in the presence of their brethren of Isaac. We can expect a reconciliation and unity in time to come which may seem most unlikely today when one looks at the political situation.

The other sense within the context of St. Paul's meaning concerns the relation between national Israel "after the flesh" and spiritual Israel, the Christian church, "after the Spirit". This was a matter of moment in St. Paul's own day. Natural Israel, Jews under the Mosaic Covenant, bitterly opposed the incipient Christian church and did all in its power to arrest and thwart its growth. This aspect is the one St. Paul had particularly in mind. "*Even so it is now*" he says; "*We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise*". Although opposed, persecuted and liable to be ensnared by the "children of the bondwoman" he exhorts his Galatian readers to "*stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*" (Gal. 5. 1). Even here, of course, the "persecution" and the enmity is not to endure forever. Again, in the coming Millennial Age, God has a place and purpose for the natural House of Israel which will bring them into harmony and amicable relations with the spiritual House. The Church of Christ in the heavens, and restored and purified Israel on earth, will then be twin instruments in the Lord's hand for the conversion of the world and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

∴ New Cnt applies to Church

Purpose of article is obscure!

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

1. Beginning of History

Perhaps the most tantalising part of the entire Bible is that enshrined in the first six chapters of the Book of Genesis, the history of that period which St. Peter calls "*the world that then was*" (2. Pet. 3.6), the world that subsisted before the Flood. So long a period, some two thousand years, yet so little said about all that men must have thought and done during that time. The coming into being of our first parents, their lapse into sin and expulsion from the garden, the first act of violence leading to the first death; two generations later, the bare statement that men "*then began to call upon the name of the Lord*". In the seventh generation, a holy man "*walked with God, and was not, for God took him*" without any explanation of where, why or the outcome. Then at much the same time the arts of metal-working and of music came into existence, and the emergence of a nomadic habit of life for some. Finally a mysterious irruption of heavenly beings who introduced a reign of terror and lawlessness in the world which led to a well-nigh universal corruption and a position when "*the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Gen. 6.5.). Not much on which to build a detailed history.

A detailed analysis can yield something of a picture, which, hypothetical as it must be on account of the paucity of material, might at least offer some perception of the nature of that world which now lies buried for ever under the sand and silt swept over it by the great waters. The very full geographical indications in the story of the Garden of Eden, when combined with the later narrative of Noah's Flood, does at least give basis for setting out the stage upon which the events took place. That should enable a better mental picture of that world to be drawn. The very complete data recording men's ages at death and at the birth of their eldest sons makes it possible to hazard an estimate of the growth of population from its beginning in Eden to its catastrophic end in the Flood which is at least better than the traditionary complete ignorance.

Most important of all, the story as here represented has to be taken on the literal reality of the Genesis statements. No other treatment is possible. Tentative as must be the conclusions and suggestions here made, they do at least show the reasonable and humanly possible nature of the account as it stands. The fact that all the characters

lived a life span of some nine hundred years, and had their firstborn children in the region of two hundred years, ten times the present condition, must be accepted. The fact that angels from heaven did come to earth and accentuate the lawless conditions of human society towards the end must be accepted. Unusual and almost incredible as these things may appear to be to modern man, it has to be realised that the present is no guide to what may have been in the past. The continuing researches of modern geologists and climatologists and archaeologists in this Twentieth century are increasingly demonstrating that fact.

So we start where the Bible does, at the beginning, and look at the land which is described as the place God prepared for his intended human creation. At the centre of that land lay the renowned Garden of Eden. This is not the place to discuss the details of Adam's creation, the coming of Eve, the nature of the sin which involved sentence of death, the fate of the Garden, the murder of Abel by Cain. All this has been presented elsewhere (*BSM Jan/Feb 1981 to July/Aug 1982*) so it must be the geographical element which is now to be predominant.

The second chapter of Genesis presents a full geographical statement, complete with names, defining the Garden of Eden. It lay on a river below the confluence of four tributaries, each of which is named. The names of the countries each tributary watered are also given. In addition, the name of the land to which Cain was exiled after his sin is given and its position relative to the Garden of Eden. One important principle must be observed; these names are not necessarily the names of those same places, if they can be identified, by which they are known today. Neither did they bear those names at the time of the events. The account in Gen. 2. Vss. 1-10 and 15-25 is in the past tense; that is history. The description of the rivers and countries in Vss. 11-14 is in the present tense; these are the names existing when the present account was put into writing.

A Twentieth century writer, describing events of the Roman occupation of Britain in the First century and bringing the fighting around Leicester into his story would not use the then name of that city, "Rataë" if he wanted his readers to know what he was talking about. He would say "Leicester". So did the compiler of Gen. 2; the next step is to

identify that compiler, if possible.

Moses compiled the Book of Genesis from pre-existing documents. The first eleven chapters contain a wealth of Sumerian words—words derived from the people of Sumer, the land from which Abraham came at the first, the earliest people of which known history yields any trace. This goes back to several centuries before Abraham, probably in the time of Eber four or five centuries earlier. Of the five territorial names recorded, four are known in Sumerian records; of the four rivers two are known. This is sufficient to pinpoint the area the 2500 B.C. writer had in mind when he compiled the account. It is an area some two hundred miles south of the present head of the Persian Gulf, now covered by the sea. "Eden" is the Sumerian Edinu, the Plain, the flat country of southern Iraq. "Nod" where Cain was exiled, is Nadu on the eastern side of the Gulf; where the River Mand (ships of Nadu) still perpetuates the name. "Cush" was the western side of the Gulf where lay the 2,000 B.C. land of Dilmun, celebrated in Sumerian legend as the site of the Garden of Eden. Assyria retained its name until the sixth century B.C. Havilah (properly Khavilah) lay in the present north-western area of Iran, where the name of the Caspian Sea was the "Sea of Khavilah" until the 10th century A.D.

The four rivers are identified as the modern Euphrates and Tigris (Hiddekel) in Iraq, the Kherkhah (Pison) in Iran, and the Wady el Batin (Gihon) in northern Arabia, all of which converge together at the northern end of the Gulf (although the Wady el Batin has been dried up since the seventeenth century A.D. due to the slow elevation of eastern Arabia).

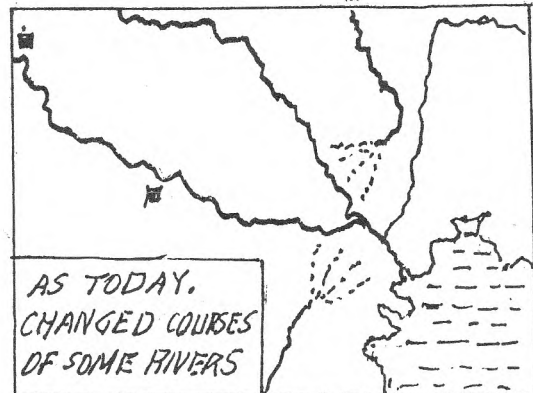
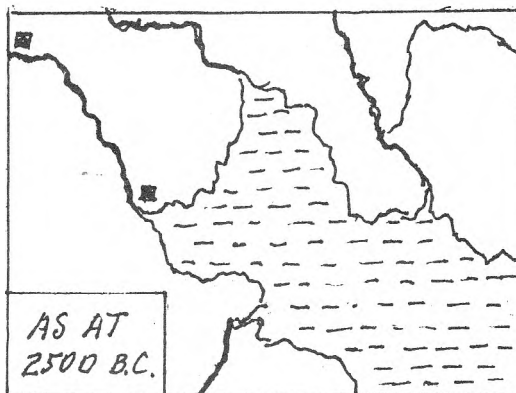
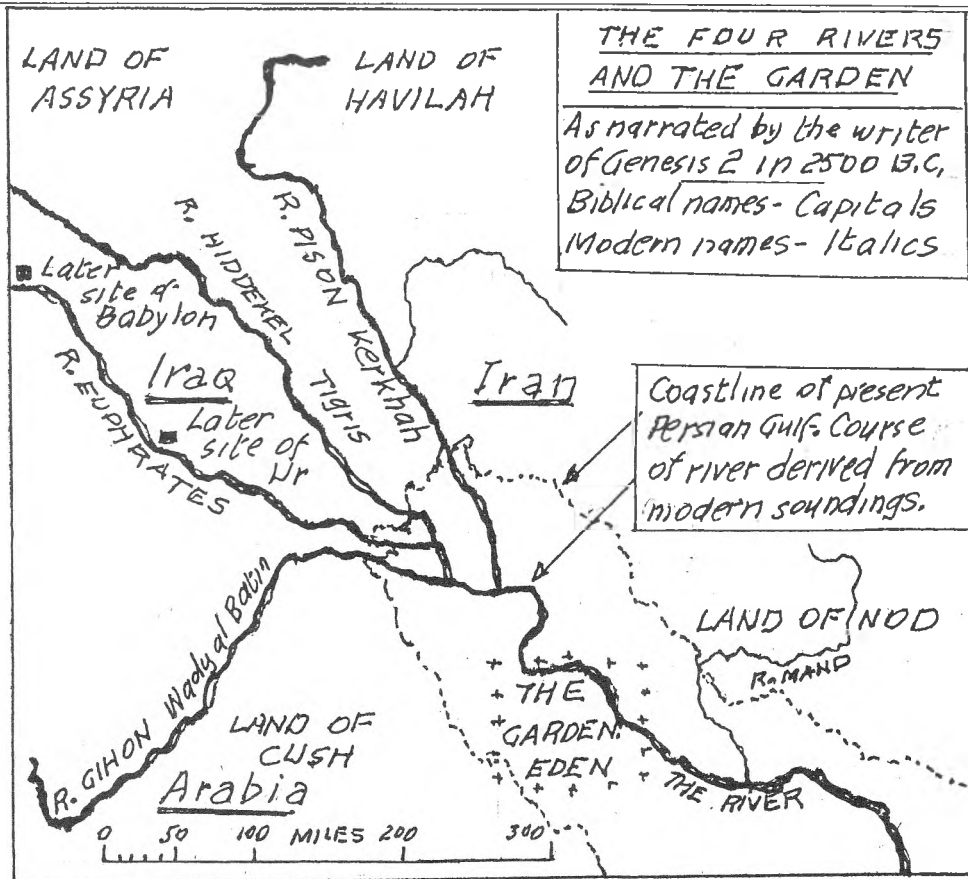
This, at any rate, is where the earliest known editor of the Book of Genesis believed to be the place where man first appeared on earth—and he lived much nearer to the events than do we today.

The literal authenticity of the story of Adam and Eve, the Temptation, the Fall, the expulsion from the Garden, and so on, has been dealt with in detail in the past (*BSM* 1981–1982) but this analysis of what little is said about the pre-diluvian world has to take the story as literally true even though there may be more behind the setting of the narrative than appears. The sin involved in the partaking of the forbidden fruit, for example, may have been in the significance of the act and not the act itself, just as the partaking of bread and wine in the celebration of the Last Supper is of no merit in itself; it is the significance of the ceremony which matters.

What happened to the Garden? In the story there was placed at its border "Cherubim, with a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep (inviolable) the way of the Tree of Life". Cherubim, the mystic guardians of God's Throne, with a mystic Flaming Sword, is evidently poetic. Whatever it was, the stricken pair could never go near the Garden again. It is a geological fact that a wide stretch of oil and gas-bearing strata crosses the Persian Gulf just at the point where the ancient chronicler located the Garden and marine oil wells exist there today. Was that "Flaming Sword" a dim reminiscence of a catastrophe somewhat similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah, when the underground oil deposits erupted in a cataclysm of flame and fire which destroyed the Cities of the Plain? A similar occurrence did happen in the Zagros Mountains in Iran not far from the site of Eden in early Sumerian times, giving rise to the legend of the seven Scorpion Gods whose fiery plumes desolated an area of four hundred square miles for several centuries before burning themselves out. Is that what happened to Eden?

How long the time of innocence in Eden? No one knows. The pre-Christian Rabbis hazarded a guess at six hours. Nineteenth century chronologists made a case for two years. There is no data to go upon. It may or may not have been before the birth of Cain and Abel, but certainly before the act which brought about the first death, and it was that act which closed the first recorded story in human history.

It is a well-known story, how Cain and Abel both brought offerings of their respective labours to the Lord in recognition of his goodness, Cain of the fruits of the ground, for he was an agriculturist, and Abel of his flocks, for he was a stock-keeper. God rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's, and Cain, moved by resentment and jealousy, killed his brother. It is not stated why God rejected the offering of Cain and the AV. does not make it clear. The Hebrew words employed reveal the truth. Abel brought the firstborn of his female lambs, the best he had to give. Cain brought, not the firstfruits, nor yet the best of his crop, but the later and inferior summer fruits (*see BSM Sept./Oct. 1987 for full analysis of the story*). Abel gave of his best; Cain of his second best. So the Divine sentence was pronounced, Banishment from the family circle and the land in which he had been brought up, an outcast with his wife into an alien land in which he and his family were to live and labour apart from the rest of Adam's family.



That land, said the ancient chronicler, was the land known in his own times, 25th century B.C. as the land of Nadu (Nod in the AV) on the present coast of Iran to the east of his site for the Garden of Eden, which is what Genesis says. The name remains to this day in the name of its chief river, the river Mand. A rugged, mountainous and inhospitable country, it rises to heights of six or eight thousand feet, with just a narrow plain through

which the River Mand makes its way. A valley about thirty miles by twenty is the only place where Cain could settle and raise crops for the sustenance of his growing family. Here the sons of Cain must have eked out a meagre living; in the eighth generation they were miners, extracting copper and iron from those same mountains, as men did in historic times thousands of years later.

So the geography of the Garden of Eden and the land of Nod can be traced today on modern maps, just as is recorded in the Book of Genesis.

So the "world that was" had its commencement, there, in a land long since submerged by the waters of the Persian Gulf, where two solitary human beings, created and given life by the Most High God, awakened into conscious life and recognised themselves for what they were, and started the whole process of human history which, thousands of years later, has brought the world of man to its present condition. That world came to its end some two thousand years afterwards by the Flood of Noah's day, when sin had submerged the world in

such a morass of corruption and misery that God brought it to an end and made a fresh start. The first episode in the history of humankind opens with the creation of a perfect human pair, capable of living their lives in harmony and communion with God and so into eternity; it closes with their open rebellion against God and his righteousness and their banishment into an unfinished environment in which they had to experience for themselves the wages of sin. History opens in Genesis with the entry of sin; it goes on into prophecy and the Book of Revelation which closes the story with recovery from sin.

To be continued.

THE LORD AT PRAYER

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1. 35.)

The details are quite graphic and paint for us a clear picture of Jesus during those happy days of his popular ministry in Galilee. Yet He was aware of the dangers of popularity and of spending too long in one place. As we read on, it is apparent that the sun was up and people were about again, searching for their hero. Jesus knew better, and if there had been any doubt in his mind when He arrived at that quiet spot, He now knew, after communion with his Father, what He must do. He said to the eager disciples, *"Let us go somewhere else—so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come."* (vs.38)

Luke gives the most complete record of our Lord's prayer life. Luke was the Gentile writer of the New Testament who spent much time with Paul on his journeys. He is the evangelist who shows us the words of Paul in action—*"Pray continually . . . 'pray in the spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests . . .'"* (1 Thess. 5. 17; Eph. 6. 18) Luke clearly establishes the links between the teachings of Paul and the work of Jesus. While it is Luke who tells us where and when Jesus prayed, it is John, the writer of the Fourth gospel, who gives us a detailed prayer of our Lord in chapter 17.

Like many children brought up in the fear and nurture of God, Jesus must have learned how to pray at his parents' side. By the time He had reached twelve years old He understood that God was his Father (Luke 2. 49). In Gethsemane He called God by the familiar form for Father—"Abba" (in our language, 'Daddy')—(Mark 14. 36)

which is the confident but tender address of a child to its father.

There are skills that need to be learnt, as in making requests and expressing appreciation for the goodness and gifts of a parent. Parents who explore these experiences with their children as they grow from birth, communicate with their offspring long before actual speech is learnt. These are the first lessons in prayer and perhaps have reference to Romans 8. 15, 16, 26.

As a child, Jesus would learn extensive portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament). He must have become very familiar with the stories of the great heroes of Israel. He would have known about Abraham's, great intercessory prayer on behalf of the cities of the plain (Gen. 18. 16-33). He would probably be able to recite the great dedication prayer of Solomon (2 Chron. 6). He would have known well the prayerful yearnings of Samuel and Jeremiah over a people and king who were backsliding from God. He would have read the expectant yet repentant prayers of Nehemiah and Daniel, as they looked forward to the restored Israel. Perhaps most of all he pondered the mighty Moses who had enjoyed "face to face" communion with his God (Exodus 33. 11).

Jesus teaching about prayer, and the prayers recorded of him, demonstrate the spirit of childhood which Jesus said would characterise those who entered the kingdom of heaven. The characteristics are dependence and need. Development of those traits enables praying believers to focus upon God and not upon self.

The first reference to our Lord praying is in Luke 3. 21, as He came up out of the waters of Jordan. He appears to be having a two way con-

versation with his Father. There we have the first of those remarkable utterances from Heaven "*this is my son*" said at the critical point in the life of Jesus from which He began his ministry. It was an event which showed the Jewish people that He was about to lay down his life in order to bring them salvation. It is an example to every believer that at such important experiences in our lives we should pray to our heavenly Father, that He may direct our paths by his Holy Spirit. Jesus urged his disciples to pray for the Holy Spirit. Immediately following his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert where He was tempted by Satan. At each succeeding critical point in his life it is recorded that Jesus specially devoted time to prayer.

When the Lord prepared to select the apostles, the men who were to be trained and sent out as the foundation members of the Christian Church, he spent all night in prayer (Luke 6. 12). Jesus needed to be sure that He was choosing the right men for this job. They were gifts received from his Father, and He, the sinless son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, needed to pray about such decisions. He could be tempted to choose leaders of the Church for the wrong reasons by putting his own human feelings before the purpose of God. In another prayer just before his death He was praying again about these men and their special needs in the days that would follow his departure. "*They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" (John 17.6). Jesus had great concern for these men, and it was no easy task protecting and strengthening such raw recruits to be the leaders of the new kingdom. As the suffering drew near, Jesus had much to teach men like Peter the way of the Lord. "*I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail . . .*" (Luke 22. 32), Jesus could not wave his hand over the band of disciples to protect them by magic. This was the real world and they had to face real temptations. It was in such situations that Jesus had grown spiritually and it was in such situations that his disciples also grew to be like him.

Another very critical time in the work of Jesus came when He did the miracle of 'the feeding of the five thousand'. The year of popularity was really ended but He continued to be the centre of attraction, and great crowds went to him. As the thousands dispersed from the meal of bread and fish Jesus told his disciples to get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the lake. He needed to be alone with God. He had been

bereaved of his cousin John the Baptist. He had been or was about to be challenged by the crowd to become their king. So He withdrew to the mountainside and there spent time in prayer. (Matt. 14. 23). To reject the people's support would be more than a disappointment for them. Jesus loved these people but now they would turn away from him. This was a turning point in his life and He needed the Father's strength as He laid bare his life in deep humility and patience. Jesus wanted the kingdom to come as much as we all do. He suffered more than we, as He looked at stricken humanity in all its poverty and sickness. Yet He must wait and pass through the valley of shadows itself.

In such an atmosphere He came to Caesarea Philippi with the 'twelve' and asked them the momentous question "*Who do men say that I am?*" Luke 9. 18 records that this question was asked "*when Jesus was praying in private*". The crucifixion was approaching and He and the disciples must be prepared. Thus it was that while they were in an attitude of prayer the great revelation was made known. Jesus began to speak to them of his suffering and death. A little later the three most intimate disciples were to go with Jesus to a mountain, (Luke 9. 28), for the specific purpose of praying, and while they were there, Jesus was changed, his face and clothing became bright white and they all saw a vision of Elijah and Moses. This is not the place to examine what happened to them all just then but this was further preparation for the coming ordeal and it occurred while Jesus was praying.

While the three disciples were on the mountain with Jesus the others were on the lower slopes and were attempting unsuccessfully to heal a very sick boy. When Jesus returned and healed the boy it was natural for the disciples to ask why they had been unable to perform the miracle. While Matthew's account tells us that they were short of faith, Mark 9. 29 says that Jesus explained to them the need for much prayer.

The implication in Luke's record is that these great spiritual experiences which reveal the immediate purpose of God and the work of Jesus Christ were linked with prayer. There could be a parallel with our experience. Times of prayer can become the wonderful moments when God reveals something of his guidance and glory.

There were times when Jesus was in agony of mind over the conditions around him and there were great stirrings of his human emotions. There were other times when He praised God with much thankfulness for the wonderful things that were

happening. One of these was on the return of the 'seventy' (or was it seventy two disciples?). As the disciples had gone around preaching and healing, Jesus had seen the powers of darkness shaken and realised that the conquest of evil was in sight. Luke records that "*at that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . .*" and again "*Father, I thank you that you, heard me*" (John 11. 41.). It is apparent from the accounts that Jesus need not have made audible public praise, for communication with God was continuous from within. Yet so that the disciples and the people around should know what was going on, He spoke audibly in prayer and thus the praise of God overflowed among those who were with him in spirit.

The deep feelings are of another nature in the next chapter when Philip brought the Greek enquirers to him. The glory of the Father can only be fully revealed in the intense suffering and death of the days ahead. From this point onwards until Gethsemane, He utters groans and questions, with tears and sighs of intense agony. These are referred to in Hebrews 5. 7, "*During the days of Jesus's life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission . . .*". This was learning obedience through what He suffered and attaining maturity through agony of soul. In all these experiences Jesus wanted only to know and to do the Father's will, so that God could be glorified in the life and death of his Son. It is when we catch the spirit of those glories and groanings, joys and sorrows, for that one reason and purpose, the glory of the Father, that we truly follow Jesus.

On one occasion the disciples went to Jesus while He was praying and asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11.1). Do we need to learn to pray? Surprisingly Jesus had already given them some instruction in prayer during the Sermon on the Mount. What prompted the question now? They were aware that John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray and that it was the custom of the Pharisees' teachers to do the same for their followers. They were also becoming aware perhaps that Jesus' approach to God was very different from anything they or anyone else had ever been taught.

An examination of the parable of the two sons (Luke 15. 11-32) gives us an insight into the way in which we may first approach God. We, like the prodigal son, come to our senses at last and realise that we ought to seek our Father. It is one of the most enlightening stories in the world. It teaches us

how the most derelict sinner may draw near to the great Creator of the Universe, the majestic and holy God. If coming to him so often with our every want breeds contempt by familiarity then we need to ponder his majesty and greatness. Our perception of him is almost certainly too small. Should we not adopt the attitude and spirit of the prodigal who was determined to go to his father and confess his faults and admit that he hardly deserved the lowest place in the household. At once the vision changes and we see the outstretched arms of the father wanting him to come home as a son. How much that picture of God reflects the words of Jesus to a sinful woman of Samaria—"*the Father seeketh such*", to worship him not on a sacred mountain or in a mighty temple, but anywhere, so long as the searching is made without hypocrisy but in sincerity and in reality.

The same attitude of heart and mind is shown in Jesus' other teachings about prayer recorded in Matthew 6 and Luke 18. It is so easy for committed disciples of the Lord Jesus, now, to think that the religious leaders and pagans of the First century were the only ones to have the wrong spirit concerning prayer. When Jesus told the parable of the two men praying in the Temple, He had in mind also those who would believe on him because of the message of the early disciples. Many a Christian has silently prayed wishfully "dear Lord, I give thanks I am not as that Pharisee". There is such a danger in the Twentieth century to believe that we can enter the presence of God with feelings of pride, of achievement and of self exaltation, to the extent that we suffer from the sin of conceit in our hearts and lives. If that is so, then we shall not be ready for what follows in the teachings of Jesus, nor the model prayers of Matt. 6. and Luke 11. The primary principle of prayer is the hardest lesson to learn and is focussing attention upon God rather than upon self. In the parable it is not the words of the sons which are of paramount importance but the words of the father. In the joy of reconciliation, there is a gentleness in the rebuke of the father, not of wrath and upbraiding. His one desire was to have the erring son back in the homestead, to restore the relationship and renew the fellowship. The story should be read alongside every passage in the Old and New Testament which speaks of the wrath of God. The question for the believer today is "Have I truly come home?"—have I really entered into the spirit of that home and have I discovered the compassion and joy of that home? The Father eagerly awaits his child, but the child may yet have disappointed the Father.

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

1. Ur to Canaan

He was named, by his father, Abu-Ramu "the storm-god ny father", more familiarly known by the Hebrew equivalent Abram. His father Tarakhu (Terah) was an idolater, a devotee of the Moon-god. Terah's name itself meant "Gazelle of the Moon-god" and the gazelle itself was a sacred animal in Moon-god worship. But in that pagan religion there was an element of a once older faith, for Abram's brother Har-Anu (Haran) meaning "Anu the great One" was an acknowledgment to Anu, the Most High God, the God of Heaven, supreme of all the gods of Sumer, revered as the only One God in the distant past of Abram's ancestors, Noah and Eber, who served the Most High God when there were no other gods known to man. And something of those early patriarchs must have come down to Abram, for he too revered and served that same Most High God and rejected all the other gods of Sumer.

Abram was married to Sar-ai (Sarai) one of several names applied to the heavenly wife of the Moon-god. She was a daughter of his deceased brother Haran, ten years younger than himself. Together with Sarai's younger brother Lu-Utu (Lot) "man of the Sun-god" and the other brother Nahor and his wife Mal-katu (Milcah), another name for the wife of the Moon-god, Sarai's sister, they lived together in one large and well-equipped house in the busy industrial and merchant city of Uri-ki (Ur of the Chaldees) at the northern end of what is now called the Persian Gulf, (although the ruins of Ur are now a hundred miles from the sea). To that city came the merchant vessels from distant lands bringing valuable metals like copper and gold, and the products of tropical countries from afar, from lands like Dilmun (now Bahrein) and Magan (south Arabia) and Melukha (now Pakistan) and from places farther east where they met vessels from China and exchanged goods and traded, for that time was much like the present and commercialism held sway and trade was brisk. So life was pleasant and busy and profitable in Ur of the Chaldees and in all probability Abram himself was a prosperous trader for he would certainly have no part nor lot in his father's equally profitable business in the manufacture of *teraphim*, little images of the gods which every respectable Sumerian kept in his house to protect from demons and all harm.

But times were changing. The great days of the Third Dynasty of Ur were now a century or more in the past, when its last king Ibi-Sin was slain by the invading Elamites from the eastern mountains, and Elamite power was in the ascendancy. Now the city-state of Babylon in the north under its famous king Hammurabi (Amraphel in Gen. 14) was threatening Elam and before long would be dominant. So the future of Ur began to look bleak, and Terah may not have been the only one wondering what to do about it.

It was at this juncture that the word of the Lord came to Abram.

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed".

And Abram did as the Lord commended.

He did not go alone. His wife and brother-in-law Lot accompanied him, and his father Terah. It is very likely that Terah, reviewing the current political situation, felt that there were probably safer places in the world than Ur, and that trade might well be equally brisk in Ur's twin-city Kharanu (Haran) in the far north some six hundred miles away, a merchant city like Ur, sacred to the Moon-god like Ur, and situated on the great trade route which came in from Siberia in the east and went on to the land of the Canaanites on the shores of the Mediterranean, from whence their merchant vessels carried goods to and from the far west. A mainly Sumerian city, inhabited by a mixture of Sumerians and Semites and Canaanites, there would be just as much demand for his *teraphim* as in Ur. So to Haran they decided to go. Nahor and his wife Milcah remained, although they did follow some sixty years later, by which time Terah was dead and Abram long settled in Canaan.

They went northward, almost certainly accompanying one of the caravans of traders which were always traversing the land, following the road which ran more or less alongside the great river, the River Euphrates, the life-blood of the land, through the wheatfields and date-palm groves and vegetable farms which in Abraham's day constituted the granary of the ancient world, although to-day that same land only produces oil and cannot feed itself. Northward through Uruk (Erech,

Gen. 10) one of the earliest of cities, one of whose kings was Gilgamesh who was reputed to have travelled to the ends of the earth to find his ancestor Noah who survived the great Flood, to get from him the secret of eternal life, and failed in his quest. Then to Shuruppak, the city where the Ark was built, so said the legend, and landed safely on the Mount of the East. A hundred and fifty miles from Ur he passed through the gates of Babylon, not yet the world's greatest city but rapidly on the way to becoming so, sacred to the sun-god, the Son of the Most High God, Redeemer of mankind, champion of the gods. But in Abram's time he was hardly known as a god; so recently as two centuries before Abram was born the name of the city meant "*the Gate of God*" but when he passed through it the name was "*the Gate of the gods*" and that change is significant for when Babylon was founded there was only one God known—the Most High God. Even in Abram's time he was known as "Abram of the Most High God".

So on until Sumer was left behind and the little company traversed the land of Mari, and entered its capital city with its magnificent palace and temples and monuments, the very existence of which was quite unknown until the early part of the present century. Semites, not Sumerians, descended from Shem like Abram himself, but idolators; these were the people of Mari—but here was no Promised Land. Then, at last, six hundred miles from Ur, Terah's immediate goal, Haran, city of the Moon-god, even though its very name testified to its being sacred to the Most High God of Heaven in the days of its founding, when there were no false gods. Here they stayed for probably some twenty years, with every likelihood of Terah resuming his trade.

Abram too must have prospered in Haran. He almost certainly took up farming, for it was at this time he increased his establishment and had servants and labourers, with children born to them. (Gen. 12.5)—the description does not fit a merchant trader but it does fit a typical farming community. And so, twenty years later, he could have been a fairly well-to-do farmer, halfway through life at seventy-five, and still no sign of the land which God had promised to show him . . . for Haran was a Sumerian city and by no means the undefiled land he had been promised.

Then, at the age of two hundred and five, Terah died.

By Sumerian custom, the father was the head of

the family until his death. Until Terah's death Abram was not altogether a free agent, but now he was free. His only brother Nahor was still back in Ur of the Chaldees. Now, surely, the sign would come!

Perhaps he needed no sign. He was free to forsake this land of many gods and seek one where he could serve his Lord in spirit and in truth. He may or may not have heard tell of the land of Canaan, a land of wide pastures and no traders. Whether or not, it was to be southward now, toward the land of Canaan, that his thoughts turned. So he disposed of his land, gathered his servants and herdsmen, his flocks and herds, together, and set out to go to the land which God would show him. There must have been some form of Divine guidance which told him that there to the south lay the place to which he had been called to go.

Two hundred miles through the northern plains, where busy cities followed one after another, interspersed with smiling farmlands in between, caravans of merchants making their way to the east where the Canaanite Phoenicians waited to barter for their goods and carry them in their ships to the distant countries of the West; a thriving land indeed, where stood in Abram's day prosperous cities whose buried remains have only in this twentieth century been discovered and excavated, revealing so much of what is known of the shining civilisation of the ancient East—Ras Shamra and Alalykh and Ebla—but Abram passed them by without stopping, for he sought "*a city that hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God*" (Heb. 11.10). Now the pasture-lands were left behind, and he faced the forbidding mountains of Lebanon. He must have seen the celebrated forests of cedars, famous and coveted throughout the ancient world, and laboured to ascend the precipitous roads with all his possessions. A weary journey it must have been, all hundred miles of it, until at length he scaled the heights of Mount Hermon and viewed, far below and far away, a land greener and fairer by far than any he had as yet encountered in his travels. And he knew within himself that this was the land he sought, the land to which God had guided him—the land of Canaan.

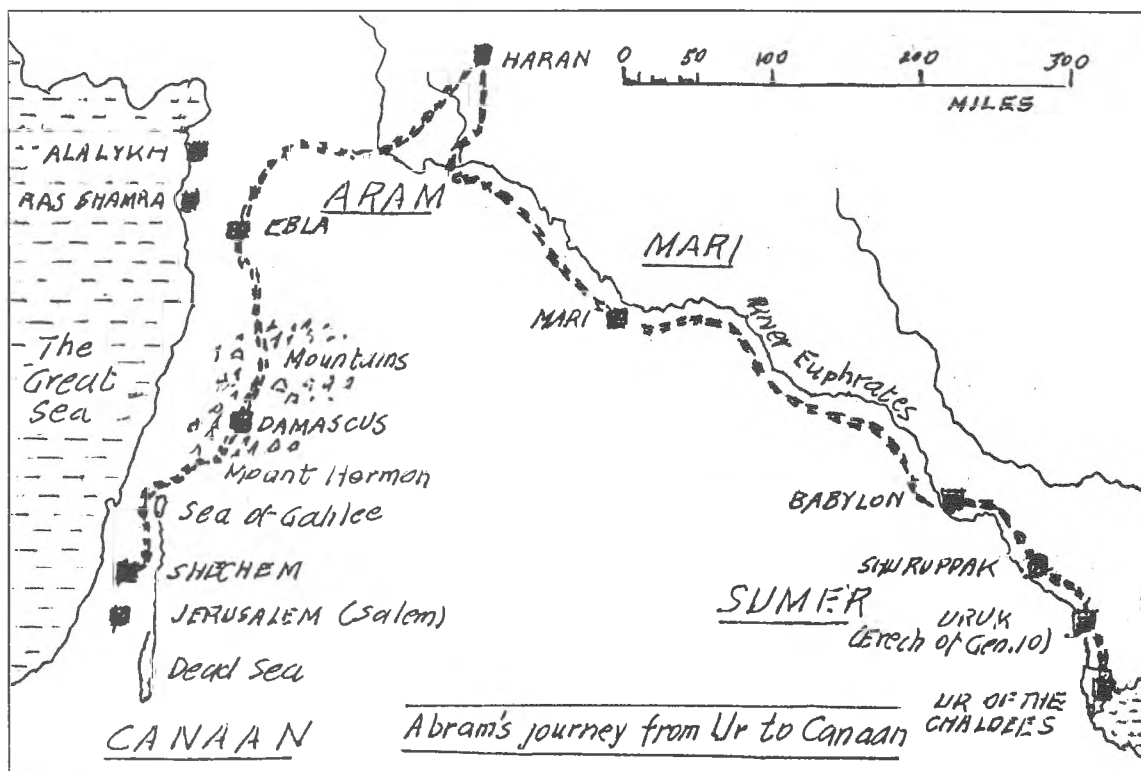
So, thankfully, he descended to the plain, finding there rich herbage for his flocks and herds, and there, perhaps, remained awhile to recuperate from the rigours of the mountain passage. The land was almost uninhabited at that time; a tiny village here and there and plenty of room for newcomers.

The few tribesmen he did meet would have been friendly and allowed him to pass without interference; there was plenty for all. So, onward by degrees, another hundred miles and then, perhaps five or six months after leaving Haran, he came to the shores of a great land-locked sea, a lake which in later days men were to call the Sea of Galilee, and there he must have rested again.

Perhaps it was the Spirit of the Lord that led him to continue a little farther. Setting out once more,

and skirting the western shores of the lake where in later days the Lord Jesus was to minister in towns as yet unbuilt, he went another hundred miles until he came to a place the native people told him was called Shechem. There, by what means we know not, he knew that this was the land to which he had been guided. There he pitched camp and there he built an altar to the Lord. At last he was in his Promised Land!

To be continued.



Physical aspect of Jesus

"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 53. 2).

It is illogical to take these words as descriptive of our Lord's personal appearance when one remembers that He was humanly perfect as was Adam and that the physical aspect of Jesus must have been one of overpowering beauty and majesty. It is unthinkable that the Son of God should walk this earth in any form other than one suited to the fact that He was indeed the Son of God. It is a significant fact that the descriptions of Jesus dating from the days of the Early Church all present him as possessed of grace and beauty; it was not until later centuries, when the influence of a gloomy asceti-

cism was fastening itself upon the Church, that the conception of Jesus as physically unlovely took the lead, and texts like this were taken out of their setting and interpreted in a grossly literal sense.

The glory of Jesus was not of this world. That was the truth over which Israel stumbled and that is why they saw no beauty in him to desire. A king must, in their eyes, be possessed of outward majesty and glory; he must be arrayed in costly raiment and flashing jewels; he must have courtiers and servants and a shouting crowd to attend him wherever he went. There were three things, yea, four, said the Wise Man in Proverbs, which "go well" and are "comely in going". A lion, which is strongest among beasts, a greyhound, a he-goat,

and a king, "against whom there is no rising up". (Prov. 30. 29-31). He marvelled at the strength of the lion, the speed of the greyhound, the irresistible force of the he-goat, and the power of the king.

These things, he said, are "comely"—but there was none of that in the demeanour of the Prince of Peace.

"I AM OF . . ."

*A discussion on
Christian unity*

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One of the deepest and most elusive aspects of the believer's standing in Christ is the fact that all believers are members of one Body—a Body over which the Lord Jesus is the Head. The statement of the Lord that He is the true Vine of which every Spirit-united believer is a branch has stood before the Christian Church since its earliest days, yet in all the years of the Church's pilgrimage, it may not be too much to say, the truth of that fact has never been fully realised. From those early days the tongues and pens of her ablest sons have tried repeatedly to explain what that sacred "One-ness" means, but never have they made the outward organisation of the Church agree with deductions drawn from the Holy Word. It is one thing to hold this doctrine as an article of faith; it is quite another to realise it as a matter of experience. Even in those days when the disciples had all things in common, the early company of believers failed to realise that full degree of Christian unity. An Ananias was found among them—a token that other interests had crept in. The widows of the homeland Jews were getting more attention than the widows of the Grecian Jews and dissatisfaction and murmuring arose. While these symptoms were of no great severity and were promptly put right, yet they were as the small occasional bubble rising to the water's rim which showed that there was fermentation down below.

We find the microscopic pattern of the whole Christian Church within the walls of the Corinthian ecclesia. It had not reached the unity of Christ. "*It hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren . . . that there are contentions among you, Now this I mean, that each of you saith, 'I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ' "*" (1 Cor. 1. 11-12 R.V.) What these divisions were may be gathered from careful scrutiny of Paul's epistles to his Corinthian friends. Phrases here and whole paragraphs there describe the peculiarities and differences of this party and that, so that it is possible to construct an outline of these hostile elements pretending to fellowship as one whole.

The churches resulting from Paul's earliest missionary labours were composed of two hostile and

incompatible elements—they contained both Jews and Gentiles. Long-standing hereditary animosities had to be overcome in the converts from either side, and, so long as outside adverse elements did not introduce themselves these animosities were curbed, if not suppressed, by the thrill of belonging to the same Lord, and by mutual participation in salvation through his blood. The first disturbing influence to break into these happy scenes proceeded from the mother Church at Jerusalem. In that city many thousands, who in some measure had believed (Acts 21.20) still remained zealous of the Law, and strove hard against Paul to maintain the rites and practices inherent in the Law. Learning of the large influx of Gentiles into some of the distant churches, they sought to compel them to submit to circumcision—telling them "*Unless ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*" (Acts 15. 1). Emissaries from James and the mother-Church followed in the wake of Paul and crept into the little companies he had gathered, and in his absence sowed these seeds of disturbing thought. This happened everywhere where Paul's intensive labour had gathered a little nucleus of believing souls, and rent the perplexed companies in twain.

The baneful influence of Jerusalem had been felt in the Corinthian Church. At least two sections of this divided Church had been created by this influence. These were the parties professing to follow Peter and Christ. These parties held themselves aloof from the uncircumcised Gentile converts, and where the influence from Jerusalem was strong (as at Antioch, see Gal. 2.11-13) would not deign to eat with their Gentile brethren. This separation of the Jewish element had its reaction on the Gentile element. Greece had long been notorious for its speculative philosophies—its communities, as at Athens (Acts 17. 21) always seeking to learn some new thing. As at Jerusalem, where over-zealous souls sought to blend the Gospel into the Law, so at Corinth enthusiastic tutors sought to amalgamate the Gospel with native philosophy and teach things which the Jewish section could not accept. These were the men who lined themselves behind the name of

Apollos, himself a native of Alexandria where Oriental philosophy had established its principal school. It was from this section denial of the resurrection of the dead arose (1 Cor. 15). Then there were some who misinterpreted Christian liberty. Taking as their warranty Paul's teaching that the true believer in Christ was set free from the Law, they stretched this teaching to mean that they were not under law or restraints of any kind, that no act was to be accounted sinful or censurable. All kinds of gross immorality were tolerated and excused—such immorality as was not sanctioned even in the unbelieving Gentile world (1 Cor. 5).

But there were others who understood Paul aright and sought, like their father-in-God, to live holy and upright lives—some, who from among the Jews, had found the burden of the Law intolerable; some also from the Gentiles who rejoiced in the salvation brought into their lives through Jesus' sacrifice. What strange admixture of outlook and teaching was gathered together in this one ecclesia at Corinth! Truly it seems as if that Church was the dumping-ground for all the theological and philosophical garbage of the earth! Together with the proclamation of the pure Gospel of Grace and the Cross of Christ, there was the enunciation of Mosaic claims, and the propagation of Oriental mysteries, interspersed by the impudent clamour of those brazen enough to excuse the blackest sin. With diversities such as these is it to be expected that anything but division could ensue? Without doubt every section could offer some justification for its attitude and for its separateness, and throw on some other group the blame for the disunited state of the Church. Seeing that neither Paul, Peter, nor Apollos, were resident elders in the Corinthian Church it is obvious that every group must have had some leading man or men at its head around whose dominating personalities the members of each party were ranged. Apostles and evangelists paid no more than flying visits, then went on their way. Resident elders remained to carry on where Apostles left off.

This was where the trouble began. Division was not engineered nor sanctioned by the Apostolic visitor, but no sooner had he left than comparisons were drawn and preferences expressed concerning the nature of their several ministries. And they who became the most readily articulate were just those who should have deprecated such comparisons and rebuked such preferences. Thus, as the forefront brethren expressed their preference for this or that style of utterance and for this or that view of the outworking of the Divine Plan, the

rank and file ranged themselves in alignment with this or that leading elder in his approval and support of this Apostle or evangelist, and his attack upon the rest of the visiting ministers. The rank and file were not much to be blamed—they only followed where they were led. The fault was in the shepherds of the flock who, forgetful of the task laid upon them by the Lord, turned away from the ministry of holy things to discuss personalities with their merits and relative demerits. Each group could justify its attitude and make out a good case for the position it assumed.

"If only Paul would be content to be like Peter, and not open the door widely to Gentile dogs, there would be far more of our own kith and kin embrace the Gospel truth." "Paul does not seem to realise that what he gains from Gentile lands he more than repels from among his own people." *"If only he was content to be like Peter and James—men who really saw the Lord, and heard the Gospel from his mouth, there would be thousands more who, though still remaining zealous of the law, would accept Jesus as the Messiah of Israel."* Thus spake the supporter of Peter's claims.

More violent and dangerous than these were the "holier-than-thou" "go-to-the-fountain-head" zealot who said he was "of Christ". Is it assumed that here, at last, was one party beyond reproach, and knew where its allegiance should be placed? Not a bit of it! Headed, perhaps, by some venerable patriarch who had visited Jerusalem in the Master's earthly days, and heard the discourse of He who spake with such authority, had accepted and believed his testimony direct, he carried it away to this foreign soil, he forgot much and mistook much of what the Blessed One had spoken, so that now it was but a travesty of what it should have been.

It is to this group Paul refers when he writes again (2 Cor. 10. 7). *"If any man trusteth in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that, even as he is Christ's, so also are we."* Of Paul, this section had not one good word to say. They challenged his Apostleship, first, because he never saw the Lord in the flesh, and next because he did not presume to live upon the brethren, but laboured with his own hands. Though admitting that his letters were weighty and strong, they held in ridicule both his personal presence and his speech. He was "straight-laced" "not-as-these-other-men", Phariseism masquerading in a supposed Christian garb, and justifying it all in the name of him who accepted all.

What was amiss? Why did all this fleshliness of

outlook prevail? Because they had not understood the purport of the Gospel call. It was a new thing in the world. Judaism had been divided into rival schools, Heathenism had had its myriad cults. They could not conceive that the Gospel call was of a different nature altogether. Every leader lived for and fostered the interests of his own following. Each one was partisan and sectarian. No single one could labour for the good of all. Not one amongst them could or would say "We are all of Christ" or viewing the broken ranks, say "Let us all together strive to be of Christ". That was their fault—they were myopic, hard-hearted, suspicious, and uncharitable. They scrupled not to interdict, to slander and defame those for whom Christ had died, and who had been sent forth in his Name.

There was a little truth, or some semblance of truth, in the teachings of each group. What they would not see was the truth held by the rival groups. They did not realise that they saw only "in part" and not the whole truth. They did not see that truth must be progressive and grow from bud to bloom. Each section thought it had "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth", and would not for a moment allow that any rival section subscribed to truth. Each rival leader thought he had all the truth and ministered what he had for his own following alone. To one group and its leaders Cephas possessed the hallmark—to another group Apollos was the criterion, to still another Paul, and to the straightest group of all, an earthly Christ. And as at Corinth, so has it been throughout the Age. So truly has the glorious ideal of Christian Unity been at once both mirage and morass—a mirage to draw onward, and a morass to engulf.

There may have been some true saints in every section of the Corinthian Church, but no single elder or leader therein was able to minister to all such saints, because the deeper and profounder things of the Christian faith had been overlaid and obscured by lesser and shallower things. Nor, so long as the dividing boundaries were observed, could saint reach out to saint over the barriers. But—and this is the great fact outstanding in true Christian relationship—while their sense of oneness was dulled and impaired, it made no difference to the actual One-ness in the heavenly Courts. That actual One-ness is an other-worldly spiritual thing, registered in heaven above. It is a mystic union of kindred souls, joined to the Lord, who died with him in his death, and were raised with him because He lives, yet running their earthly course, centuries apart, perhaps, with whole continents or oceans lying between their habitats—and found one here, and another there;

—but spite of all earthly handicaps, linked and joined up to their Lord and Head. The Shepherd of the flock knows all his sheep and no man plucks them from his hand, no matter how that man despoils the pasture, or fouls the flowing streams of truth.

It is not easy to maintain the sense of unity, even to-day. While the real interests of every sheep is in the great Shepherd's hands, the sense that we are of one calling can be blurred and dulled by an elder's unhelpful ministry. Too much insistence upon secondary things can upset the balance of the mind concerning more important things and tend to divert attention from the all-essential relationships. Such over-insistence may suit a "following", but it does not minister to the needs of the whole flock. It tends to apply itself to only a "part"—and that is Corinth over again!

Mistakes in theology may indeed need to be corrected, and a stand may have to be made for Truth, but the Christian cannot live on negatives or on denials of another man's theology. He must have the positive affirmations of the Word as his provender. And more than that, while "truth" must be, at times, defended and proclaimed, "Truth" is not the greatest thing in the Christian economy. The proclamation of Truth is but a means to an end, and the end is greater than the means. God revealed his Truth to win for himself a family—and every son and daughter to-day is greater in God's sight than any spoken means that led them into that relationship. The child is more precious in the Father's sight than even the most correct definition of a truth. Let us never forget that fact.

This conclusion remains. There are some aspects of Truth which separate the flock and divide its interests. There are some other aspects that unite, and deepen the present sense of unity. Insistence on secondary things can work present injury to sensitive souls, and draw barriers down the ranks, keeping saint from kindred saint. Only when minds have been dulled by deprivation of essential truth do they reach the point where they begin to say "I am of . . ."

Is it not the duty then of every pen and voice to seek the interests of all the flock—of all the brethren known and unknown, both inside and outside our present fellowship and seek to feed the wearied sheep with such provender that will make the sense of one-ness keen and sharp? Then, as any modern Paul may plant or some present-day Apollos water. God can use both to produce increase to the flock.

JETHRO THE MIDIANITE

Handsome of person, tall and lean, thoughtful in demeanour and a man of few words. That is how the mediæval Arab commentators of the Koran described Jethro the Midianite—Shoaib as they called him, surnamed Khatib al Anbiya, "preacher of the prophets". The Koran says it was he who gave Moses the power to work miracles before Pharaoh, and speaks with pride of the fact that he was Moses' father-in-law; pride, because Jethro was not an Israelite, he was an Arab, and as an Arab was used to play a prominent part in the out-working purposes of God.

The Koran has not much else to say about Jethro, and what there is has little value compared with the much more detailed and life-like picture given in the Bible. This hitherto unknown desert sheik was destined to play a vital role in the preparation of Moses for his memorable work as the Leader of Israel in their journey to the Promised Land.

The story commences forty years before the Exodus, when Moses, becoming aware of Israel's need of a champion, had killed an Egyptian taskmaster and in consequence was being hunted by Pharaoh's officers. Somehow or other he must flee Egypt and find refuge in some distant land where Pharaoh could not find him. He got across the frontier without being apprehended and found himself on the Sinai side of the Red Sea where forty years later all Israel was to cross with a mighty deliverance. His first impulse was probably to make his way to Canaan, two or three weeks' journey through sparsely inhabited territory, but he would quickly reflect that Canaan was under Egyptian influence and he might easily be detected or betrayed and taken back to Egypt. The alternative was to turn southward and plunge into the mountainous terrain of Central Sinai. Even so he must needs observe caution, for in that direction, only forty miles from Mount Sinai itself, were the copper mines of Serabit el Khadim, where a strong force of Egyptian soldiery superintended the work of the slave miners, and the high road to the mines, always busy with travelling officials and convoys of copper being taken to Egypt. Moses must have made his way cautiously, perhaps travelling mostly by night, until he was clear of the mines and well on the way to the south.

So it came about that, seeking to put as great a distance as possible between himself and Egypt, he rounded the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula,

climbed the mountain barrier which rears its peaks five thousand feet in the air and divides Western Sinai from Eastern Sinai, and then, looking down from those heights, saw the place he sought.

They call it Sharm el Sheikh nowadays; since the six-day war Israel has built a holiday resort there. When Moses looked down upon the land he saw a green plain something like fifteen miles long by ten wide, bounded upon three sides by the mountains on which he was now standing, and upon the fourth by the blue waters of the Gulf of Akaba. A perfect haven, he must have thought; cut off from the world, far from Egyptian influence—he had come nearly three hundred miles since leaving Egypt—and an opportunity for his identity to be lost so that Pharaoh would never hear of him again. Thankfully he made his way down the mountain slopes into the grasslands and sat down to rest beside a well.

It was there that the seven daughters of Jethro found him—seven shepherdesses, come to draw water for their father's flocks. Once more Moses found himself involved in a fight. A party of shepherds jostled the girls out of the way in order to get water for themselves; Moses intervened and compelled them to desist. The seven went home to their father full of their story of the Egyptian stranger who had so chivalrously taken their part. And Jethro, true to the traditional hospitality of the Bedouin Arab, insisted that the stranger be found and brought to his tent as an honoured guest.

Jethro was a Midianite, and Midian was a son of Abraham by his third wife Keturah. Nearly six hundred years had elapsed since Abraham's time; the descendants of Midian had grown into a company of tribes inhabiting both sides of the Gulf of Akaba, Sinai on the west side and Arabia on the east. With some of these Midianite tribes Israel was later to come into violent conflict and after the settlement, in the days of Gideon, to win a notable victory over them. It is evident, though, that here in this remote corner of Sinai the little community of which Jethro was the head had become more or less separated from its brother clans and was leading a quiet untroubled existence undisturbed by their fellows in the wider world. The fact that Jethro is described in Jud. 1.16 as "the Kenite", which in the Hebrew is "of Kain", shows that he had a forebear named Kain who gave his name to this sub-division of the Midianite people. The

names of Midian's five sons are recorded in Genesis 25; there would have been three or more generations between those sons and Jethro and in one if those generations this Kain probably settled in this spot and gave his name to the growing community.

It is evident that Jethro formed a liking for the stranger and invited him to make his home with them, an invitation which Moses accepted. Similarity of religious faith probably had a great deal to do with it, and also the fact, which must have quickly emerged in conversation, that they shared a common ancestor, Abraham. Moses served and worshipped the God of Abraham, and so did Jethro. It is likely the latter had not previously known of the existence of the Israelites, or of their sojourn in Egypt; after the death of Abraham, when Jacob was only fifteen years old, there was almost certainly no contact between his father's family and the sons of Keturah, now forming their own settlements well outside Canaan. But his forebears had evidently remained true to the faith of Abraham so that Moses on his part must have been greatly interested in finding another people, not of the line of Isaac and Jacob, who also served and revered God. The two men must have had a great deal to talk about and perhaps Moses, who had known of the Arab descendants of Abraham only by hearsay heretofore, learned many things which were to be of inestimable value in later life.

So Moses became a member of Jethro's household and undertook the duties of shepherd and herdsman, the occupation of probably nearly all the male members of the tribe, and perhaps anticipated spending the rest of his days in this quiet and sunlit valley, almost another world compared with the Egypt he had left. Eventually—perhaps not at once, but eventually—he married Zipporah, one of the daughters of Jethro, and became the father of a son. The roots were beginning to strike deep. As the years multiplied—for he spent forty years in this valley—he must have wondered at times whether God did indeed intend to use him at all, or whether Israel would in fact be delivered from Egypt. It is very probable that at such times the sage counsel of the older man allayed his impatience and quieted his restless spirit. When the day's work was done, the darkness of the night settled over the land, and the lamps flickered low in the tents, long and earnest must have been the conversations between these two, as each related to other those things relating to the One true God which had come down to them from their respective

forefathers. Much of Moses' deep insight into the character of God and the inviolability of his promises was probably instilled into him by Jethro; part of the credit for the successful outcome of the Exodus must assuredly be awarded to this almost unknown desert sheik.

There is one other significant contribution which Jethro may have made, although there is no proof, only deduction. The origin of the Book of Job, and how this Arab book having only Arab actors in its drama, got into the Hebrew Bible, is a mystery to all except those modern scholars who assert that it was a much later compilation by some pious Jew and falsely accredited to an ancient but mythical hero. The internal evidence of the Book discredits that fanciful theory anyway. The background of the book, and its allusions, no less than its plain statements, attest that it relates to events which happened in the territory to the east or south east of Canaan a few generations after Abraham but at least several centuries before the Exodus. Israel in Egypt could not have known the book, for the happenings it records took place whilst they were in Egypt. At least three, perhaps more, of the historical characters in the book were descendants of Abraham, and one of them, Bildad, did in fact derive his ancestry from Shuah the brother of Jethro's own forebear Midian. The land of Uz, in which the story of Job is set, was in the area peopled at the time indiscriminately by Midianites, Edomites and Amalekites. Is it reasonable to entertain the possibility that a copy of the Book of Job in its original form, already a couple of centuries old, was in the possession of Jethro the Midianite, whose people had originated in that very land, and that when Moses set out for Egypt and the execution of his life's mission one of the treasures he carried with him was this book which afterwards became incorporated in the Old Testament to the enrichment of the Word of God and the inspiration of succeeding generations? There is no proof that it was so, but the hypothesis does at least provide a suggested solution to a problem that otherwise has so far remained an enigma.

But now things were happening in Egypt. Says Exod. 2.23. "*It came to pass, in process of time, that the king of Egypt died*". Thothmes III, one of the greatest military conquerors of all time, after a reign of thirty-four years went the way of all flesh. He it was who sought Moses' life and caused Moses to flee into Midian. But that was nearly forty years ago and the new Pharaoh, Amon-hotep II, the

Pharaoh of the Exodus, had not been born then. The affair of Moses was past history and forgotten; it was safe for him to return to Egypt. But after so long a time in Midian he needed some very special indication from God that he was indeed to go back, and that sign he received in the incident of the burning bush. Traversing the mountains of Horeb somewhere near Mount Sinai, Moses underwent a tremendous spiritual experience in which he heard the voice of God telling him to return to Egypt, "*for all the men are dead which sought thy life*", and prepare to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Moses demurred at first; he was not at all convinced that he was the man for this great work, but at last he accepted the Divine commission and went home to tell Jethro.

A vivid sidelight on the old man's character is revealed here; one might have expected him to object. Moses was as good as a member of the tribe now; he was married to Jethro's daughter and his sons were Jethro's flesh and blood. The proposed course of action could only lead to hard labour and travail for his son-in-law and his daughter and he himself would see them no more. But there is no word of dissent or opposition. Jethro must have realised that this was the Divine leading and like all true servants to God he bowed to the Divine Will. "*Go in peace*" he said to the younger man, and Moses went.

They met once more, a little over a year later. The Exodus had become a fact, Israel was across the Red Sea and in Sinai, and Moses was leading them to their goal in Canaan. News came to Jethro that the host was approaching Mount Sinai, only forty miles from his village, and he went to meet Moses, taking with him Zipporah and her sons who had evidently been left in safety with him while the dangerous process of negotiation with Pharaoh was proceeding. Now for the first time Jethro saw for himself the kind of task with which his son-in-law was faced—it is probable that the old Midianite had never seen so many people all at once in his life before. Exod. 18 recounts the meeting. He listened to Moses' recital of all the wonders the Lord had wrought on behalf of Israel and of all his hopes for the future, and he rejoiced with him and acknowledged the mighty power of God. When in verse 11 he says "*Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods*" he is not indicating a sudden conversion to a faith he had not formerly professed; the expression is a Semitic idiom testifying to a renewed confirmation of a faith already held and does not even imply a belief in the reality of other

and lesser gods. "This is a proof to me that the Lord is supreme above all things" in the fact of his power manifested against the power of Pharaoh and his hosts.

Now here is a strange thing. Jethro offers sacrifices of burnt offerings to God on behalf of Israel, before Moses and Aaron themselves had organised or embarked on any such innovation themselves. The making of the Covenant at Sinai and the institution of the Aaronic priesthood were yet in the future and the erection of the Tabernacle was not to be accomplished for another twelve months. The sacrificing of burnt offerings at this juncture and the ceremonial meal shared between Jethro, Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel on behalf of the nation was a solemn act of thanksgiving to, and communion with, God on account of a great boon. In this case it was clearly an act of national thanksgiving for the deliverance from Egypt and a symbol of entry into the family of God. Says Exod. 18.12 "*. . . and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.*" The meaning of this ritual was that God himself shared a meal with the participants, his portion being represented by the consumed burnt offering. In accordance with the age-old custom of the Semitic East, those thus having eaten bread together could never be enemies henceforth; they were tied together in the bonds of family relationship. In a very real sense Jethro had anticipated the Covenant so soon to be made at Sinai, and taken the lead in expressing to the Most High on behalf of Israel the gratitude for deliverance, and the pledge of family union, which Israel so far had failed to express for themselves. For, be it noted, despite the marvellous deliverance they had experienced, the delivered ones had so far done nothing but grumble. Just before the Red Sea crossing they cried to Moses "*because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*" Three days later, at Marah, the people murmured against Moses saying "*What shall we drink?*" A few weeks after that, in the wilderness of Sin, the cry was "*would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt . . . when we did eat bread to the full, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*" Then at Meribah, the complaint was "*Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out*

of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst." Apart from the song of triumph immediately after the crossing there was no acknowledgement to God, and even that song savours more of exaltation over the fate of the Egyptians than humble gratitude to God for the deliverance. It was left to someone outside the commonwealth of Israel, a desert Arab, of the despised sons of Keturah, to be the first to offer up formal thanksgiving to God for the wonderful thing He had done for his people. In that solemn act Jethro identified himself with the people of the Lord and testified to his conviction that God would indeed fulfil his declared intention of making this nation his own chosen instrument for the progressive fulfilment of his eternal purposes. It was no credit to Israel, but to the eternal honour of Jethro, that he was the one who spontaneously performed this act.

The astuteness of Jethro's perception is shown by the next great service he rendered Moses. On the morrow after the ceremonial feast he stood by whilst Moses held his usual daily audience of the people, dealing with all comers, adjudicating in all disputes, great or small, from morning to evening. Jethro expostulated with him on the impossibility of one man carrying such a load of detailed administration indefinitely. *"Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone"* (ch. 18.18). He urged on Moses the imperative necessity of delegated authority and decentralised administration, the appointing of local overseers over thousands, and hundreds, and so on, to handle normal matters so that Moses was only called upon to deal with really important cases. The calibre of the man is well attested by the qualifications he counselled Moses to look for in the candidates he would thus appoint *"able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness."* It is good to know that Moses took his father-in-law's advice and organised the national administration on such sound lines that the principles he laid down continued more or less unchanged for six or seven centuries thereafter.

This is the last we see of Jethro. *"Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way into his own land"*. He never saw him again. He was an old man, probably nearing a hundred and twenty which was a normal life span in those days. A year later, when the host was about to leave Sinai for the long trek to the Promised Land, Moses invited Hobab, the son of Jethro, to throw in his lot with Israel and come with them, and although in the narrative in Numbers 10 Hobab declined the

invitation, it is evident that he did eventually accept, for his descendants lived in Israel until the Babylonian captivity. Probably Jethro felt himself too old to undertake such a venture and retired to live out his remaining days in his own quiet valley in the south; Hobab, younger and perhaps equally persuaded of the Divine calling of Israel, went with Moses accompanied by a few of the younger members of the tribe, and these became the progenitors of the Kenites who lived in Israel in later centuries. They remained tent-dwellers, nomads, never assimilating to the settled pastoral and city life of the Israelites, but always sternly rigid in their allegiance to the principles they inherited from their illustrious forefather. So late as the days of Jeremiah, when the Babylonians brought the kingdom of Judah to its downfall and the independence of Israel came to an end, the Kenites were among them and still dwelling in tents, abstaining from wine, and in all respects following the traditions of their noble predecessor. So great was their faithfulness in these respects that the Lord cited them as an example to Israel (Jer. 35. 6-19) and promised that there would always be a man of their house to stand before him for ever. Known at that time as the House of Rechab, a Kenite who lived about B.C. 900, they have given their name to a modern Friendly Society based on the principle of temperance, the Rechabites, and in this at least there is an echo of the sterling rectitude of the remote ancestor of Rechab whose name is forever linked with that of Moses.

What of the future? Has God anything in store for this son of Abraham who rendered such faithful service in those long-past days of Moses' exile and the succeeding Exodus? It is well established that the patriarchs of Biblical history who *"received a good report through faith"* (Heb. 11.39) are to be leaders and administrators upon earth in the days of Christ's kingdom, when righteousness will prevail and evil be restrained with firm hand. Here also is one who was faithful to God and zealous in his service, who played a vital part in the Divine purpose in his day, a man who for uprightness, mature judgment and loyalty to God ranks with those who are indicated in Scripture as destined for such high office. May it not be expected that God, who is no respecter of persons, with whom there is no intrinsic difference between Jew and Greek, Israelite and Arab, has already entered upon the roll of those who in the Millennial day shall emerge from the grave to be *"princes in all the earth,"* the name of an upright, courteous and wise old Bedouin, Jethro the Midianite?

PARABLE OF THE PEARL AND BURIED TREASURE

Matt. 13. 44-46

Two of the shortest recorded parables, together occupying only three verses! Their teaching and intent are identical, the one being merely a reiteration of the other, against a different background. One wonders why they are so brief; surely Jesus must have rounded out his stories in much more comprehensive form than is here written down; perhaps their very brevity as recorded is intended to emphasise one plain, clear-cut truth without the distracting effect of side issues.

The Kingdom of Heaven, He said, is like a treasure buried in a field and discovered by a man, who promptly goes away and realises on his assets in order to raise the capital necessary to buy the field. We need not stop to reflect upon the morality of the man's action; Jesus used stories based upon real life to illustrate his teachings, and this is how many men would behave under such circumstances. In any case we are entitled to assume that the then owner of the field was not the man who put the treasure there, and a good argument could be put up for the discoverer's right to the treasure. The whole point is that he saw something in that field which other men, including the owner, did not see, and he was prepared to sacrifice all that he possessed in order to acquire it.

The other story concerns the world of trade. A merchant man, in the market for valuable pearls, found one that was superb and excellent above all that he had seen or heard of before. Such was his professional appreciation of the technical merits of this particular pearl, such his estimate of the commercial possibilities inherent in its possession, that he did not hesitate to invest the whole of his financial resources in this one single pearl, and count himself a happy man to have obtained it.

The very brevity of these two parables creates some small difficulty in being at all dogmatic as to their intended application. The fact that they point to the giving up of all things in order to obtain a much to be desired end is plain; but two very obvious and definite interpretations at once suggest themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave up all in order to "seek and to save that which was lost", and however much one may question the intrinsic value of this sin-sick and dying human race which He came to save, it is not possible to deny that He saw something in man which He regarded as of value and suffered even the death of the cross in order to obtain it. Christians who have

set to their seal that God is true, and on that basis have given ourselves to the Lord Christ, we also have found a treasure which involves the willing and eager selling of all that we have, that we might obtain that treasure.

The two parables certainly take us deeply into the realms of Christian theology. There were certain heresies in the days of the Early Church which taught that Christ had no pre-existence before his advent upon earth, that He first knew life in the same way as other men. Only after his death was He exalted to the Father's right hand. Had such indeed been the case, then Christ gave up nothing and "sold" nothing in order to redeem man. In fact He had nothing wherewith He could redeem man, for as the Psalmist says of all men and any man "*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him*" (Psa. 49. 7). The understanding of the Apostle Paul was to the contrary. "*—Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2. 5-11 RSV). The R.S.V. is quoted here because it expresses so much more accurately St. Paul's meaning than does the A.V. which presents a very poor rendering at this place. The definition in human terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, has always been a difficulty, as witness the theological wrangles on this subject throughout the Christian era; but this passage in Philippians taken side by side with the two parables under discussion do at least demonstrate very clearly that the One who "*IN the beginning . . . with God*" (John 1. 1) partaker of the Divine glory, divested himself completely of that superlative state, and, again in the simple language of John "*was made flesh and dwelt among us*". "*The Son of Man*" He said himself "*is come to seek and to save that which was lost*" and in his coming He gave evidence that in lost humanity, degraded and sinful and rebellious though they be, there is something worth saving, something that to him is as

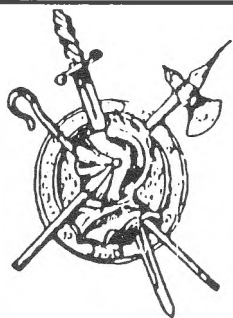
treasure hid in a field, needing only to be dug up and cleansed; a pearl of great price, needing only to have its lost lustre restored and be set in a frame of beauty suited to its intrinsic merit. One of the great lessons we Christians have to learn—and sometimes it is very difficult to learn—is that God has faith in the possibilities of man and will yet have that faith vindicated in the emergence of a sinless undying world in which all that is of sin and rebellion will have passed away. “*Are there few that be saved?*” asked the disciples of Jesus. He gave them to understand that those who eventually attain to joint-heirship with himself (Rom. 8. 17) will indeed be a “little flock” because of the stringent conditions of the calling; outside of that there is the greater call the fruits of which yield the picture of multitudes coming to God and all the ends of the earth turning to him, when the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10; Rev. 21. 3-5). The old theology declared that the few, the very few, would pass the Divine scrutiny and be admitted to heaven; the vast majority of God’s intelligent creatures would be rejected as wastage and pass into the hopeless eternity of hell. God is not so inefficient a workman as that! He will work continuously and patiently with each refractory individual until it has become abundantly clear that by no means whatever can that individual be truly and sincerely converted to live for, and give loyalty and allegiance to, the Saviour Christ. Only then will He let go and leave the sinner to the wages of sin—death.

So the purpose of God will be achieved in a triumphant and gloriously successful ending to the mission of One who sold all that He had to win mankind for himself. What of the other application of the parable?

Perhaps the best avenue of approach is through the Apostle Paul’s words, expressing his own attitude of heart to his calling “*Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him*”. (Phil. 3. 7-9 RSV). Here is expressed the utter devotion to God and God’s service which is demanded of every believer who

would come “into Christ”. There is a world of difference between the one who believes in Christ and his message and endeavours to live in conformity with it, and the one who not only thus believes but comes to Christ in full surrender and dedication of life, possessions, abilities, all, to his service as He shall direct. Only these latter will at the end “*reign with Christ*” (Rev. 20, 4) and be associated with him in the direction of the mighty evangelical work of world conversion which is to characterise the coming era of Christ’s reign, when human power and kingdoms have passed away. It is only “if we suffer with him” *now* that “we shall reign with him” *then*. That word *suffering* does not mean wholly nor even primarily the idea of physical pain as so many believe; it means endurance. He that “*endures to the end, the same shall be saved*” whether the endurance be in the realm of physical ill-health, literal persecution, or the insidious wearing-down processes of the world, the flesh, and the devil battling against our faith. So the Kingdom of Heaven in this aspect consists of those who have “*forsaken all, and followed thee*” and in consequence, “*in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory*”, will be associated with him in that glorious reign (Matt. 19. 28). The “regeneration” is the time of giving new life, the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent. It is not without significance that Jesus’ words above quoted were spoken at the time the rich young ruler “*went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*”. Here was one who came in sight of the buried treasure, the costly pearl, but he was not prepared to sell all that he had to obtain the coveted possession. And he went away a disappointed and unhappy man.

In that lies the lesson. We have the opportunity of giving ourselves in full surrender to God, without reserve or condition, to be used in his service as He may direct. Home service, foreign service, prominence, obscurity; it may be any of these, or a combination of them as life goes on. We do not know. We only know that God calls us, again in the language of the great Apostle (Rom. 12. 1) to “*present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*”. In so doing we shall be following the example of One who himself sold all that he had, and bought that field”.



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hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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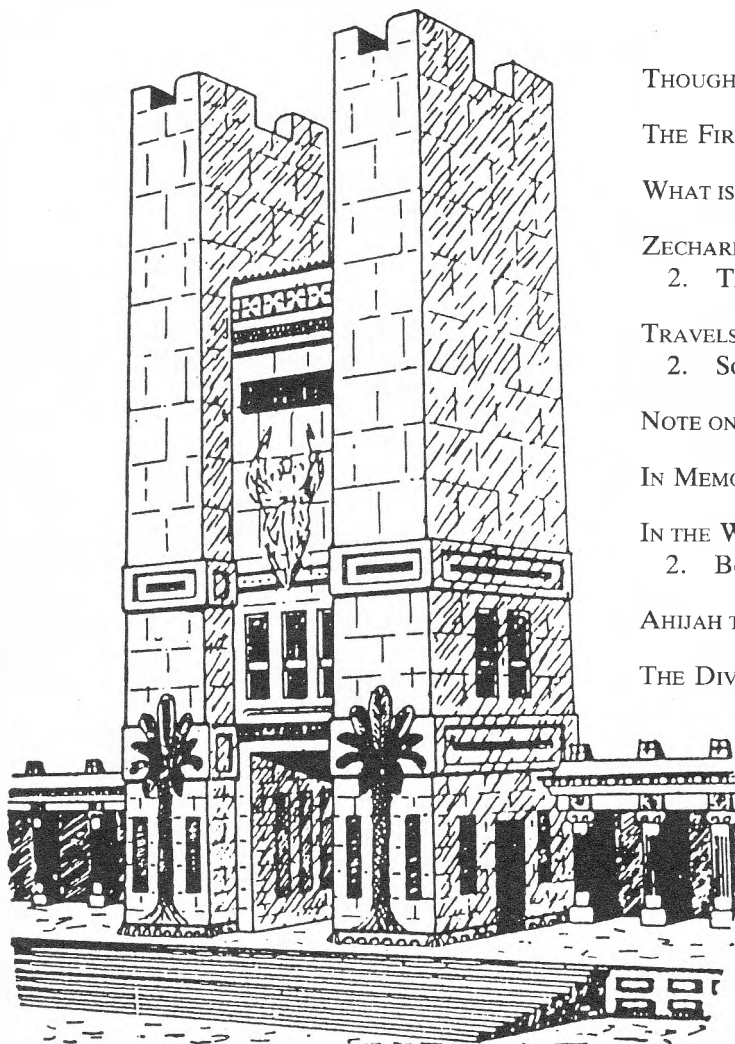
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Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.

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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 lesson 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, 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.*"

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

A glimpse of the Early Christians

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . and all that believed were together, and had all things common . . . and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common . . . and great grace was upon them all . . . and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart . . . and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2. 42-47, and 4. 32-33).

A tremendous spiritual force was born of the enthusiasm and zeal of those first Christian converts. In days of disappointment and disillusion, such as those in which many of us now live, it is difficult to realise what mighty energy resides in the concerted action of a company in which every member is animated by fellow-feeling. "The fellowship of kindred minds" is a real fellowship indeed when those minds are bent toward the realisation of a common ideal, and these early believers had an ideal of the highest and most exhilarating nature to inspire and direct their communal actions. They set out, quite naturally and quite spontaneously, to preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, with all that implied both of life and blessing for all mankind "in due time" and a high spiritual calling for those who would in this day and time be joined to this company and serve as "ministers of reconciliation", to become in due time associates of the risen Saviour, joint heirs with Christ in his Kingdom, and sons of the living God.

That was the driving force behind this wonderful family fellowship of the primitive Church. It drew its inspiration from the apostles' memories of the Last Supper. Up there in the quietness of that upper room their minds had received an impression which could never be effaced. *"This do . . . in remembrance of Me"*. In remembrance of him! How could they ever forget? The mystic ceremonial of bread and wine had bound them to eternal association with Jesus their Lord, and now that they had seen him alive after death, were witness of his Resurrection, they knew without doubt, as Peter declared thirty-five years afterwards, that they had not followed "cunningly devised fables" but had been actual eye-witnesses of the most

tremendous event in all history. *Christ was risen!* That they knew, and now all the rest would come to pass in due time. He had gone away, but He would surely come again, and even if they in the meantime must sleep awhile in death, He would raise them to be with him in glory and manifest them with himself to all the world in that day when the golden visions of the prophets became glorious reality. There was no doubt about it: all was true; the Kingdom would surely come; and now they must cling together as brethren and "tell the whole world these blessed tidings". That was the joyous theme which engrossed their thoughts and loosened their tongues as they met from one house to another and began to lay the foundations of a Church destined to endure to all eternity.

It was in the house of Mary the mother of Mark the evangelist that the Christians first assembled. If tradition be true, it was in that very house that the Last Supper itself had been held. There, just outside the walls of the Old City, remote equally from the Palace of Herod, the residence of the High Priest, and the official quarters of Pilate the Roman governor, the ones and twos stole out of the city gate and gathered to share with each other the joys and hopes of their new found faith. There was much scanning of the Old Testament Scriptures to be undertaken; much listening with shining eyes and eagerly parted lips as the apostles, one after another, expounded the new meaning they now saw in those ancient records. The overshadowing of the Holy Spirit was upon every such gathering, and as the flickering lamps cast their fitful shadows on the walls and the night outside grew dark and quiet, the subdued voices went on and on, telling of the glorious destiny in store for mankind and the mighty work of witnessing to which they themselves had been called.

The listeners became conscious of a deeper note. Their calling was not to be that of mere publicists, advertising the King and his Kingdom along purely informative and intellectual lines. They were called to *live* the Kingdom, to show all men by their own pattern of life what the teachings of their Lord could do to a man or woman who is utterly and irrevocably committed to him. It was that which came so startlingly new to those who so recently had been in bondage to the dead letter of Judaism and its law. This was a personal relationship into which they had entered with their Lord,

and with that close intimacy was bound up the moral obligation, so much more compelling than the "thou shalt not" of the Mosaic Law, to show their love for their Master by putting his precepts into practice.

So it was that, instantaneously, the company of believers became a family. It could not possibly be otherwise. The possessions of each were no longer personal property—they belonged to the family. The necessities of those who were without means at once became the concern of the family, for they were brothers and sisters in Christ. The apostles, the eleven who were known by all to have been the closest attendants on the Lord Jesus, became in a peculiar sense his personal representatives, and quite naturally assumed the position of fathers in the family. The broad lines of the community were drawn out by them, and without any question at all the company of believers accepted the apostles' "doctrine and fellowship". There were no objections; there was no dissension; the spontaneous joy which burst forth from every heart and found expression in the Pentecostal cry "He is risen" became a medium in which the fellowship of the Spirit had its birth and grew to take full possession of the infant Church.

It is in this atmosphere that Christian missionary work is effective. "See how these Christians love one another" said the wondering Tertullian a hundred and fifty years later. The witness of the life is always tenfold more eloquent and convincing than that of the lips. No wonder that of this time it is said "and the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved". This was no arbitrary, Calvinistic act of the Father, selecting individuals here and there and attaching them willy-nilly to the growing community. The family spirit and the missionary enterprise of this band of crusaders made it possible for God to direct into their company those of Jewry whose hearts were already in a waiting attitude before him, and who would recognise in this new spirit that had come into the world that of which the prophets had spoken. The Lord added, but the church retained, those who came into the family, saw with their own eyes what Christ had done for these people, and remained to take their place and share in the work that lay before that family.

Little did those early believers dream that life for them was to go on into old age without their realising the fruition of their hopes. In the first rosy flush of the promise "I will come again" they looked for his appearing in the clouds of heaven to

take them to be with him and to set up his Kingdom upon earth, this year, next year perhaps, certainly in the third year. He had gone away, but He would come again. They knew now, as they had not known before, why He must needs go away. He had suffered and died for them and now in the glory of his resurrection must go to the Father from Whom he had come in order that He might receive the ovation of triumph due to a conqueror. He had overthrown the gates of death and broken down the bars of hell. Satan and all his minions were defeated and now the angels of heaven were acclaiming the One who beforetime had been pre-eminent amongst them, had laid aside the glory which He had with them before this world was, had been born of a virgin, was found in fashion as a man, manifested the glory of God in the embodiment of human perfection, and at the hands of wicked men had been crucified and slain. He had gone to be seated at the right hand of the Father whilst his disciples were to execute the commission of witnessing to his Name among all the nations. The world was a small place; they would complete that work within the next few years; and then He would come.

So it was that in their annual commemoration of that last meal together they repeated to each other the longing words "Till He come!" It became a solemn ritual among them, a phrase combining within its compass all the faith and all the hope and all the ardent desire that possessed their minds and nerved their hands to action and endurance. "*Till He come*"—surely it will not be long! As each lifted the cup to his lips he realised anew the significance of the action. He was partaking of the blood of his Lord; he had become blood-brother to his Lord; now and for all time he was irrevocably associated with his Lord in the work of reconciliation. "*This cup is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins . . . Drink ye all of it.*" They knew that the Old Covenant was passing away, for it had failed to bring life to man, failed to effect release from the thralldom of sin. The blood of bulls and goats, offered year by year without ceasing, had given a measure of communion with God and a feeling of peace to Israel, but it had not taken away sin. Moses the deliverer had brought them out of Egypt and led them to Canaan, where they might live a life of peace and prosperity, but he had not given them everlasting life. And the unbelief of Israel had nullified and made of none effect all the glorious promises which had been told unto the fathers by the prophets. But

God had promised a new Covenant, one that would succeed where the old one had failed, one that would take away the stony hearts of Israel and give them hearts of flesh, one under which every man would know the Lord and sit under his own vine and fig-tree with none to make him afraid. And now Jesus had told them that in his own Person He was about to make that new Covenant possible by the offering of his life to God, just as the blessings of the Old Covenant were made possible by the offering of a sacrificial bullock to God. The day had not come, even when Jesus spoke, for that New Covenant to go into operation. Sin must reign unchecked yet for a season. The stony hearts could not yet be turned into hearts of flesh, nor the pure language be heard on the lips of the people. But the offering had been poured out "for sin" (Isa. 53. 10). For three and a half years had the anti-typical bullock lain on the altar, its blood covering the mercy-seat which is in Heaven itself, mute testimony to the loving devotion of that Son who had said "*Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God*" (Heb. 10. 7). But even with the final consuming of that offering the time had not come. Although those early believers knew it not, sin was to continue yet for another two thousand years the while the offering continued. "Drink ye, all of it" the Master had said. Slowly the realisation filtered into each mind that they, too, were called to devote their lives' best endeavours, their abilities, their talents, their resources, all that they had and were, to this same laying down of life because of the world's sin and the world's need of reconciliation from that sin.

What wonder then that in after days Paul told them that God had made them "able ministers of the New Covenant" (2 Cor. 3. 6)? They were to stand as representatives and ambassadors of that new order of things which was to be instituted at their Lord's return. More, they themselves were, by their devotion to and association with their Master, to be joined with him in the grand future work of writing Divine law in the hearts of men. By virtue of this mystic ceremony they had become separated from all that was of the world and were

now "*fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of Gold*". They were a company of brethren, looking forward to a life of sacrificial service until their Lord should come, and then to the ministerial duties of that New Covenant under which Israel, and not Israel only, but the whole world of man, are to receive the Divine blessing of life.

So that brave-hearted brotherhood stepped out—into the unknown. It was on the promises of God that they took their stand, and in full assurance of faith that they challenged the world with their witness. It was not long before dark storms began to rage against them—the arrest of Peter and the anxious time when the Church, gathered together, made prayer unceasingly on his behalf (Acts 12); the trial and martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7); the menace of Saul of Tarsus, and finally, the fearful catastrophe of A.D. 70, when the armies of Rome encompassed Jerusalem and the ageing men and women who had been youths and maidens when Peter preached his Pentecostal sermon hurried quickly out of the doomed city and across Jordan to Pella. They remembered the Master's prophetic words, told them by their fathers in the faith, "*When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains*" (Luke 21. 21). And when they returned, Jerusalem was no more. The alien had destroyed the city and the sanctuary, and nothing was ever the same again.

But in the hearts of those whose faith had survived even that crowning disaster there burned still the passionate hope "*He will come again!*" They waited still, and year by year continually, as old age crept upon each one of the fast diminishing brotherhood, they comforted one another with the sure and certain knowledge of the things they had learned in past and happier days, and talked of that Jesus Who had walked with and taught them forty years before. And year by year continually, as they gathered together to keep the feast, shaking hands held the cup, and quavering voices repeated, in tones of certainty and triumph, the thrilling words "*Till He come!*"

"The teachings of Jesus do not have the appearance of a fresh philosophical theory or of a new truth, kindling in him a constant surprise and intensity. It seems rather like unconscious knowledge. He speaks of the great invisible world as if it

had always lain before him and, as familiarly, as to us stretches out the landscape which we have seen since our birth. The assertion of a future state is scarcely to be met with in his teachings: the assumption of it pervades them".

Henry Ward Beecher

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL?

A Reflection

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified." (1 Thess. 4.3 NIV).

Paul was writing about the ultimate purpose of God. It is a direct command of God that his people shall be cleansed and made ready for his future work. It is a process by which his people can express now his love for all mankind and especially his concern for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only in this way can they be changed into his likeness. How does this affect our day to day, minute by minute, experiences in life?

God gave to the people Israel a law which revealed his will for them in fairly detailed terms. Priests and prophets interpreted that law so that men and women could understand what was a good moral behaviour. Jesus' life and teaching did the same for Christians, assisted by apostles and teachers. In this last decade of the Twentieth century, in an affluent and democratic society, basic principles are unchanged. The problem of making decisions and facing temptations are a little more complex than they were in the days of Jesus or Abraham. An examination of the means by which God revealed himself in Bible times may provide clues as to how He might do so today.

The most important factor in discovering the will of God is our relationship to him. That friendship demands complete penitence of heart, and total surrender of our will to him (Rom. 12. 1-2). Constant prayerful meditation upon the Bible enables this relationship to develop into a consciousness of God which will affect everything we say and do. The Word of God contains many examples of the way in which He spoke to his people of old. It is fascinating to notice the number of times that God's message was the opposite of human inclinations. Some, like Abraham, seem to argue with him (Gen. 17-18; Exod. 3-4). The revelation must have been very clear, leaving no doubt about God's intention.

The way in which Abraham's servant discovered a bride for Isaac is an interesting example of God's communication (Gen. 24). How different was Jacob's experience (Gen. 28-35). He went back to the land Isaac was forbidden to go to, chose one of his wives and was married to the other by deception. There is also a contrast in determining God's will in the lives of two exiles wanting to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was escorted by a military guard, while Ezra believed that was not God's will for him (Neh. 2. 9; Ezra 8. 22). God has revealed

himself in different ways to different people all through history. Sitting in judgment of others in this matter will not make it easier for any child of God to interpret his will more clearly. Patient waiting upon God will.

The central goal of Jesus' life was to do his Father's will. It was his food and drink and He taught his disciples to pray for it. When He came to his last great ordeal He prayed to God about it, as he had done at other critical times in his life.

It is also clear that God gives liberty in the making of decisions. Hence some of the disagreements which occurred in New Testament times, beautifully summarised in Rom. 14. The colour of our coat or the way we cook our food may not affect our Christian life. Nevertheless there are guiding principles which as stewards of God's gifts we shall need to observe. The way we plan our day and choose our activities will be qualified by whether it is God's will (James 4. 13-17).

George Muller of Bristol said that discovery of God's will could be likened to a captain navigating his ship into harbour. At one port around British coasts there were three lights and when the helmsman steered his ship so that all three lights were lined up one behind the other, he knew that he was on course to enter the harbour. So the Christian may line up three important factors in life's experiences and when they agree there is good reason to move forward. They are; the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit within our hearts; the circumstances of our lives; and prayerful thoughts upon the Word of God. Others have witnessed to the fact that this is how they discover the will of God.

What job do I take? What house do I buy? Where should I go for a holiday? What book should I read? Should I join a club? As a Christian may I have a hobby? These are the kind of questions which each child of God must answer for himself. It is disobedience to the Word of God to pass harsh judgment upon other believers. We do know that God wants every soul surrendered to him, to use his or her gifts for his Kingdom. Therefore in our job we should be serving the interests of God's Kingdom, (not just paying expenses for our earthly life). Whichever house we live in (rented or bought), it will be a home we share with God. The touchstone in all these questions is whether or not we can do it to the glory of God.

Living with a consciousness of God's presence

every day and trusting that He will lead us to do those things he wants us to do, we will avoid anxiety and arrogance concerning the decisions we

take. It will help us to develop confidence, obedience and a sensitivity to the Divine leading such as a child has in its father's or mother's strong grasp.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

2. The Rider in the Myrtle Trees

The series of visions comprising the first six chapters of Zechariah are very similar in style to those of the Book of Revelation, the outstanding difference being that whereas Revelation deals with the Church's conflict with evil during this present Age, Zechariah's visions include Israel and her conflict with evil during the times before Christ. Both reach to the same period—that of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth. The style of symbolism, based on Old Testament history and prophecy, is common to both and it is likely that Zechariah, like John on Patmos, saw these strange and picturesque tableaux in waking moments, closely attuned to the influence of the Holy Spirit and completely unconscious of the everyday world around him. Whether they appeared as optical views before his physical sight or were directly impressed upon his brain is of no consequence; in either case the understanding was conveyed to his mind so that to Zechariah it was as if he indeed stood and observed in a world where these things were real.

The first vision (chapters 1. 8 to 2. 13) shewed him a man, riding a red horse, standing motionless in a grove of myrtle trees at the bottom of a deep valley. Behind the rider appeared others, also mounted on horses, denoted red, speckled and white. Zechariah enquires as to the identity of these riders, and an angel—the “revealing angel” who remains with the prophet throughout the visions—tells him that they are those whom the Lord has destined to wander through the earth. At this point the riders address a cry to their leader on the red horse complaining that in their wanderings they find that all other peoples in the earth are at ease and rest; they alone apparently are compelled to wander eternally. At this the leader on the red horse, who is now called “the Angel of Jehovah”, raises his voice to God, desiring him that He will shew mercy to Jerusalem and Judah, who have been under his displeasure for seventy years. The Lord replies with an assurance that the time has come for his displeasure to be lifted, for Jerusalem to be rebuilt, and prosperity come to Israel. At this point a pair of horned bulls appear on the scene and the prophet becomes aware of the menace of

their four powerful horns. To his further enquiry the angel declares that these horns are the powers which have scattered Israel and Judah over the earth but their power is about to be broken. Behind the bulls come four craftsmen bearing the tools of their trade; these, said the angel, come to restrain and break the power of the horns and make possible fulfilment of the Divine promise.

The key to this rather strange imagery is contained in verse 12, where the Angel of Jehovah cries “*O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?*” This is obviously in reference to the Babylonian captivity recently ended, which was always described in terms of a punishment of seventy years. On this basis the subject of the vision is Israel at the time of the Restoration and this is the starting point of Zechariah's prophecies.

The mounted riders, sent by the Lord to “*walk to and fro through the earth*” are symbols of the people of Israel, condemned to banishment, to be wanderers and exiles among all nations. The other nations of mankind, by contrast, “*sitteth still and is at rest*” in their homes, but Israel has no home. Because of past apostasies the Lord has dispersed Israel thus. Now the time has come for her to be regathered to her own land, symbolised by the myrtle trees in the deep valley. The myrtle, indigenous to Canaan, is used as a symbol of the Holy Land; in Zechariah's day Judah was not, as at other times, exalted to the tops of the mountains, but occupied a very subordinate position as a province of Persia, hence “*in the valley*” (A.V. “*bottom*”). There were three groups of horses, distinguished by three colours. The Israelite riders are carried by the horses “*to and fro through the earth*”; evidently in the horses we are expected to see the hostile nations which conquered Israel and took the people into captivity. There were three such up to Zechariah's day, Assyria, Babylon and Persia. One group of horses was red, one “speckled”, and one white. The rendering of “speckled” is open to question; the word only occurs once elsewhere, in Isa. 16. 8 where it is translated

"principal plant". Ellicott suggests that "*seruq-qim*" here is a corruption of "*shechorim*" which means black, and this supposition if accepted creates a harmony between these horses and those of the later vision in chapter 6, which lends support. On the assumption that this conclusion is justified there is a certain fitness in the colours. The red horses picture the Assyrian power, the first to exile Israel from the land and carry them away "*through the earth*"; red is the colour of blood and hence a symbol of war, and Assyria more than the others waged frightful and unrelenting war in the pursuit of its ends. The black horses picture Babylon, the next nation to enslave Israel. The Babylonians were not so outrageously cruel as the Assyrians; they waged war only for the attainment of their object and Israel's bondage to them was characterised more by the hopelessness of captivity in a strange land without hope of release. The blackness of death was a fitting symbol of Babylonian bondage. "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion*" (Psa. 137. 1). In contrast to that, the Persian rule which succeeded Babylon was one of tolerance and favour, opportunity for the exiles to return and rebuild their homeland. Hence the white horses fitly indicate Persia.

Now the wanderers have returned to the homeland. They stand among the myrtle trees, and with them is their princely champion, the Angel of Jehovah, himself riding a red horse. He also has come forth for war, but in his case it is war for the deliverance of the oppressed people. They have someone to plead their cause before God and to lead them unto victory. This is not the first time that the Old Testament hints at an other-worldly power pledged to the defence and triumph of Israel. Joshua, contemplating his plans for the conquest of the Promised Land, was met by a celestial visitant, a soldier with drawn sword, who told him "*as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come*" (Josh. 5. 13-14). In the days of Hezekiah the Angel of Jehovah appeared in the night and decimated the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19. 25). In the last great conflict, said the revealing angel to Daniel, Michael the great prince will stand up to deliver Israel and bring the evil powers to an end (Dan. 12. 1) and Michael here is but a cover name for the Angel of Jehovah. His true identity is made known in the Book of Revelation, where in chapter 19 the Heavenly Rider appears to make short work of the armies of evil, and reveals his name; the Word of God! Here in Zechariah, then, the Angel of

Jehovah is the Divine *Logos*, later to be personified on earth as Jesus Christ the Son of God, here pictured as superintending the regathering of Israel and the overthrow of Israel's enemies. In all of this there is a vivid foreview of a greater regathering and a greater overthrow when this same Divine Word, "*this same Jesus*", is revealed in the power of his Second Advent for the world's deliverance.

The Angel of Jehovah cried to the Lord for an end to Israel's exile and suffering; the answer came, not to him but to the revealing angel with a message for the prophet. "*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great zeal*" ("jealousy" in the O.T. has the meaning for which we now use the word "zeal") ". . . I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; . . . my cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad, and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem" (ch. 1. 13-17).

Here is the basic promise. The people shall be restored and Israel shall rise again. The national enthusiasm aroused by this message did indeed have the effect of creating a revived Jewish State, even though subject to Gentile rule, for a few centuries, but eventually the heavy hand of the oppressor came down upon them again. The promise had only a limited fulfilment, for the people were not yet ready for their high destiny.

"*Then lifted I up mine eyes and saw and behold, four horns*" (ch. 1. 18). These were most likely representations of the horns of bulls, used so often in the Scriptures as metaphors for the idea of power or brute force, and by extension of ideas to denote, prophetically, earthly powers or kingdoms. Thus "*the horn of Moab is cut off*" (Jer. 48. 25) denoting the end of Moab as a nation; there are many similar instances. The angel explained the horns as symbolising the powers "*which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem*" (ch. 1. 19). Immediately behind the horns came four "*carpenters*" (A.V.). The Hebrew word means any craftsman or worker whether in wood, metal or stone; perhaps "craftsmen" is the happiest rendering since nothing is said as to whether they were carpenters, blacksmiths or stonemasons. Whereas the horns pictured the earthly powers which had desolated Israel, the craftsmen, said the angel, represented a further power which was to destroy the horns. "*These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head; but these*" (the craftsmen) "*are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the nations*" (ch. 1. 21). This

word "fray" is rendered by most modern translators to terrify or frighten; "fray" in modern English means to rub or file down or to wear away, but in mediæval English and therefore in the A. V. it meant to terrify or affright, and is the root of our modern words "afraid" and "affray". It is tempting to think of the four horns finding reality in the four empires which held Israel in thrall, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, but in such case there would need to be found four individual powers to act as their conquerors. It might well be that since the number four is associated with the idea of universality as respects things on the earth—four winds of the earth, four corners, and so on—the idea here conveyed is that of the entire assembly of hostile nations at enmity with Israel helpless in the face of a new development, the appearance of a corps of craftsmen, of builders, who not only cannot be resisted but eventually strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. From this point of view the vision may well picture the commencement of a great development in the out-working purpose of God. Up to this time, the people of God have been helpless in the grip of their enemies. That grip has been loosened and there now appears a company of builders, of craftsmen, who are going to build the Temple of God and make it an architectural and artistic creation to the glory of God, and there is nothing the nations can do to stop it. And when that Temple is complete its builders will become a means in the Lord's hand to annihilate all evil. No wonder the enemies are terrified. The horns of evil are to be broken and scattered; the craftsmen, rejoicing in the edifice they have erected, will emerge triumphant.

To a decree this vision had an application in the building of the Second Temple and the restoration of the Jewish State in the days of Zechariah, but only to a degree. Other horns were afterwards to appear with their threats of oppression; other builders come upon the scene to build an even greater and spiritual Temple. The symbols must surely find their full scope in the work of all God's servants, whether Old Testament Jew or New Testament Christian, labouring to build that edifice which will become the meeting place between God and man in the coming Age of blessing. The builders of times gone by, the builders of today, all will find that their combined life's labours have resulted in the weakening and final downfall of the horns of the nations. Had Israel in the days of the Restoration been all that was

indicated, one solitary craftsman could have filled the picture; the fact that four craftsmen, as four horns, are seen, denotes that in them is included the entire, the universal, company of labourers for God in all ages, united together in one great work, the builders of the symbolic Temple of God and the elimination of all evil from among the nations.

All this was still in prospect. Jerusalem as yet was still in ruins and the prophet was painfully conscious that his people needed positive assurance of the future. That assurance was now given. Chapter 2 opens with a new character in the drama, a man carrying a "*measuring line*", more properly a surveyor's cord, for this man is a surveyor, come to measure out the ground and plan the new Jerusalem. This was the answer he gave to the prophet's enquiry. "*To measure Jerusalem*" he said "*to see what is (to be) the breadth thereof and the length thereof*" (ch. 2. 2). This is the first result of the promise given in chapter 1 "*I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies, saith the Lord of Hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem*". The city destroyed seventy years before by Nebuchadnezzar was to rise again.

But there is a new aspect to this restoration of the ancient city. Whilst the surveyor was getting on with his task, the revealing angel left Zechariah's side and "*went forth*" to meet "*another angel*" who was advancing towards him. It seems very likely that this "other angel" was in fact the "Angel of Jehovah" of chapter 1, for the words he speaks in the following verses and the position of authority he seems to occupy are hardly appropriate to anyone of lesser rank. He gives the revealing angel an instruction. "*Run, speak to this young man*" he says, referring to Zechariah, who was a silent observer "*saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein*" (ch. 2. 3-4). These few words expand the scope of the prophecy at one step to include the glory of Israel at the end of this present Age. The expression "towns without walls" is exactly the same as the "unwalled villages" of Ezek. 38. 13. "*Perazoth*" denotes unfortified country villages, incapable of defence against an enemy. At only one time in history can Jerusalem be described by the epithet "*perazoth*" and that is when the inhabitants thereof have put their entire trust in God for deliverance from their foes. "*For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her*" (ch. 2. 5). This is an expression definitely associated with Israel's final triumph. "*The Lord shall be unto thee an ever—*

lasting light, and thy God thy glory" (Isa. 60. 19). *"In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"* (Isa. 26. 1). Verses 4 and 5 are clearly intended to extend the scope of the vision from the Restoration of Zechariah's own day to the greater and final restoration at the time that God comes in power for the salvation of men. To express the same thing in New Testament language, it is the time of our Lord's Second Advent and the establishment of his Millennial Kingdom.

On the basis of this promise God now calls his people back from captivity. Here there is an extension of prophetic view into future times, for at this moment the nation had already returned from Babylon and were engaged in the rebuilding of their national polity. But not all. There were more Jews remaining in Babylon than returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua. In the days of the Book of Esther, only thirty years later, they were to be found in every province of the Persian Empire, from Egypt in the west to India in the east. The vast majority of the Ten Tribes had not come back; they were still in the mountains of Assyria and Media, and most of them never did come back. Here in the prophecy the Lord is looking to a greater and still future Return and a correspondingly greater Restoration.

"Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven . . . Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon" (ch. 2. 6-7 R.S.V.). There is a two-fold Return envisaged here. Those who still dwell with Babylon are bidden to escape to the homeland whilst yet there is time; those who have been scattered to the four winds of heaven, an expression indicating the widespread lands of all the earth, are called to take their flight homeward. As respects this latter injunction, at the time of the vision Israel had not yet been scattered, in that sense, to the four winds of heaven, so that here again we have a word which carries us forward in time to the day, to use the words of Jeremiah, when God will send for fishers and hunters to seek out his people from every part of the world and send them home (Jer. 16. 16).

And the next two verses clinch the argument, for the Lord goes on to declare that He will shake his hand over the enslaving nations and they will become a spoil to Israel (ch. 2. 8-9). That cannot be until the close of this world order. In no sense of the word did Persia in Zechariah's day become "a spoil" to Israel, nor have the powers of this world at any time since. Upon the contrary, before many centuries had passed Jerusalem entered that phase foretold by our Lord when He said that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.

The rest of the vision almost explains itself. *"I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord"* (ch. 2. 10). Words of tremendous import mirrored in John's visions of Revelation *"the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God . . . shall be their God"* (Rev. 21. 3), and if the Revelator's words in fact take in their scope, not Israel alone but all mankind, that does not destroy the analogy for both are true in point of time. The next verse in Zechariah demonstrates that. *"And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of thee . . . and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you"* (ch. 2. 10-11). Words such as these can only be true at the end of this Age when Heaven comes down to earth for the salvation of mankind. This entire vision, which begins its story with the return of a band of Jewish exiles to their ruined land in about the year 536 B.C. as riders upon red, black, white horses, led by the Divine Lord on his red horse, closes with the greater return from all countries of the earth and at the end of this world-Age, led still by that same Divine Lord. His name now, in this greater and more momentous context, is called the Word of God. He appears from the heavens, still mounted upon a steed for war, and of him it is said *"in righteousness he doth judge and make war"* (Rev. 19. 11). What wonder that this first of Zechariah's visions closes with the commanding words *"Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord; for he is raised up out of his holy habitation"*.

To be continued

"My Father, help me as a follower of Christ to say 'Thy will be done'. Thou would'st not have me accept thy Will because I *must*, but because I *may*. Thou would'st have me take it, not with resignation, but with joy, not with mere absence of murmur, but with song of praise . . . Give me, O

Father, the blessedness of the man whose delight is in thy Law, who can tell of thy Statutes rejoicing the heart. Then shall I obey thee with perfect freedom and say from my heart 'Thy Will be done'."

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

2. Sojourn in Egypt

Quietly settled at Shechem after the four hundred miles trek from Haran, Abraham had time to consider his position. He had probably been something like four months on the journey travelling in stages of perhaps ten miles or so every alternate day, pitching camp at night and resting his flocks and herds the next day and starting out again on the day following. As a moderately prosperous stock breeder at Haran he probably had a labour force of twenty or so men with their wives and families and a few personal attendants together with a tradesman or two, a carpenter, a blacksmith and a medical helper with some cooks and workers in fabrics for tent and clothing makers. Altogether there could have been as many as seventy or eighty persons in his entourage together with sheep and goats and cattle, and now they had entered a sparsely inhabited rural area they had to be completely self-sufficient for all their needs. And somehow or other when passing through Damascus he had picked up an individual who later figured in Ch. 15.2 as "Eliezer of Damascus" who became steward of his house and a trusted overseer of all his possessions. It is probable that the entry of his sizeable party into Canaan was quite an event in the lives of the existing inhabitants.

Shechem later became the Capital of Samaria, the Ten Tribe Kingdom, but in Abraham's day it could not have been more than a village, it was, however, obviously even then an important centre, for the foundations of a massive fortress or walled area, dating from this time, have been discovered. Some important chieftain exercising authority over the surrounding area must have made this his centre and around his stone built headquarters must have nestled the wattle huts of his people. The village lay in the middle of a fertile and well-watered plain about ten miles by eight and there was probably plenty of room for an immigrant with the consent of the local chieftain. Abraham settled down and began farming; his food stores must have been getting exhausted and he needed fresh crops of grain and foodstuffs for his people and his stock. That meant a twelve months stay while the crops were growing by which time something like a permanent settlement, a village, would have grown up. He built an altar to the Lord (Ch. 12.7) which looks as though he expected to stay, but he could not have remained

in Shechem for more than twelve months—just enough to replenish his food stocks. Then it was tent-pegs up and off again, still going south.

No reason is given for the move. It may be that the existing community of Canaanites began to feel that this comparatively numerous party of settlers was going to threaten the resources of their little valley and the early friendship began to come under strain. It may be that Abraham himself became conscious of a Divine leading urging him to go farther—this was not the place the Lord intended for him. At any rate, Ch. 12. 8 has him on the move again to the district of Bethel up in the highlands thirty-five miles away, so that a week later found him selecting a suitable spot not already occupied by Canaanites and there he pitched camp again and built another altar to the Lord. Presumably he thought that this was to be the place of his settlement. It was not to be. Within another twelve months, time enough for another crop of foodstuffs, he was on his way again, this time to an undefined place vaguely described in Ch. 12.9 as "journeying" to the south, i.e. the *Negeb*, the southern part of the present land of Israel where Hebron and Beer-Sheba are located. This was probably another forty mile journey and he most likely finished up somewhere in the *Shephelah*, the fertile plain lying between the Judean Highlands and the sea; here perhaps resides another possible reason for this constant journeying from place to place, for Ch. 12. 10 says ominously "*and there was a famine in the land*". One of those periodic famines which in later times figured so much in the history of Israel, as in the story of Jacob and later of Ruth, was afflicting the land, and the provision of food for a travelling company such as that for which Abraham was responsible became a vital problem. Apparently even the fertile plain of Judea was insufficient for his needs, for vs. 10. goes on to say "*and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was grievous in the land*".

Less than three years after entering the Land of Promise Abraham was leaving it again, making his way to a strange land and a strange people, with no guarantee that he would be well received, only hoping that he could find a place where he could settle awhile and sustain his people. That must have been a trial of faith! It was a long journey, some two hundred miles through what is now a

desert waste, but in that day well forested almost down to the sea coast and relatively uninhabited. He probably followed the coast trade route, finding abundant water and enough wild growing food to feed his company for the two months or so he was on route to Egypt. So at last, he came to the land of the Pharaohs, where the famine had not penetrated. Here he came up against an unexpected obstacle, the "*Shur*", the wall and line of fortifications which in much earlier times the Egyptians had built along their frontier to control the entry of Asiatics into their land. Here he must have encamped for a while whilst the Egyptian officials took down in writing full details of his company, the place from which they had come, their purpose in coming to Egypt, the proposed length of their stay, all the formality and "red tape" of modern officialdom, and a long wait whilst all this information was transmitted to Pharaoh and his august decision awaited.

The verdict was favourable. Abraham and his company were to be permitted to enter. They passed the massive ramparts which guarded the frontier into a land strangely like their own native land of Sumer which Abraham had left twenty years or so previously, a land of wide fertile fields with running streams, rural villages of land workers at intervals, and here and there cities with magnificent buildings and monuments just like those he had known in those past days. He must have wondered why the Lord had allowed him to come into a land so much like the one he had left to go to Canaan. But he settled down; there was plenty of room. The population of all Egypt at that time is said by Aldred (*"The Egyptians"* 1961) to have been no more than a million or so that for all its magnificence the land was very sparsely inhabited.

He took over a piece of unoccupied land and began to build up his probably by now somewhat attenuated flocks and herds. This was not the Promised Land, Abraham must have been fully conscious of that, but he was without doubt content to wait until he received a definite indication from the Lord as to his next move. In the meantime, however, trouble threatened, Sarah's beauty attracted the attention of the Egyptians, and the fact was communicated to Pharaoh. The known history of Egypt at this early period is not very exact. Unlike the Sumerians in Abraham's native land, who inscribed their records on baked clay tablets many of which have survived to this day to be recovered intact and deciphered by inves-

tigators, the Egyptians wrote theirs on a kind of parchment made from the papyrus reed which grew profusely in their rivers and streams, but which perished with the years, so that what is known is derived mostly from paintings in the tombs of dead and gone notabilities. Abraham's visit coincided with a time when Egypt was emerging from a period of general confusion and disorder on account of contenders for power; one or other of these rulers must have been the Pharaoh concerned in the narrative but there can be no certainty which one. What is certain is that, in common with all eastern kings of ancient time, this Pharaoh arrogated to himself the right to take into his harem any woman who took his fancy. Abraham had anticipated this possibility and had told Sarah not to reveal that she was his wife — eastern kings were not above having a man murdered if that was the easiest means of obtaining his wife — but to say that she was his sister (Ch. 12. 12-13). The word rendered "sister" means any female blood relative; "kinswoman" is the best English rendering, and Sarah was of course Abraham's niece as well as his wife. He probably reasoned that this artifice might give him time to appraise the position once in the country and get out again in time if this eventuality appeared likely. He miscalculated; Pharaoh's emissaries got there first, and Sarah found herself added to his probably already quite numerous collection. Before condemning the Patriarch too heavily for this evident temporary lack of faith it might be realised that he was approaching a people and a culture he had probably heard of by repute, but with which he had no practical experience, only that it was violently different from his own, and he was temporarily quite unsure how to act. Even the best of men do have their off moments. He need not have worried — this Pharaoh was evidently an honourable and upright man. As soon as he discovered the truth he restored Sarah to her husband and roundly upbraided him. "*Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, saying, She is my sister? Behold thy wife; take her, and go thy way*" (Ch. 12.18-19). He had apparently given rich gifts of slaves, flocks and herds to Abraham in consideration of the arrangement, and there is no indication that he asked for them back. But Abraham was no longer acceptable in his country; he was to go.

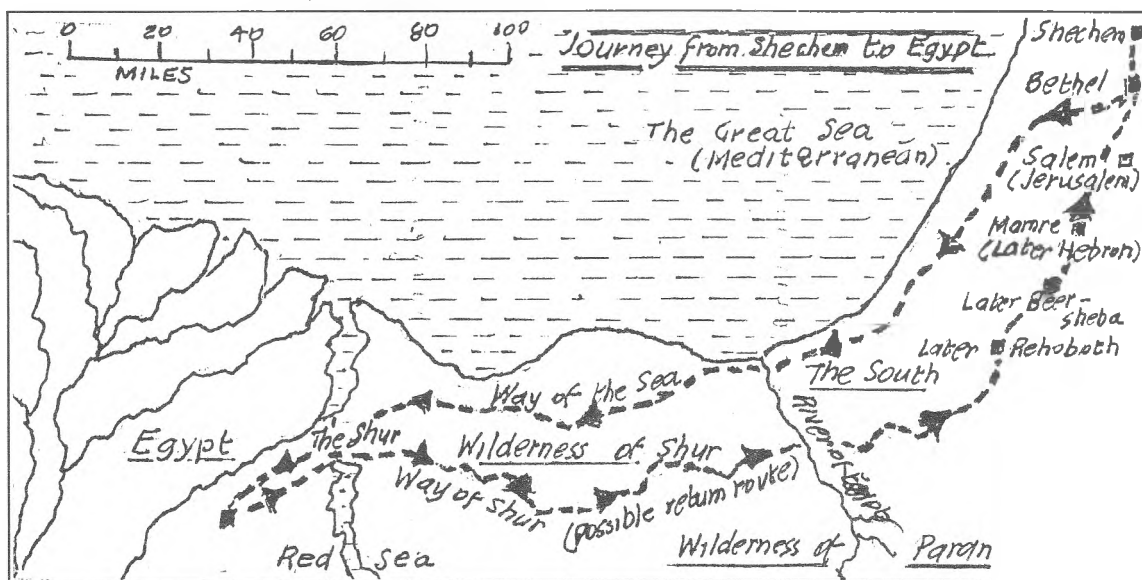
It was the Lord who indicated the truth to Pharaoh, by the infliction of what is described as "*great plagues*" upon him and his house (Ch. 12,

17). How the Monarch discerned the connection is not stated, Egypt at that time, like the Sumerians, had but recently begun to adopt the worship of many gods, but they still revered the Supreme God, the Most High. The only difference was that they called him Amon, the uncreated, the universal God, where the Sumerians called him An, the Most High God. In some way the God of Abraham "got through" as we would say, to this man, and he reacted immediately as an honourable man, and Abraham, chastened, one would hope, by the experience, was in the desert on his way back to Canaan, admittedly enriched in this world's goods, but with Pharaoh's reproof still ringing in his ears. He had been in Egypt about three years.

It is possible that he did not return by way he had come, what was in ancient days known as "the way

likely. That would bring him into Canaan in the area where he spent most of his after life, past Beer-Sheba and Hebron (at that time known as Mamre), until at last he got back to Bethel from whence he had set out three or four years previously. Genesis gives no indication which route he did take, but the fact that very soon afterwards he selected this whole area, from Hebron to Beer-Sheba, and to the south, for his wide-ranging interests, might at least indicate this prior acquaintance with this particular territory. So he came back to the altar he had built at Bethel, to a district still unpopulated just as he had left it, "unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of the Lord" (Ch. 13.4).

There is nothing more said about the famine.



of the sea", following the sea coast, the high road between Canaan and Egypt habitually used by traders and armies alike. Canaan at that time was nominally under the political control of Egypt, and Pharaoh's soldiers were constantly passing and re-passing that way. Unlike his former journey, Abraham was now a rich man; Ch. 13.2. indicates that he left Egypt not only with much cattle, but much silver and gold. Evidently Pharaoh had been very lavish with his gifts, but here in the wilderness Abraham's party with such possessions could be an easy prey to unscrupulous traders or rapacious soldiers. It is possible that with this in mind he took the alternative and more difficult route over the mountains, known as "the Way of Shur", thirty miles to the south, where such perils were less

Evidently while Abraham was away in Egypt the hot dry seasons had passed and the rains had come. He now had many more sheep and cattle and other animals than he possessed when here before, and his household was considerably augmented with men and women workers given him by Pharaoh—only about four years later, according to Ch. 14. he had no less than three hundred and eighteen "trained servants"—the word means a disciplined body of men, guards or soldiers—who pursued the Elamite invader a hundred and fifty miles, engaged in combat and defeated the latter's forces, recovered the captives and booty and returned in triumph. A force of that dimension must indicate that Abraham now headed a very large and growing community which demanded an extensive area

of land.

An interesting confirmation that it was just at this time the famine did cease comes from a totally different source. From the chronological indications afforded by the Old Testament and by known Sumerian and Babylonian history of the period, it is possible to deduce that Abraham's expedition to Egypt and his return took place some years before 2000 B.C. The 20th Century climatologist, C.E.P. Brooks, in his *"Climate through the Ages"* (1948) has shown that about 2200 B.C. the world in general entered upon a two-century period com-

mencing with an excessively hot and dry climate lasting more than a hundred years or more followed by a change to a heavy rainy period towards its end.

Abraham must have returned to Canaan about three quarters of the way through this period. Just one of the many incidental confirmations that Old Testament history is remarkably accurate.

And so, for the second time, Abraham found himself in Canaan, the Land of Promise.

To be continued

Note on Matthew 12.40

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12. 40).

On the surface it seems a simple statement relating to our Lord's lying in the grave, between his death and his resurrection. The somewhat unusual expression "the heart of the earth", does provoke the question as to whether some other and less obvious meaning is intended.

This is the only one of the some hundred and fifty instances of "*kardia*" in the New Testament where the word does not refer to the human heart. In English usage "the heart of the earth" implies a considerable depth below the surface; a body interred in a cave tomb only just below ground level hardly merits the term and it is this which usually gives rise to the query. But what did the term really mean on the lips of Jesus?

The Old Testament speaks of the "heart of the (Red) sea" (Exod. 15. 8) and the "heart of Egypt" (Isa. 19. 1) where the obvious meaning of the term is "midst". The Hebrew for "heart" is *leb* or *lebah*, appearing some 450 times in reference to the human heart, but also translated in the A.V. fourteen times "midst" where this is the obvious meaning. Thus we have "midst of heaven" (Deut. 4. 11) "midst of the sea" (Psa. 46. 2. Prov. 30. 19 Ezek. 27. 4) and Absalom caught by his hair "in the midst of the oak" (2 Sam. 18. 4). More relevant to the point at issue is Jonah 2. 3 "thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas". Perhaps this is the source from which Jesus took his allusion. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Septuagint Greek, which latter was in general use in Jesus' day, this reference to Jonah's immurement in the "midst" of

the seas uses the word "heart". Jesus normally spoke in Aramaic, which was the contemporary form of Hebrew, but whichever language He used, it could well be that He was thinking of Jonah's expression "the heart of the seas" and repeated it for his own case except that it then became "the heart of the earth". Nothing more than a preview of his own death and burial precedent to his resurrection would appear to have been in his mind.

The "three days and three nights" has also provoked much discussion and not a little controversy. The accepted Christian tradition as well as customary reading of the New Testament allow for parts only of three days including two nights, from three o'clock on Friday to dawn on Sunday. Various reconstructions have been worked out to extend this period to a full seventy-two hours but these of necessity come up against two apparently unassailable facts; one, that 14 Nisan of A.D. 33, the year of the Crucifixion, ended on Friday 3rd April at 6.0 p.m.; two, the fixed conviction of the Early Church that the Resurrection took place on Sunday morning. Much more can be said on both sides of the question than will be attempted here, but it is possible that the expression "three days and three nights" in the Greek New Testament is analogous to the Old Testament Hebrew "evening-mornings", metaphorically indicating any period extending over parts of the stated number of days. We use a similar colloquialism today in saying, for example "I shall be away for three days" although in fact we leave at midday on Wednesday and arrive back at 3.0 p.m. Friday. Nothing more than this may be intended by the New Testament narrative.

IN MEMORY OF HIM

A memorial talk

It is impressive how fast the years glide by. As the various special seasons of the year come and go, it seems so little time has elapsed since the last. So Memorial follows Memorial, the years glide by, and we are growing older. With the passing of the years this present evil world becomes more unstable—so from two angles one wonders how many more Memorial seasons the church of God will keep this side of the veil, or this side the Kingdom. As one grows older, physical strength weakens, and at the same time the demands made by the modern world grow greater under the acceleration of the great increase of knowledge in this day of rushing to and fro. Consequently one hears on all sides the lament of weariness—“*I am so tired*”. Physical weariness may, to an extent, be offset by taking more rest and reducing the pressures around one by doing a little less, and this is often a wise procedure. But as consecrated Christians attention is toward the things of the Spirit. When peculiar difficulties of the “narrow way” are added to the physical weariness of “earning a living” and “providing things honest in the sight of all men”, a Christian sometimes faces a special dilemma. God has not ordained that those striving toward joint heirship with Jesus in the throne of his Kingdom should have an easy and trouble free life. The way is one in which one can expect to feel weariness. How do we re-act? May the Heavenly Father make it profitable to reflect for a short time upon an answer to this question.

Jesus came to give his life a ransom for all. As a perfect man He knew no sin, therefore need not have suffered or endured any weariness. But time and again his healing hand reached out to some poor ailing sinful human, and each time “*virtue went out of him*”; in other words He surrendered some of his own vitality or strength. Many such occasions during the three and a half years of his ministry brought him to a condition, physically, much on a par with the fallen creatures He had come to save, so that as He was led to crucifixion He stumbled beneath the weight of his cross, and another was commandeered to help him carry it. The same healing missions doubtless, caused him to sit down on the well, “*being wearied with his journey*”, as He talked to the Samaritan woman. It was because of his many wearinesses that our Lord became such a great High Priest—Hebrews 4. 15 reads, “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*

...”—no, indeed, He *experienced* what we experience; and so it is that we are able to come so boldly to the throne of grace, and obtain “mercy . . . and help in times of need”. The Amplified Version of Hebrews 4. 15 is so simple and beautiful—“*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to understand and sympathise and have a fellow feeling with our weaknesses and infirmities and liability to the assaults of temptation, but One who has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning*”.

It is this One upon whom thoughts especially dwell at this season of the year—the Memorial; He “*who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death . . .*” (Heb. 5. 7). Truly, He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; all who remember him are fully assured He understands their trials, and will ever reach out his help at every call. Memorial services are occasions to pay tribute to the memory of one who has gone from us, to recall features and characteristics of the departed one’s life which proved inspiring and helpful. With earthly friends, particularly parents and close relatives, we sometimes spent moments musing upon memories; and as Christians it is most profitable to dwell often upon the life of our Saviour, the *perfect* One. He trod the way of weariness which all know something about. What were his re-actions? The answer should be the same to the earlier question, What should be ours? If one falls short of it, as many do in their imperfection, yet it is the will, the desire, to draw *examples* which can be set before us, to follow as nearly as one can. Long before our Lord’s time, the Psalmist David wrote several psalms which were largely prophetic of our Lord’s experiences. One such is psalm thirty one — used now particularly because of verse five. The Lord had many times delivered David from his enemies, so that he had learned to put his trust in him when he was oppressed, and verse five is how he expressed it—“*Into thine hand I commit my spirit . . .*” (my life, my being). He trusted God to take care of him. So also did Jesus during all the earthly experiences as the Lamb of God who was to be sacrificed to take away sin. How He suffered, was straitened, in difficulty, until his baptism unto death was accomplished (Luke 12. 50), but He never lost the peace of God in his heart! Into his Heavenly Father’s hand He committed his being, though we do not find him

using the exact expression of David until He was about to draw his last breath on the cross. Luke 23.46 (Amplified Version) reads—“*And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And with these words he expired*”. A short time later the first disciple of Jesus to suffer martyrdom used the same expression—in Acts 7. 59, “*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*”.

As we consider our Saviour now during this memorial season, may we be helped towards the distress relieving spirit of committing our way fully to the Lord at all times. Especially when we have gone *all* the way, “*have resisted unto blood*” (actual death) “*striving against sin*” (Heb. 12. 4), may we be able to say with full assurance—“*Into thy hands I commit my spirit*”. Such an attitude, if we can maintain it continually during our daily walk, will prove a blessing. This is shown in a very beautiful way by the words of one who has long since finished the way. His words will bear repetition—“To be a true and faithful servant I must put myself daily into Almighty hands, and say, ‘Into thy hands I commit my spirit’—for this day and every day . . . These words Jesus himself used when, on the cross, he was looking out on death; but they had been, before that, the words of one who was looking out, not on death, but on the difficulties and trials of life (Psl. 31. 5). If they were enough for my Master to die upon, they are more than enough for me to live upon, and so I say—Into Thy *protecting* hands I commit my spirit, for the *keeping* of it. Life is full of temptations, the world full of snares; I cannot keep myself, but thou canst keep me from falling; I trust myself to thee. Into thy *tender* hands I commit my spirit, for the *comforting* of it. The sorrows of my life may be many, the waters deep, the furnace hot; I may have thick darkness over me soon in which I could lose all my joy, but if thou

wilt whisper to me then, ‘I am with thee still’, I will fear no evil. Into thy *correcting* hands I commit my spirit for the *sanctifying* of it. I am willing to be chastened if only the chastening makes me purer than before. Take what way thou wilt with me, I will bless the hand that smites. Into thy *moulding* hands I commit my spirit for the *consecrating* of it. Use me to thy glory. I would not live to myself. Let self be killed that Christ may be all in me. Turn me as the clay is turned in the potter’s hands. I would fain be a vessel for the Master’s use, filled with the Master’s grace, and thou canst make me so. And then if death should come even suddenly, I will hear thee calling, and reply. ‘Into thy *redeeming* hand I commit my spirit for the *glorifying* of it. Thy creating hands fashioned me, thy preserving hands have kept me, thy guiding hands have led me, thy appealing hands have beckoned to me, thy smiting hands have chastened me, but they were always saving hands that delivered me, and sheltering hands that covered me. I ever found them to be loving hands, I have proved them to be strong, and so I trust myself entirely and for ever to thee; Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth’.”

He who has made it possible for us to enter into this blessedness, to know such godliness with contentment, which is such great gain, is the One whom we, at this season, are especially remembering. He led the way none other had ever trod before, and He made it possible for us to receive the privilege of entering into his suffering experiences that we may know the fulness of his joy at his right hand in the kingdom. As we lift the cup that signals our participation with him as members of his body in the experiences of the present time, may we commit our spirits to him in the glad anticipation of soon drinking it “new” with him on the other side of the Vail.

No power to separate

“*Who shall separate us from the love of the anointed one? Afflictions? Distress? or Persecution? or Famine? or Nakedness? or Peril? or Sword?*”

“All of which things we are liable to whilst dwelling in the flesh. How overwhelming any of these experiences might seem to be at anytime! And, physically, we are no better equipped to endure them than are other people; many of whom suc-

cumb in despair. Nevertheless these experiences, when they do come, are not able to separate us from the love of the Anointed. They may have the effect of deepening and strengthening that love, but cannot separate us from it.

Clearly the way of triumph for all of us is, to hear his voice and follow him unhesitatingly. Indeed—“*In all these things do we more than overcome, through him that loved us.*”

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

2. Be Fruitful and Multiply

No picture of the antediluvian world can be complete without giving some attention to the question of population. The general conception of that world is one that was occupied by swarming multitudes something like the world we know today. A little thought will show that it could not possibly be anything like that. The Genesis narrative declares that the human race started with one pair. Biologically there is nothing whatever against that, and since our first parents, fresh from the hand of their Creator, were obviously free from present day demerits of "inbreeding" the story is logical enough. It follows therefore that for quite a few generations the number of human beings on the earth was exceedingly small. Since from the data given the length of life and interval between successive generations was ten times that usual at present, the associated time scale, measured by present day standards, was exceedingly long.

The antediluvians are said to have lived for periods of more than 900 years. After the Flood, according to Genesis, there was a gradual drop to two hundred at the end of the next thousand years. Later Biblical records brought it down to something like the present in another thousand. Historians of two thousand years ago record earlier historians of a thousand years before their time as confirming much of this with examples of such long-lived men quite independent of the Bible account. No one knows why. It may have had something to do with climatic changes, for experienced climatologists like Brooks have shown a pattern of world climate deterioration since 3000 B.C. which almost exactly mirrors the steps of shortening human life recorded in the Bible (see "*Longevity of the Ancients*", *BSM Jan/Feb 1976*). Ancient Babylonian, Sumerian and Egyptian records give the same picture of extraordinary long life in very ancient times. Fantastic as the idea may seem to the modern mind, it must be accepted as a fact.

It is noticeable, too, in the Genesis account, that the ages of marriage and first births increased in proportion. Before the Flood eldest sons were born when their fathers were 160/200 years of age. In the first thousand years after the Flood the age was around 130. In the days of Abraham it was down to 70. It is evident also that the ratio between the woman's fertility period and the length of life was the same as now, and this implies an age span

of about 170 to 500 of the average antediluvian age of 920. This determined the rate of growth of the population.

The other factor is the size of the average family. The Scriptural data is very scanty. Adam had three recorded sons and other sons and daughters, but how many more is not stated. All his recorded descendants had sons and daughters. Noah, at the end of the period, had three known sons and no intimation as to others. His three sons who survived the Flood with him had, respectively, seven, five, and four sons; in these cases it is implied in Gen. 10 that these were the only ones. The average family of sons between all these and a few succeeding generations is only a little above four. If the much later cases of Terah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by their most fertile wives is included the average is still the same. Jewish legends stemming mainly from the immediate pre-Christian centuries credit Adam with, variously, five, seven, and nine sons, but these quite definitely have their source in the fertile imaginations of enthusiastic Rabbis. For the purpose of building a tolerably realistic picture of the antediluvian world, therefore, it might be discreet to adopt a figure of six sons, and as many daughters, per family, born over a period of 340 years in each case. There can be no certainty, yet on the other hand there is no means of approximating nearer the truth and this will at least afford an idea of the likely position.

In such case there would have been a birth at an average interval of thirty years, ten times a very usual figure nowadays, just as the normal life span then was ten times as much. Since records began in relatively modern times it has always been found that male and female births are consistently, and remarkably, equal in number. Experts in eugenics can explain why this is so, but usually in technical terms not always understood by others. It does indicate though that each man in those early days could find for himself a wife, although for the first generation or so from Adam that wife would have to be a sister. In this connection it is rather remarkable that in the apocryphal "*Book of Jubilees*" (c 150 B.C.) enshrining Jewish legends about those days, it is stated that Cain, Seth, Enos and Kainan in the first three generations all married their sisters—only after that did the relationship extend more widely. The Genesis narrative does put the ages of the firstborn of these at a higher figure than

their successors, as though they had to wait for a younger sister to grow up.

Seth was born, according to Gen. 4, when Adam was 230 years old (130 in the AV) which allows for Cain to have been born at the lower limit of 160/170 and a daughter a little later on who eventually became Cain's wife. This figure of 230 may provoke a question in the minds of some since the AV gives Adam's age at the birth of Seth as 130, and a word on this point is desirable here. The figures for the ages of the patriarchs between Adam and the time of Abraham in the AV are those of the standard Hebrew Bible, which was last revised by the Jewish scholars known as the Masorites in the ninth century A.D. This revision was on the basis of a former revision made by earlier Masorites in the first century A.D. In both cases certain alterations to these ages were made by the Masorites to avoid the claim that, because the pre-Christian Hebrew Scriptures indicated the near close of six thousand years from Adam at the birth of Jesus his Messianism, appearing at about that time, was vindicated. All ancient writers of the day, including Josephus the Jewish historian, many of the early Church Fathers, and Apocryphal books such as the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Book of Adam and Eve, and the like, together, with the Greek Septuagint which was translated from the Hebrew Bible about 250 B.C., unite in testifying to the longer ages. A number of internal evidences go to show that in the first century revision the Masorites deducted six hundred years from the ages of some of the antediluvian patriarchs so that the six thousand years would not terminate until about AD 1100 and so refute the Christian claim. By the 9th century the critical date was getting uncomfortably near again and the Masorites of that era did the same with the post-diluvian patriarchs and so advanced the date to the 17th century A.D. There is no question at the present time as to the general accuracy of the Septuagint chronology.

With Cain gone, Adam and Eve were alone until Seth was born, perhaps not many years after the tragic death of Abel. "*God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew*" (Gen. 4.25) said Eve. It has been surmised that in fact Cain and Abel were twins, and there may be some basis for the supposition. Instead of the usual formula "*and Adam knew his wife, and she bare Cain*" (or Seth later on), Gen. 4.2 has it "*and she again bare his brother Abel*", where the word "again" means addition or completion, as though

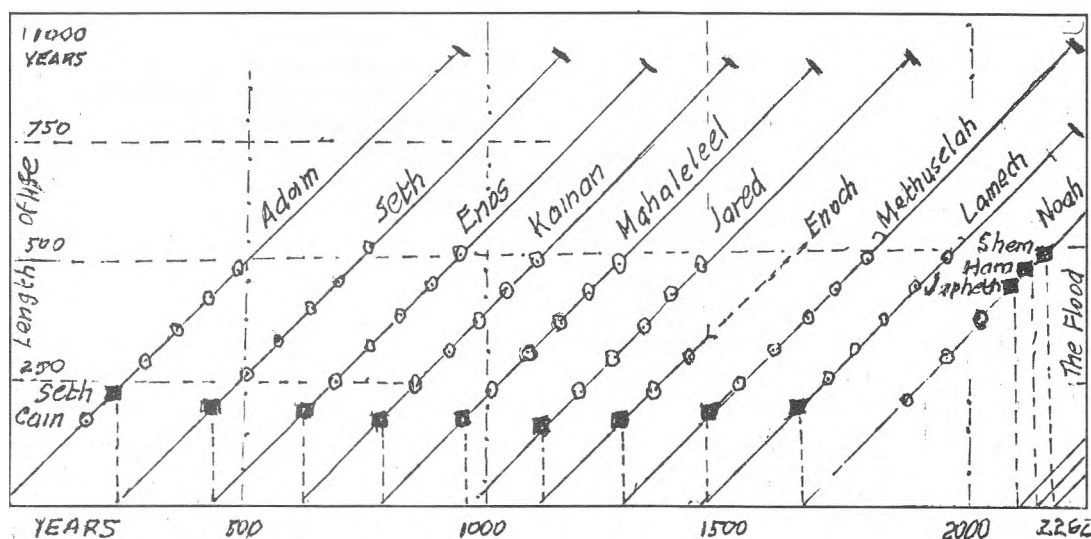
the second half is indicated. This would at any rate fit the time periods of the story for it could allow both Cain and Abel to be say fifty or sixty years old at the time of the tragedy and Cain's banishment, and allow for one sister, born in the interim, to accompany him into exile, later to become his wife. Presumably Adam could have had four more sons and five daughters, born between Seth at year of the world 230 and the last son or daughter at year 500.

So, five hundred years after creation, Adam's family was complete. one son and daughter in exile, the remainder fast growing up and taking their share in the work of raising food for sustenance. By that time Seth could have had three children and Cain, away in the Land of Nod, five. The human community was very small, twenty-two in all, and the Divine sentence was "*cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground*" (Gen. 3, 17-19). The nature of the world outside the Garden has always been a matter of speculation, it is probable that it was very largely forest, as was most of the world in early historic ages. Men have to cut down the trees and make clearings to grow crops for food, as they have done throughout historical times. It must have been a hard life, largely a struggle to glean the wild grain (*the herb of the field which is upon the face of all the earth*, Gen. 1, 29 and 3, 18 denotes the wild grain from which our modern wheat, barley and maize etc. have been developed through the ages), an arduous process of daily food gathering until they could clear areas of ground for cultivated grain and other foodstuffs. Until he was more than four hundred years of age Adam did not even see any grand-children, and no sign of any action on the Lord's part to indicate his moving to fulfil the promise that eventually the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head.

This may be the reason behind the rather cryptic comment on the birth of Enos, first son of Seth and first grandson on whom Adam's eyes fell. Four hundred and thirty five years after Adam awoke to conscious life in the Garden his grandson Enos was born, says the chronicle (Gen. 4.26); "*and to Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enos. Then began men call upon the name of the Lord*". The marginal reading in the A.V. "to call themselves by the name" has nothing to commend it; the Hebrew preposition is definitely "on"

and not "by". So soon after creation there would be little point in the alternative, there were only Adam's sons in existence and they must still at least have been known to each other as acknowledging the power that had created their parents. But to call upon his Name was a quite different thing. The arduous life hitherto led by this little family must have led to a longing for some sign from the Lord that He would soon redeem his promise of eventual deliverance. The first generation, by now comprising only five sons and maybe five daughters, had not yet yielded the promised seed? Was there hope in the second generation? Eve's reference to the Seed at the birth of Seth had not so

has never died. Two thousand years ago St. John closed the last book of the New Testament with the fervant supplication "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*", And it will surely be; even though those few supplicants were destined to wear out their lives in nearly a thousand years of arduous labour, there is evidence that their faith held, onward through their generations. Although there is no knowledge of the language they had began to evolve between themselves nor the names, if any, by which they designated God, it is a fact that nearly all the Hebrew names by which the antediluvian patriarchs are known in the Bible, transliterated from the Sumerian language in which they were



Illustrating relation of birth period 160/500 years in antediluvian era.
Solid squares — birth dates of sons as stated in Genesis.
Open circles — remaining birth dates approximated.

far yielded anything. Was there any hope in this son of Seth?

The "men" referred to in Vs. 26 could only comprise Adam, Seth and at the most four more. This was no mighty congregation lifting its corporate voice in prayer to God in some imposing building, it could only have been a small family gathering united in supplication to the Lord that this new entrant to the world might be the promised Deliverer from the woes of life and alienation from God. It was a mercy that those distant ancestors of ours had no inkling of the truth. More than seven thousand years later men are still looking and waiting for that deliverance, Abraham had to come and go, and Moses, and the nation of Israel, and the Christian Church of this present era, and still the Deliverer has not come, but the hope and belief

recorded three thousand years after creation, embody the then Sumerian names for the Most High God, the God of Heaven, who before the days that idolatry crept in they worshipped, as had their father Noah before them, as the only true God. During at least the first thousand years or so before the Flood, man must have acknowledged and worshipped God.

Of all that thousand years of history, until the death of Adam, nothing more has survived, not one intimation of what men thought and said and did, nothing more than lists of the eldest sons in the two lines of Cain and Seth. The human race survived and increased, although slowly. The second generation, that of Enos, could only have amounted to thirty-six men and presumably as many women and it was the year 675 before the last

of them were born. The third generation yielded about 400 but many of these were not born until after the death of Adam. Altogether, calculating from the ages and geneological figures given in Genesis, the two communities at Adam's death a thousand years later could only have amounted to about 200 in the land of Nod with Cain, and one thousand born of Seth and his other brothers somewhere near the lost Eden.

In the year 930 Adam died. That must have been a shock to the entire community. Apart from Adam, Eve, Cain and his wife none of them had ever seen death. The eldest ones among them had lived eight centuries and not seen death. The event must have brought home to them the grim reality of what their fathers had repeatedly told them but they themselves perhaps could hardly visualise. Perhaps again, as in the days of Enos five hundred years earlier, they "*called on the name of the Lord*". Like the Psalmist many centuries later, some must have wondered if "*God had forgotten to be gracious*". A thousand years of human history and all that is known or can be inferred is comprised in the story of the Garden of Eden, the crime and banishment of Cain, and that on the

birth of the grandson Enos "*men began to call upon the name of the Lord*". In that thousand years the human community had increased to less than two thousand persons, probably occupying an area no greater than ten or twenty miles square. It has been reliably established that in ancient as well as modern historical times primitive peoples tend to grow in communities to a maximum of a hundred persons; the community then divides to establish two or more and repeat the process. This could well have been the custom in those pre-Flood days, by Adam's death a scattering of a dozen villages a few miles from each other.

The antediluvian world was a very small one in those early days. But now things were going to change. Population was going to increase rapidly and the generations after Adam's death would change the scene. This is marvellously confirmed by the first verse of Gen. 6 "*it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth*". Another generation was to see a population of something like a ten thousand, and growing rapidly. And at the same time, the shadows began to darken.

To be continued

No self glory

"And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." (Acts 14. 28).

What is so extraordinary about this report made by Paul and Barnabas of their missionary trip is they did not tell the Church of Antioch all that *they* had done and how *they* had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. They gave God all the glory! There is not the slightest trace of self-glory in this report. They could have recounted some exciting experiences that had befallen them, for they had travelled through Cyprus, crossed the arm of the Mediterranean Sea which separates Cyprus from the mainland, travelled through the provinces of Pamphylia, Pisidia, and into Galatia. They had founded churches and ran into the opposition of Jews who resented the success the two missionaries had among the Gentiles. The opposition grew into violence "*against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.*" (Acts 13.50). Later, after

an attempt to stone them in Iconium, "*they fled to Lystra and Derbe*". More wonderful things happened when Paul healed a man crippled from birth and the crowd, thinking they were gods come down in likeness of men, wanted to offer sacrifices to them. With great difficulty the two missionaries restrained the multitude from offering up the oxen. Following this, the Jewish leaders again stirred up the people and seized Paul, stoned him, and left him for dead. Oh, what a story they could have told the brethren, with themselves as the heroes, but they did not! They said God was the one who had done wonderful things.

What a lesson for us whenever we begin to think God cannot accomplish his purposes without us. That which is of greatest import is not what we are doing, but what God is doing with us. Unless it is God working through us, all our activities come to nothing. We are his instruments to achieve his purposes, and only as we yield ourselves to him, will his blessing be upon our efforts to serve him.

(Cicero "Berean News")

AHIJAH THE SHILONITE

The little priestly settlement at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood for four centuries during the period of the Judges, had lain desolate since the disastrous day when the Ark of God was captured by the Philistines in the time of Eli and Samuel. It was still inhabited, but its glory had departed, for the Tabernacle had been hurriedly taken down and re-erected at Nob out of the Philistines' reach. Later it went to Gibeon, and now, in the middle of the reign of Solomon, it had for twenty years past been superseded by the magnificent Temple the Israelite king had built at Jerusalem. But Shiloh had still one claim to its credit; it was to produce the first of the long line of Hebrew prophets who rose up, one after another, to call kings, priests and people from their indifference and idolatry back to the worship of God and allegiance to the Mosaic Covenant. That line terminated in Malachi, who, four hundred years before Christ, foretold the coming of a Herald of Messiah and then Messiah himself, the Sun of righteousness, to arise with healing in his wings. Malachi was the last of those prophets, and the first, more than five hundred years before him, was Ahijah of Shiloh.

Ahijah, like Malachi, recorded his prophecy in a book. Unlike Malachi, his book has not survived. All that is known of his preaching and work is contained in the First Book of Kings. From that brief record we can draw a picture of the man and his character, a picture which is tantalising because it is so dim. But the fact that he conveyed the Divine message to the principal figure in the secession of the Ten Tribes in the days of Rehoboam shows that he was a man of God and stalwart for the delivery of his message in a day of general apostasy.

It was at the time that King Solomon, at the height of his power and glory, had begun to relapse into idolatry himself that Ahijah comes on the stage. The great king had multiplied himself wealth and possessions beyond all kings of his own time and before, extended his dominion from the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates, increased the number of his wives and concubines, erected imposing buildings and splendid palaces, and now all these things had stolen his heart away from God. Among the people, who had been compelled to pay heavy taxes for all this glory, and labour at the arduous work involved, discontent was rife. The prediction of Samuel had come true, and the people who had clamoured to have a king over them like other nations were now paying the price. And God, looking down from heaven, foresaw unerringly the disruption to which all this must

inevitably lead. So he sent Ahijah to declare his judgment.

At a time which cannot be closely determined, but was probably about ten years before Solomon's death, his attention had been attracted to one of his servants, an upstanding, courageous and industrious young man named Jeroboam, an Ephraimite of Zereda, a village in the Jordan valley. Solomon needed a trusty man to supervise the forced labour levies in Ephraim; Jeroboam was given this commission and set out to assume his new duties. As a member of the working classes he probably had no ambitions beyond earning a reasonable living and keeping out of trouble; better men than he had dabbled in politics and either succeeded or failed and that was not for him. The duty now laid upon him by the great king was an honour and a promotion and he considered himself fortunate but that was as far as his thoughts went. Until he met Ahijah!

The way to Ephraim from Jerusalem led past Shiloh. As he drew near the almost deserted village he saw coming towards him a strange figure, a man, clothed in skins, with flowing beard and burning eyes. Jeroboam knew that this was a prophet of the Lord and entitled on that account to some respect but he could have had no idea whatever of the message and the admonition he was to receive. The story is found in 1 Kings 11; "*it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field. And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces*" (vs. 29-30). Rather strange conduct, and disconcerting, to say the least. Jeroboam, conscious of the dignity of his new position and the desirability of impressing his subordinates and workmen, had invested in new apparel suited to the situation; now this complete stranger had come up to him and torn the garment into twelve pieces. But before he could so much as expostulate, Ahijah had thrust ten of the pieces into his unwilling hands and told him that God intended to sever ten of the tribes from the kingdom of Solomon and make Jeroboam king over the. Because Solomon had forsaken God, and worshipped the abominable gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations, and had failed to keep God's statutes as had David his father, then at his death this judgment would come upon his kingdom. Came the charge to Jeroboam "*it shall be, if*

thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (vs. 38). Then, abruptly, the prophet turned and stalked away, his gaunt figure receding rapidly into the distance, and Jeroboam was left standing alone, holding the torn pieces of his new garment helplessly in his hands.

He had a lot to think about as he continued his journey. It has to be assumed that Jeroboam was at this time a faithful worshipper of God and adherent to the Covenant. The Lord would hardly have called and appointed him otherwise. That mandate and exhortation which had just sounded in his ears could only mean one thing, that he was to have the opportunity with the ten tribes which both Saul and Solomon had had with all Israel, and both had thrown away. He was to be a king, and reign as king in Ephraim. But he was to lead the ten tribes in firm allegiance to the God of Israel. That was the condition; there is little doubt that at that moment of time Jeroboam fully intended to implement that condition. It must have been, almost immediately afterwards, either by overt action or indiscreet word, Jeroboam revealed abroad what Ahijah had told him, for news came to Solomon and he sent emissaries to execute Jeroboam; high treason in the kingdom was not to be tolerated. Jeroboam got away to Egypt and remained there until Solomon's death, but not before he had so impressed his fellow Ephraimites that he was marked out as their champion when the inevitable rebellion broke out. So soon as Solomon's son Rehoboam had ascended the throne, representatives of the ten tribes, with Jeroboam at their head, came to the new king with requests for the alleviation of the servitude his father had imposed on them. This part of history is well known, how that Rehoboam refused and promised them even greater burdens so that the Ten Tribes revolted from Rehoboam and set up a separate kingdom under Jeroboam as their first king. Thus the prediction of Ahijah was fulfilled.

Now, for a span of years, Ahijah drops out of the picture. The sequel shows that he continued to dwell quietly at Shiloh. Rehoboam went to war in the endeavour to regain his lost subjects but to no avail. Jeroboam was firmly in the saddle and he set about organising his new kingdom on a permanent basis. There is no reason to doubt his sincerity and endeavour to exalt the worship of the God of Israel among his subjects. There was one

serious handicap. He had no centre of worship, no Temple as had Rehoboam in Jerusalem; instead, there was the opposition sanctuary in the town of Dan in the north, established several centuries previously by Jonathan the grandson of Moses and served still by his descendants, still nominally worshipping God but with many of the appendages of idol worship. It seems to have been this which gave Jeroboam his idea. To dissuade his people from going to Jerusalem to worship and becoming too intimate with the subjects of Rehoboam and perhaps repenting of the separation and so threatening his own kingship, he determined to institute two sanctuaries to Jehovah in his own territory, one at Dan where the existing establishment could be utilised, the other at Bethel in the south of his dominions where he would install a priesthood of his own creating. For each sanctuary he provided an image of Jehovah in the form of a golden bullock, and invited all his people to join him in worship. *"And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan . . ."* and Jeroboam offered incense upon the idol altar (1 Kings 12.25-33) and the people assented, and that day the fate of the Ten Tribes Kingdom was sealed.

For how long Jeroboam thus led Israel away from God cannot be determined precisely, but the judgment of God was near and the erring king was once more to meet the man who at the first had conferred the Divine commission upon him and declared the condition. Considering that he first built his new capital of Shechem and spent probably a few years organising his political framework before thinking about his religious sanctuaries the apostasy would not have come at once. It is recorded that Shishak of Egypt, first Pharaoh of the 23rd dynasty, invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam and forced the Hebrew king to surrender all his treasures; since Jeroboam had been given refuge in Egypt by this same Shishak it is probable that these two had formed a political alliance aimed at embarrassing Rehoboam, and if this be so it might well have been fifteen years or so before Jeroboam's apostasy at last incurred its inevitable retribution.

The son of Jeroboam fell sick, and the sickness seemed to be unto death. Although he is called a "child" in 1 Kings 14, the word really means a son without limiting his age to early childhood; in this case he must have been at least a youth for it is stated that *"in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam."* It would seem that his father had

brought him up in the "nurture and fear of the Lord" to such good effect that the son had not followed his father into apostasy. He was probably the heir to the throne, and Jeroboam was deeply concerned. In this concern, he bethought himself of the prophet Ahijah whose prediction so many years ago had come so startlingly true. He told his wife to disguise herself, go to Ahijah and ask what would be her son's fate; *"he shall tell thee what shall become of the child."*

This is where the prophet comes back into the picture. It does not seem to have occurred either to the king or to his wife that if the prophet could indeed read the future he could also see through any disguise. And, of course, the disguise was useless. *"When Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door, he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam: why feignest thou thyself to be another? I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."* Then, in all its awful solemnity, came the judicial sentence. *"Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel; Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to thee; and yet thou hast not been as my servant David . . . but hast done evil above all that were before thee . . . made thee other gods, and molten images . . . therefore I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam . . . and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam . . . for the Lord hath spoken. Arise, get thee to thine own house, and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die . . ."* (1 Kings 14. 16-12).

So the unhappy woman returned, and as she entered her house, her son died, and all Israel mourned for him, for he was well loved. But Ahijah had said that he only of all the house of Jeroboam would go to his grave in peace because he only was righteous in the Lord's sight and he was to be taken from the wrath to come. And from that day to the time two centuries later when Shalmaneser of Assyria overran the Ten Tribe Kingdom, and brought it to an end, and transported its people to remote corners of his empire, there were no good kings, only bad ones, and the people sank further and further into idolatry. There were many prophets sent to them after Ahijah, but they heeded them not, and at last the penalty of the violated Covenant was exacted from them.

Of Ahijah we hear no more. He probably died at Shiloh, and with his passing a light went out of Israel. He wrote his prophecies in a book, for it is referred to in 2 Chron. 9.29 and from that reference it would appear that he must have lived

through the reign of Solomon; the story in 1 Kings reveals that he was old and blind when Jeroboam's wife visited him. As a youth he probably saw the rise of the kingdom under David and shared in the high hopes of so many at that time that the kingdom would endure forever under David and his successors, by the power and blessing of the God of Israel. As a mature man he lived through Solomon's reign and witnessed the gathering worldliness and indifference to the things of God which increasingly characterised king and people. He must have spoken out against that. Then came his mission to Jeroboam and perhaps he had high hopes of this enthusiastic and upstanding young man whom God had appointed to make a fresh start with Israel, only to have those hopes dashed when he saw the old evils, and more, creeping in again. So, as an old man whose life's work was nearly done, he became the messenger of judgment and knew that after his death final disaster must come. Perhaps, though, it was also revealed to him, as it was to Daniel at a much later date, that despite all these apparent failures of God's purposes with Israel, there would at the end come success, a day when Israel shall have learned the lessons and come wholeheartedly to God in a loyalty that will thenceforth never falter. Like so many of his fellow-prophets, he must have died in supreme content, assured that evil will one day pass away and everlasting righteousness be supreme.

Ahijah's book has not survived. It is just possible, though, that part of the First Book of Kings is from his hand. Chapter 11 vs. 1 to chapter 14 vs. 20 constitutes a self-contained account of Solomon's decline into idolatry and its consequence in the emergence of Jeroboam, with Jeroboam's own similar course, ending with his death. The details given can only have been known to someone familiar both with Solomon's reign and the intimate incidents of Jeroboam's life. A man of God, living in the northern kingdom, is indicated. It is to be noted also that only in this account is the story of Solomon's idolatry to be found. The remaining portion of 1 Kings, and the parallel narrative in 2 Chronicles, contains no hint of this and from these accounts it would be assumed that Solomon was faithful to God to the end of his life. It might well be, therefore, that these particular chapters in 1 Kings represent all that remains of the lost book of Ahijah the Shilonite. If that is so they constitute a testimonial to a faithful man who lived his life in obscurity but was used of God to do great things.

THE DIVINE WILL IN LITTLE THINGS

"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes" (Cant. 2.15).

Jackals, they were, abundant in Israel in those days—the AV translators were rather weak in their Natural History. Packs of little jackals, nibbling voraciously at the stems of the vines, inhibiting their growth so that the fruit withered and died. The Hebrew word for "spoil" means to corrupt to destruction. Fitting simile for the little things of daily life which can lead astray unless regulated by our knowledge of the Divine Will.

But how to discern that Will? In the bigger things of life the way is usually fairly clear; the dividing line between what is right and what is wrong in the Lord's sight is so plainly stated in the Word, so evident in the light of our knowledge of the Divine principles, that there is little doubt. We choose either the right way or the wrong way, knowing what we do, and abide by the outcome. But in these little things, so apparently trivial, so everyday in their occurrence, so seemingly unimportant, does it really matter so much? Is the Lord really so concerned? Will it really have so much effect on our Christian lives?

It is then that we have to remember the little foxes.

Just a little nibble at the stem, and the fruit withers.

It is related of William Penn, the celebrated colleague of the Quaker leader George Fox, and later on founder of the American State of Pennsylvania, that shortly after his conversion he had such a problem. William Penn was a highly placed member of society, a nobleman in the 16th century Court of King James of England. As such, and in common with his equals, he was expected to wear his sword at all times when in public; to appear at Court, as he was frequently required to do, without it, would be taken as an insult to His Majesty. In the past care-free days that presented no problem, but now that he was a Christian, and a Quaker to boot,—well, that was different. What would the Lord have him do? So he came to George Fox with his problem.

The Quaker leader surveyed him dispassionately. "Wear it as long as thou canst, friend William" he said.

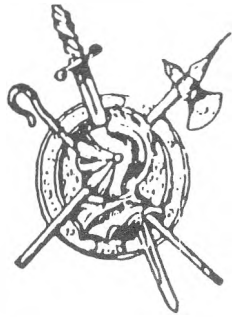
At their next meeting Fox looked at his friend.

"Where is thy sword, friend William"? he enquired.

The answer came equally seriously. "I took thy advice, friend George. I wore it as long as I could".

There, perhaps, lies the answer. Our Lord is not so demanding that we in our insufficiency must make the right decision in this field in every little problem and facet of life as that we think about it and decide for ourselves what would be the right thing to do. If we have made the wrong choice in all sincerity, He can easily put it right—or perhaps leave it to the outcome so that we can learn the lesson for ourselves. Pupils in the school of Christ do not always get their sums right first time, but so far as the Teacher is concerned the important thing is that they pass the examination at the year's end. In the meantime, *"he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust"* (Psa. 103.14).

St. Paul had a healthy outlook on questions of this nature. In his day one of the minor problems was the propriety in the Lord's sight of eating food, usually meat, which had previously functioned as an offering on the altars of the pagan gods of Rome. Such food was afterwards sold in the public markets (I Cor. 10.25), and formed a major part of the daily food of the poor—and many of the early Christians were poor. Said Paul *"I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself—but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean"* (Rom. 14.14). The Lord places more importance upon the sincere endeavour of the Christian to form a right judgment than upon the rightness of the decision. Should he or should he not devote a measure of time to the pursuit of good music which might otherwise be given to the study of the Scriptures? The Lord loves good music; he spoke of little children playing their pipes, and anyway there are harps and trumpets, or their celestial counterparts, in Heaven. Is it judicious participation in a social festivity? One of the first things our Lord did after his baptism was to attend a wedding; not only so, when the wine ran out He provided some more. Is it a due meed of personal adornment? The first clothes any human being ever wore were fabricated by the hand of God in the Garden. It is for us to use all things gratefully, moderately, wisely, to his glory. *"Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all to the glory of God."*



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

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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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NOTICES

Chesham Convention. Some readers are interested in the annual gathering which has been held at Chesham for a good many years. The friends responsible for this function advise that it will NOT be held this year on account of venue difficulties and manpower problems.

Literature stockroom. The stockroom is now fully organised and operational at the new location. Literature listed on this page is available, free and post free, on request to 11 Lyncroft Gardens.

An acknowledgment. During January a renewal request accompanied by a £5 note was received but without sender's name and address, bearing Bristol postmark. The renewal cannot therefore be entered nor acknowledged. If the Bristol reader sees this it will be appreciated.

Someone else removed their copy from the envelope, obliterated

the address and marked the envelope for return to us by the Post Office, evidently to indicate desire for no more copies to be sent. Without knowing the name, this we cannot do. A word now from this reader is necessary before we can take action.

Gone from us



Sis. Joyce Colbourn (*Hildenborough*)
 Sis. A. Neary (*Fermanagh*)
 Sis. Eva Oram (*Brechin, Scot.*)
 Bro. Tom Webb (*London*)



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

TIME AND JUDGMENT

*A discourse
for today*

"Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him." (Eccl. 8. 6).

Men can neither judge their times nor time their judgments; God can do both. It is because He can do so that those who believe in God's fixed intention to lead mankind into a life of everlasting peace can rejoice and be exceeding glad at a time when the misery of man is so great upon him that it almost invariably shows itself plainly in his face. Man is notoriously incapable in his handling both of time and judgment. He has been endowed with a brain of so complex a structure, and mental and intellectual faculties of so high an order, that God can say to him, as He did once through the prophet Isaiah, "Come, let *us* reason together". At any rate, those faculties are more than sufficient for the intelligent planning of human life on earth so that all may take their fill of earth's bounty and live in the full and unrestrained acceptance and enjoyment of all that God has provided for their happiness. But man's judgment is so much at fault that he finds himself ploughing back into the land the food he has grown, instead of consuming it; throwing back into the sea the fish he has caught, instead of eating that; going to war to preserve his freedom but accepting in order to do so a bondage from which he finds he cannot escape when the war is over, and in a hundred ways demonstrating to the observer's satisfaction if not his own that the misery that is great upon him is very largely his own fault. The continued degeneration of the human race in consequence of its unrestrained use—or abuse—of its own powers of judgment is equalled only by the progressive deterioration and despoiling of this planet on which it lives, and that is another consequence of the same cause.

Neither has man made any better use of time. Historical records go back five thousand years Bible history goes farther. The Bible is more candid about the results than is ordinary history, but the consequences to-day are getting plain enough for all to see. Throughout this long span of man's time, man has succeeded in doing nothing except make tolerably certain that his time has about come to an end, and that if anything is to follow at all it must be God's time. Men have had plenty of opportunity to try out their judgment on how the world ought to be run and society conducted, and all they have to show for the outcome is that the misery of man is great upon him. The only

apparent fruitage of man's experiment with time appears to be that, unless God intervenes, a few more decades will see the end of the experiment, and time, so far as man is concerned, be no more.

But Solomon was not thinking about human manifestations and use of time and judgment when he uttered his famous dictum. He was thinking of time and judgment of a higher order, of that associated with God. Solomon knew, what so many to-day do not know, that the centre of all things both in space and time is God, and that whatever is, is by his permission if not of his direct interposition. No one who has any real understanding of the character of God would accredit him with responsibility for the entrance of sin and evil into the world, or suggest other than that God hates evil with all the vehemence of his Divine purity; that same understanding should guarantee an appreciation that the fact that evil is still with us after these many thousands of years does not by any means indicate that God has lost either interest or control. The whole point is that God is bringing two great influences to bear upon mankind. The one is time, and the other judgment. When both have done their work God will have achieved his great intention, an intention that has never altered, and man will have achieved his destiny. And if one should cavil at the suffering experienced by man while the process is being worked out, it may very reasonably be asked—*what about God?* Is He not affected also? Man has at most seventy or eighty years of life in which to experience his greatness of misery; God has been watching the unbelief, the perversity, the wickedness of man, the oppression, the injustice, the devilry, for a hundred times as long. And who of mankind can hope to understand the grief of One who created this fair earth a garden and placed upon it a creature made in his own image and likeness, only then to watch his creation reduced to a shambles and his creature transformed into the image and likeness of the Devil? For full five thousand years the love of God was held in leash until his judgment decreed the time ripe to intervene in human affairs by sending his Son to show mankind the way out. Not until then had the development of mankind progressed to that point at which the message could do its work: not until then could He inspire the sublime words "*God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life*"!

Men rejected him; their judgment at fault again! *"Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life."* Time had not run its full course; men in general were not yet ready to listen to the voice that spoke from heaven. Judgment came upon that generation but still they did not repent. For two thousand years longer man has set his face determinedly away from God; and still is his misery great upon him.

But the end of even the longest day comes at last, and all the signs now are that the time of man's dominion has nearly expired; God is about to take over. The world is very evidently entering into judgment; the imminent collapse of the present world order will affect all nations and races of men on the face of the earth for all now are dependent one upon another. The collapse is due to the selfishness and greed of men and their refusal to abide by the standards and laws of God; it is therefore the judgment of God upon them even although it is at the same time the natural and inevitable sequel to their own wrongful course. But when it is over men will be ready to listen to God; they will have to, for there will be no other in a position to speak with any confidence or authority. So time and judgment come to their climax together and God is able at last to talk to mankind with some prospect of being heard.

Now this is just for what the disciples of Christ have been waiting for hundreds of years. It is foretold that "the saints shall judge the world". The sublime promise given through Isaiah was that the consecrated people of the Lord would be employed in opening the blind eyes, bringing out the prisoners from the prison, and those that sat in darkness out of the prison house. The net result of their ministrations would be that every man should sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none make them afraid. The prospect of so desirable a consummation to the message and work of Christianity is of itself so attractive that the danger is—we forget there is something to be done first.

That something is the training and the qualifying of the teachers and leaders.

One reason that time and judgment has had to delay the introduction of this long hoped for future Age of universal wellbeing has been that God, in his inscrutable wisdom, decreed that the teachers and leaders of men in that Age must themselves have been drawn from the ranks of men, and must be trained and fitted for their future work by the manner in which they make use of life's experiences *now*, and the knowledge of human

frailty and sin that they gain *now*. Until the teachers are thus qualified God is not ready to make a start. Time and judgment, therefore, is operative in a special sense towards the disciples of Christ at this day and hour. Time, because God is working to a timetable and the opportunity to join with him in the work of restoring mankind to righteousness must eventually close, and judgment, because the calling to which we are called is a serious and important one and there must be a decision at the end as to whether we are really fitted for the duties to be required of us. Jesus spoke of many who said "*Lord, lord, in thy name have we done many wonderful works . . . we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets*" but He had to say, nevertheless, "*I never knew you; depart from me*". Whatever they may ultimately become fitted for, they are not fitted for the work of administering the affairs of the Kingdom of Christ in the Millennial Age.

A very natural but a very tragic mistake on the part of those who would "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" even to association with him in the conduct of Millennial affairs is the conclusion that a life of extreme piety and much acquiring of Christian doctrinal knowledge together with considerable withdrawal from contact with the world and its affairs, is the life to which God is calling. If the Lord should be looking for inmates to staff a celestial monastery in the hereafter there might be something in the suggestion, but He is not. He is looking for workers, for men and women who will be able to go out into the Millennial highways and byways and bring the lost and dying to the warmth and light of Christ's fold. He is looking for those who will be like the Lord himself, merciful and sympathetic administrators; merciful and sympathetic, because they have learned mercy and sympathy in their experiences with their fellow men in life before. So that while piety is very necessary, and knowledge very useful, in the formation of that mature Christian character without which no one will see the Lord, it must be the piety and the knowledge which is acquired in conjunction with the world and with some very first hand knowledge of its problems. The religion which will at the end be stamped with the hallmark of Divine approval will be that which was branded by the Lord's own half brother, James, as "true religion and undefiled before God", the religion that not only keeps its professor unspotted from the world but also visits the fatherless and widows in their affliction. On the memorable day when Jesus began his life's work by preaching in the

synagogue at Nazareth He took the book of the prophet Isaiah and read these words "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised*". And for ever after that day He discharged that commission in terms of going about doing good—preaching the gospel of the kingdom, yes, but at the same time accompanying that preaching by acts of goodness and benevolence, so that little children ran toward him and the afflicted and sorrowing brought their troubles to him. That is the example we are bidden to follow, and although it is not within our power to work the miracles that He worked it is by all means well within our power to manifest his spirit of kindness and benevolence toward all who are in affliction and sorrow, and do what we can to lighten the weariness of the way for those who begin to find life well nigh intolerable. There are plenty such

now, and there are going to be plenty more in the very near future. "*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren*" says the king at the last "*ye have done it unto me!*" That parable relates to humankind in the next age, but the principle is equally applicable to us in this Age and day. The sincerity of our desire to help and lead mankind into the way of peace in the Age when we have all power is attested by the degree to which we try to do it in this Age, when we have little or no power. Until the fulness of time has come the misery of man must remain great upon him. Until the judgment of God upon a dying world order has been executed the misery of man must remain great upon him. But while these two factors continue to hinder the emergence of mankind into the life and light of the Millennial kingdom there is much that we can do to alleviate the lot of some, if only a few, of earth's children, and so demonstrate that we have indeed partaken of the spirit of our Father which is in Heaven.

Israel's Regathering

They come from far, as the Old Testament prophets said they would. The old vigour and tenacity returns as soon as they set foot upon the sacred soil, and the old arrogance. Not for nothing are those born in the land known as "sabras"—the name means a prickly pear. The land is being restored and built up; the desert is beginning to blossom as the rose; their advances and discoveries in scientific and technical knowledge are beginning to spill over into the wider world to the greater benefit of man generally. Of old time Isaiah said, "*they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations*" (Isa. 61.4). They are doing all this, and nothing can stop them. Despite their continuing unbelief, God's purpose is directly involved, and no one can fight against God.

One final time of stress is ordained, one last trial of faith, an event which will bring to the surface all the underlying devotion of which Israel is capable and leave them, at last, fully ready for their destiny. The continual progress and prosperity of

Israel will excite the jealousy and antagonism of the wider world, and, perhaps, some dawning realisation that this emerging nation is indeed as the Bible has so consistently declared, the initial phase of the incoming earthly Kingdom of God which is to overcome all evil and institute everlasting righteousness. Whatever the reason, there will be a great coalition of alien powers and interests intent upon destroying Israel. Ezekiel (chaps, 38-39) pictures this attempt under symbol of the 8th century B.C. invasion of the Middle East by the Scythians, Gog of the land of Magog and much people with him. Israel is pictured as defenceless so far as material weapons are concerned, but resting in faith that God will deliver—and God does deliver. That deliverance, and the vindication of Israel, and the overthrow of the "hosts of Gog", mark the time of Israel's complete conversion and acceptance of her destiny. "*So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that time and forward*" is the prophet's comment on his account of this momentous event.

WHEN THE CLOUD TARRIED LONG

The tribes of Israel, journeying from Egypt to the promised land, provide a fitting picture of the Church on her pilgrimage to her heavenly home. Throughout their journey the Israelites were tent-dwellers, and their meeting place with God was a tent. This arrangement, necessitated by their journeyings, gave way to a permanent disposition when they reached their goal.

The Apostle Peter uses this picture of a tent-dweller to portray his condition as a pilgrim when in 2 Pet. 1. 13-14 he writes "*Yea, I think it meet as long I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me*". The word translated "tabernacle" means simply "a tent" and Moffatt puts it "so long as I am in this tent I deem it proper . . . since I know that my tent must be folded up very soon". The Apostle Paul also uses this picture when in 2 Cor. 5. 1-4 he writes, "*I know that if this earthly tent of mine is taken down I get a home from God, made by no human hands eternal in the heavens. I do sigh within this tent of mine with heavy anxiety, not that I want to be stripped—no, but be under cover of the other, to have my mortal element absorbed by life*". (Moffatt.) We, living in the overlapping of the ages, and viewing from Pisgah's mountain the home we hope soon to reach, can surely echo these sentiments.

This longing however, was tempered with a contentment which we, in these last days, do well to emulate. The Apostle Paul tells us that he had LEARNED, in whatsoever state he found himself, to be content. We would suggest that, to the Apostle Paul, this was a lesson not easily learned. Fiery, impetuous and fanatical as he was, he would not take kindly to anything savouring of passive acquiescence, yet the fact remains that he DID learn to be content.

This contentment should not, however, be confused with satisfaction, for although the two words are used synonymously there is an important difference. At the time when the Authorised Version was written, the word "content" was limited to earthly or mundane things, whereas satisfaction was raised to a much higher level. To be content meant to have the desires limited by present enjoyment, having a quiet mind, accepting one's surroundings. Secular writings demonstrated the value of this quality, for Thomas Decker wrote

*"Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers,
Oh sweet content.*

*Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed
Oh, punishment."*

Shakespeare, who wrote during the same literary period, put it,

"Poor and content is rich, and rich enough."

Two hundred years later Shelley wrote,

*"Alas I have no hope or health,
Nor peace within or calm around,
Nor that CONTENT, SURPASSING
WEALTH*

*The stage in meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned."*

The difference between contentment and satisfaction is seen in the words of Thackeray "which of us is happy in this world, which of us has his desire, or, having it is satisfied"; and is concisely summed up in these words of Mackintosh, "It is right to be content with what we have, never with what we are". It is somewhat unusual to quote from secular writings, but our sole purpose is to emphasise the subtle difference between contentment and satisfaction.

Let us consider "what we have", noting first what the children of Israel had on their pilgrimage. They had dwelling places which provided simple yet adequate shelter, yet which could be easily moved. They were provided with food sufficient for their needs, but above all they had a place wherein their leader could meet their God—the tabernacle, or "tent of meeting". This could be taken down and transported when they were on the move. This "tent of meeting" contained, among other things, the Ark of the Covenant, or "ark of the presence" and the Shekinah glory, representing God's presence in their midst, shone from between the cherubim. This representation of God's presence penetrated, as it were, the fabric of the tent and was manifested as a cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. This sign of the Presence moved from above the tent as an indication that they were to move on, and came to rest when they were to remain encamped.

We as travellers to a heavenly realm have all these things in antitype. These bodies of ours, weak and frail though they may be, are adequate as temporary coverings, but if at any time they seem woefully insufficient to stand up to the storms and tempests of life, we can and should strike our tents and move them into the shadow of the Rock of ages, where our feeble frames can borrow strength, as it were, from that great crag which was cleft that we might find a refuge. We, too, have a

"tent of meeting" with its "Ark of the Presence"—a sanctuary into which we may, nay must, withdraw, that we may have fellowship with those of like precious faith, and hold communion with our Father and Lord. The benefits and blessings (and the responsibilities) provided by this temporary tent of meeting are too many and varied to be discussed here and are well known to us all, but we should like to consider briefly that cloud that sometimes "tarried long". (Num. 9. 19.)

When it moved it indicated that it was God's will that they (the Israelites) should continue on their pilgrimage, and when it tarried long it just as effectively indicated that it was God's will that they should be content to remain and await God's time. How often do we feel, as pilgrims and strangers, that it is time we moved on, and just as often do we allow earthborn clouds to obscure that pillar of fire, which assures us not only of God's abiding presence but also of his infallible guidance. Nevertheless that abiding cloud continues to hover over all who are making their way to a heavenly reward, and will indicate to each one of us how and when we are to move nearer to that desired haven. This picture can only be applied very loosely, for whereas in the type the children of Israel moved on in a body and entered Canaan as a nation, in the antitype each individual member down the Age has been led by that pillar of cloud to the gates of the New Jerusalem, there to await the call to enter in. It may well be that at this late hour the cloud that has tarried long will soon rise from about the "tent of meeting" and lead the remaining members of the Church into eternal fellowship with the Lord and all the saints—who knows! Our attitude should surely be that of the Apostle Paul as he "longed to be under cover of his home from God". He said *"I am prepared for this change by God, Who has given me the Spirit as its pledge and instalment. Come what may, then, I am confident; I know that while I reside in the body I am away from the Lord, and in this confidence fain would I get away from the body and reside with the Lord. Hence also I am eager to satisfy him, whether in body or away from it"*. (2. Cor. 5. 5-10 Moffatt.) The Apostle was "eager to satisfy him" and here indeed is the crux of the matter.

We have very briefly considered "what we have" with which we should be content, and as tent-dwellers we should indeed be content to wait with patience until the cloud that has tarried long lifts and bids us enter in, but as was suggested earlier we must never be content with what we are.

If we would be "satisfied", with a heavenly

home, we must first satisfy him who is to be Judge of all. It is a sobering thought that "what we shall be" depends entirely upon "what we are". This may seem a sweeping statement but it is based upon the Apostle's words in 2 Cor. 5. 10. Rotherham's translation reads "For we all must needs be made manifest before the Judgment seat of Christ, that each may GET BACK the things done by means of the body, according to the things practised, good or corrupt". Moffatt's translation reads "For we all have to appear, without disguise, before the tribunal of Christ, each to be reputed (paid back) for what he has done with his body, good or ill". The term "body in this text is synonymous with the term "tent" as used by both Peter and Paul, so whilst we have to be content with this body of ours, we must never be content with what we are doing with it. As we sojourn here below we have to mingle with all sorts and conditions; with neighbours, tradesmen, colleagues or workmates, as well as being privileged to meet from time to time with those of like precious faith, and we do find that every contact we make, every book we read, every meeting we attend, in fact that every experience which comes our way, leaves some impression upon these "tents" of ours. These impressions may be erased or retained according to the standards of behaviour which govern our conduct. They may be shallow or deep according to the intensity of the experience, so some are much more difficult to erase than others; but even as we can only keep our physical senses keen and alert by keeping our bodies clean, so we must keep our minds clean that our perceptive faculties may remain unimpaired. In this connection our Lord's words in Mark 7. 15 are very much to the point *"Nothing outside a man can defile him, it is what comes out defiles him"*. So while we remain here as tent dwellers, waiting for the cloud that carries to lift and guide us to our heavenly home, our lives should be a blending of quiet contentment and sanctified activity, our attitude should be one of acquiescence to the revealed will of God. At the same time we should seek that growth in holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Even as contentment is limited to earthly and mundane matters, and satisfaction raised to a higher level of living, so if we are content with our lot now, shall we be satisfied with our heavenly reward. Satisfaction is not a mere acceptance of what is there, but a fulfilled desire for something else. With what shall we be satisfied? *"I shall be satisfied when I can break the fetters of flesh and be free. When the arms of my Father encircle his child,*

O, I shall be satisfied then." The height of all spiritual aspiration is reached in the words of the Psalmist. "I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness". Rotherham translates this "in righteousness shall I behold thy face, shall be satisfied when awakened by a vision of thee". Leaser puts it "As for me, in righteousness shall I behold thy face, I shall be satisfied when I awake with contemplating thy likeness". Would you wish to be awakened by a vision of the Lord? Would you be satisfied to be awakened contemplating his likeness? If so you must first satisfy him. We are all waiting for, longing for, praying for this glorious change. So, whilst thus waiting for this the greatest of all blessings, let us be content but not complacent, let us work as well as watch, let us fight and not faint, let us be content with what we have, but let us stretch every nerve, pressing on to attain, by God's abounding grace, the victory which belongs to all overcomers, so that "at the bidding of the upgoings of the cloud from off the tent" we may be ready to move forward and enter into the Heavenly Canaan.

As pointed out at the beginning, the temporary dwelling of the wilderness gave way to more permanent dwellings when Israel settled in the promised land; likewise when each member of the Church reaches the end of the way, their tent will be folded up, but what will take its place?

Jesus said "*In my Father's house are many mansions*", and even as the tent, which is the meanest of dwellings, is a fit picture of our earthly body, so the mansion, which may be considered the ideal dwelling, is a fitting picture of our "home

from heaven". Now we dwell in a tent, but when the cloud that has tarried long ascends finally into heaven, we shall be admitted into heavenly mansions. Shall we be satisfied with these celestial dwelling-places? Shall we not forget the tarrying of the cloud when, lost in wonder, we view with rapture our eternal home? Now we see as through a dim window, then we shall see face to face. Now, we are limited, frustrated by the frailty of our earthly tents. Now we are hampered by the imperfections of our finite minds. Now we become tired, faint and weary—then we shall enjoy unfailing and eternal energy—then, untrammelled by inherent weakness, we shall be gloriously endued with inherent life. Now we must needs spend our days in earth's defiling atmosphere, now we must rub shoulders with evil and degraded men—then we shall spend eternity in the pure atmosphere of heaven in the presence of our God, our beloved Lord, and all the heavenly hosts. So we might continue, endeavouring to grasp the wonder, the beauty, the grandeur of our heavenly abode, but alas, these finite minds of ours cannot begin to comprehend the superlative dwelling places which await all who successfully pass the Judgment seat of Christ.

So, whilst we wait with patience for the final upgoing of the fiery cloud, let us, whilst there is yet time, seek to attain that perfect character-likeness to our Lord which will enable us to take our place in the sanctified assembly which will be ushered into heaven, there to dwell through all eternity in one of our Father's many mansions.

Surely it takes years of Christian experience and overcoming to be able to say from the heart that "All things come of Thee". There is no second cause to the true child of God, but rather the daily faith that every experience is ordered of the Father because He sees that it works out for our highest good, now and hereafter.

* * *

"The one great hope for the whole creation, towards which, blindly and unconsciously, if not with intelligent desire, all are reaching forward, is the 'marriage of the Lamb'. It is the hope of the Bride who shall then be one with the Lord in all his glory, and power, and fulness of blessing. It is the hope of the nations, who shall then know the blessedness of righteous rule. It is the hope of the soreburthened earth, which longs to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And it is the hope of the

No amount of preaching that "God is Love" will impress our hearers if we have not love one toward another. It is of no use expounding John 3. 16 if we ourselves are not also found to be "giving" of our best and dearest that others might be saved, nor of talking about the One Who came to be servant and serve mankind if we show no disposition to serve them too.

* * *

Lord himself, whose heart yearns over his Church, purchased with his own blood, but still lying in the desolateness of death, or amidst the defilements of this evil world, and whose word of promise is, '*Surely I come quickly*'. Let our response ever be, '*Even so, come Lord Jesus*'. Let our hearts be broken through our sympathy with the burdens and sorrows of all, and let us utter in his ear continually the cry that shall hasten the common deliverance."

(William Andrews, 19th cent.)

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

3. The Cleansing of the Priest

"Then he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him" (ch. 3. 1 R.S.V.).

A new vision appears. The wide view of Jerusalem is gone; the prophet stands in spirit, probably in the Court of the Temple, witnessing a ceremony which seems to have much in common with the Levitical consecration of the High Priest. Joshua was High Priest in the days of Zechariah, the spiritual head of the nation just as Zerubbabel was its secular head. Now Zechariah sees this man standing before the Lord, arrayed in unclean garments, and Satan present to accuse him before God. The accusation is rejected; the Lord commands that Joshua be clothed in new and clean garments and a diadem placed upon his head. Then comes a solemn charge. If Joshua will faithfully discharge the duties of his priestly commission he will inherit an enduring place in the company of God's ministers. And he is to prefigure the Messiah who will come in the fulness of time to lead the nation into the promised era of righteousness and peace when every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree with none to make them afraid. (Micah 4. 4).

It is logical to think that the vision was intended to have an immediate although limited application to Israel in Zechariah's day, even although its major significance has to do with the wider aspects of the Divine Plan. Thus Joshua in his "filthy garments" fitly pictured the defiled priesthood and Temple worship, consequent upon Israel's captivity in Babylon and the desecrated Temple. Satan, standing to accuse him, symbolised the hostility of the surrounding nations anxious to induce the Persian power to withdraw its support of the newly established Jewish State. But here God steps in. *"The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan"* he says *"is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"* (ch.3.2). Israel at this time, so recently delivered from Babylon, was in very truth a brand plucked out of the fire. So Joshua is clothed with new garments and crowned with a diadem as a symbol of the restored State and new glory of the returned exiles. This indeed was a fresh start for Israel: now, at last, the failures and apostasies of those five centuries when the kings reigned could be forgotten and the nation go forward to its destiny. So the charge to Joshua (ch. 3. 7); if he should walk in God's ways and keep God's charge, then his rulership should be confirmed forever. He would see the fulfilment

of the old-time prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the emergence of a "branch" of David, a descendant of David's line, who should rule as both King and Priest. The outcome was to be the removal of the iniquity of the land and the eternal peace and prosperity of its inhabitants.

The golden vision was never realised. True, the Temple was built and for a while the zeal of the people for their God was great; probably the lifetime of Joshua was marked by a continuing national allegiance to the covenant. But old sins of cupidity, lawlessness and irreverence were still under the surface; by the time of Ezra fifty years later the nation had relapsed into its old ways, and corruption had penetrated into the priesthood. Ezra's notable prayer on the occasion of his coming to Jerusalem (Ezra 9 & 10) highlights the situation. *"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens"*. It is true that Ezra brought about a national revival and reform, but that was short-lived. Thirteen years later Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah and found that all Ezra's work had been undone and Jerusalem was again a desolation. For twelve years he ruled and laboured among a fickle and at heart unbelieving people; but at the end of the twelve years he was recalled to Persia and immediately the nation relapsed again. He returned to Jerusalem subsequently and instituted further reforms, but as with Joshua, so with Nehemiah, after his death the light went out, priests and people alike abandoning all pretence of serving God and belief in the high destiny of their nation. So the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy in the person and work of Joshua and the generation he served as High Priest was not realised because of unfaithfulness and unfitness; the only possible fulfilment is that which runs its course through the Christian Dispensation and the one that follows, the Millennial Era in which the climax of Zech. 3 finds its reality.

It would seem, then, that this chapter takes us away from the background and the events of the prophet's own day and leads irresistibly into the future. The climax of the vision, the emergence of the "Branch"—a title the Scriptures confine to the Lord Christ in his Messianic glory—the removal of iniquity, and the Millennial setting of verse 10, all point to this. Hence Joshua the High Priest,

clothed in unclean garments which are taken away and replaced by clean ones, is clearly a figure of the Christian Church of this Age in process of cleansing and fitting for her future work in the next Age.

On this basis the elements of the vision fall into place. The central figure is the Royal Priesthood of the Millennial Age. A great deal of Old Testament imagery pictures our Lord uniting within himself the combined offices of King and Priest. The Psalmist lays down the principle that when that Age dawns Christ is to be a "*priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek*" (psa. 110. 4). That is a reference back to the Genesis story of the Priest-King of Salem (Jerusalem) in Abraham's day, the story which the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews uses so effectively to picture the work of Christ at his Second Advent. Whereas at his First Advent and in his sacrificial role, He was pre-figured by the order of Aaron, a sacrificing and a dying priesthood, at his Second Advent and in the power of his glory he appears as a royal priest, a Priest-King, after the order of Melchisedek. But the New Testament shews that He is not alone in this; there is to be associated with him in that restorative work among mankind of the future Age the company of his faithful disciples of this Age, the Christian Church, those who in Rev. 17. 14 are said to be "*called, and chosen, and faithful*". And it is the Book of Revelation, which indicates that this same Christian Church is to be considered as sharing with her Lord the honoured title of the Royal Priest-King. "*He hath made us kings and priests unto God*". "*They (that have part in the first resurrection) shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*" (Rev. 6; 20. 4). Joshua, standing in an unclean condition, can fitly picture the company of his disciples who, after cleansing, ultimately become part of the "Royal Priest". Hence verses 1-3 of Zech. 3 can logically represent the Church of this Age standing, by virtue of the consecration of its members to God, in the presence of the Lord, the "angel of Jehovah" of verse 1, clothed with unclean garments, the defiling influence of sin, which is now to be taken away. The clothing with "change of raiment" (verse 4) is easily seen to represent the "*being arrayed in fine linen clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*" (Rev. 19. 8). Justification, reconciliation with God, the life of sanctification and dedication to the High Calling, all this is what is involved in this being arrayed in a change of raiment. How apt in this context are the words of verse 4 "*I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will*

clothe thee with change of raiment".

Satan, the enemy of Joshua, is equally the enemy of all who would enter into a covenant of service with the Lord. It is noteworthy that he disappears from the vision so soon as the Lord's reproof is uttered. So in the reality. The Prince of Evil has great power and influence in the world of men but the power of the Lord is greater and every "brand snatched from the burning" and brought to Christ is immune from the Adversary's devices.

Who are "*those that stood before him*" (i.e. before the angel of Jehovah, the Lord) in verse 4? These are the ones who actually strip the unclean garments from Joshua and array him in the new ones. Probably, just as Satan represents the powers of evil that would endeavour to keep Christian disciples in the way of sin, so "those that stood before" the Lord represent his ministers, whoever they are and from whencesoever they come, who are the instruments employed by the Lord in his work of transforming the hearts and lives of the believers, which is the real fulfilment of the change of garments. What has often been called "the ministry of angels" might well have its place here.

Now comes the indication of royalty, of a "*fair mitre*"—more accurately, a brilliant diadem—being placed on the head of Joshua. It is sometimes thought that this is the "mitre" which formed part of the Levitical priests'—Aaron's—regalia, but the word used makes it more likely that a royal crown or diadem is intended, as in Isa. 62.3 "*Thou shalt be . . . a royal diadem in the hand of thy God*". The symbol could well speak of the insignia of royalty which the prospective "Royal Priesthood" even now possesses, whilst still in this life. "*Ye are . . . a royal priesthood*" (1 Pet. 2. 9). So the Christian Church, as yet but a prospective heir to the glory that shall be revealed, stands in clean garments and with a royal diadem, acceptable in God's sight.

That commission is stated in verses 6-7. "*The angel of the Lord enjoined Joshua, Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here*" (R.S.V.). Now this appears to envisage the discharge of a present duty as the essential preliminary to receiving certain administrative authority, and entering into a place or joining a company which stands in close relation to God. It ought not to be difficult to discern the application. The injunction laid upon all who come to the Lord as members of his Church is both to walk in his ways

and keep his charge, Consecrated Christians of this Age, having been faithful to their calling and having learned well all that the Divine Providence in the circumstances of life has taught them, will be privileged in the next Age with duties of oversight and instruction of the whole race of mankind then to be called to repentance and reconciliation. The final phrase is then the obvious comment. These who are thus found fitted and qualified for eternal association with the Lord in his future works are destined to be with him, translated from this terrestrial world to that which is outside the range of human sense, but which is nevertheless the home of radiant beings always and altogether devoted and active in the service of God. Dr. Moffatt may have had more than a flash of insight when he rendered this particular sentence *"I will give you right of access to this company of mine"*. Whatever the precise meaning of the original, it is a definite assurance that the faithful are eventually to be admitted to a condition of being, of life, an eternal home, which is in the presence of God and of those who, metaphorically perhaps, stand before his Throne.

Now comes the inspiring sequel to the vision, one that reveals in a few simple phrases the inflexible purpose of God to remove evil from the world and lead mankind into a condition of everlasting contentment. *"Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at . . ."* (ch. 3. 8). This is the prelude to a most important announcement; but first of all the characters thus addressed have to be identified. If Joshua the high priest is a picture of the Church in the flesh, who then are "thy fellows that sit before thee", "men wondered at"? It is not easy to find a class of men in this present order of things who can fitly be described as "fellows" to the disciples of Christ. The qualifying expression "men wondered at" is difficult to apply; the Hebrew word means a miracle or a sign but the context would certainly not be satisfied by describing them as "miracle men". Every translator has his own slant on this phrase; thus the R.S.V. renders *"your friends . . . men of good omen"*. Dr. Young *"Men of type they are"*, Leeser *"distinguished men are they"*, Rotherham *"men to serve as signs"*, and Ferrar Fenton *"they are witnessing men"*. Now most of these expressions have been from time to time applied to Israel, the nation that was God's witness in the world and became not only a sign to all men of Divine power but a type of the later arrangement in Christ which was to come after his First Advent. Even the expression

"miracle men" would not be out of place; the survival of that nation throughout history despite all that has endeavoured to destroy it, and its territorial resurgence in this our own day, has frequently been described as a miracle. And the fact that both Joshua and the "men wondered at" are bidden to heed the Lord's declaration that He will bring forth his servant the "Branch", and none among men save the Christian Church and believing Israel could have the faintest idea of the meaning of that expression, goes far to encourage the conclusion that this is the understanding intended.

"For, behold" says the Lord *"I will bring forth my servant the Branch"* (ch. 3. 8). The "Branch" in Scripture metaphor is Christ—at his Second Advent and during his Millennial reign. It has its origin in the fact that Jesus, as a man, came in descent of the line of David and so fulfilled in his own person the prediction that Messiah would come of David's seed. Thus we have Isa. 11. 1. *"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse"* (Davids father) *and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"*. The rest of this chapter describes the Millennial rule of Christ and its beneficent consequences for men. Says Jeremiah 23. 5 *"The days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth"*. Again the same prophet declares (ch. 33. 14-15) *"In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David: and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land"*. From these allusions it is obvious that Zech. 3. 8 relates to the establishment of the Millennial administration upon earth, in which both the Church and regathered Israel, the heavenly and earthly instruments of world conversion in God's hand, will occupy significant positions.

"For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree" (ch. 3. 9-10).

A stone, having seven "eyes", engraved by the hand of God, becoming the means of removal of evil, resulting in men calling or inviting their fellows to the shelter of the vine and fig tree. The Hebrew word here rendered "stone" (*eben*) may equally refer to a precious stone, a pebble or a boulder of granite. The context has to decide.

In this case the background is that of the coming Millennial Kingdom and immediately the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" of Daniel 2. 34-45, this same Millennial Kingdom, comes to mind. The "stone set before Joshua" could well symbolise this same Kingdom. The usage of the term "engraving" is perhaps not too happy a one; "*Pathach*", means primarily to open a thing, as a door, a book, the gate of a city, or to loose a thing, as bonds or girdles, and only secondarily to engrave. In fact it is rendered "Open" some 80 times and "engrave" only twice. It may be therefore that having "set", or established, the stone which symbolises the Kingdom, the Lord throws it open for all who will to enter, much as the gates of the holy city of Rev. 21. 25, are thrown open to redeemed humanity. This would make sense of the succeeding phrase "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day", for the entrance to the "stone" kingdom being thus thrown open the logical consequence is the conversion and reconciliation of mankind in the Millennial Day.

The seven eyes are significant. In chapter 4. 10 they are referred to as the "*eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth*". This idea of the all-seeing supervision of his creation by the Most High is very prominent in Scripture. "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" says the writer of Proverbs (15. 3). Elihu, that far-sighted young man in the days of Job, said "*his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings*" (Job 34. 21). A little known seer, Hanani of Judah, warned King Asa "*the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth*", (2 Chron. 16. 9). And in more poetic frame the Revelator sees the "*seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*" (Rev. 5. 6; 1. 4). These expressions indicate God's awareness of all that goes on in his creation: as the writer to the Hebrews says, "*all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*" (Heb. 4. 13). This does not imply that there are seven literal dissociated eyes travelling over the earth's surface to behold what is going on. The seven is the symbol of completeness, and the seven eyes picture the

many-sided and universal Divine perception from which nothing is hid. In point of fact "*ayin*" can equally well mean "aspect" or "face of" and is used in these senses frequently in the Old Testament. It is probably more logical to think that what Zechariah saw in the vision was not a boulder of rock adorned with representations of seven human optic organs, but rather a seven sided stone block, a stone having "seven facets" as some translators put it, so that one-seventh of the stone faced in each of seven directions. Thus would be well symbolised the Divine supervision of the Kingdom, seeing and ruling in every direction.

So the stone comes to rest on the ground before Joshua; the Kingdom is established on earth, Joshua and his fellows are ready, and the Millennial work is commences. "*In that day*" as Rotherham "*ye shall invite one another to come under the vine and under the fig tree*" or the LXX "*ye shall call together every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree*" or, again, the R.S.V. "*In that day, says the Lord of Hosts, everyone of you will invite his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree*". The essence of this final scene in the vision is the fact of invitation. Vine and fig tree are symbols of the Millennial Age; in that day men will invite their fellows to share in the blessings of that Age. The basic principle is laid down in Rev. 22. 17 "*And 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*". This is the time when all men everywhere will have the opportunity to hear and accept the grace of God in Christ and progress, if they will, to a condition of full reconciliation with God and entry into the eternal state of the blessed. It will be by invitation and not of constraint; by persuasion and not of command. But the prospect is that of a world in which sin and evil are done away; the progress and development of the sons of men unhindered and untrammelled by violence, fear, selfishness, disease or death. Man will, at last, have attained his place in creation.

To be continued.

Charity should begin at home, but it should not stay there. Life is service. Service is a part of life; it

is the only real human life, and from Christ's own experience we see the great example of it.

“EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM”

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him” (Rev. 1. 7).

This is a reference to the Second Advent and the revelation of Christ to the world at that Advent. The point at issue is whether that revelation is made through the natural sight or what might be termed spiritual vision or mental sight. In past ages the question did not arise; the prevalent belief that our Lord was resurrected in his fleshly human body led to the logical conclusion that He would return in that same body and hence would be seen of men by natural sight. The more up-to-date view is that our Lord rose from the dead in the glory of his Divinity, a glory that cannot be sensed by natural sight, and the human body buried in Joseph’s tomb is not part of his present being. It follows therefore that at his return, unless He “materialises” in human form as He did upon certain occasions between the times of his resurrection and ascension, He is not perceptible to human sight, and the fact of his return must be discerned by other evidences.

It is not sufficient, though, thus to dismiss this Scripture, for the statement here is that “every eye shall see him.” Some have pointed out that the word is *opsetai*, which is said to mean the seeing with natural sight, and hence that the text should be taken literally despite the considerations which have been expressed. Now in fact this word, in its various grammatical constructions, has both uses in the New Testament, to “see” with the physical eyes and to “see” mentally. Since this is a rather important point a few instances of this latter usage are given here in order to establish the matter.

Jno. 3.36 “He that believeth not the Son shall not *see (opsetai)* life”.

Luke 3.6 “All flesh shall *see (opsetai)* the salvation of God”.

Matt. 27.4 “What is that to us? *see (opsei)* thou to that”.

In the Greek O.T. (the Septuagint):

Psa. 49.9 “That he should still live for ever and not *see (opsetai)* corruption”.

Zech. 9.5 “Ashkelon shall *see (opsetai)* and be afraid”.

And in the Apocrypha:

Baruch 4.24-25 “The neighbours of Zion shall *see (opsontai)* your salvation . . . thine enemy hath persecuted thee but shortly thou shalt *see (opsei)* his destruction”.

These instances—there are others—indicate that the word is not used exclusively to mean the seeing by physical sight; it does on occasion indicate seeing with the mental sight and it does not follow therefore, that the use of *opsetai* in the text concerned teaches that Jesus at his return be necessarily visible to men.

The next thing to consider is the thought in John’s mind when he wrote the words. What did *he* mean to convey? What is the understanding that the Holy Spirit sought to impart to us through John’s ready pen?

The verse stands by itself; it has no direct connection with either the preceding or the succeeding verses. It is an ecstatic outburst, as it were, on John’s part, using the language of the Old Testament. He offers his greeting, a greeting of grace and peace from the Father, the Son and the angelic host, the “seven spirits before the Throne”, to extol the One who has both saved us and made us kings and priests. Having concluded this greeting it is as if a new thought strikes him and he exclaims “Behold, he cometh . . .”, seeing the ultimate end of what he was about to witness in vision on Patmos. We should take the verse as being, not a bald, sober statement of an expected physical appearance, but a rhapsody of praise for a forthcoming event expressed in familiar Scriptural terms. The words of this verse are repeated from the sayings of Jesus and the utterances of the prophets and it is to those origins that we should turn rightly to understand the text.

The memory immediately in John’s mind must have been the reply of Jesus to the High Priest (Matt. 26.64). John was present at that scene (Jno.18.15) and heard the words: “hereafter ye shall see (*opsontai*) the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven”. That was a direct reference to Dan. 7.13 “One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven . . . and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people should serve him”. Now that verse in Daniel, in common with the whole of the chapter, is clearly metaphorical. We do not expect the Most High in the form of a bearded patriarch to set himself upon a material throne and superintend the burning of a literal ten-horned beast. Neither do we expect that the Lord Jesus will be literally brought before a throne of fire in order to receive his kingdom. John knew all this when he quoted those words in Rev. 1.7 and there was no doubt in his mind as to the reality of

that Coming even although he knew himself to be describing it in metaphorical terms.

Perhaps John's thoughts ranged farther back still than the time of Daniel, and recalled the golden visions of Isaiah, in which the same word is used for the same event. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall *see* (*opsetai*) it together" (Isa. 40.5); "For they shall *see* (*opsontai*) eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion" (Isa. 52.8). John probably associated with these Scriptures another theme, that upon which the prophet Zechariah dwelt when he said (Zech. 10.10) "*they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son*". John had already associated that word with a limited fulfilment at the time of the Crucifixion (Jno. 19.47); now he associates it with a greater. Not only would the "watchers", as in Isa. 52.8, see the Lord returning to Zion; not only would "all flesh", all the world, as in Isa. 40.5, see the glory of the Lord revealed; not only would the wicked who had risen up for judgment, as in Daniel 7, see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, but those who in John's sight were the farthest of all removed from God—"they also which pierced him"—would experience this same realisation of his return for judgment and blessing. None can escape the Coming of the Son of Man. All are to be brought before him that he might separate them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25.32). Just as in Zechariah there is a world-wide mourning for an only son so

also in John's ecstasy he foresaw that "*all kindreds of the earth shall wail over* (not because of) *him*". The idea is that of mourners wailing over a dead beloved one. The correspondence between Zech. 10.10 and Rev. 1.7 on this point is exact.

It should be clear then that since the "seeing" in the Scriptures which gave John his inspiration for this verse in Revelation is not physical but metaphorical, John is hardly likely to have intended his words to be interpreted to mean physical sight. He knew that the seeing in those texts was with the mental sight and it is reasonable to conclude that in alluding to them he applied the same meaning.

Incidentally, if "they that pierced him" are literally to witness his coming in the clouds of heaven it follows that they must be resurrected before the Second Advent takes place, and this is certainly not the case. The Lord comes, first, admittedly, to raise his faithful ones. After that, and with the Church, He is revealed, in some perfectly convincing fashion, to the living world as the world's Saviour. Only after that event, and the manifest establishment of the Messianic kingdom in power, will the General Resurrection commence and "they that pierced him" be awakened from death to stand before the "Great White Throne". They will not, they can not, physically witness his return to this sphere of man, but they will "see" him then in exactly the same way that we, now, see, "eye to eye", the Lord returning to Zion.

Waters of Death

A writer in the "*Jerusalem Post*", some years ago bewailed the polluted state of some of Israel's rivers. He said "*Wadi Sorek, which was once a most beautiful approach to Jerusalem, has now been turned into a 40 kilometer sewer, open and running all the way from Jerusalem itself to the Mediterranean*". We in this country, of course, are equally familiar with polluted rivers, but in this particular case there is a special association which high-lights the circumstance very vividly. The Wadi Sorek is the river which was in the mind of Zechariah when, in his vision of the Millennial Kingdom, he spoke of living waters going out from Jerusalem "*half of them toward the eastern sea and*

half of them toward the hinder sea". (Zech. 14.8). In his vision he saw the two rivers he knew so well, the Kidron running into the Dead Sea and the Sorek into the Mediterranean, and pictured them as rivers of life, carrying everlasting life to all the people of earth. But under the conditions of this present world the Sorek is a river of death, foul and polluted, no fitting subject for Zechariah's eloquent simile. It will take the remedial judgments and living gospel of the Age of Christ's rule over the earth to convert it to a river of life, "living waters", a fitting symbol of the purifying and ennobling influences which will cleanse men from the defiling impurities of evil.

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

3. Chedorlaomer King of Elam

Back at Bethel after the return from Egypt, Abraham, now about eighty years of age, began to settle down in the land to which the Lord had called him (ch. 13.3). High up in the highlands, a healthy and normally fertile locality, he might reasonably have expected to remain and prosper as his household and possessions expanded. God had promised to make of him a great nation so that eventually through his seed, his descendants, all the families of the earth would eventually be blessed. He had returned from Egypt a much richer man than he had entered it—beside his original sheep and cattle, considerably multiplied whilst in Egypt, he now had asses and camels, men and women slaves, gold and silver given him by Pharaoh, and was well on the way to becoming a major power in the land—as in fact he did so become not many years later.

But temporal prosperity brings its problems and Abraham found this out almost at once. His nephew Lot, his wife's brother, who had elected to leave Ur with him and share his fortunes, was now building up an establishment of his own. Says the narrator in Vs 13.5 *"and Lot also, which went with Abraham, had flocks and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, that they could not dwell together"*. In other words, the land available was becoming inadequate to sustain their joint households, and, says the narrator rather ominously (vs 7) *"and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land"*. The existing inhabitants were beginning to look rather askance at these two numerous communities in their midst. And too, *"there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle"*. The most important factor in the stock raising process was the water supply, and it is obvious that the water resources were beginning to prove insufficient.

It was Abraham who took the initiative. He told Lot they would have to separate, each to an area adequate for their own purposes. As the senior of the two he could rightfully claim to have first choice of the available alternatives, but he did not. He gave his nephew the first option. "The whole land is before you" he said, "you go the way you choose, and I will go the other, and we shall remain brethren". It is evident that Canaan was still insufficiently peopled to create any difficulty in choice "Is not the whole land before thee" said Abraham

(vs. 13.9); that meant that Lot had virtually untrammelled choice of an attractive area for his establishment.

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere . . . as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoan" (The A.V. has Zoar, the settlement near the ill fated Sodom and Gomorrah in which Lot and his daughters took refuge during their destruction, but this is a mistake in the Hebrew for Zoan, in the fertile Delta area of Egypt which they had so recently left, and is so stated in the Syriac). And as he looked down from the Judean highlands to that luxuriant tropical valley with its ill-fated "Cities of the Plain", he unhesitatingly elected to go there and dwell among the Canaanites, of whom the narrator observes caustically *"but the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly"*, a choice that was to bring him disaster some seventeen years later.

The character of Lot is a strange one. According to Peter he was a righteous man who vexed his soul from day to day with his fellow-citizens' wickedness (2. Peter 2.8.) and he attempted to defend the two wayfarers from the violence of the mob not knowing they were angels well able to defend themselves, yet on the other hand he must of known what kind of community he was joining. The advantages of the fertile land in which he could settle apparently outweighed the demerits. At any rate, he went the fifty or so miles down into the Plain and left Abraham in possession at Bethel. His character is painted as hesitant and indecisive, righteously inclined but not moved to make any real effort to forego the advantages of this world's amenities for the sake of the things of God. He reaped the fruits of that disposition in disaster at the end. He is last seen with his two daughters bereft of all his worldly possessions and just surviving in a cave halfway up a barren mountain.

Now the Lord appeared unto Abraham, in what fashion is not indicated but in some guise or by such means as to make the message quite plain. He was to survey the land of Canaan in all directions and all that he surveyed was in a future day to be his possession, and that of his descendants. At his first appearance to the patriarch at Shechem, some seven years previously, the Lord had promised the land to Abraham's seed—now the promise included him personally. It has often been

remarked that he himself never did possess any part of it—he was always a wanderer, a temporary occupant of land he did not own. The writer to the Hebrews (ch.11) includes him among those stalwart worthies of ancient times who counted themselves but strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Since Jesus himself did say that “*your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad*” one can only assume that it will be in that yet future day that this particular promise will be fulfilled, that the old patriarch will live again, and tread the soil of the land over which he once wandered, and see for himself the fulfilment of the promise that his seed shall inherit the land and from that land go out, as Isaiah was to predict many centuries later, to declare God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.

And it was in the course of that survey of the land that Abraham decided to move location once more, some thirty miles to the south, to a valley high up in the highlands of what later became Judea, to a place called by the local people Mamre, later to become known as Kirjath-Arba “the town of the Arabah”, the south part of the Holy Land, and still later Hebron, its name still, for the town is still there after four thousand years. And there Abraham built his third altar to the Lord. The locality was the territory of three Amorite chieftains, Mamre, Eshcol and Aner, brothers, and it was in Mamre’s area that Abraham settled, apparently with ready consent on the part of the occupants, for a little later on those three were “*confederate with Abram*” (ch.14.13), Here, on the border of “the south”, the Arabah, the wide-spreading land so fertile in those days, so desolate and desert in these modern times until the newly-born sovereign state of Israel began colonising it and restoring its ancient fruitfulness, it was that Abraham probably hoped to enjoy a period of quietness and prosperity with friendly neighbours and plenty of room to expand. His hopes were doomed to frustration. Within two years of parting from Lot, grave news came by messengers. The land was threatened by invasion and warfare.

Whilst Abraham was still back in Haran, the Elamites from the eastern mountains (now Iran) had conquered Ur of the Chaldees and other city-states of Sumer and had extended their power westwards to the Mediterranean Sea which included Canaan so far as the borders of Egypt. The burden on the Canaanites was light—an annual tribute of the produce of the land was all that was demanded and for twelve years this had

been forthcoming and the Elamites had left them alone. But in the thirteenth year they rebelled and withheld the tribute. Inevitably, in the following year the Elamites took action.

The story is recorded in Chap. 14. Chedorlaomer (native name Khudur-Lagamar) King of Elam gathered some of his vassal kings to his side, called up his forces, and marched the thousand miles to Canaan to take the necessary action. He had with him Amraphel King of Shinar (Hammurabi of Babylon) soon to overthrow him in turn and take possession of the Empire, although he did not know that at the time, Arioch King of Ellasar (Eri-Aku of the Sumerian city-state of Larsa) and Tidal King of nations (a petty chieftain of the wild independent mountain tribes east of Babylon) each with a contingent of men, and went out after that tribute. It need not be thought that it was a very large army by modern standards. When the renowned Sargon of Agade, reputedly the first great military conqueror of history, only some two hundred years before Abraham, went out to war, his army consisted of six hundred men, and with these he extended his sway over the same area, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. In his recorded narrative of his campaign against these same Elamites he says “*the carnage was fearful—sixty Elamites were killed and I took sixty more as prisoners*”. If Khudur-Lagamar’s army was of the same dimension the eventual victory of Abraham with his three hundred and eighteen “trained servants” plus some help from his Amorite allies is more understandable.

So the hostile army approached from Damascus in the north, down the eastern side of the Jordan, the tribes occupying that side seemingly being the more guilty in this little matter of the tribute. First came the turn of the reputed giants, the men of Ashtaroht Karnaim, for all their renowned physical prowess helpless before the invaders as they were again when Joshua led Israel against them five hundred years later. Then it was the turn of the Zuzims, another tribe of giant men, and the Emims likewise; by now the invaders were at the southern end of the eastern side of the Dead Sea where the state of Jordan is now, and already carrying with them much plunder. So to the south, where Edom was later to be, and as far as the oasis at Kadesh-Barnea, where Israel at the Exodus was one day in the future to spend forty years. Back again into Canaan proper to smite the Amorites, and then their final prize, the wealth of the Cities of the Plain where Lot lived.

This is where Abraham comes into the story.

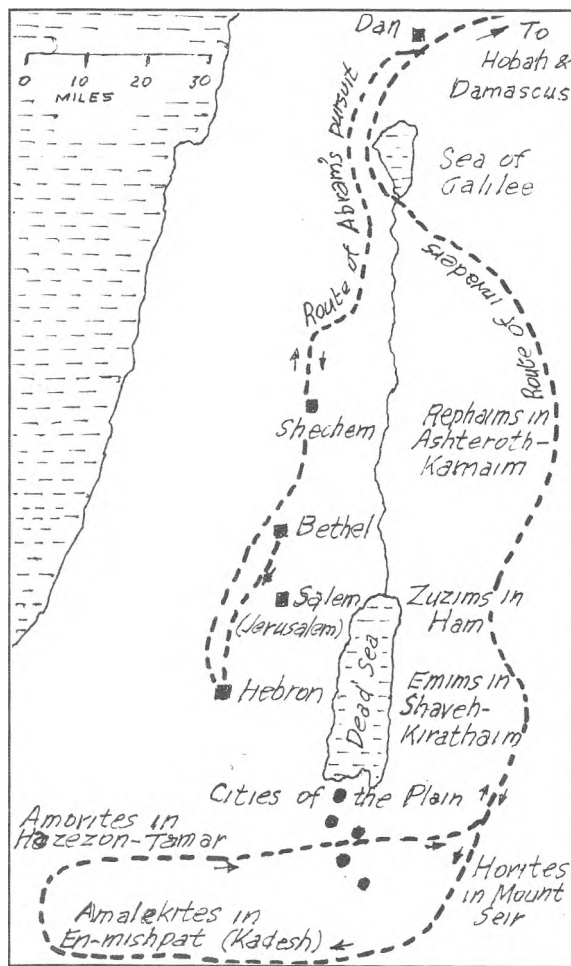
The men of the cities fought hard but they were defeated, their kings slain, their homes ransacked. The victors took their way home, carrying with them Lot and his family and all his possessions, along with the others, back to the land Lot had left with Abraham some thirty years earlier. And when, a few days later, Abraham heard the news, he called up his force of three hundred and eighteen men trained to guard his now wide spread interests and protect his possessions, and in company with his Amorite friends set out in pursuit.

They caught up with them a hundred miles away at Dan, says the account. Some later editor of the Book of Genesis must have modified the original to make it more intelligible to his readers, for it was not called Dan until a section of the tribe of Dan annexed that territory in the days after the Exodus. In Abraham's time it was a peaceable settlement of Canaanites named Laish (Josh.18.29). Here they attacked by night and put the enemy to ignominious flight which means they must have left the plunder behind. Not content with this, however, Abraham continued the pursuit for another fifty miles to Hobah on the north of Damascus (A.V. and the Hebrew say "left hand" and since the Hebrews viewed the east as in front "left hand" always means north.) Since Chap.14,15 refers to the "slaughter of Chedorlaomer and of the kings that went with him" it does look as though Abraham was out to make sure the unwelcome intruders did not come his way again. It is true that for the rest of the patriarch's life there is no record of the men from the East troubling Canaan. Hammurabi and Eri-Aku at least do figure in later Babylonian history so they at least did get away; of Chedorlaomer nothing more is known.

So Abraham returned in triumph with his brother-in-law and family, all the other rescued captives, and all the looted property. The new kings of Sodom and Gomorrah—succeeding those slain in the onslaught on the cities—came out to meet and congratulate him. It is to be noted that these and their people had not troubled to join Abraham in the pursuit—the Amorites of the highlands were evidently of more martial spirit than the Canaanites of the valley. And in addition with them there came another important personage, Melchizedek king of Salem, Priest of the Most High God, a royal priest ruling a people who, like Abraham, still worshipped the Most High God.

Salem is of course, Jerusalem, and this is the earliest mention of the name in any record that has survived.

The name gives evidence of its antiquity—for the Hebrew form, Yeru-shalom, is the transliteration of the Sumerian "uru"—city—; "Salim" god of peace; hence, city of peace. The presence of a community here still serving "the Most High God" is evidence of their establishment long before Abraham entered the land. Perhaps earlier members of the race of Abraham in Sumer emigrated here before he did, maybe several centuries



Abram's move from Bethel to Hebron and Chedorlaomer's invasion.

before, in the days of Serug or Reu, forsaking the idolatry of Sumer just as Abraham had done now; And now Melchi-zedek, two Hebrew words meaning "king of righteousness", derived from the original Accadian language of Abraham's ancestors, Malikatseduk, meaning the same, was one of perhaps a long line of rulers keeping the worship of One God alive in this land. When

Joshua and the Israelites invaded it six hundred years later the king of Jerusalem was Adoni-zedek, Lord of Righteousness. That is significant.

A great deal of romantic fantasy has surrounded the name. Jewish legend, followed by Christian speculation, led to a claim that he was in fact the patriarch Shem, son of Noah and ancestor of the Semitic peoples. That is not possible; Shem was dead five hundred years before Abraham was born. Another legend associated him with Enoch, brought back from heaven for the purpose. Perhaps the most bizarre is that he was the Son of God himself, sojourning on this earth for a short period, long before his birth at Bethlehem, for the purpose of this one incident. In point of fact he was just one worshipper of the One God, probably descended from Shem through his son Aram who is believed to have fathered the Semites who first colonised the land now known as Syria, and appears in history for this one brief interlude and

then disappears again.

So Abraham returned to Hebron and settled down to his farming interests and Lot returned to Sodom to rebuild his life there. For the rest of Abraham's life the alien forces from the east interfered with Canaan no more—perhaps they had learned their lesson.

After some nine years in the land there was still no evidence of the fulfilment of the Divine promise that once in the land he would become the father of a great nation. His wife Sarah was nearly seventy-five and no children yet, at a time when in another fifteen years or so it would be too late, but no sign in the record of doubt or apprehension in Abraham's mind. The Lord promised and that was good enough for him, and in the meantime he got on with his farming and supervised his growing area of occupancy, by now probably reaching well to the south of Hebron, and waited in quiet faith, on the Lord. *(To be continued).*

Polluted Soil

"Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather little in; for the locust shall consume it" (Deut. 28.38)

This was the penalty that Israel had to pay if they ignored the Divine way of life and chose to follow their own instead. They did choose their own way, becoming at last under Solomon and succeeding kings a commercially orientated nation of traders which brought them much of the luxuries of this world and destroyed the original land culture and husbandry which gave them their early virility as a people. From tillers of the soil and breeders of cattle they became merchants and traders and builders and artisans, all for monetary profit. They left the villages for the towns, and the land died under them. Isaiah declaimed against their luxury and material wealth and prophesied the disaster that it would bring them. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem at the end he took from the Temple treasures the value of which at to-day's prices is estimated at three billion pounds, and left the sacred edifice a smoking ruin.

History repeats itself. Today we sow our seed in soil that is increasingly devitalised and polluted and reap the result in constantly decreasing or impoverished harvests. The food that does get grown is taken up by commercial interests and converted, treated, preserved, canned, frozen, packed in cardboard and polythene and coloured tinsel and made subject to all kinds of Government regulations regarding the extent to which harmful additives may be included, and the resultant product is often a caricature of the original. So much wasted effort and the end is inferior to the

beginning. The business man jets to the other side of the world in six hours at the expense of a heavy consumption of fuel and energy, and once there he has to rest for twenty-four hours before he is sufficiently adjusted to do his business. Great corporations swallow up their competitors and become so big that there are ten administrators to every one who actually does the work. Schools in Britain have a thousand or more pupils and so much effort is needed to operate the centralised administrative machinery that the personal aspect of the children's education is submerged with consequent repercussions on the efficiency of their instruction.

Man was not designed to be big or to do things in a big way. Anthropologists have noted that aboriginal tribes living near to Nature allowed their communities to grow usually to about a hundred persons and then "hive off" to start new communities. Not for them the big city with its problems. Scientists have found—to their surprise and dismay—that the native peasant with one cow and a crude wooden plough produces his food with an energy consumption only one fifth of that demanded by all the intermediaries in up-to-date practice culminating in the modern combine harvester. In a world where resources of energy are at a premium, the big man with all his paraphernalia of large scale production machinery uses five times as much energy to produce a ton of food as does the small man with primitive devices. Perhaps Isaiah "had something" when he foresaw the time when men will plant their own vineyards and eat the fruit of them!

WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8. 12).

This used to be considered the principal occupation of those unfortunate enough to be consigned to the old-time Hell; now that a more logical view of the purpose of God for man has for the most part replaced that old belief there is scope for a fresh examination of this expression and a fresh appraisal of its meaning. It occurs seven times in the New Testament; six in the Gospel of Matthew and one in that of Luke. Three times it is associated with outer darkness and twice with a furnace of fire, Luke's reference is a parallel account to one of Matthew's so that there are really six instances; five of these are parables which are in their contents symbolic of spiritual or dispensational truths.

In each of the six cases those represented as thus giving vent to their feelings are shown as having lost some greatly desired prize or been excluded from some greatly desired position, and are expressing their resentment, their impotent fury and frustration in the face of this loss. Repentance or remorse is not implied, only rage and animosity. The word for weeping or wailing in these instances, and only once else in the N.T., is *klauthmos*, which is an intensive development of *klaio*, to weep, and denotes a violent breaking forth or paroxysm of disappointed grief. The gnashing of teeth is used in the Scriptures as an indication of hatred and enmity of the wicked against the righteous, as can be perceived by the following instances. Job 16.9. *"He who hateth me teareth me in his wrath; he gnasheth upon me with his teeth. Mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me"*. Psalms 35. 11-16, speaking of David's enemies *"False witnesses did rise up . . . they rewarded me evil for good . . . in mine adversity they rejoiced . . . they gnashed upon me with their teeth"*. Psalm 37. 12. *"The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth"*. Psalm 112.10. *"The wicked shall see it" (i.e. the prosperity of the righteous) "and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish"*. Lamentations 2.16. *All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee; they hiss and gnash the teeth"*.

In the Greek Septuagint the word for "gnash" is rendered in Prov. 19. 12 the "roaring" of a lion, and in the Apocrypha, Ecclesiastes 51.3 "delivered me from the teeth of them that were ready to devour

me". These examples illustrate the malevolent nature of the action thus described.

Coming now to the occasions in which the expression is used, the first occurs during Jesus' encounter with the Capernaum centurion (Matt. 8.12) when He commended the Centurion's faith as greater than that of Israel generally and said that many from outside the polity of Israel would come from east and west and north and south, and sit down with Abraham and others in the kingdom of God. *"but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*. The "children of the kingdom" were, of course, all who by virtue of their Divine calling, originating with the Mosaic covenant at Mount Sinai, were the first to whom the opportunity of accepting Christ was offered. In the main, they rejected him, and in consequence, as Jesus said on another occasion, *"the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matt. 21.43). The "outer darkness" was the exclusion from this aspect of the Divine purposes and the weeping and gnashing of teeth the animosity and resentment of those thus excluded. The early chapters of the Book of Acts reveal the intensity of that animosity. The parallel reference in Luke 13.28 may or may not refer to the same incident but the situation was the same and the purport of the Lord's word is the same as in Matthew.

The next example, in Matt. 22.13, concerns the man in the parable of the marriage of the King's Son, an invited guest who was discourteous enough to decline the usual proffered festal garment at the feast. In consequence he was cast into outer darkness where was weeping and gnashing of teeth. This parable relates to the successive calling of Jews and Gentiles to the Gospel of Christ, the acceptance of those who answer the call on the basis of their justification by faith in Christ (Rom. 5.1) and the elimination from this company of the unfit who repudiate that justification. These latter could include, at the time Jesus uttered this parable, those Jews who trusted in "the works of the Law", salvation through the Mosaic Covenant, rather than through faith in Christ. Consequently they were excluded from the feast in the parable, "cast into outer darkness", suffering the same fate as their fellows in the earlier reference. It must also include those who in

later times repudiate their justification and so lose their places in the Church of Christ.

The third example occurs as the sequel to the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25.30. Here the servants who traded with their talents and made increase were commended but the one who allowed his to lie idle and useless went into the outer darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth. The general application of this parable is to the Christian life and opportunity of serving our Lord's interests during the course of this Age prior to his Second Advent. The "reckoning" at the end of the parable, when the master returns and enquires as to the use his servants have made of the "talents" entrusted to them, is not the Last Judgment or anything like that. It relates to the members of the Church of this Age, the dedicated followers of Christ who, if faithful to their calling, will be associated with him in the evangelical work of the next, the Messianic Age. The decision as to the fitness or unfitness of each such individual will be made at the Advent when the Lord comes for his own, and the casting of the unprofitable servant into outer darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth is again a figure of speech for the exclusion from that high honour. An important point to observe here is that progress is a law of the spiritual life as it is of Nature. The fault of the unprofitable servant was not that he had failed to achieve great things like the one who had doubled the value of his trust but that he had achieved nothing at all. He could at least have put his lord's money in the bank and had some interest to show for the period, but he had not done even that. He threw his lord's bounty back in his face and libelled him into the bargain and demonstrated, not merely apathy, but hostility to his lord; so, like some of the Pharisees of old, he well merited the sentence of exclusion from the heavenly kingdom which his hostility had earned.

After this comes the story of the faithful and evil servants of Matt. 24:51, one in which the ministers of Christ are pictured fulfilling their task of "feeding the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5.2) in watchful anticipation of the imminent Second Advent. One such minister has no faith in the imminence of the Coming and he uses his position not as a faithful

minister of the faith, but to serve his private interests and indulgences. Again, as in the previous case, the Lord comes unexpectedly and passes the same sentence. Because of unworthiness and apostasy from the obligations of his sacred mission he is cast out and again there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The final two instances form a pair. The parable of the wheat and tares culminates in Matt. 13.42 by the tares being cast into a furnace of fire where there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth". That of the dragnet culminates in Matt. 13.49 by the useless fish in the catch being treated similarly. In both cases the combined allusion depicts the exclusion of the unfit from the society of the fit at the end of the period of the trial. The sowing of the wheat and intrusion of the tares pictures the work of this present Age with the harvest of the wheat, the true and faithful adherents of Christ, and separation of tares, the opponents of Christ, at its end. The sweeping of the net gathering fish of every kind and the process of separation into good and bad equally well pictures the work of the Messianic Age when all mankind will be brought into the net of the Divine call and invitation of that Age, and once again, the true and the apostate will be separated.

One vital principle runs through all these instances. The symbol of gnashing of teeth indicates that those who fail to attain their invited place in God's purposes do so, not because of ignorance, inability or even apathy, but because of deliberate hostility to God. They depart as they are bidden, but as they depart they gnash their teeth in rage and enmity. That was true of the Pharisees who could have entered the Kingdom but refused, and hounded Jesus to death. It is true of those who, having once entered and embraced the Christian way, deliberately repudiate it and engage in hostile action against it. It is true of those who, at the end of the Messianic Age when mankind's Day of probation comes to its end, resolutely defy the goodness of God and the only basis upon which life can continue, and remain unrepentant to the last. There is a terrible finality in the words of those men in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19) "*we will not have this man to reign over us.*"

He that is much in prayer shall grow rich in grace. He shall thrive and increase most that is

busiest in this, which is our traffic with Heaven, and fetches the most precious commodities thence.

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

3. Enoch and the children of Cain

Adam died in the year 930. By that time he had seen some of his descendants to the fourth generation including his great-great-grandson Mahalelel who was destined to carry on his line to Noah and eventually to Abraham, but the human community was still very small; as his eyes closed in death there were still only about six hundred persons in the community. But now there was beginning to emerge what in modern times is called a population explosion. Within another three hundred years, when Enoch was a little over a century old, that six hundred had increased to something like ten thousand, and what had been at most a few little village communities living close to each other became a more widely spread system of Clans or Tribes leading increasingly separate life-styles. The extent to which the descendants of Cain were still alien from the remainder of the community is impossible to determine, but the fact that Genesis 4 preserves the record of their pedigree down to at least fifteen centuries from Eden does show that some connection was maintained. It is hardly likely that the original separation was maintained into later generations, and the story of the first murder became more remote and relegated to the past. What is more intriguing is the fact that whereas ten generations of Adam's descendants through Seth to Shem, Ham and Japheth at the time of the Flood are recorded, those through Cain extend only to the seventh, so that Tubal-Cain and his half-brothers Jabal and Jubal would be roughly contemporary with Methuselah. At that time, for reasons which do not readily appear, knowledge of Cain's later posterity was not recorded, although the record does close with a vivid picture of the development of that posterity.

That picture involves the only real indication of human activity in the pre-diluvian era apart from the intimation that at the first Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain a tiller of the ground. Three descendants of Cain in the seventh generation are recorded as the first to embark upon three distinct spheres of human enterprise, the keeping of cattle, the invention of musical instruments, and the production of copper and iron implements. All this was round about fifteen hundred years from Eden. According to Gen. 4. Lamech in the sixth generation from Cain had three sons, by two wives, named Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain. Jabal, says the account, was the father of tent-dwellers

and cattle-breeders—the expression means that he was the originator, the first, to introduce the nomadic way of life associated with cattle breeding. One wonders why, at this stage, the breeding and care of cattle should be introduced. At the beginning with Adam man's food was to be the natural products of Nature—grain, vegetable, fruit. It is true that after the Flood the Lord permitted the addition of animal flesh. Cattle could be kept for only one purpose—food. Is it that after six or seven generations accustomed to tilling the soil men were beginning to find that the production and consumption of animal flesh provided easier means of obtaining nutriment than growing crops? It would be at just about this time the father of Noah uttered a remark, recorded in Gen. 5. 29, concerning *"the labour and toil of our hands because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed"*. If Jubal and his tribe were the first tent-dwellers the implication is that from living in permanent houses or farmsteads they adopted the nomadic style of life, allowing their herds to wander over continually fresh ground, following them as they went. Perhaps with the rapidly increasing population the need to spread further afield to find space for necessary crop-raising was becoming a problem.

Jubal, the narrator goes on, invented musical instruments, the harp or lyre, and the flute, (mistranslated "organ" in the A.V.). Stringed and wind instruments! This implies a more settled form of society; here was a community which was proceeding toward the development of the arts and sciences. This section remained as farmers dwelling in settled villages; but already the inventive genius of man was beginning to emerge. And the third son, Tubal-Cain, took his people up into the mountains, away from the others, for up there they had found strange substances embedded in the rocky outcrops, metallic ores, and they discovered how to smelt the copper and the iron out of that ore and fabricate tools, utensils, ornaments and things of beauty—and perhaps weapons also, for now another dark page in the history is opened to view, to reveal a second murder.

Lamech, the father of these three, killed a man who had done him some injury, and now was boasting about it to his two wives. If this man, a murderer and a polygamist, was at all typical of his generation, then the human race was already declining into that condition of corruption which

the Lord condemned so severely on the eve of the Flood seven centuries later. It is a strange little story in Gen. 4, all the more so because of its brevity. If Cain by Divine command was to be immune from the vengeance of his fellows by a sevenfold Divine retribution then Lamech claimed one seventy times as much. It is hardly likely that this Lamech was a God-fearing man; more perhaps that this was a threat to his fellows of dire consequences if they interfered. The nature of the incident and the fact that it has a place in the scanty record of those times might justify the inference that this was the first murder since the days of Cain fifteen centuries earlier. Perhaps it was now that men really did begin to turn away from God and commence that descent into ungodliness which called forth the Divine condemnation. It need not be thought that all Cain's descendants were apostates. Both Lamech's father and grandfather had names incorporating the name of God, evidence that some of them at least shared the faith of the sons of Seth.

Nothing is known of the descendants of Cain after this time, seven centuries before the Flood. Gen. 4 goes to seven generations and there stops. Gen. 5 gives the complete list of the line of Seth to Noah, nine generations. That leads to some enquiry as to who wrote these chapters in the first place and when. The Hebrew form of early Genesis gives evidence of translation from a Sumerian original of about the 25th century B.C., five hundred years before Abraham. That is as early as researchers are ever likely to go; no kind of writing earlier than that has ever been discovered. But the account of the Flood was obviously first set down in writing by an eye witness, and, for all that we know, the story of Eden may have been preserved by Adam himself in his later years. One clue is afforded by the reiterated expression "*these are the generations of Noah*" "*these are the generations of the sons of Noah*", and so on some eleven times in Genesis. The Hebrew word "*toledoth*", translated "generations", does not mean a generation of men, for which "*dor*" is the term in the O.T.; it denotes a family history, its origins, and appears as the concluding remark of a particular section. So the first sentence in Gen. 5. 1. "*this is the book of the generations of Adam*" is the conclusion to Gen. 2 to 4. Apart from the history of the Cainite Lamech and his sons that might well have been recorded by Adam himself. In the early centuries of course no necessity existed for writing, when so few of men had been born; only when the population had measurably

increased, toward the end of Adam's life, would the need arise and that in turn bring about the invention of the art. It only needed someone to add details of the last two Cainite generations, by someone living some time after Adam's death, to render "the book of the family history of Adam" complete as we have it today in the form of Gen. 2 to 4. The earlier narrative, Gen. 1, the "*origins of the heavens and of the earth when they were created*" (Gen. 2,4) were possibly written down by Divine revelation at the same time.

The Sethite patriarch living more or less contemporaneously with the sons of Cainite Lamech was Enoch—younger than Lamech but older than his sons; perhaps this is why the story of the Cainites ends with this generation. Enoch could have completed the story to his own times but after he passed off the scene no one included the Cainites in the Genesis history. Perhaps, after all, they had become too profligate to be considered worthy of mention. The sons of Lamech could have been a couple of centuries old when Enoch disappeared from earth—Gen. 4 could have been completed during that time, and there the history of the Cainite peoples, by then perhaps something like four thousand strong, comes to an end so far as Genesis is concerned.

This is where Enoch comes upon the scene—Enoch, seventh from Adam, in the line of Seth, the mystic sage around whose name so much mystery and not a few fanciful speculations have been woven. The Genesis history is singularly reticent; it merely states, in the genealogical table which constitutes chapter 5, that Enoch "*walked with God, and he was not, for God took him*" (Gen. 5. 14), this at the age of three hundred and sixty-five years, after which apparently no man saw him again and no one knew where he was. Jewish tradition has made up the deficiency with a wealth of legend which, by the time of our Lord, had him spirited away by angels to experience a kind of guided aerial tour over all the earth which, expressed in modern geographical terms, would seem to have embraced all the territories known in our Lord's time from the Atlantic coast of Africa to the frontiers of India, including a sight of the lost Garden of Eden, and after that conducted through seven distinct heavens above the earth until he found himself in the presence of the Deity. Here he was instructed as to the Divine intention to destroy the earth by a great flood on account of the wickedness of man, and told to go to the "angels that sinned" (Gen. 6), to convey the Divine sentence to them. After all this he was caught up by the

"chariots of the spirit" and conveyed to the Garden of Eden, where he spent the rest of his life alone. He was credited with being the inventor of writing, on account of which he had the name "scribe of righteousness", and the originator of astronomical science, as well as the author of the antediluvian histories now forming the first few chapters of Genesis. Altogether a remarkable set of achievements for one man's lifetime.

References to all this occur in several apocryphal books of the time around the First Advent, the most complete being the so-called "Book of Enoch" (I Enoch) at about 150 years before Christ. The Bible itself gives no information on all this; Jude in his epistle quotes part of its opening concerning the Lord coming "*with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all*" and applies this to the Second Advent of Christ, although in the Book of Enoch it is the Most High himself who comes down on Mount Sinai for the same purpose; Jude was evidently quoting from the book, which was well known in his day, merely to illustrate his point, not to claim Divine authority. The writer to the Hebrews mentions Enoch in his eleventh chapter as an example of sterling faith, who "*was translated that he should not see death, and was not found for he had this testimony, that he pleased God*", (Heb. 11. 5). The idea found in some modern Christian circles that Enoch was taken to heaven without dying is nowhere implied in the Scriptures; whilst it sounded reasonable enough in the 18th century it is a bit absurd in the 20th. The ancient Jewish idea was that he spent the remainder of his life isolated from men and no one knew where he was.

Legends like this do grow from a basis of some historical truth and it may well be that some unrevealed happening does lie behind the Genesis allusion to Enoch's disappearance. It is right to attach little or no importance to the excessively fanciful allusions in the Book of Enoch to his aerial/celestial travels. But there is one interesting element in Sumerian tradition which may have a bearing. Various Sumerian epics of the time of Abraham and later record the names of ten kings who were claimed to have ruled before the Flood (it has to be admitted that these epics often get mixed up between the great Biblical Flood and several lesser floods which occurred round about the time of the Patriarch Eber and onward nearly to Abraham, so should not be taken too seriously). But in these records there appears the name of the sixth or seventh from the first king, one En-sib-zi-

anna, King of Larak (which incidentally did not come into existence until long after the Flood) who, like Enoch, is credited with having introduced the art of writing and other amenities to the Sumerians; the meaning of his name in the Sumerian language is "the lord the faithful shepherd of God". The same epics called the first king of the ten by a name which meant "man" and the tenth, said to be king of the city-state of Shuruppak, was the man who built an Ark under instruction from his God to save himself, and his family from a great Flood. It is unlikely that there can be any affinity between this Sumerian legend, dating from before 1700 B.C. and the much later Jewish writer who says concerning Enoch, that he was first among men that are born on earth who learnt writing and knowledge and wisdom and who wrote down the "*signs of heaven*" (Jub. 4. 17), but taken together they do add an important element to the brief statement in Genesis to the effect that Enoch "*walked with God*" or as the Greek Septuagint has it "*was well pleasing to God*". Somehow an ancient fact of history, embellished through the ages with a great deal of amplification and distortion, but itself not recorded in the Bible, lies behind this age-old conviction that a man, seventh in descent from Adam, started the developing human race in its insatiate thirst for knowledge which has brought mankind to the position it finds itself in today.

It is impossible to be dogmatic or even tolerably certain but there is the possibility that the structure of early Genesis points to Enoch as the man who first set down in readable characters the story of mankind from creation to his own day, a period of fifteen hundred years, in a script no modern man has ever seen or is likely to see, one that as mankind increased again after the Flood was translated into the earliest language now known, thence into Hebrew, and finally into modern languages of the present day.

That was not the end of Enoch. According to the same legends, he was prominently concerned in the great catastrophe which was now about to fall upon the human race, a reign of tyranny and violence which was going to plunge the earth into a condition of corruption which led the Lord God to bring about a great change and to start all over again—but before that change could come about the utter inability of man to order his life without God had to be manifested before salvation could come. The lesson of Eden had to be learned again.

To be continued.

THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

*A sometimes
misunderstood word*

More than twenty times in the Old Testament it is said that God is a jealous God. The statement is often misunderstood, naturally enough since the word "jealous" in modern English has a very definite and not very pleasant meaning. The Hebrew word translated "jealousy", however has a wider range of meaning, and a systematic examination of the use of the word in the O.T., and its Greek equivalent in the N.T., soon removes from the Divine character any suspicion of the attitude of heart and mind normally associated with English usage of the word "jealousy".

The "jealousy" of God is his concern and zeal for the preservation of his own holiness in the sight of men, and for the fulfilment of his Word. The word is translated "zeal" about as many times as it is translated "jealousy" and if every text in which the word occurs is examined it will readily be seen that "zeal" is as good a rendering as "jealousy". As an example, take Zech. 1.14 "I am *jealous* for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great *jealousy*". In this passage God declares his concern at the treatment of Jerusalem by the other nations and his determination to deliver her. So Nahum 1. 2 "God is *jealous*, and the Lord revengeth". Here it is God's coming judgment on the heathen city of Nineveh for its oppression of Israel that is in view. Again Isa. 42.13 "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up *jealousy* like a man of war" against the enemies of the chosen people. "All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my *jealousy*" He says through Zephaniah (Zeph. 3.8). In a rather different setting we have the jealousy of God for his own good Name and worship, as in Psa. 78.58 "For they (Israel) provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to *jealousy* with their graven images". In Deut 32. 16 we have "they provoked him to *jealousy* with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger" and in Ezek. 5.13 (where the word is rendered "zeal") "I the Lord have spoken in my *zeal*, when I have accomplished my fury in them". This same jealousy of God is shown as the driving force which accomplishes his purposes. In Isa. 9.7

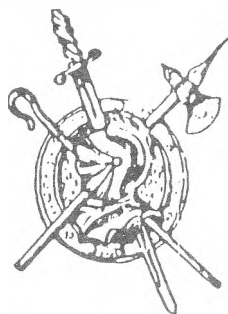
we have, speaking of the Messianic kingdom one day to be bestowed upon the Child that should be born "The *zeal* of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this", and in Isa. 37.32 the same expression is used with reference to the Divine determination to restore Israel to the Holy Land after the time of desolation. One of the Messianic Psalms (Psa. 69.9) represents the Messiah as saying to the Father "The *zeal* of thine house hath eaten me up", an allusion to the consecrated mission of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to earth at his First Advent. (St. John quoted this verse and applied it to Jesus on the occasion of his expelling the money-changers from the Temple—see John 2.17).

It is not surprising, then, to find that the same word is used by the New Testament writers in the same fashion. "I am *jealous* over you with godly *jealousy*" says St. Paul to his converts in 2 Cor. 11.2. Obviously "zeal" is his meaning there, as also in Rom. 10.19 "Moses saith, I will provoke you to *jealousy* by them that are no people." God would incite Israel to greater zeal by the spectacle of his dealings with the Gentiles. The elders of the church in Jerusalem, visited by St. Paul, said to him "Thou seest how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all *zealous* of the Law" (Acts. 21.20). In his epistle to Titus (2.14) St. Paul speaks of the church of God as being "*zealous* of good works", and in Rev.3.19 the Lord Jesus himself bids certain backsliding ones to "be *zealous* therefore, and repent".

When, therefore, God declared to the people of Israel (Exod. 20.5) "I the Lord thy God am a *jealous* God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me", He was saying in effect that in his zeal for the exaltation and establishment of righteousness and the eventual fulfilment of his purpose. He would allow the evil of evil men to run its course through the generations, as it has done, that it might bring forth its inevitable fruit and so at the end disappear from his creation. Divine jealousy and Divine zeal for righteousness are one and the same thing.

Those who have come into real heart sympathy with God have learned to see him as the Fountain of all goodness and truth and blessing. To them He is the one altogether lovely. His law is their delight, his friendship and love are their very life. When the heart has become thus centred in God, it is the most natural impulse to commit its way unto him.

Illustrating how rapidly God's command to "breed abundantly" (Gen. 8. 17) after the Flood could be obeyed by the lower creation is the fact that two rooks imported into Australia in the year 1900 increased to half-a-million by 1950, and now present a major problem to farmers.



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

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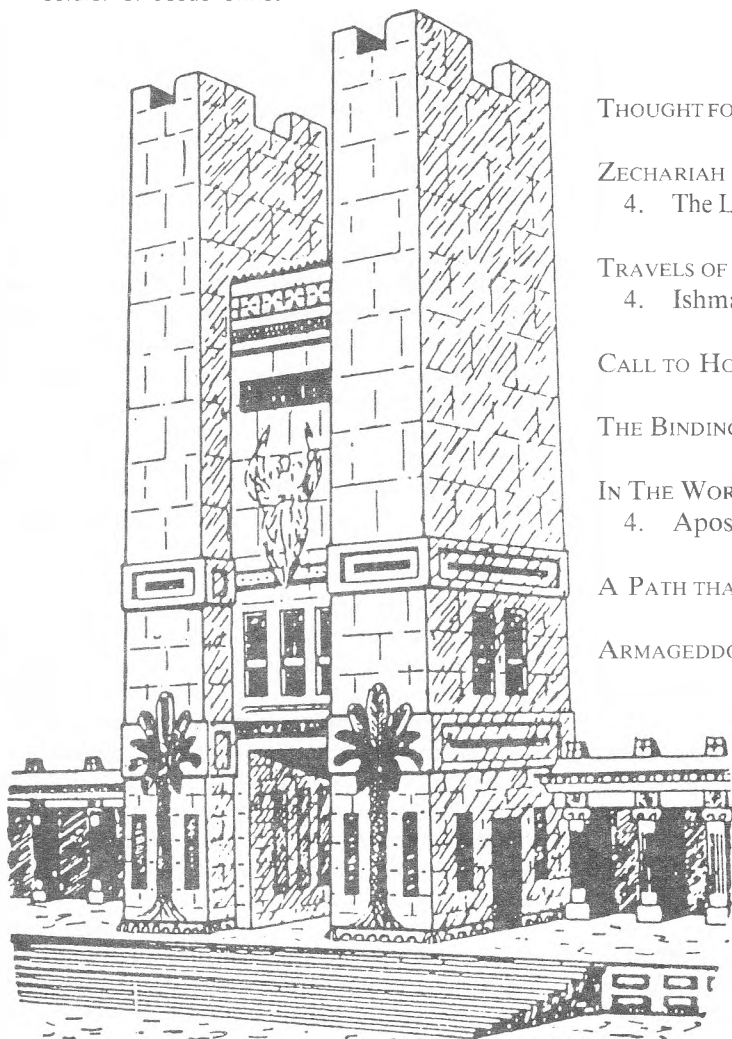
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this." (Eccl. 7.10).

How prone we are to look back upon the "old days", those early times in the way of Christ which seem as though surrounded by a rosy halo. In contrast with the disappointment and frustration of the present they offer themselves as much more to be desired than the things of to-day; the fondest hope of quite a few is that in some way or other the interests and activities of long past times may be recaptured. We would fain resurrect those departed glories from the dust of oblivion, dress them up once more in their faded trappings, and seek to regain for ourselves the joys and thrills of our "growing-time" in the way of the Truth.

Now King Solomon tells us that such procedure is exceedingly unwise. He does not even recommend our sparing time to cast so much as a few longing thoughts back upon the irrevocable past. With masterly restraint of language he says *"thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this"*. And how right he is! The successful business man may be understood if he decides to re-visit his native village and look upon the scenes of his boyhood, but should he start to run around in knickerbockers and try to accommodate his portly frame to his old school desk he will only succeed in making himself look ridiculous. And is it so very different for the Christian? We have, surely, progressed since those early days. Our spiritual stature, the breadth of our theological understanding, the scope of our Christian outlook and activity, will, if we have faithfully used our privileges and opportunities, have expanded out of all comparison with the immature efforts of our babyhood in Christ. Roseate as the backward view may seem, it has no place for us now, and to

achieve the aim of restoring those days and re-establishing those activities would assuredly bring disillusion and disappointment on a greater scale than anything we have ever experienced.

The Christian is not like a road-roller. He has to keep going on in one direction only. He is the original inventor of the one-way street. *"Forgetting the things that are behind"* cries Paul *"and reaching forth"* unto the things that are before. I press toward the mark." What a good thing it is that our God also forgets the things that are behind! Not many of us but would prefer to forget quite a lot of things that happened in those "good old days". None there are who, even if they could attain to their desire for a revival of the position of fifty years ago, would wish for their personal failures and mistakes and shortcomings to come to life again and be repeated. Contrary to the thought sometimes expressed, we Christians are *not* called upon to enquire for the old paths; we are expected to press forward as pilgrims seeing always the vision of a celestial city, thinking never of the past, not much about the present, but a great deal about the future. And if it be a choice between the roseate glow which lingers about past glories, a glow which is a dying one anyway, like sunset, and the golden radiance of the everlasting city which is tinging the sky above the distant hills in front of us—well then, how foolish we should be to prefer the fading radiance of the past to the shining brilliance of the future. Let our eyes and hearts and hands, thought and word and action, be turned forward, recking nothing of that which is past and can never be recalled, but reaching always to that which is before, hasting to higher and farther reaches of endeavour and achievement until, at the last, we appear triumphantly *"before God in Zion"*!

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

4. The Lampstand and the Olive Trees

The Lampstand and the Olive Trees! Picturesque symbolism this, relating somewhat of Israel's ancient ceremonial to its reality in the Kingdom of God. It is evident that this fourth chapter of Zechariah is looking forward into the future much more than it looks back into the past, for it displays as its main feature the active operation of the Holy Spirit in a world where the supremacy of God is unchallenged, and this happy state is not yet.

Zechariah saw a golden lampstand, reminiscent of that which stood in the "Holy" of the Tabernacle and later in Solomon's Temple. It had the seven lamps, apparently carried on seven arms diverging from a central column, but there the similarity ended. Each lamp on Bezaleel's construction had its own reservoir for oil which had to be filled daily by the attendant priests. The lampstand seen by Zechariah possessed a central "bowl", a common oil container, from which seven pipes radiated to the lamps so that they drew a continuous supply of oil from the bowl and needed no replenishing. On each side of the lampstand stood an olive tree, with branches overshadowing, and from each tree a "funnel" or connecting pipe leading to the bowl. From the olives on the trees a continuous supply of olive oil flowed through the two funnels into the bowl and from thence to the seven lamps so that their light was continuous; they never went out.

In answer to the prophet's question the revealing angel told him that the vision was a symbolic representation of the manner in which the Holy Spirit of God would execute the Divine purpose. "*This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel*" he said (ch. 4. 6-10) "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone*". At first sight there may seem to be no rational connection between a lampstand with two olive trees and a mountain becoming a plain with an emerging headstone. There is, however, one readily discernable link—the work of God denoted by the angel's words is executed by the power of the Holy Spirit; the principal element in the symbol is the olive oil, flowing from the two trees into the lamps and giving light. The Holy Spirit is frequently symbolised by olive oil, as witness its use in the anointing of the Levitical priesthood in symbol of dedication to Divine service, and Peter's application of the same to Jesus; "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the*

Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10. 38). This allusion is almost certainly derived from Psalms 45. 7 in which the victorious Messiah in the days of his glory is addressed; "*God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*". That the followers of Christ, dedicated to his service, participate in this anointing is clear from 1 John 2. 27 and the phrasing of this verse makes crystal clear that it is the possession of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the anointing, and thus the fact that this is the meaning of the oil in Zechariah's vision is confirmed.

Now the two olive trees are called by the angel "*the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth*" (ch. 4. 14). "Sons of the oil" is the literal Hebrew expression. These trees are the twin sources of the oil which flows to the lamps and gives universal enlightenment. There is only one time in history when two channels of the Holy Spirit are discharging their duty simultaneously side by side, and there is sevenfold illumination in consequence, and that is in the Millennial Age, when the Lord's twin instruments, the Christian Church in Heaven and the restored and converted Holy Nation on earth, are engaged in their work of sending the light and life of the Divine call worldwide. "*The nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising*" said Isaiah of the earthly Holy Nation (Isa. 60. 3). "*The light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days*" he says again in Isa. 30. 26 and this might well be the basis for our Lord's words describing the position of his followers of this present Age, the Church, when He said of that coming day "*then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matt. 13. 43).

The lampstand, then, represents the Millennial Kingdom on earth, shedding its light—which implies life—upon all mankind, dispelling the darkness of sin and leading men into the light of eternity. The oil, flowing from the trees into the lamps and therein converted to light, indicates the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh through the medium of the earthly and heavenly aspects of the "Servant", the two anointed companies who have been found fitted for the task of world conversion. In Nature, of course, the tree does not create the oil; it is able to produce oil only because it receives energy and power from sunlight with which so to do. So in the reality. The Lord's servants are not

originators of the Holy Spirit of power; they are mediums for its transmission and the power comes to them from the centre and source of all life and power—the Eternal.

Fully to appreciate the relation between the lampstand vision and the “headstone” application it is necessary to examine the structure of the chapter. It is very possible that some dislocation of the text has occurred at a very early date; verses 11–14 have to do with verses 1–5, and the message respecting the headstone, which appears in the centre of the chapter, would seemingly be more appropriate at the end. If in fact there has been such dislocation it must have occurred quite soon after the writing of the book, for the Septuagint, which was translated from the Hebrew Scriptures about 250 B.C., has the same arrangement as our A.V. Zechariah probably did not complete his writings until late in his life which would hardly be more than two centuries before the Septuagint. In between these two dates came the time at which the Old Testament canon was closed, reputedly by Ezra, and it might well have been then that the slight confusion in the text occurred. There is no difference to the interpretation of the chapter in either case, but the re-arrangement does cause the passage to run more smoothly and understandably, and helps to clear up the very obscure A.V. rendering of verse 10. An endeavour is made here to offer what is thought to be probably the correct reconstruction.

After beholding the lampstand with its seven lamps (vss. 1-4) and asking the revealing angel “*What are these, my lord?*” the narrative proceeds (vs. 5) *Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, no my lord.* (6a) *Then he answered and spake unto me saying* (10b) *These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth* (11) *then answered I, and said unto him. What are these two olive trees . . .* (12) *And I answered again and said unto him, What be these two olive branches . . .* (13-14) *And he answered me and said . . . These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.* (6b) *This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts* (7) *thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel shall become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone shouting, Grace, grace unto it*”. Then the chapter concludes with a personal word from the Lord to Zechariah (8) “*Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying,* (9) *The hands of Zerubabel have laid the foundation of*

this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you. (10a) *For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*”. This is then the end of the chapter.

Thus arranged, the chapter first describes the vision of the lampstand and olive trees, and the angel’s explanation (vss. 1-6a, 10b-14) picturing the Lord’s two anointed ones, Israel and the Church, commencing their work in the Millennial Age as channels of the Holy Spirit to the world of men; next it presents the angel’s declaration respecting the demolished mountain and the setting of the headstone (vss. 6b-7) picturing the passing away of the kingdoms of this world at the instance of the victorious Christ in kingly power in the same Age; finally it records the word of the Lord to Zechariah himself (vss. 8-10a) assuring him that the completion of the Temple in his own day under the administration of Zerubbabel was to be a sign to his fellows of the Divine authority behind his prophecy. On this assumption the chapter is consistent and logical.

On this basis, after saying in verse 14 that the two olive trees are the two anointed ones which stand by the Lord of the whole earth, the angel concludes his explanation of the lampstand by saying (in vs. 10b) and referring obviously to the seven lamps, “*those seven are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through all the earth*”. Chapter 3 speaks of the stone, laid before Joshua the High Priest, which had seven facets or eyes, a seven-sided stone, so to speak, picturing the universal surveillance of the “stone” Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, in the earth during the Millennial Age. Now here in chapter 4 the same idea is expressed but this time the universal power and surveillance of the Holy Spirit “in that day” is pictured by the sevenfold light from the lampstand, also going forth into all the earth, the “seven eyes of the Lord”.

With this picture in mind it is easier to comprehend the second section, the angel’s message regarding the mountain and the headstone. The great mountain which is to become a plain is of course the mountain of the kingdoms of this world. “*It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it*” (Isa. 2. 2). “*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain*” (Isa. 40. 5).

The picture here is that the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down to earth out of Heaven (Rev. 21) and as a city crowning the summit of a great mountain ("*the length and the breadth and the height of it were equal*" Rev. 21:6) rules supreme over all the earth. Zerubbabel here is an alias for the Messianic King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel himself neither moved a mountain or saw any earthly kingdom fall prostrate before him. He died as he lived, a governor of Judea, subordinate always to the Persian King. But Zerubbabel as the representative of royal power in Judea at that time fitly pictures the King who shall reign in the day which sees the reality of the vision. And this is where the "headstone" comes into the picture.

The "headstone" or "corner stone" was the principal foundation stone of a building and served in ceremonial fashion much as do the "foundation stones" of modern buildings, laid in a formal ceremony by some notability and as often as not blessed by some ecclesiastical dignitary. (At least this was the rule a generation or so ago; the concrete and glass monstrosities of the present are usually put up with too much haste to allow for such leisurely preliminaries). The basic idea was the same; the foundation stone in theory determined the position and size and purpose of the building and was in a sense representative of the building. This principle is used in the Scriptures to delineate the Lord Christ as the foundation and sustainer of the edifice which God is building in this Age; first the Christian Church, of whom He is said in Eph. 2:20 and Pet. 2:6 to be the "chief corner stone", and later the Holy City of the next Age of which he is both chief corner stone and its everlasting light. "*The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner*" sang the Psalmist in Ps. 118:22. "*Behold*" said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah "*I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not be confounded*" (Isa. 28:16). Here in Zechariah this same corner stone is brought forth amid general rejoicings to initiate the building of that new Divinely ordained structure which is to succeed the levelling of the "great mountain" of this world. In this context the picture is that of the building of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, upon the ruins of the destroyed "*kosmos*" of this Age, and the exaltation of Christ as supreme. When earth's new king once asserts his power and authority in the earth He will not desist until his work is finished by the entire human race being

brought to a full knowledge and understanding of the Christian Gospel, and every individual has made his deliberate and final choice for good—or evil. "*He shall not fail nor be discouraged*" says Isaiah of our Lord at this same time "*till he have set judgment in the earth, and the coastlands*"—the extremities of the earth—"*shall wait for his law*". (Isa. 42:4).

This ends the second section of the chapter. The demolished mountain and the headstone which replaces it, an exhibition of Divine power by the Holy Spirit in contrast to human might and power, of vss. 6–7, have nothing to do with rebuilt Temple in a "*day of small things*" of vss. 8–10. In any case the one is a revelation to Zechariah by the angel and the other a direct word to him from the Lord. The two sections relate to distinct and dissimilar matters.

It is possible that vss. 8–10 are not intended to have other than a local and immediate prophetic application. The word of the Lord was to Zechariah directly; it told him that Zerubbabel, who had already started building the Temple, would also finish it, and by this sign, said Zechariah to his hearers or readers, they would know that he was a true prophet, that the Lord of Hosts had in truth sent him to them. Those who had despised the "*day of small things*", the meagre results, so far, of the Jewish restoration in Jerusalem and Judea, would yet rejoice when they saw the plummet—instrument used in building construction—in the hand of Zerubbabel. The R.S.V. puts it very succinctly "*For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*".

The prediction was certainly literally fulfilled. Zechariah had this word from the Lord in the second year of Darius of Persia (Zech. 1:1) which was 519 B.C. The Temple was started under the administration of Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., stopped by order of Cambyses of Persia in 529, resumed by permission of Darius in 520, and finally completed by Zerubbabel in 516, three years after Zechariah uttered these words. Throughout that frustrating period of twenty years, with the very existence of the new Jewish colony menaced by powerful enemies, it must often have seemed that the people lived in a "*day of small things*"; their present situation bore very unfavourable comparison with the glories of the old days before the captivity, when Solomon's Temple was still standing and the city of Jerusalem the wonder of nations. So those who crowded to hear Zechariah's colourful predictions on the occasion of their first utterance,

seeing, figuratively speaking, "*the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*", realised three years later that the words of the prophet had come true and stamped those words with the seal of Divine authority.

It is possible to draw a parallel with the future. Whether that parallel is intended in this passage may be questioned, but it is true that in the day of Christ's power soon to come, when in the glory of his Kingdom the Holy City shines resplendent and complete, those amongst men who in this day and this life have despised and ignored the apparent weakness and futility of the Divine programme, or have not believed in any God-given destiny for mankind, will "rejoice" at the then evident power

and activity of earth's new rulership. At any rate an earlier prophet, Isaiah, was in no doubt about the fact when he declaimed (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 rejoice and be glad in his salvation*". And if, in the wonder and rapture of that moment, they conveniently forget that in the past they were largely unbelievers and agnostics and were only unknowingly "waiting for him" there will be no recriminations on that score from our God. Like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, all He wants is to have his erring sons repent, and reform, and come home. That is why the Holy City comes down to earth.

(To be continued)

Spurgeon on the Millennium

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the most famous of British preachers. The following extract from one of his sermons shows how fully he accepted the Millennial teaching of the Bible.

* * *

"We stand on the borders of a new era. The present dispensation is almost finished. In a few more years, if prophecy be not thoroughly misinterpreted, we shall enter upon another condition. This poor earth of ours, which has been swathed in darkness, shall put on her garments of light. She hath toiled a long while in travail and sorrow. Soon shall her groanings end. Her surface which hath been stained with blood, is soon to be purified by love, and a religion of peace is to be established. The hour is coming when storms shall be hushed, when tempests shall be unknown, when whirlwind and hurricane shall stay their mighty force, and when 'the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ'. But you ask me what sort of kingdom that is to be, and whether I can show you any likeness thereof. I answer 'No'. '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' in the next, the Millennial, dispensation; 'but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit'. Sometimes when we climb upwards, there are moments of contemplation when we can understand that verse 'From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' and can imagine that thrice-blessed hour when the King shall put on his head the crown of the universe; when He shall gather up sheaves of sceptres, and put them beneath his arm; when He shall take the crowns from the heads of all monarchs and welding them into one, shall put them on his own head, amidst the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand who shall shout his praises. But it is little enough that we can guess of its wonders. *O Christians, do you know that your Lord is coming?* In such an hour as ye think not, the Man who once hung quivering on Calvary will descend in glory; the head that once was crowned with thorns will soon be crowned with diadem of brilliant jewels. I do look for his pre-millennial advent, and expect He will come here again. Jesus, our Lord, is to be King of all the earth, and rule all nations in a glorious, personal reign."

It is an idle dream which now possesses so many that the Church is to bring in the Kingdom in the absence of the King. There is not one word for it in all the Scriptures. It contradicts the exhortations for continual watchfulness for him—not for death,

but for him who is the conqueror of death—which imply the possibility of his coming in any generation, and therefore the certainty of his coming before the long, fixed period of the Millennium, which is the time for rest, not for watching.

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

4. Ishmael

Three times had the Lord spoken to Abram and each time declared that from him would spring a great nation and the land would be the possession of that nation for ever. He had been in the land now for nine years and as yet the Lord had given him no children. He and his wife were halfway through life and he would not have been human had he not began to wonder when the promise would be fulfilled. Now, as recorded in Gen. 15, the Lord spoke to him again, and he took advantage of the opportunity to broach the subject "What wilt thou give me" he asked "*seeing I am childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus*" (vs.2). The man who exercised oversight over all his household seemed destined to inherit it all in the absence of a son of the family and this was definitely not what the Lord had promised.

In response the Lord entered into a covenant with Abram—the celebrated "Abrahamic Covenant" which ranks first among the three great "salvation covenants" of Scripture, the Abrahamic, the Law Covenant of Sinai and the New Covenant of the coming Millennial Age. This Covenant sealed Abraham's right to the land in which he now dwelt. The Lord made a similar covenant with Noah after the Flood to signal his promise that the earth would never again be devastated.

Now the promise of eternal inheritance of the land was to be ratified by a symbolic ceremony. Abram was to take from the best of his stock a heifer, a goat and a ram, with a dove and pigeon, cut them all in half, and arrange the pieces in two parallel rows. At the moment of the ceremony both Abram and the Lord were to pass between these two rows, symbolising their joint association in the matter of the promise. When the time came, and Abram played his part, he found himself accompanied by a supernatural radiance surrounding a fiery torch, (described somewhat clumsily in the English AV translation as a smoking furnace and a burning lamp), and in that experience Abram knew that the Lord was with him. And it was at that time he heard the voice of the Lord confirming his word "*Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates*" (ch. 15:18). In that simple ceremony of association together the Lord gave his word, a word that will never be broken.

But there was something else. The future was

not all sunlight. There was a dark shadow also. Vs. 12 tells that before the ceremony during the afternoon, Abram fell asleep, "*and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him*". That word means fear or apprehension. The progress toward fulfilment of the promise embodied also some great catastrophe was indicated in the words of the Lord (vs. 13), "*know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge,—and afterward shall they come out with great substance..... But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again*". That is a most remarkable statement, for it foreshadowed, and accurately foreshadowed, events which were not to happen for another six centuries. Abram's great-grandson did go down into Egypt two hundred years later; they grew there into a nation but it was a slave nation, oppressed and afflicted. Four hundred years later still they followed Moses out of that land bearing with them the riches of Egypt, and under Joshua returned to the land which was theirs by promise.

Unless one asserts that the Book of Genesis is an elaborate work of fiction, compiled long after the events it professes to relate, it has to be accepted that the Lord knows in advance what is going to happen in the affairs of men. It was a famine in Canaan in the 19th Century B.C. which led Jacob to take his family into Egypt to ensure sustenance. It was jealousy of certain of the sons of Jacob which was the means of Joseph being in Egypt to receive them and ensure their acceptance. But had an unknown caravan of Midianite traders not happened to pass by when the jealous brothers were about to kill Joseph he would never have gone to Egypt at all. And had Moses not been saved by his mother from the edict of Pharaoh, perhaps Israel would never have left Egypt at all. Divine foreknowledge consistent with the exercise of man's own freewill is something beyond the range of human understanding. Man's mental capacity cannot take it in; but the Lord did say on one occasion "*I am God declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass—I have purposed it, I will also do it*" (Isa. 16. 10-11).

Twelve months later Sarai gave up hope. She was now seventy-five years of age and had been

married some thirty or forty years without any sign of a child. "*The Lord hath restrained me from bearing*" she said to Abram. If the Lord's promise was to be fulfilled and Abram was to have a son and heir, she would not be the mother. That, at any rate, was how it seemed to her. It must have been a bitter blow, for she had shared her husband's journeys and vicissitudes of fortune evidently with the same faith that was his characteristic and now it seemed that all was to be of no avail. Yet the word of the Lord had to be fulfilled; Abraham must assuredly become the father of a son who would become the heir of the promise. So she came to Abram and suggested he take one of her slave-girls in the endeavour to provide the much needed heir. "*I pray thee*" she said "*go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her*" (ch. 16. 1-3).

Before criticising the morality of this proceeding it must be realised that this, in the society of that day, was an eminently proper and customary thing to do. The laws of Sumer and of Mari, the lands from which Abram and Sarai had come, in which they had been born and brought up, directed this proceeding in the event of this situation arising: The wife was under obligation to select and present one of her slave-girls to her husband for this purpose. Upon the birth of a male child that child became the legal heir to the father's estate and the mother became automatically a free woman and the legal second wife of the father. If however, the first wife did at a later date succeed in presenting her husband with a boy, then that boy became the legal heir and the former slave-girl's son took second place, with such provision as his father saw fit to provide for him. The mother however, did not lose her status of freedom; she remained the second legal wife and the father henceforward had two wives.

Sarai's choice fell upon Hagar, one of the slave-girls given her by Pharaoh during the brief sojourn in Egypt. Hagar has been described as an Egyptian, but that only need mean that she was born in Egypt. The name is a Semitic one and there was always a population of Semitic peoples in Egypt, descendants of Shem drifting in from Asia in times of famine and staying on. An Egyptian slave was more likely to be Semitic than native Egyptian, and Sarai, conscious like Abram of the special destiny of the expected child, would probably insist on Semitic blood. And so Abram took Hagar—who was not likely to have been given any choice in the matter, although the prospect of thereby becoming a freewoman could

have been a definite inducement—and almost immediately a child was on the way.

Unfortunately, and as said in ch. 16. 4, Hagar, in her exultation, "gave herself airs", as would be said nowadays. "*Her mistress was despised in her eyes*"; she had achieved what Sarai could not achieve and the latter was resentful. She "took it out", as the saying goes, on her husband, oblivious to the fact that the whole enterprise was at her instigation in the first place. "*Thy maid is in thy hand*" he responded "*do to her as it pleaseth thee*". Abram has sometimes been unjustly denigrated for this remark; he was in fact only reminding Sarai that the same law which made the whole thing possible also provided that if the second wife in any way tried to usurp the first wife's position she must be returned to her former status, at least until a male heir should be born. It seems from the account that Sarai took this provision a little too literally—the account says "*dealt hardly with her*" and in the margin, "*afflicted her*", and in consequence the girl ran away.

"*And the Angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness . . . on the way to Shur*" (vs. 7). She had done pretty well if, as was certain, she was on foot. The well of water where the Angel found her was named there and then Beer-lahai-roi, and it was close on a hundred miles from Hebron where she started. Hagar must have been at least six or seven days on the journey, sleeping at night where she could. She probably had set out with the idea of finding her way back to Egypt and was following the mountainous road known as the "way of Shur" which Abram had probably so recently traversed on his way back from Egypt. Unfortunately she had somehow lost track of the road—it is still there, and nowadays is a main motor road but in Hagar's day was no more than a dirt track—for Beer-lahai-roi is twenty five miles away from that road and Hagar would never have made Egypt and undoubtedly would have perished in the wilderness. The Angel evidently thought so too, for his greeting was "*Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou, and whither wilt thou go*"? And quite simply—and probably feeling "dead beat" anyway—she just responded "*I flee from my mistress Sarai*". So the Angel of the Lord told her gently to return to her mistress and quietly submit, that she was destined to bear a son who she was to name Ishmael, meaning "*whom God knows*", for the Lord knew of her affliction at the hands of Sarai and her consolation was to be that the Lord had a purpose for that son. He was to be a "*wild ass of the desert*"—the wild ass was a noble

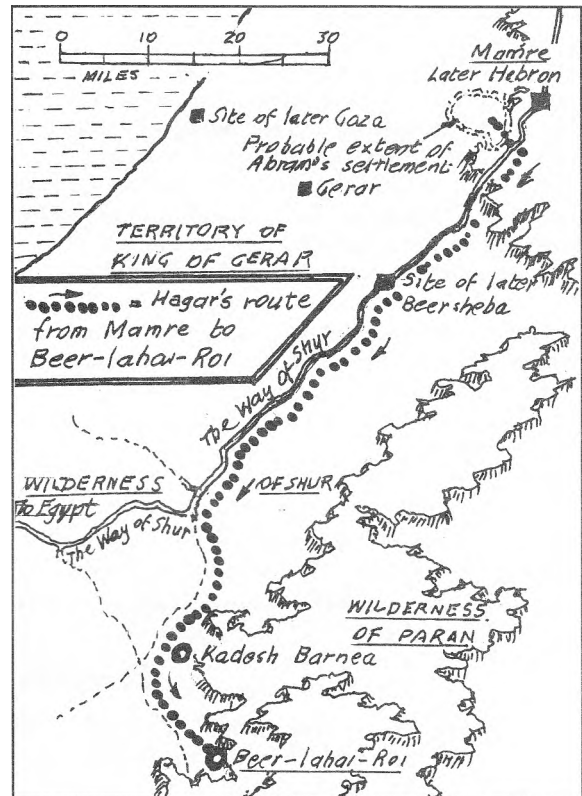
animal, roaming the wilderness, untamed by man, free to go where and how he wished (vs. 12). And Hagar in reverence and humility bowed her head and said in effect "Lo, behold, do I then see God, and live?" for she knew, as did all in those far-off days, that only a very few in all the ages were permitted to see God and live still—and to her was this vision granted. That is implicit in the name which Hagar there and then gave to that well where the Angel had found her—Beer-lahai-roi, "the well where I saw God, and lived". And be it noted that the word in that instance is one that means "seeing in vision or with the mental sight". That slave-girl underwent a profound spiritual experience on that day in the Sinai Desert and perhaps that experience fitted her for her destiny. She became the matriarchal ancestor of a substantial proportion of the Arab world of today. The founder of one of the world's three great monotheistic religions, Mahomet the prophet of Islam, claimed descent from Ishmael, so that in a sense Hagar the slave girl of Abram takes her place beside Mary the mother of Jesus and Jochebed the mother of Moses. So Hagar retraced her steps that hundred miles back to Hebron, made her peace with Sarai, and settled down quietly to await the birth of her son.

The next thirteen years are a blank. Life was apparently uneventful and Abram probably prospered and extended his possessions and territory, living in peace amid amity with his Amorite neighbours. The Genesis record is completely silent as to the events of those thirteen years. Abram was probably now reasonably content—he had the promised son whom he, wrongly as it turned out to be, thought was the promised seed of blessing, and as Ishmael grew up into early boyhood he must have begun to think that all was now well.

Then the Lord appeared again to Abram.

The story is in Gen. 17. It comprises an account of the Lord's reiteration of the Covenant entered into fourteen years earlier with an extension of the promise to include Abram's descendants to distant generations as a people specially set apart for the Divine purpose. "Thou shalt be a father of many nations" said the Lord "I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee". As a sign and symbol of that setting apart for Divine service of those coming generations the Lord instigated the rite of circumcision for all who came within that pale; this extension of the covenant was sealed by Abram's willing acceptance of the rite for himself and all his house. From now and onward they were

a people separate from the other inhabitants of the land, a people for a purpose, consecrated to the service of God. Now, perhaps, and for the first time, Abram began dimly to perceive something of the manner in which he and his were to be used of the Lord in blessing all the families of the earth, the promise which had led him to forsake the old life in Ur of the Chaldees more than forty years previously.



Hagar's flight

But there was more to come. The Lord now had a personal word for him. He and Sarai his wife were to adopt new names. "Neither shall thy name be any more called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee . . . as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be" (Vs. 3. & 15). The old pagan name Abu-Ramu, "the storm god my father" was to be Ab-raham, "father of nations". Sarai the moon-goddess was to be Sar-ah, "princess". The new relationship to God was to be accompanied by new names. The old association with the land of the idolators was gone for ever.

And now came an intimation that was as unwelcome as it was unexpected "And I will bless her"

(Sarah) "*and give thee a son also of her, Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her*". And at that, Abraham, prostrate before the Lord, made light of the remark inwardly, ("laughed" in the AV means literally to treat lightly). Abraham at this point just did not take the Lord seriously, he was unbelieving. "*Shall a barren wife of ninety years of age bear a child?*" And the need was no longer there—he already had a son who was obviously the apple of his eye, so he reminded the Lord of the fact. "*Oh that Ishmael might live before thee*". Surely the Lord could see that here was the solution to the problem of the Seed; why interfere with the established position now?

But the Lord had the last word, "*Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. Twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year*". "*And he left off talking with him*" (vs. 19-21).

The patriarch must have pondered over those words a long time. Not one son, but two sons. Both of them to have some part in the outworking of the

purpose of God. The second son, Isaac, to be the heir of the promise; through him and his were all families of the earth to be blessed. But the first also was to be fruitful and multiply exceedingly until he became a great nation. Perhaps the full implication of that second promise is not apparent to us even now. It has often been remarked that the Semitic race, whether Israel or Arab, is the most spiritually minded of the three great races of humankind. It is true that the Semitic race has given the world the three great monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And all three worship the same God. That fact is not always realised as it should be. The life's mission of Mahomet was to wean his fellow-Arabs away from their idolatrous worship of many gods and bring them to the one true God, and to Mahomet that God was the God of Israel of his day. The gap between Judaism and Islam is not very wide, and when the true relationship between the Father and the Son is understood, not so very wide between Christianity and Islam either. And Father Abraham is a prophet to all three. Abraham could not of necessity foresee anything of all this, but he must have had plenty to think about during those quiet times at Hebron, and wondering perhaps what further revelations of the Divine Will were yet to be made to him.

(To be continued.)

Preaching and Teaching

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.

CALL TO HOLINESS

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet. 2.9).

Peter had been in darkness until Jesus came. He was a Galilean and Matthew wrote. . . *"Galilee of the Gentiles – the people living in darkness have seen a great light."* (Matt. 4.16, Isa. 9.2). No matter how well Peter tried to keep the Law as a Jew, he needed to be called out of darkness. It was a darkness of human prejudice, of meanness of spirit and of unwillingness to see any possible goodness in the peoples of the nations around him. It took Peter a long time to be totally rid of that darkness. Nor was he alone, for the barriers which people erect around their own little group take a long time to be demolished by the Spirit of God. Labels which are stuck on to other people take a great deal of removal.

When Peter heard the Lord talking about clean and unclean practices and what goes into the mouth and what comes out of it, (Mark 7) he could never have imagined the possibilities of those words. A few years later he was sitting on the roof of a house in Joppa when he had a vision. It might have reminded him of the words of our Lord by Galilee. Peter traditionally was at Mark's elbow when the younger man wrote his gospel. In Mark 7.19 there is a brief word of explanation by the writer – *"In saying this Jesus declared all foods 'clean'."*

Peter was praying on the flat roof in the seaport of Joppa. Out at sea he might have seen the billowing sails of the ships. He saw in his vision, let down in a kind of sail cloth, all kinds of animals, some 'clean' and some 'unclean'. A voice told him to kill and eat but he refused. He recognised the voice of the Lord, yet twice more he refused saying that he had never eaten anything that was 'unclean'. The unclean condition had nothing to do with hygiene. These were animals which were pronounced by the Law as unholy, unfit for God's service as food.

The light which flooded Galilee and Judea from the son of God must shine into the hearts and lives of the Gentiles. It was Peter who was once more to launch forth into the deep. Until the day when Peter visited Cornelius at Caesarea, he regarded Gentiles as unclean and unholy and unfit for the presence of God (Acts 10). Peter had been on a journey visiting early Christian believers in Judea between Jerusalem and the Great Sea coast. He stopped at Lydda and healed a man called Aeneas.

Then he went on to Joppa and raised Tabitha from the dead. Finally, he stopped at the house of Simon who was a tanner by trade. (Acts 9). It was quite something for any respectable Jew to stay in the house of a man who earned his living from handling animal carcasses. After the vision he went a step further and invited some Gentiles to sleep under the same roof. Next he went up country with these men to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. Jews did not enter the Roman city if they could help it. They certainly did not enter the house of a pagan to stay and eat there. When he arrived back in Jerusalem eventually, the Christian church there was aghast at the thought that he actually ate with those uncircumcised heathen (Acts 11).

Peter made it clear to the brethren in Jerusalem that not only did he have fellowship with these Gentiles and declare the Gospel to them but the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them, just as it had been on the first disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Later Peter was to write *"... chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood"* (1 Pet. 1.2).

The language that Peter uses in his letter shows he had discovered that the privileges which had been the prerogative of Jewish priesthood were now for all disciples of the Lord Jesus. Privileges which once belonged only to Israel now could be enjoyed by all of any nation who would accept Jesus as their Saviour and give their hearts to him. The writer to the Hebrews takes our minds back to the tabernacle ritual and the consecration of the High Priest who alone was allowed to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. Here the greater High Priest had entered the Most Holy with his own blood and produced a real atonement for the sin of the people.

Now all priests were allowed to enter the sanctuary and stand before the presence of God. *"... brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water"* (Heb. 10. 19-21).

In a sense the picture is carried a stage further by Paul's words at the beginning of chapter 12 in his

letter to the Romans. Paul uses very serious language relating to the priestly service. It is the presentation of our bodies as a holy sacrifice. Yet although those bodies are accepted as holy, in the next verse the apostle goes on to exhort the brethren "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity" (Phillips). These words of Paul clearly define two phases of sanctification. The first is the consecration of the life by God which makes it immediately acceptable to him. The second is the slow and sometime painful cleansing process, God does in our human lives.

Writing to the church at Ephesus (5.26) Paul says "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word*". The word 'cleansed' in this text is similar to the Greek word used in John 15.3 where Jesus speaks of branches being pruned or purged. The cleansing agent for members of the Church which are the branches in the vine is the Word of God. By an intelligent reading of the Bible and resolute application of its teachings in the life, the Word of God does cleanse slowly but surely, those things which are 'spots and wrinkles' and cause us so much pain. That they are in our flesh there can be no denial (1 John 1.8) and to do so would be self-deception. But the previous verse makes it clear that we may be cleansed through Jesus' blood. The word, retained in our memories through the Holy Spirit, is ready for use to combat the enemies within. To change the analogy it is like the probing scalpel of a surgeon or High Priest.

The ultimate picture of holiness is given in the chapters in the Corinthian letter where this study began (2 Cor. 6.16). "*For we are the temple of the living God.*" Paul is contrasting the possibility of becoming the temple of idols. The world worships the things that it most prizes. These cannot be allowed dominance in the minds of God's people. They can be a polluting influence. Modern media in press and television carry many things which Jesus would not approve of were He sitting beside us. If they are allowed to remain in the innermost recesses of our mind, controlling our thinking and thence our speech and actions, they will be the moulding force in our lives to shape us according to their pattern and not the "pattern seen in the holy mount"—that of Jesus Christ the holy one of God.

We are stewards of God's dwelling place. It is

vital, as we read the Word of God and consider the things which occupy our attention, that we remove that which clutters up God's Temple. Rigorous treatment is demanded, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to repair and restore God's work in our lives. This is not just a matter of worldly activities or reading. Sometimes they would have been more spiritually healthy than the tortuous and bitter arguments of former days within the Church. There have been meetings and services among the Lord's people since the days of the Corinthian church, until this day, which have not been holy.

The purest and loveliest souls among the Lord's people have followed their Master into the poorest homes and chatted with those considered to be the worst in the social order. Jesus was filled with the Spirit, not with the wine of his hosts. He was spiritually strong and could not be pulled down, but He lifted many up. Before we can reach such souls, we too must broken at the foot of the Cross.

We are only fit as the dwelling place of the Most High if we permanently recognise our need of him in lowliness of heart. We need to accept God's discipline, for it is by that means we share his holiness (Heb. 12. 10). That discipline is often given by the experiences of life which are too easily resented. It may be by the word of a brother or sister in the Lord, it may be by a colleague or acquaintance; but we must beware of resenting God's hand of discipline. "... *without holiness no one will see the Lord.*" (v.14). The word 'purity' of Matt. 5.9 "*Blessed are the pure in heart*", and the cleansing of John 15.2 "*and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes*" are connected with that characteristic which Jesus so much admired, "*without hypocrisy*", a character without guile. Only contrition before the Lord can reach that standard. We must allow his searching love to root out every kind of bitterness which would spoil our fellowship with him. He only wants the best for us. This is not the case of an Old Testament High Priest, nor a law court judge, not even a twentieth century 'big brother' looking over our shoulder to see what we are doing wrong. Jesus is our Saviour who loved us so much that He died for us. He is our bridegroom who loves more than any earthly spouse. When Peter committed the sin of denying the Lord there is no record of Jesus' recriminations over the event; no record that He spent an hour "tearing strips" off the fallen disciple to humiliate him. Jesus looked at Simon and the strong fisherman melted into tears. We need to do just that sometimes.

In nearly all of Paul's letters he writes to the

'saints'. For the apostle it was another way of addressing all the believers in Christ Jesus. All who have given their hearts to the Lord and accepted him as their Saviour, whose lives have been consecrated by God for his service in the 'perfecting' of the Lord's disciples, they are the saints, the Holy Ones of God. These are not special disciples. They have no particular recognition from the Church. They are those in whom God lives. First impressions of such may be rather misleading. They may appear to be very ordinary folk and quite unprepossessing by the world's standards of 'goodness'. Paul once wrote "*The Lord knows those who are his*" (2 Tim. 2.19). They are words which probably go far back into the history of God's people, perhaps so far as Israel's wanderings in the desert. They are words which give everlasting comfort to those who seek to bear the holy

image of the Master. They are words which ignore the boundaries and barriers of human invention which divide and separate God's people. They are words which carry a responsibility too for those that are Christ's must bear the pure light of his face to a dark world. These are the ones described as "Blessed and holy" and who will be priests of God and of Christ (Rev. 20.6).

Earlier in that same second letter to the Corinthians, Paul had described how it was possible for the unholy children of men to reach that sublime condition in God's presence. In this present time they "reflect the Lord's glory . . . being transformed into his likeness". When plants such as vines grow and produce fruit they soak up the sunshine. We must not allow any cloud or shadow to come between us and the Sun of Righteousness. Then we shall live in true holiness.

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." (John 15: 8).

In our endeavour to bring forth fruit to his praise, let us bear in mind the old illustration of the wild rose stock into which you have grafted a choice rose. In due time you know that you will have beautiful roses, but you know, too, that there is a tendency for the old stock to send out shoots, and if you allow it to do that you will have nothing but wild roses from the old stem. The gardener, therefore, every time he sees a shoot coming from the old stem, takes a sharp knife and cuts it off. So let us, by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body, that we may live and produce fruit to the glory of God.

* * *

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint. *Isaiah 40:31*

Walking increases our vision, so we faint not. Running increases our progress, so we are not weary. Flying increases our elevation, away from the bonds of earth to wait upon the Lord. In the natural realm, walking is ordinary, running is sometimes difficult, flying is impossible. The Lord, however, gives us strength for the mundane, the challenge, and, to us, the impossible. *W. J. Pell*

Do you walk the streets with seeing eyes? Do you scan the faces of those you meet? Do you see care written large on every countenance, the wrinkled brow, the furtive look, the gripping teeth, the pursing lips, the hurried walk? What does it all mean? Tension, really hyper-tension; life's fitful fever, speed, hurry, getting there! Some to attain money and honour, others to hold their jobs.

That lack of ease—dis-ease, can invade our other world too. The fight within, without, may be so grim that we cannot relax. It keys us up too much, like a string tuned up above pitch, and we get spiritual wrinkles, gripping teeth and pursing lips. We cannot rest, we cannot break the tension, we must be doing.

Nerve doctors say there is a knack in releasing this condition that might be likened to an overwound spring. It is nothing more than reclining, and letting the limbs fall as dead; the arms, legs, body, and head, until the chair carries the weight. It is not a matter of doing something to break the tension, it is not doing; that is all, but when it comes about it is rest, refreshing rest. So with the tired, over-tense spirit, when it is allowed to become "dead" in Jesus. "*I will give you rest.*"

THE BINDING OF SATAN

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that ancient serpent, which is the devil, Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more" (Rev. 20: 1-3)

This 20th chapter of Revelation pictures the work of the Millennial Age, when the Lord Christ is the acknowledged ruler of this earth and all its peoples are to be made fully conversant with the Divine standards of life and enjoy the opportunity to make their momentous choice, for good or evil, for life or death. The decision is to be a personal one, and none will be able to say that powers of evil from outside have hindered or thwarted their desire to be converted and find reconciliation with God. In that Age a man will die only for his own sin, only because, with full knowledge and ability to choose and practice that which is right in God's sight, he nevertheless elects to remain evil for the love of it. Hence this picture in these few verses, drawn to delineate the suppression of the power of external evil so that it can no longer adversely influence or affect men against their will. In that Age it is to be true that *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 65:25) In order to accomplish that end it is obvious that the Devil himself, the Archangel of all evil must be deprived of his power to instil evil and sin into the hearts and actions of men, and this essential preliminary to the work of the Millennial Age logically introduces this 20th chapter.

The literal personality of the Devil is not always accepted nowadays; many feel that the Scripture references to Satan and Satanic power can be well understood as allusions to the presence and influence of evil in an abstract sense over humanity. There is no doubt, however, that the New Testament writers believed in Satan as a powerful celestial being in a state of open rebellion against God, directly responsible for the introduction of evil into the world at the beginning, for its promotion and development throughout human history, by Divine permission, and destined for ultimate destruction when it has been abundantly demonstrated that he remains unrepentant and unregenerate to the last. It is true that Origen in the 2nd century claimed that not only all mankind, but eventually the Devil himself, will succumb to the drawing power of Christ and so become reconciled and attain eternal life, but it cannot be denied

that at least three of the inspired writers—John, Isaiah and Ezekiel—foresee the irrevocable extinction of the personal Satan with the passing of evil from the Divine creation.

The background is this world at the time during the course of the Second Advent when the Lord Christ, having already resurrected his Church to be associated with him in his Millennial work, has broken the power of those of earth's forces which have stood in opposition to his assumption of power. Included in these forces are all those institutions of men which are in themselves evil and have oppressed the sons of men. Under symbols of the "beast", the "false prophet", the "kings of the earth", in chapter 19, these are pictured as drawn up in battle array to contend with the Rider on the White Horse from Heaven—the Lord Christ in martial guise—and they all are defeated and destroyed, their destruction being symbolised by the fiery lake. Only the dragon remains, and this 20th chapter identifies this dragon of Revelation with the serpent of Eden and Satan the destroyer, thus completing the identification. The lesser evil powers having been dealt with, and the time having come for the resurrection of all the dead to experience the call to conversion and life of the new Age, it remains to deal with Satan so that the last hindering influence is removed. Hence the angel descending from heaven with a great chain in his hand is another representation of our Lord at his Second Advent, specifically as respects that aspect which has to do with the restraint of the Evil One.

This "binding of Satan", that he should "deceive the nations no more", presupposes that he has possessed and exercised the power to deceive men and instil evil thoughts and influences into their minds during the present and past spans of human history and this supposition is confirmed by our Lord's reference to him as the "prince of this world" and Paul's "the god of this world". (Jno. 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4). It is this power and freedom which will be taken from Satan throughout the whole period of the Millennium and this constitutes his "binding". His personal freedom of movement, so to speak will not be limited any more than will be the personal freedom of evilly disposed men on earth during that Age, but he will be powerless to reach men's minds in any way. This same prohibition will of course apply to men themselves; none will be prevented from thinking evil thoughts or harbouring evil desires and intentions, but the

power to inflict evil or harm, physical, mental or moral, upon others, will be lost. We do not know how Divine power will be exercised here in a fashion of which we have little, if any, conception today, but it will be true that although a man may formulate an intention to do evil to another he will find himself physically and mentally unable to put that intention into effect. That restraint will operate throughout the Millennial Age.

A glance at daily events shows that the binding of Satan has not yet taken place and is not yet even in progress. The powers of evil have greater control today in earth's affairs than at any past time. Many of the devices and acts of certain classes of men are characterised by a cold blooded ferocity and disregard for human suffering which can quite literally be said to be devil-inspired. The fearful experiences through which so many of earth's people must pass today are evidences that the archangel of evil is still the god of this world and that his subjects still render him service. The entire setting of the passage which tells of this "binding" indicates that it takes place concurrently with the outward assumption of authority by the Lord Christ in the sight of all mankind, when the law of the Lord goes forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2.3) and after the power and influence of all earthly evil institutions and forces has been broken and destroyed. That point in history will be the true commencement of the Millennium.

The vision of Revelation 12, depicting a conflict between Michael the archangel and the dragon, culminating in the dragon being expelled from heaven and thrown down to earth, is sometimes claimed to be connected with the "binding of Satan" but this is not so. In Rev. 12 the dragon, after being dealt with by Michael, is in no sense bound, but very much alive and active, and remains so to the end of the chapter. The interpretation of this particular symbolic presentation has to be sought in the realm of past history, of the relation and inter-action between, first, Judaism, from which came Christ the man-child, and Roman paganism and the emerging organised Christian power which ultimately overthrew and succeeded paganism. It certainly does not apply to any aspect of the Second Advent.

God is omnipotent. *"He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psa. 33.9) His ends are achieved by means of orderly development, and He permits the continuance of evil up to a pre-determined limit for a wise purpose, yet when his time to act against evil and evil-doers has

come, none can resist his will. He brought the evil of the antediluvian world to an end without calling upon the help of Noah. He destroyed the Cities of the Plain without any assistance from Lot. When the hosts of evil converge upon the Holy Land in the last great day of this Age it will be God himself, alone, who will act. As it was in the days of Jehoshaphat and the Moabites *"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle—for the battle is not yours, but God's"* (2 Chron. 20. 15-47), so with the binding of Satan. Divine power will operate from heaven to end, in one moment of time, every scrap of power and influence Satan may possess over man and spirit.

One may begin to wonder at this point just what is the attitude of Satan himself to all this. How does he regard this already well-publicised picture of his approaching doom? After a very successful career of crime, what, if any, preparation is he likely to make to resist any threat to the continuance of his present activities? What, if any, resistance can he offer to the omnipotent power of God? Is there any likelihood that Origen was right after all, and that eventually the Devil will abandon his evil ways and embrace righteousness? In the face of the positive statements of Scripture above referred to this would not seem likely. What perhaps is more probable is that in fact Satan, a fallen being separated from God by millenniums of sin, does not really believe in his heart that the threatened fate will ever materialise. The position is much the same with many of mankind. Men today, in general, do not really believe in God. They have lost their knowledge of him, and with that vital belief in his power or interest in them. "If there is a God, he either does not care or has no power to put right things that are wrong in this world!" That sentiment fairly expresses the considered judgment of the natural man who has been separated from God by sin from the beginning. Yet in that beginning man knew God, walked with God, talked with God; that is clear from the Genesis story. The difference has been effected by sin. It is reasonable to think that the same principle can hold good in the case of Satan. He also had the privilege of knowing God, walking with him, talking with him, and appreciating his power. He embraced sin, and since nothing that is of sin can stand in the Divine Presence, he too from that moment must have been banished, separated from God just as truly as was Adam. Would it be surprising, therefore, if Satan, blinded by his own sin, concludes that after all this time God is evidently unable to complete his designs, and that

sin can continue indefinitely on its apparently successful course.

If this hypothesis be well founded, the great enemy of man will continue busily with his plans, waging war against all that is holy and true and lovely upon earth, unbelieving until the hour has struck. In the heyday of his dominion, attendant angels carrying out his dark orders, the cry of his suffering prisoners going up to heaven, his power will vanish as one snaps off the electric light. Suddenly he will find himself bereft of power, of influence, of servants, of an empire—alone. Too late, he will realise that the onnipotence of God has waited for this moment, and that his long course of rebellion against his Creator, with all its terrible consequences for mankind, has ended.

Can one picture that lonely spirit through all the thousand years of earth's jubilee? Free to roam through the vast spaces of God's creation, free to observe, to meditate, to scheme, but powerless to affect or influence in any way the mind or the heart of the weakest or humblest of God's creatures. Seeing all, hearing all, unable to interfere, the seal of Divine authority marks him out and sets him apart like Cain, an outcast, an exile, one upon whom is the judgment of God. He may translate himself out of our material universe into that spiritual sphere which is beyond the scope of human sense or understanding, and wander through the celestial land as alone and remote from the presence of God as when he presided over

earth's destinies. He may come back into our world of time and space to find the thousand years of restitution still in progress, but wherever he goes and whatever he does, Satan will be bound, altogether unable to interfere further in the plans of God for his creation.

Of his being "loosed out of his prison" at the end of the thousand years, as stated in Rev. 20.7, it is necessary to speak guardedly, for this is the only Scriptural reference to this aspect of the subject and the words are vague and obscure. It is difficult to think that any of humanity, after all the experience with good that they have had under the Millennial reign, would again fall for Satan's blandishments. Perhaps it is intended as an opportunity for him to demonstrate whether, after all that he has seen, he may yet, at the eleventh hour, repent of his evil deeds. If the prophetic Scriptures are to be taken literally, there is no repentance, no turning again, nothing but an irrevocable determination to fight against God. Perhaps, even then, he does not really believe that "the wages of sin is death". Once, a long time ago, in the beginning, he deceived Eve, saying "ye shall not surely die"; can it be that at the end he deceives himself? At any rate, if that should be his determination, in the face of all that he knows of the goodness and love of God, then there can be only one possible sequel. "*I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more.*" (Ezek. 28. 18-19).

Christ the Centre

As the sun is the centre of our solar system, so Christ is the Christian's sun and centre of desire. As gravitation holds the planets in their proper orbits, so love holds the trusting heart in the pathway of willing obedience. As in completing the solar circuit, the earth receives the pleasing variety of seasons adapted to beauty and health, and to promote all organic life, so in our loving service of Christ, there is a pleasing and useful variety of gracious and profitable experiences. Sometimes fierce storms sweep across our pathway to drive us into the shelter of his promised grace. Sometimes the cold repulsiveness of the world's unbelief and sin chills us like a winter's blast, driving us to the central, steady sunlight of a Saviour's constant love, causing springtime to burst forth in the Christian's heart, and bursting buds of developing faith and love to expand into the fruits of Christian

grace. But there is no winter in the sun, and he who has the Sun of Righteousness in his heart will have constantly the springtime of his abiding love.

* * *

There is much that is disappointing and saddening and unsatisfactory in our daily lives and it is easy to let the mind dwell on the future glories that are promised the faithful ones and hope fervently for their speedy coming. But the world also is groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and their distress is far greater than ours, for they have not the hope that we have, no knowledge or expectation of future deliverance, nothing but a dull despair that sees no avenue of escape from the oppression of this world's evil.

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

4. Apostasy from Heaven

The world of man was fifteen hundred years old, and Adam had been dead for nearly six hundred years. The community of mankind sprung from him now numbered perhaps twenty-five thousand, reaching down to the generation of Methuselah, now more than three hundred years old, and the successive families must by now have been spreading outwards along the four rivers of Eden to find living space. The translation of Enoch was thirteen years in the past and if there is any kernel of truth in the Jewish legendary stories related in the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees about his activities with the rebellious angels, this would be the time. It is interesting to perceive that this is the period when the population began noticeably to increase. This twenty-five thousand was to become well over a hundred and twenty-five in the next three hundred years, which fits in with Gen. 6. 1. and here has to be related the story of the "*Angels that sinned*" of Jude 6, and the "*angels that kept not their first estate*" of 1. Pet. 3. 20. That story is so apparently bizarre that modern expositors can perhaps be excused for refusing to credit it, but that is only because in the main they have not advanced beyond the 16th century conception of angels, disembodied spirits wearing a material white robe and furnished with a pair of very material wings wherewith to fly from the celestial regions to earth. Modern knowledge coupled with an up-to-date and exhaustive study of the Bible text warrants a very different conception of the subject. The story as related in Gen. 6 is that when mankind began noticeably to increase in the earth some of the "sons of God", the angels, assumed human form and took wives of "the daughters of men", producing in consequence a race of quasi-human beings whose conduct instituted a reign of terror in the earth and, in conjunction with the increasing lawlessness of mankind, led the Almighty eventually to destroy the entire community in the great Flood and start again. Says the narrator "*and it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose.....There were "nephilim" in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown*" (Gen. 6, 1-4), This latter verse gave the A.V. translators a lot of trouble, "*Nephilim*" was

rendered "giants" from the Septuagint which had rendered "*nephilim*" *gigantos*, our *gigantic*. "Also after that" is more accurately rendered by the intensive "indeed", followed by the deonstrative "afterwards" so that the verse is better rendered "*the nephilim were in the earth in those days, and indeed afterwards, whenever the sons of God went into the daughters of men, and they bare to them gibborim (mighty ones) which were of olden times, the renowned ones*". The "*nephilim*" were the quasi-human progeny of the angels and their human wives. How could such a thing be?

According to the Bible, the ancients were more accustomed to the visits of angelic beings from the celestial world than is the case to-day. In all instances—some forty or so in the Scriptures—they appeared sometimes as radiantly glorious beings, more often as an ordinary everyday man arrayed in the usual garments of the particular period. The one who appeared to Joshua did so as a military commander with a drawn sword in his hand; the three whom Abraham accosted at Hebron as travelling wayfarers. The assumption by these latter of human form was such that they could partake of a hearty meal of roast lamb before proceeding on their way. Although it is clear that the angelic creation exists and is adapted to a world fundamentally different from this terrestrial world the evidences are that in order to become perceptible to, and to deal with, human beings in this world they must as it were leave that world and transform themselves temporarily into beings adapted to this world—almost as if they had to change their wavelength, to use a strictly modern term. Our Lord after his resurrection and before his ascension appeared as a gardener to Mary, a stranger to the two on the way to Emmaus, and so on. It follows then that if angels from heaven did indeed take human women as wives they did so with all the powers and attributes of human beings themselves. If God created the body of Adam from the atoms of which all terrestrial substances are composed; if Jesus could produce fish, bread and wine in the same manner, it is logical to visualise angelic beings present on earth for the execution of some definite commission appearing among men and making use of the same powers as did their compatriots in Bible history. Why were they present on earth at all? Genesis states the fact but gives no hint as to the reason. According to the Book of Enoch, recounting legends current among

the Jews, they were sent by the Lord to teach men the useful arts such as metallurgy and agriculture, and the sciences such as astronomy. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there any hint that they were commissioned for such purposes. If the Book of Jubilees statement that it was in the days of Jared that they came to earth is worth anything it is perhaps just a coincidence that this is the time of Tubal and Jubal of the line of Cain, who are said to have been the first to practice metallurgy and develop musical instruments. It is true also that Berosus, the Babylonian priest-historian of 275 B.C., recorded the ancient tradition that in antediluvian times supernatural beings came up out of the sea to teach men the arts and sciences and the origin and nature of the universe, "and since then" said he "nothing new had been discovered". It is probably justifiable to conclude that if they were on earth at all, it must have been for a purpose beneficent to humanity and they came as the messengers of God, perfect and sinless—once here they renounced their allegiance, and embarked on a course of conduct alien to their commission, a course which ended in disaster.

The New Testament confirms this. Jude calls them "*the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation . . .*" (Jude 6). The fixed opinion of First century Jewry and Christianity alike, and the contemporary historian Flavius Josephus and theologian Philo of Alexandria, was that such an event did indeed happen in the days before the Flood and gave rise to the Genesis account and the related legends.

What was the object? To think that life on earth in the company of degenerate and dying women, no matter how beautiful, could be attractive to angels accustomed to an infinitely more glorious environment "beyond the stars" has only to be suggested in order immediately to be rejected. To abandon their own world with its powers and possibilities, unknown to us, but admittedly infinitely greater and more glorious than anything on this sin-cursed earth, with presumably an eternal succession of dying wives, was surely not likely to be an attraction worthy of the consequent alienation from God.

It is possible that the motive behind this action on the part of the angels was not self-indulgence, but rather meritorious in its impulse, and it turned out disastrous because of the angels' own measurable ignorance of the position. That the angels do not have all knowledge is indicated by several Scriptures even though they are of a higher order than humans. Suppose in their state of

incomplete knowledge of the situation they conceived a plan by which they could help the Almighty remedy the disaster of Eden and infuse new life into the dying human race. They must have known of the Divine promise in Eden that in a future day the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3. 15), that the serpent, temporally triumphant at having seduced the first human pair into rebellion and therefore death, would eventually be defeated and the original everlasting life restored to man. They themselves, the angels, possessed that enduring life. Suppose they could find a way of infusing that enduring life into the human race? That surely would be a good thing in the eyes of the Almighty.

Something like this could perhaps be suggested by the origin of the term *nephilim*, by which the Hebrew historian knew the progeny of the angels. Modern commentators usually say the word is derived from the Hebrew and Arabic verb *naphal*, to fall or to drop, and so, "fallen ones". In the Old Testament and in the Talmud *naphal* is used of a premature birth or an abortion, as in Job. 3. 16, Psa. 58. 8 and Eccl. 6. 3, for example. The later legends surrounding the name might well justify the description of monsters, or abortions. Nevertheless this is one example of a common fallacy associated with every attempt to explain the meaning of Biblical proper names. When men first coined this name there was no Hebrew language, nor for more than two thousand years thereafter. Whatever the meaning or derivation of the name, it must have had its meaning in the language of the antediluvians and no one knows the nature of that primitive tongue; the nearest one can get to it are the archaic Sumerian and Akkadian, about 2500 B.C., in the days of Eber. There is plenty of evidence that the story of antediluvian times existed in written form at that date.

It is possible that the word comes from the akkadian *napistu-ilu*, which in that form means life-breath of God. If this appeared in the original account, when it came to be translated into Hebrew a thousand years later it would become *nephesh-elohim*, which in ordinary speech would merge into *nephilim* or *neph-ilim*.

If this hypothesis can be held to be reasonable then the story becomes lucid. All men without exception were dying and would die, primarily because of Adam's sin by virtue of which he could only pass imperfect dying life to his descendants. The New Testament is adamant about that. All men die in Adam. The New Testament makes clear that Christ, the resurrected Christ, can and

will give eternal life, undying life, to all of Adam's race who at any time will renounce sin and accept him as Redeemer. But there was no New Testament in the days before the Flood. Did those angels, knowing that in themselves reposed undying life, reason that by infusing that life into the human race they could create future generations which, freed on that account from the death which is the common lot of all men, might succeed where Adam had failed?

It must have appeared workable, and surely the Lord God who had sent them to earth to help and instruct mankind would approve so laudable an object. They could create a race of super-men who would transform mankind. After all, leading scientists today are trying to do much the same kind of thing in what they call genetic engineering and could unwittingly, as did those angels, bring about a similar disaster. For disaster it was, whatever their motives. There was an unknown factor in the matter which nullified all that they were trying to do.

For when those women, whether willingly or unwillingly, had given birth to these children and they began to grow to man's estate, instead of being models of uprightness leading man in the paths of righteousness, they turned out to be monsters of cruelty of whom men went in terror. The language in Genesis is very restrained; it only says that they were mighty men of renown. It was an evil renown. The apocryphal books of the centuries just before Christ came preserve the memory of those times. *"They consumed all the acquisitions of men, and when men could no longer sustain them, the nephilim turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds and beasts and reptiles and fish, and to devour one another's flesh and drink the blood"* (1 Enoch 7. 3,-5). *"And the women have born nephilim, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness"* (1 Enoch 9.9). The book of Jubilees describes how they *"took themselves wives of all which they chose, and they begat sons the nephilim and they were different and they devoured*

one another" (Jub. 7. 21). In consequence *"lawlessness increased on the earth, and all flesh corrupted its way, alike men and cattle and beasts and birds and everything that walketh on the earth, all of them corrupted their ways, and their orders, and they began to devour each other,.....and every imagination of the thoughts of all men was thus evil continually"* (Jub. 5.20).

Had the angels grievously erred? Is it that the Lord in creating man implanted something which differentiated man from the entire animal creation of earth, something above the purely physical and instinctive, something which gave him the qualities of reverence for and loyalty to his Creator, of distinguishing right from wrong and deliberately choosing one or the other? Was it that the angels did not know this, and all they succeeded in doing was to produce a race of creatures which had the form of human beings but the mentality and instincts of ravening animals. If the traditions recounted in Enoch and Jubilees have any basis of truth stemming from ancient times such hypothesis well fits the description. Did the angels succeed only in fathering sons who were complete and probably very impressive biological specimens of humanity, but in actual fact were brutish and savage animals which followed the laws of their nature by ravaging and devouring as the accounts say they did.

According to the traditions it was during the lifetimes of Jared and his son Enoch that this condition of things upon earth began. That was about seven centuries before the Flood and only six after the death of Adam. In that case this terrible oppression persisted for seven hundred years through the times of Jared to Noah and probably two more unnamed generations before the Lord acted to remove it by means of the Flood. One wonders why He waited so long. It was only in the generation of Noah that He declared the world of man was so utterly corrupt that there was only one way out. And even Noah had to be six hundred years old before deliverance came.

To be continued.

Let this then be our resolve, that, casting aside all that makes for disunity and unbrotherliness, and scrupulously respecting each other's convictions in those matters of our faith and practice which do not violate the fundamentals of the faith, remembering that as servants we stand or fall to

our own Master, we may become a community united in our fellowship, persuaded of the truth of our message, possessed with a sense of the urgency of the times in which we live and the imminence of the Kingdom.

A PATH THAT NO FOWL KNOWETH

A Study in Job 28. 1-11

The Book of Job excels in descriptions of the virtues of Divine Wisdom. "*Where shall wisdom be found? The depth saith 'It is not in me'. . . but unto man God saith 'Behold the reverence of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'*" (Job 28. 28). It is in the development of that theme that Job prefaces his picture of the search for wisdom with a natural illustration which must have been familiar to all of his hearers—a description of man's quest for mineral treasures below the surface of the earth. Job's description of a miner at work in his own day is a fine piece of literature.

It is not merely as literature, however, that we look upon this passage. The Bible is much more than an anthology of the world's finest writings. It is a book of instruction for the man of God, and every one of its chapters has been set in its place by the overruling providence of the Holy Spirit, to the intent that teaching, exhortation and encouragement may be given to those who in every age have sought to know God's ways. Even so prosaic a subject as a day in the life of a Sinai copper miner has been transformed by the inspired tongue of this man of God into a vivid illustration of the search for the Divine wisdom, and an analogy with the salient features of the Divine Plan, the embodiment of that wisdom.

The passage in question is Job 28. 1-11. It is primarily descriptive of the art of mining as carried out in Job's own day and betokens his own close acquaintance with the details. As he reflects aloud on the ardour with which men search underground for metals and precious stones whereby to serve and enrich the life of man, he directs the mind to that parallel search "in the dark places of the earth" for the wisdom that will eventually make men like gods, "knowing good and evil". There is a striking contrast here between the attitude of the first human pair, who sought to obtain that knowledge by the easy way of self-indulgence, and failed, and this conception advanced by Job in which Divine knowledge and wisdom can be attained by men, but only at the cost of great suffering and hardship—perfection coming through suffering, as in the New Testament setting, "*through much tribulation shall ye enter the Kingdom*". (Acts 14. 22).

Job commences his parable by alluding to the known fact that the valuable metals—silver, gold,

iron and copper—could be obtained only by sinking mines in the mountains and rocky places of the earth. He goes on to describe how men take no heed of the darkness of their mine workings, how they sink a shaft and are let down by ropes, swinging to and fro until they reach the bottom; how that the birds and animals of the earth will not venture into such places, but the intrepid miner, burrowing his tunnels under the very mountains themselves, restraining and leading off the waters that break out and would flood the workings, diligently seeks and finds the precious objects of his quest. So he comes out again into the light, enriched with his discoveries. So, says Job, is the lot of the man who has found Divine wisdom after the harrowing experiences of this world of sin and death.

The translators of the Authorised Version were academic scholars but not technically minded men, and when translating the Book of Job, a book which abounds in technical terms connected with the arts and sciences of the ancients, they were often uncertain or ignorant of the meanings of those terms. The A.V. renderings in the Book of Job often requires correction in the light of present-day knowledge. In such light read the patriarch's words, adapted from the A.V. with necessary corrections.

*For there is a mine for silver;
And a place for the refining of gold.
Iron is extracted out of the ore,
And copper is smelted out of the rock.*

*Man setteth an end to darkness.
And searcheth out to the farthest bound.
He hath sunken a shaft away from the
dwellings of men.*

*They have no support for the foot;
They hang down, far away from men
They swing to and fro.*

*Out of the earth cometh bread,
And underneath it is turned up—as it were fire!
Among its stones are found sapphires,
And it hath ore of gold.*

*That path no bird of prey knoweth!
Neither hath the vulture's eye seen it.
The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor hath the lion passed thereby.*

*He putteth forth his hand upon the red granite
And undermines the foundations of the
mountains*

*He excavates channels among the rocks
And restrains the streams that they trickle not,
His eyes discovereth every precious thing,
And the hidden things he brings forth to light.*

There is an indication of the date of the Book of Job in the first verse. The order of the four metals is in the order of the relative value at the time before the Exodus. Silver was extremely rare and therefore of more value than gold until after the entrance of Israel into the Promised Land, and iron was more valuable than copper. Not until the Phoenicians began to bring silver from Spain during the times of the Judges did gold become the more valuable metal. There is this indication that the passage is older than the Exodus or the time of Israel in Egypt.

Modern research has demonstrated the accuracy of Job's description. He speaks of iron and copper being smelted from the crude ore. The blast furnaces of Egypt are referred to in Deut. 4. 20, and remains of such furnaces dating back to the time of Abraham have been found in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Blast furnaces have been found in Cyprus almost identical in principle and construction with those built in the North of England during the 18th and 19th centuries. The description of the mine shaft in which men were let down standing in a loop of rope, or a crude box, swinging to and fro, with "no support for the foot" is true to life. Such shafts, up to three hundred feet deep, and four thousand years old, have been found in the Sinai mountains. But the Holy Spirit did not cause this description to be recorded for the light it sheds upon the industries of the ancients. It was preserved for the light it can shed upon the life of the man of God, and it is because Job, with his knowledge of God and his close communion with God, was able to frame his description in words which suggest deeper truths to our minds that we can linger over this chapter with profit.

Silver, gold, iron, copper and sapphires. These are the fruits of the seeker's activity. To obtain them he must separate himself from the world of men, tunnel a way through the darkness under every possible condition of toil and danger and fight against floods of waters which threaten to break through and overwhelm him. Dark and dismal is his lot, but he is at least shielded from the danger of wild beasts and birds of prey whilst he remains in the mine; they do not dare to penetrate the "secret place" in which he abides.

There are several analogies which may be drawn with this picture, but the one which comes most readily to the mind is that which applies familiar

Scriptural symbolism of the metals mentioned. Taken in harmony with the theme of the chapter, the search for wisdom, it presents a miniature picture of the Divine Plan. The first obligation laid upon one who renounces the world's interests and becomes a "co-worker together with God" is to seek Divine wisdom, the Truth from above—and silver is often used in the Scriptures as a symbol of that wisdom and truth. "*The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*" (Psa. 12. 6). "*The tongue of the just is as choice silver*" (Prov. 10. 20). "*If thou seekest her (wisdom) as silver*" (Prov. 2. 4). Just as the ancient miner went first for the silver, esteeming it as of more value than anything else, so do those that seek the Lord search for his truth, counting it as of supreme value to their lives and standing before him. From this receiving of heavenly wisdom, truth from above, into good and receptive minds, comes the understanding of Divine law which leads us so to walk before God that we may become partakers of the Divine nature (2 Peter 1. 4), symbolised by gold—another object of the miner's quest. The crude ore, as gathered from the mine, had to be completely crushed and the pure gold refined,—an apt picture of the crushing, fiery experiences which are necessary to us before the fine gold of the Divine nature can be revealed in us. But when at length that longed-for end has been achieved, comes the turn of the iron. Iron, too, is a symbol, a symbol of earthly things that are strong and unyielding, and in this connection an apt illustration of the strong, irresistible rule that is to be established upon earth after the "sons of God" of this Age have been clothed upon with the Divine nature and shone forth "*as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father*". (Matt. 13. 4), It is this event for which the world is waiting, as seen so clearly by Paul when he said "*the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God*" (Rom. 8. 19).

Even this strong rule of the coming Age cannot be set up without prior preparation and endurance. The strength of that kingdom lies in the fact that its rulers, its administrators, have all been previously tried in the fire and found worthy. Iron is weak and valueless until it has been smelted from its ore in a blast furnace, and then worked by rolling, forging and hammering until all its latent strength is brought out. So with the rule of the Messianic Age. Its force, its power, its authority, its very effectiveness, is not derived merely from an arbitrary decree of the Most High, but from the rigorous course of development and testing to

which its "princes" have been subjected. The "kings and priests" of that Age will have found their way to that position through the darkness of the mine workings and therefore the "iron" that they have produced is adequate to every demand that will be made upon it. The kingdom will not break in pieces like other kingdoms, but it shall stand for ever. (Dan. 2. 44).

So to the copper—familiar symbol of perfect humanity. Just as the silver of heavenly wisdom and truth results in the bestowment of the gold of Divine Nature upon the Church, so does the iron of Kingdom rule result in the copper of perfect human nature to mankind. The final fruitage of the miner's activities will be the "smelting of copper out of the rock". Men in the next Age will achieve perfection only through hard trial and endurance; that Age, pleasant and favourable in many aspects, will have its call to stern endeavour and endurance. Men must build strong characters and be able to stand for righteousness to all eternity. The copper must literally, in the words of Job, be melted out of the rock.

Thus is achieved the overspreading presence of God's majesty in all creation. "*The dwelling place of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and be their God*" (Rev. 21. 3). When all that hath breath shall praise the Lord, and every tongue in heaven and on earth gives honour and glory and blessing to him that sitteth upon the throne, for ever and ever (Rev. 5. 13) then indeed will the miners of this Age have extracted the last treasure from the earth. Perhaps Job was guided by the Holy Spirit when, of all the dozen or so precious stones mined by the ancients he chose for mention "among its stones are found sapphires". Sapphires are pre-eminently stones of faithfulness which guarantees that as truly as God lives, all the earth shall be filled with his glory. "*I will lay thy foundations with sapphires*", He says to Zion

(Isa. 59. 11). There was under his feet, when He appeared in vision to the elders of Israel in the days of Moses, a "paved work of a sapphire stone" (Exod. 24. 10). When later on, Ezekiel also saw him in vision, there was "an appearance as a sapphire stone" (Ezek. 1.26). So it will be when God at last appears to men in the accomplishment of his plans; his faithfulness will be manifest; there will be a sapphire stone "as the body of heaven in clearness" (Exod. 24. 10).

Let the miners, then, go on in all diligence, seeking precious treasure. The enemies of God and righteousness, the birds of prey and the fierce lions, will not be able to harm them as they go about their work, for such do not know the path. The vulture's eye does not see it, the wild beasts do not tread it and the fierce lion dare not enter, "*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty . . . there shall no evil come nigh thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling*" (Psa. 91. 1. 10). That is the promise; whilst we are doing the work of God, the Lord will preserve us from evil, and we shall come forth into the light of day bearing precious treasure for the world's salvation.

So do we challenge this world and all its might, fearing not to put our hands upon the solid granite rocks in faith that those rocks can be riven by the power of our God. So do we tunnel under the foundations of the mountains, taking from the very heart of the kingdoms of this world those things which shall be treasure indeed in the kingdom to come. So do we excavate channels among the rocks to entrap and lead off, to dam up and restrain the floods of error and opposition, of evil and unrighteousness. So we go on, in supreme confidence that it may be said of us, as was said of that unknown miner of long ago; "*his eyes discovereth every precious thing; and the hidden things he brings forth to light.*"

Prospect of Peace

"*In that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt into Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance*" (Isa. 19. 23-25).

A wonderful conclusion to the chapter; a picture of universal peace! Throughout Israel's history Assyria and Egypt were alternately at warfare with the nations around Israel, or with each other, marching and counter-marching across the fair

lands of Judah and Israel and ravaging wherever they went. The picture of a highway between the territories of these two great empires with the citizens of both passing and repassing upon their lawful business, must have seemed a very unlikely one, especially in the days of Isaiah, when Assyria and Egypt were locked in a death-grip which had to end with the crushing of one. But that is what Isaiah saw, a day when the contending factions of mankind would have resolved all their enmity and jealousy into that calm and quiet fraternity which is to be the hallmark of the next Age. The highways of that day will be the highways of peace, and war and violence will be no more.

ARMAGEDDON – MEANING OF THE WORD

Referring to the article "Armageddon" in the Nov/Dec 1992 issue, a reader suggests that the omission of the H (Arm . . . instead of Har . . .) makes the prefix mean "city" (Heb. Ar) rather than "mountain" (Har) and is more likely to mean "city of God" rather than the traditional "Mount of Destruction" usually favoured by commentators. The reader enquires if this justifies the thought taken in conjunction with the phrase "Behold, I come as a thief" in the context, that "Armageddon" refers to the gathering of the Church to her returned Lord rather than the gathering of the nations as is usually thought. This investigation is the outcome.

* * *

The A.V. "Armageddon" in Rev. 16. 16 is stated in that verse to be a Hebrew word. Commentators and theologians alike for centuries past have associated it with the ancient Canaanite town of Megiddo (still existing and now known as Leijun but still marked on some modern maps as Megiddo), close to the north side of the Carmel range of mountains not far from Haifa. This town commands the main road crossing the range used in ancient times by traders and hostile armies in the frequent wars between Egypt from the south and Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians from the north, hence its reputation. Barak fought Jabin king of Hazor there, Israelite kings Joram, Ahaziah, and Josiah died there. Commanding the pass over the mountains between the Plain of Esdraelon and the Judean lowlands, the area became the scene of military conflicts, not all of which are recorded in the O.T., hence the term "Mount of Destruction" usually given as the meaning of the name. This comes from the Hebrew "arm", to be high or lifted up, and "gadad" to break or crush in pieces, "arm-gadad" which is not much like "Armageddon" and may be thought by the critical to be a bit strained. Adding an H to make "har-magiddo" where "har" is the Hebrew "mountain" does nothing to improve the position since the Greek aspirate for H does not appear in Rev. 16. 16. and in addition there is a final N in the word in Revelation which does not exist in the town name Megiddo, mentioned eleven times in the O.T.

One similar word does occur in the O.T. Zechariah 12. 11 speaks of a great mourning in Israel at the Time of the End, when Israel will perceive and accept the returning Christ at his Second Advent, *"as the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon"*. Here is a

word similar in construction to that in Rev. 16. 16. The Douay Bible (English translation from the Latin) spells the name "Magedon" as does the Greek "Armagedon" of Rev. 16. 16. And that provokes the question: was John referring, not to the town of Megiddo in Israel, but to an annual event in Syria far to the north?

Throughout the Middle East, as far back as history and legend can be traced, there was an annual springtime commemoration of the death and resurrection of the Sumerian-Babylonian god Tammuz, Syrian name Adonis or Rimmon, son of the Most High God, who met an untimely end and went down into the world of the dead. At his going the sun darkened, the cattle died, crops and vegetation failed, and there was universal mourning. Then his betrothed, the goddess Inanna, Ishtar or Venus, followed him into that world to bring him back. Upon their return the sun came out and Nature was restored, to widespread rejoicing. (For details see *"The Mourning of Hadad-Rimmon"*, BSM Mar/Apr 1988). Every springtime the peoples of the Middle East observed a ceremonial lamentation lasting a week in memory of this (Ezek. 8. 14 *"women weeping for Tammuz"* refers to this observance even in Israel in his day).

In Phoenicia and Syria to the north of Israel the river Adonis in its spring floods runs red due to the red clay banks bordering its higher reaches. That, said they in those days, was the blood of the slain god and immediately the lamentation began. This was the "mourning of Hadad-Rimmon" of Zechariah, and this apparently is the basis of John's use of the word. A little thought may reveal the application.

Zechariah 12 refers to events occurring at the end of the Age when Israel is being re-established in her own land in face of the enmity of the whole world which is intent on destroying her. Concurrently with this, the conversion of Israel as a whole and their acceptance of Christ as their Messiah takes place. *"They shall look on me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as for an only son"*. Then in chaps 14 and 15 the Lord intervenes to save them, overthrow the forces of the world and set up his Millennial kingdom. John has the same vision; The "sixth seal" of Rev. 16. 12-16 pictures the gathering of the kings of the earth against the Lord and it also includes his *"coming as a thief"*—during his Second Presence, prior to his open revelation to the world—for the

purpose of gathering his Church, concurrently with the re-gathering of Israel and their conversion, and the gathering of the earthly powers to the final conflict. So three gatherings are progressing simultaneously, all pictured to John's mind by the vision of Zechariah.

John says *"a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armagedon* (Greek spelling). "Ar" is the Hebrew word for city, town, dwelling-place, place, derived from Sumerian "Uru", a walled place. (Cain built an "ar" a city, in AV but it was no more than a walled dwelling for his family). "Maged" is a Semitic word meaning to exceed in honour and glory, derived from "gagad", chief, noble. It comes originally from the Sumerian "magu", most noble. ("Rab-mag", twice in Jeremiah, "most noble chief", was the Babylonian official title of Nergal-Sharezzer, commander-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army besieging Jerusalem in 587 BC, and who ultimately became king of Babylon after the death of the latter's son and successor.) "Adon" is the Hebrew word for Lord,

the title of Adonis or Adonai. Hence Ar-magedon can stand for "place of the most noble lord" just as the Syrian title "Hadad-Rimmon" means "mighty lord". The "place of the most noble Adonis" was the valley of the river Adonis in Syria, the principal scene of the annual lamentation.

Did John then use the vision of Zechariah as the basis for his own vision of the gathering both of the forces of this world and those of the next for the "battle of the great day", during which the members of the Church are being translated to be with their Lord in the celestial world, Israel is re-gathered and converted, awaiting her final trial of faith, and the forces of this world gather together to face the forces of Heaven? Revelation 19 records the outcome, at the appearance of the Lord as the "Rider on a white horse", with his Church, come for the salvation of all men, even for those who so ignorantly oppose him. As the article which inspired this examination stressed, Armageddon includes both judgment and blessing — but the blessing triumphs!

The Eternity of God

God is an eternal Being. Then a thousand years with him are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. That is to say, a thousand years and one day are such inconsiderable measures of duration, that whatever disproportion they may have to each other, they appear to have none when compared to the duration of eternity. There is a great difference between one drop of water and the twenty thousand "baths" which were contained in that famous vessel in Solomon's temple, which, on account of its matter and capacity, was called a sea of brass; but this vessel itself, in comparison with the sea properly so called, was so small that when we compare all that it could contain, with the sea—one drop of water with the sea is as twenty thousand baths, and twenty thousand baths is as one drop of water. There is a great difference between the light of a taper and that of a flambeau; but expose both to the light of the sun, and their difference will be imperceptible. The light of the taper before

the sun is as the light of a flambeau, and the light of a flambeau as the light of a taper. In like manner, eternal duration is so great an object, that it causeth everything to disappear that can be compared with it: a thousand years are no more before it than one day. We minute creatures consider a day, an hour, a quarter of an hour, as a very little space in the course of our lives; we lose, without scruple, a day, an hour, a quarter of an hour; but we are very much to blame; for this day, this hour, this quarter of an hour, should we even live a whole age, would be a considerable portion of our lives. But God revolves, if I might venture to say so, in the immense space of eternity. Heap millions of ages upon millions of ages; add new millions to new millions: all this is nothing in comparison with the duration of an eternal Being. In this sense, a thousand years are but as one day, and one day as a thousand years.

(Selected from an old book).



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

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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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AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

The attention of all readers is directed to this announcement. The time has come for younger hands to take over much of the work of the BFU from those who have handled it for the past four or five decades. As from 1st January, 1994, the central address, to which all correspondence of a non-editorial nature should be directed, will leave Hounslow and be located at:—

BIBLE FELLOWSHIP UNION

4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone,

NOTTINGHAM, NG13 9JL, England.

Derrick Nadal of Barnstone has been appointed Secretary. Nicholas Charcharos of Tring succeeds Basile Dumont as Treasurer as from 1st January. Albert Hudson remains Editor of the Monthly and other publications. Basile Dumont remains a member of the Advisory Council. It is felt that these changes will enable the conduct of the Monthly to continue normally into the future. The Literature Stockroom and Circulation control is already centred at Nottingham, handled by a new team of helpers.

The Announcement is made this early since the Monthly takes seven weeks to reach the American continent and up to three months to Australia and the Far East, and it is desired that all readers be appraised in time for their letters to be correctly addressed. Any that are received at Hounslow after the end of this year will of course be sent on to the new centre at Nottingham although this will inevitably involve a little delay in handling.

NOTICES

"The Plan of God in Brief". This 100-page abbreviated version of the "Divine Plan of the Ages", first produced in 1922 and running through four English, two Swedish and one Hebrew edition, has now been re-printed in its eighth edition and is available on request. The B.B.I. in Australia and the P.B.I. in the U.S.A. are holding stocks and readers in Australia are requested to send their requests to the Berean Bible Institute, 1 Springfield Street, Briar Hill 3088, Victoria, Australia, and those in the U.S.A. and Canada to the Pastoral Bible Institute, 3802 James Street No. 67, Bellingham, WA 98226, U.S.A. For those in U.K. and other parts of the world, apply to Hounslow until 31st December, then to Nottingham. For those who do not know this book it may be said that it comprises a well-planned exposition of the Divine purpose for mankind.

* * *

Christian African Relief Trust, The June 1993 Newsletter relating to the work of this Trust is to hand and reveals a remarkable increase in the quantity of food and clothing sent to nine African countries consequent upon the financial support

of well-wishers, all being spontaneous free-will offerings. Following the old tradition of which most readers of the "Monthly" are aware, no appeals for money are made, on the principle that if our Lord wishes a certain work to be done He will inspire his people to make it possible. In consequence the last eighteen months has seen five thousand boxes of food and forty-five metric tonnes (forty British tons) of clothing despatched and carefully distributed by local ministers, pastors and other responsible Christian workers in the countries concerned. Readers interested in helping with gifts of good unwanted clothing etc or who would like to be kept in touch by means of the periodic Newsletter may contact the Secretary of the Trust, Mr. G. G. Tompkins, "Whitegates", Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, HD8 0LR.

* * *

5000Series Renewals. Readers in the 5000 series should find a pink renewal slip for 1994 in this issue and it will be appreciated if such will return same intact without delay signifying their wishes. Readers entered since June may ignore the slip.

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

5. The Flying Roll

Of all the strange visions of Zechariah perhaps that of the flying roll in chapter 5 is the most bizarre. The prophet looked toward the sky and perceived a giant roll, of the kind used in his day for the writing of books, a roll of either parchment or dressed goatskin—probably the latter—but of a size no ordinary roll had ever attained. Thirty feet long and fifteen feet across, it swooped down almost like a modern dive-bomber; as it swooped it entered into the houses of the wicked, destroying them with the force of its impact and by reason of the writings it contained—this much is implied though not stated—compelling the occupants to stand and be judged for their misdeeds and separated into the penitent and the impenitent . . . the scene changed and now the prophet beheld a large earthenware measure, a store jar, inside which crouched a woman prevented from emerging by reason of a heavy cover of lead. Even as he looked, two flying figures, women with the wings of storks, swooped down from the sky, laid hold of the jar, and flew away carrying it, so the watching prophet was told, into the land of Shinar, where it was to be permanently established. Strange pictures, flickering across his consciousness and without any attempt by the revealing angel at explanation. What did it all mean?

The key to the chapter is the flying roll itself. The angel said of it, in chapter 5. 3 *"this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth"*. The word rendered "curse" means, not only an execration or an imprecation, which is the usage of "curse" in English, but also an oath, and in this sense is associated with the Divine promises and covenants. Thus Deut. 29. 12 *"that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day"*. The "oath" between Abraham and Eliezer in connection with the latter's commission to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 29. 41) is another instance. Quite often the word appears in connection with Moses as the intermediary. The fact that this "flying roll" is shewn as meting out judgment upon the thieves and perjurers in verse 3, and destroying their houses in verse 4, is sufficient to indicate that the "curse" in this instance refers to the Divine oath, or promise, or covenant, and so the roll becomes the symbol of Divine righteousness or Divine Law by which all things are to be judged. This conclusion is confirmed by the dimensions given—twenty cubits long by ten cubits

wide. This was the size of the second compartment of the Mosaic Tabernacle, the Holy, where stood the golden lampstand and the altar of incense. It was also the size of the "Porch" of Solomon's Temple—and in all probability of the rebuilt Temple of Zechariah's day—the place from which the High Priest emerged to bless the people. Thus the flying roll is associated with Divine Law, Divine judgment and Divine blessing. The fact that it is effective, destroying evil, judging sin and creating a separation between the righteous and the wicked stamps it at once as having its application in the Millennial Age, the only Age when such things are completely true. So the setting of the chapter becomes evident; this is the Divine Law of the Millennial Age, going out to do the work of that Age to the elimination of evil and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

Now the A.V. says of this flying roll *"everyone that stealeth shall be cut off on this side according to it, and every one that sweareth shall be cut off on that side according to it . . . it shall enter into the house of the thief, and . . . of him that sweareth falsely . . . and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof"* (ch. 5. 3-4). The determinant words here are "cut off" and "consume"; it is clear that the A.V. does not have the last word, for various translators offer one or other of two quite contradictory meanings in the case of "cut off". Thus Leese has "destroyed", the LXX "punished", and Margolis "swept away", but Rotherham gives "let off", Young "declared innocent", R.V. "purged out" and Ferrar Fenton "reformed". The reason for these variations is that *niqqah*, which means primarily to be pure, innocent, cleansed, free from blame, pardoned, etc., also has the meaning of being "cleaned out" as we would say, vacant, empty, hence can easily be rendered "to clear" in Exod. 34.7 where God *"will by no means clear the guilty"*; in Num. 5. 19 *"be thou free from this bitter water"*; Exod. 21. 19 *"he that smote him shall be quit"*; Job 19. 28 *"I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent"*; Jud. 15. 3 *"now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines"* and Psalms 19. 13 *"then shall I be innocent from the great transgression"*. The cutting off of the sinner, by the flying roll, therefore, means, not his destruction, but the cutting off from his sin, his being made clean, pronounced innocent. Since this can only be achieved by his repentance and conversion, we

have here a further insight into the basic principle of the coming Age. As the Wise man said (Prov. 16. 6) "*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and in the reverence of the Lord men depart from evil*".

But it is different with the houses of the wicked. The same Divine standard which cleanses the sinner from his sin makes short work of the erection he has built. It enters into the houses and consumes them with the timber and stones thereof. That is a significant expression. In the Levitical Laws for dealing with leprosy in a house it was provided that the priest should "*break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the houses; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place*" (Lev. 14. 4-5). Leprosy is a well known symbol of sin in Biblical allegory; there can be little doubt that the reference in Zechariah to the houses being consumed "with the timber and stones thereof" is intended to picture the obliteration of sin by that which is pictured by the flying roll.

These first four verses of Zech. 5, therefore, may well be taken to describe in allegorical language the operation of Divine Law in the Millennial Age, both in its aspect of judgment upon sin and that of conversion of the sinner. The two specific crimes mentioned, that of swearing falsely by God's name, and that of stealing, relate to the third and eighth commandments of the Mosaic covenant. The roll was written on both sides—"*stealeth . . . this side*" and "*sweareth . . . that side*" (vs.3); on the assumption that in a symbolic sense the roll contained all ten commandments, five on each side, those mentioned would be the middle ones of their respective sides; thus the "stealing" and "swearing" might well be representative of the entire Law. By the impact of this Law the houses—works of men—are utterly destroyed, but by means of repentance and conversion the men themselves may be saved and pronounced clean and free from guilt. This is the work of the flying roll and the result is that repentant sinners are separated from their sin and made acceptable in the sight of God.

What happens to the dominion of evil? Does it remain, possibly to rise again and pollute the cleansed earth, or is it removed for ever? The answer to that question is shewn in the second stage of the vision, the woman in the "ephah".

The prophet beheld a strange sight. He saw what is described as an "ephah" with a woman sitting inside it. Strictly speaking, the ephah was a Hebrew measure of capacity used for liquids and loose materials such as grain, and was equal

approximately to nine gallons. But no woman, no matter how diminutive, could possibly have squeezed into an ephah measure. It is clear from Old Testament usage, however, that the word "ephah" was used as a term for measures of indeterminate value. Thus Deut. 25. 14-15 speaks of "*divers measures*" and "*just measures*"; Prov. 20. 10 "*divers weights and divers measures are alike abomination to the Lord*"; Micah 6. 10 "*the scant measure that is abominable*" are some of the instances where "ephah" is translated "measure". It is correct therefore to say that Zechariah saw a "measure", an earthenware jar, large enough to contain a woman. Such a measure would be the homer, equal to ten ephahs, and this implies a jar say two feet across and five feet high. This is adequate to the vision in which a woman is seen crouching inside.

Now the angel defined the woman—"this" he said "*is wickedness*" and he cast her down inside the measure and imprisoned her therein by sealing the open top of the jar with what is described as a "*talent of lead*" (vs. 7). The talent was a measure of weight roughly equal to an English hundred-weight. A piece of lead of that weight made to fit the top of a two foot jar would be some six inches thick—a very effective seal and not much chance of the woman ever getting out. It is to be noted here that the word rendered "talent" is *kikkar* which properly means a circle or sphere, hence anything circular such as a circular tract of country, a loaf of bread (made as a circular flat cake in those days) or a coin or piece of money. It is only therefore necessary to suppose that this *kikkar* or "talent" of lead was merely what the A.V. margin calls it, a "*weighty piece*" of circular form made to fit the top of the earthenware jar in which the woman was imprisoned.

This woman represents the evil and wickedness which had, as it were, been "*driven underground*" by the work of the flying roll. The earth and its inhabitants are cleansed from the taint, and all sin and evil, symbolised by the woman, has been concentrated in this earthenware jar and by reason of the enclosing cover unable ever again to escape to pollute the earth. Sin has been sealed up for ever. Now the prophet lifts up his eyes again and sees a new apparition in the sky (ch. 5 vss. 9-11), two flying figures, women having long wings like those of the stork, "*and the wind was in their wings*". Swooping down upon the sealed up measure with its imprisoned occupant, they laid hold of it and soared up again into the sky, flying with strong strokes eastward until they were lost to the sight in

the distance. "Whither do they bear the measure?" asked Zechariah of the revealing angel. "To build it a house in the land of Shinar" was the reply "and when that is ready they will set the measure there in its own place". This is an evident picture of evil, finally and for ever overthrown, taken away out of the land and banished to "its own place" whence it can never return to trouble mankind. The stork-winged women are the Divine agents employed to execute this mission. The stork, although an unclean bird in the Levitical law owing to its habit of devouring serpents, frogs, lizards and the like, was given its Hebrew name *chasidah*, "the merciful one" from *chasid* meaning to be merciful or pious, on account of the reputed love and solicitude existing between parent bird and its young, which was famous among the Israelites. It thus became a symbol of love and devotion and of a benevolent protecting power watching over family life, for which reason storks were allowed to nest and breed in and about the homes of men without interference. In point of fact, our English word "stork" is from the Greek *storgos*, meaning natural or family affection; this word appears in the New Testament to render *storgos* several times, such as Rom. 1. 31 and Tim. 3. 3 "without natural affection" and Rom. 12. 10 "be kindly affectioned one to another". Thus these stork-like creatures might well picture the powers of mercy and piety which in the next Age will have the effect of removing sin and evil far away. "The wind was in their wings" says the prophet; in all the prophetic Scriptures there is a strong association of thought between the blowing of terrestrial wind and the Holy Spirit in active operation in the earth—the same word *ruach* is used for both "wind and spirit" and the translators could with equal propriety have rendered "the Spirit was in their wings". Thus it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the burden of the world's evil is lifted up and away from the places of men and taken to a far land from which it can never return.

In the prophecy that land is said to be "the land of Shinar" (ch. 5. 11). Shinar as a territorial name had long since passed out of use in Zechariah's day. Shinar was the ancient Sumir (Sumer in English), one of whose cities was Ur of the Chaldees in Abraham's time, and another, Babylon. In Biblical history Sumir, or Shinar, figured in the story of the Tower of Babel and the founding of Babylon. Just as Jerusalem and Judea represented the land of God and his righteousness from the ideal standpoint, so Babylon and Shinar represented all that was anti-God and idolatrous,

depraved and evil. The fiercest diatribes of the Hebrew prophets were directed against the evil city of Babylon and great was the acclamation when that city fell at length, never again to rise. If a place on this earth had to be chosen to represent the home and repository of evil then that place would surely be Babylon. Fitting, then, the measure with its imprisoned woman was taken, in defiance of the laws of space and time, to the ancient, no longer existing, land of Shinar, to be permanently established there and never return.

The most fitting commentary on that final scene in the vision is a New Testament one. "And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20. 14-15). The lake of fire is, of course, metaphorical, the destruction, passing out of existence, which was suggested by the consuming fires of Jerusalem's garbage dump, the Valley of Hinnom (Heb. *Gay-Hinnom*, Gk. *Ge-Henna*) outside the city. Just so will evil and all incorrigible, irrecoverable evildoers pass away and be no more when the combined mercy and judgment of the flying roll has completed its work. The way into the New Jerusalem, the city of light and life and love, is open to all who will enter, and the opportunity to be cleansed of all defiling influences in order that entry may be gained will be freely vouchsafed. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come . . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22. 17). That is the mercy aspect of the flying roll. But it remains true that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth . . . but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21. 27). and "the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers" and so on "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire, which is the second death" (Rev. 21. 8). That is the judgment aspect.

So evil and all wickedness is buried at last in the city of the dead, established in the land of Shinar, "in its own place". It is a remarkable fact that Isaiah's magnificent prediction of the doom of Babylon has remained true through the ages when other ancient cities have been rebuilt and restored to human habitation. "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there . . . but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there: and their houses shall be full of howling creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there . . ." (Isa. 13. 19.-21). To this

day the site of that ancient city is a waste of broken brickwork and drifting sand, shunned by men and infested with wild animals. The place where once stood the proud Tower whose top was to reach unto heaven is now a reed-grown swamp, every vestige of that one time magnificent edifice gone save a few rows of mouldering bricks. There, in that desolation, Zechariah saw the earthenware jar, with its captive symbol of evil, carried to share the oblivion which has fallen upon that place. Here is the realisation of the promise made to the Kingly Priest in the vision of chapter 3 "*I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day*". And it is removed to a place from which it can never return. When Zechariah was told that ephah was to be established or set in its own place he must have thought

of the famous Temple of Marduk in Babylon, standing in all its glory alongside the great Tower which Genesis calls the Tower of Babel. There, in that centre of world idolatry, devoted to the service of all the false gods of mythology, he must have pictured the final resting place of the ephah. There it would be set "*upon its own base*" in the very centre of the land of Shinar and in its principal shrine. But today all that is left of that proud Temple lies buried beneath sixty feet of alluvial soil and sand, deposited by the annual floods of the River Euphrates through the centuries. That is where Zechariah's vivid allegory leaves all that is evil and alien to God—buried far underground whence it can never emerge to trouble man again.

To be continued.

The Name of God

"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 have 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.

"*Make me to know Thy ways ,O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation: for Thee I wait all the day long.*" (Psa. 25: 4,5 RSV).

Love for truth lies at the foundation of a righteous life. If we want to be the precious treasure of the

Lord, if we want him to claim us as his own, we must establish habits of thought which will keep the truth fresh, lively and inspiring to us. Whatsoever things are true, of the truth, think on these things.

JABEZ

On I Chron. 4. 9-10

Hidden away amongst a lot of chronicled generations, somewhat like we might term in our day a giant "family tree", we have a record of a woman (who is not named) and her son whom she bare, named Jabez. It seems remarkable that in chapter after chapter narrating these ancients of previous time only this one man Jabez has special mention regarding character.

Scholars tell us that there was a city in Judah which bore that name at one time, but practically nothing is known about it except that there dwelt there "families of scribes" (1 Chron. 2. 55). Jabez may have become the head of one of these families. Jabez lived a long while ago and everything concerning him is very obscure, except that there is quite a sermon which is of interest to us. For the chronicler to break off simply from the narration of names to make this comment about Jabez in particular suggests that Jabez must have been an out-standing personality, especially in relation to his standing with God his Creator. He must have been one of those whom Psalm 65. 4. refers to: "*Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts . . .*"

Like Jabez we should be very appreciative that we have been drawn or introduced to Jesus so that we can approach unto God and learn how to "dwell in his courts". There was something which seems to have given Jabez a "flying start" to this blessed condition. He had a good mother. How do we know that Jabez had a God fearing mother?

The margin of the AV says that the name Jabez means "sorrowful". The concordance says it means "height". Possibly both are right. Sorrowful is how Jabez's mother saw his birth in the first place, and height may well be associated with what God decreed Jabez should become. We will deal with the latter thought further on.

Jabez's mother said she bare him with sorrow. What does that mean? One of the reasons, perhaps the main one, was that as a God fearing woman she was conscious of her fallen estate and would have Genesis 3. 16. in her mind, knowing that because of our first parent's transgression "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children". She knew the truth that Job declared in Chapter 14.4. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, *not one*". The Psalmist too in Psalm 51.5 realised the same truth — "*Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*". This is the truth expressed by the Apostle in Romans 5.12 ". . . by

one man sin entered into the world and death by sin . . ." But Jabez's mother was one of those who because of her faith in God was "saved in child bearing" (1. Tim. 2. 15). Her faith lifted her above many mothers who had not such faith in God. She believed God would over-rule all her affairs and would offset the consequences of the Fall in her particular case.

She lived before the advent of Jesus, but she was one of those to whom Heb. 11.32 refers. She was one of those whom the Apostle said he had no time to mention. She was one of those who saw (better) "things far off", and acknowledged they were strangers and pilgrims in the present environment. She received in advance a portion of the blessing that Jesus was to bring to God's people a little later on. She found no contentment walking "according to the course of this world" with its desires of flesh and mind, the nature that constitutes the "children of wrath" (Eph. 2.3.) God had been mercifully kind to her and had lifted her up to higher ground. It can be assumed that it was the influence of a godly mother that caused her son Jabez to have such desire to walk close to God.

This is where the Concordance meaning of Jabez's name comes in; it means "Height". He may be seen as a kind of fore-runner of those who in a later time, during the Gospel Age, God would raise up to seek the "heavenly places in Christ Jesus", those who would seek things higher than things of earth, the "things above", not the lower things (Eph. 2.6 & Col. 1.2) Jabez desired above everything else the *blessing of the God of Israel*. Is that not what all members of the "body of Christ" seek? The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich indeed, and every real Christian's concern is that they do not obstruct the blessing's flow. It is necessary to remember our fruitfulness for God depends upon his blessing. We may by his grace be permitted to sow or lodge some seed in the heart or mind of another, but it is God who must water and tend it that it may prosper and grow. Care must be taken not to obstruct God's work by forcing our opinions on others, or by displaying an attitude that might hinder another from taking heed further to the Gospel message.

Jabez was seeking in advance what Jesus' followers desire now to be led of the Spirit of God and kept from leaning to their own understanding—to find that way of holiness, that godliness with contentment which is such great gain, and be kept from the snares and temptations of earthly things

which have appearance of good to the fleshly mind but which, allowed to encumber the spirit mind, drown in destruction and perdition (1. Tim. 6. 6-11). Moffat translates this portion of 1 Chron. 4.10 – *“Oh that thou would’st prosper me and enlarge my lot: Oh that thy hand might aid me: Oh that thou would’st ward me from the evil, that no hurt may befall me”*. The A.V. version gives the last phrase “that it may not grieve me”. Another translation renders it “that it be not to my sorrow”. So the thought seems to be – keep me from the evil which would make me sorry afterwards. Surely such thoughts “ring a bell” for every mature Christian. The wrong courses we take in our human weaknesses and our headstrong attitudes and doings in youthful days and throughout our life’s experiences, eventually “come home to roost”. In course of time, sooner or later, they bring grief and sorrow.

What an amazing insight Jabez had! He was one of those who, though too early to run for the rich blessing of the Gospel age himself, was able to offer very good advice to those privileged so to run. The good report we have of him here in Chronicles assures us he will be numbered with those who have received a “good report” and will awaken to a “better resurrection” (Heb. 11. 32-35). That thou would’st keep me from evil—long before the time of Christ’s First Advent Jabez uttered the words of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray—Abandon me not in times of temptation, but deliver me from the evil one. God himself never tempts anyone. It is Satan who does the tempting, and he is more than a match for us many times on our own for he is a wily and powerful foe. This is where the real meaning of the prayer comes in—we are asking God to help us combat the Devil.

“And God granted that which he requested”. How beautiful: What a real man of God this Jabez must have been! We do not know any details about his life at all, only the mention of his name in two verses of the whole Bible. But the chronicler must have known more, and though he had not the time nor space to give more of his history in his “family tree” he felt at least compelled to make a special mention of him among all the other names.

What were the requests that Jabez made and which God granted him—that he would enlarge his “coast”; other translations give “enlarge his border”. In present day language it would mean “make a better man of me”. He asked God to keep him from evil so that no hurt came to him. And God answered his prayer. There are no details of Jabez’s life so exactly HOW God answered his prayer is not known. We can be sure however that God did not shield him from all temptations and little failures along the way. Great man he apparently was, but he was still a “fallen” man, therefore would not do all things at all times PERFECTLY. God would have dealt with him as he did with David and the Old Testament worthies. David said of himself in (2. Sam. 22. 36) and reiterated in Ps. 18.35 that “God’s gentleness made him great”. Further concordance reference suggests that God’s gentleness is exercised towards those who are truly humble in spirit.

David said of himself in Ps. 4.1 that “God enlarged him in distress” Farby translates it “in pressure thou hast enlarged me”. How beautifully true these sentiments are of all the Lord’s true people. If we maintain the right spirit before him, every slip and stumble will be turned to profit—all things will work together for our good and our characters will grow, be enlarged more and more to reflect the image of Jesus. As one has expressed it “Our failures and shortcomings do not picture the end of our progress, but they help to promote **God’s end for us**”. So what are our requests made unto God? Are they of such a nature that we can say nothing could please us better than to know God will grant them all to us? A searching thought.

Is our prayer superlative for the granting of that which God has said he is pleased to give us if we ask him for it—his Holy Spirit. May our lives be as genuine and sincere as Jabez must have been for God to grant him what he requested.

Jabez must have been a man such as the writer of Proverbs referred to in Prov. 16.7 *“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him”*. He surely must have been one according to Ps. 21.2 *“The Lord gave him his hearts desire . . .”*

The Memorial is a time when we come together to commemorate, not only our Lord’s death for us, but also his death for the world; not only the privilege we have of association with him in present sacrifice and future service, but also his

intention to give life and human perfection to all men in due time; not only our fellowship together as one family, as fellow-heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, but also our future service together as able ministers of the New Covenant.

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

5. Doom of Sodom

It had been a warm morning and now it was mid-day with the sun beating down fiercely. Abraham was resting from his activities in the shade of the portico of his tent. The AV just calls it the "tent door" (ch.19.1), but the tent of an eastern emir like Abraham would have been a much more elaborate and luxurious creation than the everyday word would suggest. Abraham, as befitted his position, would have been sitting inside a covered porch which gave entrance to an elaborate and spacious pavilion of sheepskins and goatskins, the interior divided into compartments by tapestry curtains, within which all the affairs of daily life were conducted. Sarah his wife was busy inside with her own affairs and responsibilities. The men of the establishment were out of sight, inside their own tents and huts, waiting for the sun's heat to decline before they could emerge to resume their work.

Came into view three men, travellers, as though making their way to a distant destination. They would have passed on, but Abraham, true to Eastern ideas of hospitality, hastened out to intercept them and urge them to stop and refresh themselves, and rest awhile in the shade of his trees, and join him in a meal, before resuming their journey. Graciously, they assented, settling themselves under the trees while Abraham hastened first to his wife, requesting her to make bread for the meal, then to the herd to select a choice calf, which one of his men was instructed to prepare, and so set the meal before his guests, standing by them to meet any subsequent need while they ate. All of which was in the true stream of hospitality of the day and Abraham had probably done the same thing many times before. But this time there was a difference. The visitors had finished their meal and the heat of the day was lessening, for the sun had passed its zenith and the time must have been getting on for three in the afternoon, and ordinary travellers would be anxious to be on their way to arrive at their destination before nightfall. But these three showed no inclination to move. Abraham waited, courteously.

One of them spoke, suddenly, "*Where is Sarah, thy wife?*"

A strange question, and one which in that Eastern culture could easily be misconstrued. Womenfolk were customarily kept well in the background, especially when strangers were present. And how did this stranger know the name of Abraham's wife? Who were they anyway? And

why in no hurry to leave? For the first time the patriarch began to feel there was more in this visit than he had thought. Was the Lord's hand in this? He checked the reply in ordinary circumstances that he might have made and said quietly "Behold, in the tent", and waited.

"I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son".

So that was it. These men were from the Lord, Angels, come to earth to announce the imminent birth of the son the Lord had promised him thirteen years previously, when he had pleaded for Ishmael and the Lord told him Sarah would indeed bear to him the "seed of promise" in the fulness of time. That promise had been between the Lord and himself and now here he was being told that the time was at hand for the fulfilment of the promise. He began to look upon these men with a new respect and waited to hear what next they had to say.

Sarah, inside the pavilion behind the hangings, also heard the words. Probably, curious, she was listening anyway, and she dismissed the idea straight away. The AV says she "laughed within herself"—the Hebrew word means to make light of a thing, to dismiss it as fanciful. "At my age, and my husband's age, what nonsense!" But the next words pulled her up sharply and she panicked. "*Wherefore did Sarah make light of this; is anything too hard for the Lord? Sarah shall have a son!*" These men were not ordinary men. They could read her thoughts! Then they must be from the Lord. Swiftly she came out to the little group and uttered a feeble denial, but to no avail. The chief one of the three looked at her, perhaps contenting himself with saying in effect "Oh no, you really did not believe me". Abraham and Sarah must have had much to talk about that night after the strangers had gone.

Now the three did move into the open, indicating that they were about to leave—and in the narrative, stood and looked in the direction of the notorious city of Sodom, forty miles away, four thousand feet below them down in the valley of the Plain. In some way not mentioned it appears they indicated that as their destination, for the next that is said is that Abraham went a short distance with them to point out the way.

At this point it seems that a remarkable revelation was made to Abraham. One of these three men

begins in the account to be referred to as the Lord, the Deity himself. Was it the expression used—*"shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do . . . because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see"*. The two other men had left them now and were walking in the direction of Sodom, leaving Abraham standing before the Lord. Did Abraham suddenly recollect that the last time God had said "I will go down" to see what men were doing was at the time of the Tower of Babel and that involved judgment. Did that cause Abraham to realise that judgment on Sodom was imminent and now there was to be another overthrow? And is that why he at once began to plead with the Lord to avert the threatened judgment for the sake of the few righteous men there might still be in the doomed cities? The rest of Chapter 18, which tells the whole story, seems to read that way.

But did the Deity himself really come down in body of flesh to stand on the earth and talk to Abraham? Is such a thing conceivable? King Solomon was in no doubt about that. He said No. *"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built (2.Chron 6.18).* To us now, as to the ancients then, the idea is unthinkable. The one who held converse with Abraham must have been one who was the Lord's representative, endowed with and manifesting his power to the extent that it could be said with truth that he was the Lord's manifestation to Abraham in exactly the same manner that Jesus was when one occasion He said *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* and John *"No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son . . . he hath declared (manifested) him (John 1.18).* God declared through the prophet Isaiah that he was the creator of all things (Isa.45.12) and yet Paul told the Colossians (1.10) that by the Son were all things created in heaven and earth. Here, clearly, is a case where our Lord in his pre-existence appeared to Abraham and spoke in the name of and in the stead of his Father. The two men disappeared in the distance, on the way to Sodom. It was a difficult journey over rocky mountainous terrain, forty miles of it, descending the mountains to the extent of four thousand feet. It must have been about half past three in the afternoon; by five o'clock they were walking through the gates of Sodom. No mortal man could have done that. These two had powers which belong only to the citizens of Heaven.

So Abraham began his plea *"Wilt thou also*

destroy the righteous with the wicked. Peradventure there be fifty righteous in the city That be far from thee, to slay the righteous with the wicked . . . Shall not the judge of all the earth do right!" The Lord must have looked upon his servant compassionately, for he must have felt the same way himself, and yet, throughout all history the righteous have suffered with the wicked when the wickedness of evil men has brought suffering and death upon a community. Even though in the out-working in the Plan of God those who suffered in that imminent disaster will stand again upon the earth, in a day when evil is to be restrained, and Christ is universal King, and have opportunity to turn from their ways, and live. That word came to Israel from the Lord in a much later day. *"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; Wherefore turn ye from your evil ways, and live ye; for why will ye die, O ye house of Israel?" (Ezek.8.23, 31-32)*

"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (Ch. 18.26). The patriarch knew within his heart that there were not fifty righteous. Would the Lord exact the penalty if there were several short? Would the Lord destroy the city just for the lack of five? "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it". Perhaps only forty? "I will not do it for forty's sake"—Thirty? "I will not". Twenty? "I will not". "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once; peradventure ten shall be found there" "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Someone has estimated—on the basis of what is known of Canaanite settlements of the period—that the combined population of the Cities of the Plain was probably in the region of fifty thousand. And not even ten righteous. Lot and his two daughters were saved; the two angels saw to that.

Abraham gave up, The decree of the Lord must stand. The nest of evil must be rooted out, and the Lord went his way. Early next morning, Sodom and Gomorrah blew up.

The story of the overthrow is no part of the story of Abraham (for full analysis of that account see *B.S.M. (Sept/Oct and Nov/Dec 1987)*). He almost certainly never knew what was its cause and nature, nor set eyes on the subsequent desolation of the fertile valley in which the cities stood. He probably never saw Lot again nor knew what had happened to him—Lot is never mentioned in connection with Abraham after this point. Subsequent and modern research has established what happened, how that underground oil, gas, bitumen and sulphur deposits underlying the Dead Sea and

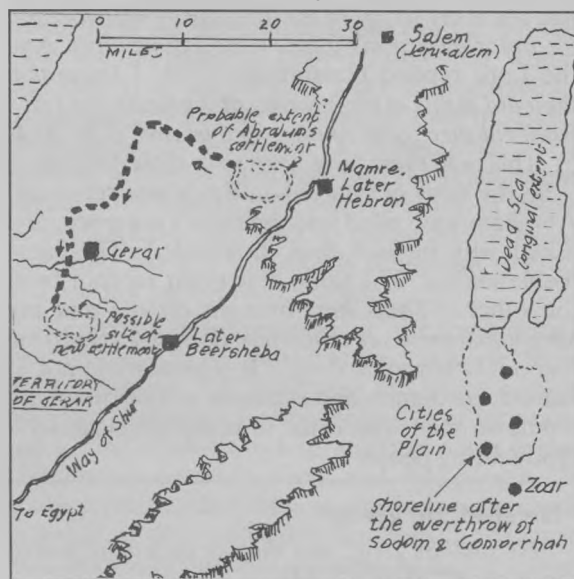
the plain where the cities stood became ignited, probably by a combination of earthquake and lightning, and blew up in a blazing holocaust of fire which destroyed everything on the plain. When it was over the plain was no more; its place was occupied by the shallow waters of what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea where the water is only about twelve feet deep. Lot and his daughters, taking refuge in a cave high up on the mountains on the eastern side of the sea, viewed the inferno hopelessly. The fires could have continued for many years. A similar occurrence took place at a much earlier time in the Zagros mountains east of Baghdad, where similar deposits are known to exist. Seven crevasses opened in a ten-mile stretch of mountain and the escaping oil and gas, ignited by lightning, burned for several centuries, giving rise to the Sumerian legend of the seven Scorpion Gods whose fiery plumes desolated the land for miles around and whose poisonous breath killed all who came near. To this day a stretch of mountainside ten miles long by four wide leaves a legacy of white limestone carbonised and turned black by the intense heat.

Isaiah used the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah to illustrate his conception of the last judgment at the end of this Age, when the Lord arises to bring the dominion of evil to an end and institute his own world of everlasting righteousness, *"It is the day of the Lord's vengeance . . . and the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch" (bitumen) "and the dust thereof into brimstone" (sulphur) "and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever."* (a long indefinite time) from generation to generation it shall be waste. None shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Isa. 34. 8-10).

The catastrophe happened in the early morning. The two angels stayed the night in the house of Lot, but *"when the morning arose"* (Ch.19.15) meaning about 5.0 a.m. they urged Lot to flee at once, even taking the hands of the three to compel haste. Vs. 27 of the same chapter tells how Abraham went *"early in the morning"* to the place where he had stood before the Lord, and looked toward the land of the Plain, *"and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace"*. That was the end of the Cities of the Plain.

It must have been immediately after the destruction of the cities that Abraham moved his headquarters once again. The reason is not stated and is a little obscure—he had been settled at Hebron for some sixteen years, was occupying an extensive area of farmland with several hundred families in

the community looking to him for a livelihood, and on good terms with his Hittite neighbours. It may have been the disaster in the Plain that prompted the move. The fires continued to burn and he might have no knowledge of whether they would ever go out. That, and perhaps the memory of the earlier invasion of Chedorlaomer, may have decided him to get further away. He did not however abandon his holding altogether, for in later years those same Hittite Chieftains counted him as one of themselves (Ch. 23.6) and Sarah died and was buried at Hebron, but from now on most of the patriarch's life was spent in the land of Gerar, forty miles south-west of Hebron, verging upon the desert regions of Sinai yet itself a well watered and fertile land adjacent to the sea-coast.



Migration to Gerar

Chapter 20 recounts the story *"Abraham journeyed from thence" (Hebron) toward the south country and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar"*. The capital of the country, probably only a small settlement, was also called Gerar (not many miles from the present town of Gaza in the well known "Gaza Strip") and the "king"—really a tribal chieftain; was named Abimelech. It is uncertain whether he and his people were of Canaanite or Egyptian origin. His own name is Semitic but that of his army commander-in-chief is Egyptian. The land is referred to in the account as the Philistine's land but this is only an explanatory note of a later editor for the Philistines did not penetrate there from Crete until the time of the Judges. So Abraham came into the

locality, settled in an area of vacant land, and carried on with his farming.

Strangely, Abraham repeated his mistake of twenty years earlier by again concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife and letting it be known that she was his sister. One would think that once was enough but apparently not so. The consequence was that "*Abimelech took her into his harem*"—; this incidentally is one argument in favour of Egyptian origin. This custom was common among Egyptian rulers but not Canaanites. But the Lord intervened at this point and this revealed that this ruler and his people were worshippers, like Melchisedek and his people, of Abraham's God, the Most High God. Said Abimelech "*Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation, said he not unto me, she is my sister. In the integrity of my heart and the innocency of my hands have I done this*". And the Lord replied reassuringly "*Yea, I know that thou did'st this in the integrity of thy heart, for I also withheld thee from sinning against me*" (Ch. 20.4-6). This man must have been very close to God.

So the story of Pharaoh in Egypt was repeated, Abraham was called into the ruler's presence, and asked why he had thus dissembled. The same feeble excuse. The same downright reproof from the other. "*Thou hast brought on me and my kingdom a great sin. Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done*". It is impossible not to admire the dignity and rectitude of this otherwise unknown man who ruled in complete sincerity a God-fearing people.

(To be continued).

"He shall be great"

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest." (Luke 1. 32).

In this world men are accounted great because they have achieved some noteworthy thing that has produced immediate results. A skilful general wins a crucial battle—he is accounted a great soldier. A commercial magnate welds a number of trading organisations into one enormous unit, controlling a major part of some vital commodity—he is a great business man. A shrewd and plausible politician rises to the top by his astute handling of foreign affairs—he is a great statesman. None of these is called great while as yet he is in the state of progress towards his goal, while his plans are developing, but only when he has "arrived". The world demands, not only success, but the visible evidences of success, before it will bestow its diploma. The man who patiently and zealously builds for the future, knowing that his goal will not be reached in his own lifetime, and that the fruit of

If these people were in fact of Egyptian stock it might be easier to understand Abraham's actions on these two occasions and on no other. With Canaanites and Amorites he knew where he was—there was little or no likelihood of this kind of thing happening. With the Egyptians it was the norm. It is easy to accuse Abraham, the man of faith, of lack of faith in this particular direction, but there is always one chink in the armour of the best of men.

At any rate Abimelech did not, like Pharaoh on the former occasion, expel Abraham from his dominions. "*My land is before thee*" he said "*Dwell where it pleaseth thee*". He gave him sheep and oxen, menservants, and a thousand pieces of silver, no inconsiderable sum in those days, by way of compensation for the unintentional wrong he had effected. In later days the two became firm friends. So Abraham settled in the area east and south of the town of Gerar, and here he remained for the rest of his life, extending the scope of his activities and becoming, without much doubt, the leading Stock-breeder in the land. For seventy-five years he supervised his many interests and it was during that seventy-five years that the most momentous event of his life took place.

For it was at Gerar, before many more months had elapsed, that the long-promised, long hoped-for, almost disbelieved-in event took place. Sarah, Abraham's wife, at ninety years of age, gave birth to Isaac, the Seed of promise, Abraham's son and heir.

his labours will only be reaped by posterity, is never esteemed great whilst yet he lives, even though recognition may come after his death, when at last the realisation of all his dreams is there for all to see.

So be it then, with our Lord Jesus Christ. Of all great men He is the greatest. He came down from Heaven to achieve the greatest work of all time, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind and the consummation of God's creative Plan. His greatness was not recognised then, but in days to come it will be plain for all to see. "He shall be great"—that is the promise and it cannot fail of fulfilment. Men, and angels too, will join together in worship and adoration, praising and blessing the name of the Son, that name which is exalted above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

HEIRS OF GOD

We think of an heir as someone who inherits wealth and status from someone who has died, usually by being related to that person. In the Old Testament the word 'heir' more often refers to shared out possessions. This is the idea in Deuteronomy 4.20 (RSV) "... the Lord has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own possession." There is a similar thought in Deut. 9.29. In the New Testament Jesus becomes the heir of God's promises and God's kingdom. He actually uses the word 'heir' in his parable of the "Tenants in the Vineyard" (Luke 20.14). Paul, in his letter to the Romans, couples with Jesus those who believe on him, as joint or fellow heirs (Rom. 8.17). There was no difficulty in Jewish Christian thinking about sharing with Jesus as heirs of God until early Christian churches began to have mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul had to explain that non-Jewish Christians were also fellow heirs in Christ. *"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus"* Eph. 3.6 (NIV).

Such an idea was resisted in the Christian church of the first century. Human nature, because of fear and prejudice, had built a barrier between Jews and all other peoples. In the centuries before Jesus came that barrier had developed in an effort to keep God's people pure and free from contamination with 'pagans'. At our Lord's First Advent this hatred of Gentiles was shown by their response to his message in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4. 24-30). Paul experienced a similar reaction when he spoke to the Jews of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 22.21.22.

Peter had the great privilege to break through this barrier when he visited Cornelius. His address to those first waiting Gentiles began *"I now realise that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to"* (Acts 10.34 GNB). But Peter found it difficult to apply that principle in practice (Gal. 2.11-14). There are echoes of the problem still with us, but there can be no doubt about God's view of the matter. The Scriptures from the beginning show the universal love of God. There are many examples of the way in which men and women overcame the kind of barriers which are constructed by human thinking. Those that share the work and the

joy of their Creator allow nothing to come between them.

The "promise" referred to in Eph. 3.6 was mentioned by Paul in Gal. 3.29 where he wrote that those who are Christ's are "heirs according to promise". To discover that promise we must turn back to Gen. 12.3, for God told Abraham that through his descendants He would bless "all the families of the earth". One of the most outstanding examples of being 'heirs together' is found in the relationship between Abraham and Isaac. Abraham's trusting obedience was based on a love for God which outweighed even his affection for the boy. Through this son, God had said that he would fulfil all his promises and even if the lad died, the old patriarch believed that God 'would provide'. It is not an easy story to understand, particularly to our western minds four thousand years later. It serves as a remarkable acted parable, giving us an insight into the relationship between Jesus and his Heavenly Father. It serves as a remarkable reminder to the people of Israel that child sacrifice was utterly repugnant to God and was not part of their worship.

Abraham was not under automatic compulsion. Had this been so the nature of the test would have been worthless. It is more than just believing and obeying. Faith exercised by the heroes of Scripture was a bond of trust which sprang from a wonderful relationship between God and his people. It enabled them to do the things which were the exact opposite of their natural inclinations. They must have been very sure that the message they received was from God. This has been the basis for martyrdom through the centuries.

Father and son were spiritually richer for the experience. For one it was the culmination of a life of service for God. For the other it was a threshold of learning to trust and obey. This was a shared experience of two men who were "heirs of the promise" in a very special way. It stands as a reminder that in God's service differences in age are not a problem. Old and young serve the same God and must learn to walk hand in hand before him.

Another remarkable record of loving trust is found in the story of Naomi and Ruth. It is a remarkable story of two people, of different ages and backgrounds, joining together their hearts and lives for comfort and support. Naomi's faithfulness to her God had stirred the deepest emotions of her

daughter-in-law. Their friendship could have been stifled by fear and prejudice. It was rewarded by them sharing a child who was to become an ancestor of Israel's great king David and of the Messiah himself.

Within the early life of David there is another classic story of how two people may move together in the purpose of God. His friendship with Jonathan was not the most likely turn of events. One was a prince, brought up in the circle of his father's court. Saul hated David and did everything possible to kill him. The king, knowing that David might become his successor, expected that Jonathan would share his hatred for the young, tough shepherd. As the story unfolds we see a remarkable friendship, devoid of pride and jealousy, where joys and sorrows are shared, and each seeks to protect and comfort the other. Jonathan looked beyond the intrigue and corruption of an earthly royal court and saw the noble qualities of David's character. He also looked beyond the time of David's persecutions, to when he, Jonathan, the king's son could be second to David in the nation. All this helped to prepare David for the great work in God's purpose which he would do as king of Israel.

There are other stories of companionship in both Old and New Testament which illustrate the idea of "heirs together". They were people of contrasting characters but who worked together for mutual good. They were ready to endure difficult experiences for each other. These were not chance meetings of people who just happened to "bump into each other". Their common goal was to do what God wanted them to do. They fulfilled a role in the history of redemption. So it is for many of God's children now.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. *"In that cry, Abba, Father, the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs. We are God's heirs and Christ's fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings now in order to share his splendour hereafter"* (Rom. 8.16-17 NEB). In his prayer recorded in John 17.22-23 we have the first glimpses of what that sharing can mean, because He has given us his glory and we have become one with him. How does the Spirit testify with our spirit that we are the children of God? At first the sinner must be convinced of sin (Jno. 16.8). Then there is the transforming and renewing work through the glory of God which brings victory in our lives (2 Cor. 2.14; 3.17-18). He demonstrates his power in the lives of his people, in their activities and in

the gifts of the Spirit. God, living in us, speaks to us through his Word and by the inner conviction of our hearts. God's over-ruling providence is seen at work in the lives of his people. He answers their prayers in a very practical way. They have joy in each other's fellowship. All these things, and much more, are part of the 'earnest' or guarantee of the Spirit (Eph. 1.14). They produce a fruitage of the Spirit in lives that are surrendered to him.

Sharing heirship with Jesus has a dual promise. It concerns our life here and now; it concerns our life hereafter. Both are an integral part of God's purpose for our lives. He promised that in a life of real service for him there will be peace and rest. To this added the joy of learning to love, as Jesus loved. The second phase of the promise concerns the promise made to Abraham so long ago and which now becomes increasingly meaningful in the light of world events. *"All the families on earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed"* (Gen. 12.3 NEB).

We are fellow-heirs with Christ if we share his suffering (Rom. 8.16,17). Those who have given their lives to Christ daily share their lives with him. The Bible characters mentioned earlier give a valuable picture of this; the early disciples counted it all joy that they were allowed to share in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus had led them to expect this (Matt. 5.10-11; Acts 5.41). Living with Christ now, is a time of getting to know him (Phil. 3.10); it is all part of a shared and integrated experience which leads to sharing the inheritance in his kingdom. That glory will be a showing forth of the love of God in giving to all humanity unparalleled happiness. The tears of yesterday in famine, disaster and disease will be dried in the everlasting joy of full life, completely free from sin and death.

In his first letter to scattered Christians of the First century Peter writes about relationships. He first discusses slaves and masters (1 Pet. 2.18-20). Then he goes on to matters concerning husbands and wives. At first sight a careless reader might obtain the impression that the Apostle is giving support to a husband who wields arrogant dominance. Such an attitude has been prevalent within the Christian Church through its long history. It has not been confined to husbands or even masters of slaves. The words of Jesus at the Last Supper (Luke 22.25-27) should have been enough to eradicate that spirit from his church. Taken seriously, anyone who has a leading part in the human family of the family of God must behave like a slave to the rest. These are words for parents and teachers as well as for elders and

pastors. For the husband and wife, Peter reminds them that they are "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Pet. 3.7). The partnership began when God said that "*It is not good that man should be alone*" (Gen. 2.18). It should have been so sweet and precious; sin shattered the vision of continuous happiness but the principles of partnership have never changed.

Human beings survive adverse conditions better in social clusters. More importantly they need the interaction of others to develop and maintain the high intellectual activity for which they are unique. Isolation does not promote qualities of character which the Creator planned. He designed the partnership of marriage so that each should serve and please the other. The Master endorsed this in his words, recorded in Mark 10.7-9. It is a picture of his own relationship with the church and each individual in the church (Eph. 5.22-33). So Peter reminds husbands and wives within the church that they have a common inheritance in Christ. This is the opportunity to exercise

sacrificial love in a way which no other human relationship offers. The word used for hinder in 1 Peter 3.7 is one used to describe the breaking up of a road surface to impede progress. Any injury to the partnership interrupts the line of communication in prayer to God. Moodiness and wanting ones own way stifles a Christian's prayer life. All who love the Lord Jesus and have given their hearts to him have a very special friendship; none are left out, whatever else of life they have missed or lost. He remains the companion and guide of their lives; in him we have the sweetest and most dependable fellowship. In the bitterest experience or amid endless monotony of ordinary life, Jesus is the most important factor; however hard we fall He will pick us up. No matter how depressed or distressed He is there to comfort. Do we remember him?

We are heirs of a wonderful future in radiating happiness to all the families of the earth — and we can enjoy that heritage now.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

*A two-part
essay*

Part 1.

The Second Epistle of John is thought to have been written at Ephesus, following the writing of the First Epistle (eight of its thirteen verses are to be found in the First Epistle also) and to have been addressed to a sister in Christ otherwise unknown to history. It is this question of the Epistle's purpose that has given rise to the most disputed point in its short length of only thirteen verses. "*The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth*" is how he opens the epistle. Some commentators and scholars, reluctant perhaps to give the honour of an entire New Testament epistle to a woman, however saintly, especially to one who is not identified in any other extant writing, have suggested that under that pseudonym John intended the church at Ephesus, or perhaps the entire church on earth, to be understood. It is not a convincing suggestion; the fact that the elect lady has children who are associated with her in the greeting, and moreover has a sister who in turn also has children (verse 13) makes the supposition practically impossible of serious consideration. It seems virtually certain that John was writing to an actual person of his acquaintance, one whom he esteemed very highly "in the Lord" and the only question is, who was she?

There is not much likelihood of that question

being answered, this side of the Vail. Some have hazarded the view that Mary the mother of Jesus is the one to whom the Epistle was written. That is hardly likely; Mary must almost certainly have died many years before this date. Mary's children—James, Joses, Jude, Simeon, Salome, would have been well advanced in years themselves, almost John's own age. It has to be concluded that we have no clue to this sister's identity.

The word "lady" in verses 1 and 5 is *Kyria* which was a Greek woman's name, the equivalent of the Hebrew "*Martha*" and also a Greek term of respect roughly equivalent to our English word "madam". John would be no more likely to use "madam" in preference to the more intimate term "sister" than would we toward one who is well known to us and highly esteemed as a sister in Christ. The most reasonable conclusion then is that the sister's name was in fact *Kyria*, and that the Apostle knew her sufficiently well to address her habitually by her "Christian" name. She was evidently a convert, perhaps Jewess, more likely Greek, probably middle-aged and with a family of children, "teen-agers" as we would say, living in one of the Greek towns of Asia where there were brethren, perhaps Colosse or Laodicea or Smyrna, within reach of the Apostle's travelling abilities.

She had a sister, whose children at least apparently lived in Ephesus itself so that when the Apostle wrote this letter to his friend Kyria he would quite naturally add the words of greeting from those children with which the Epistle is ended.

The entire letter therefore is just a little personal word, a gem of Christian correspondence, somewhat akin to Paul's similar letter to his friend Philemon of Colosse, preserved in the New Testament as an example to us of how the believers in that day felt towards each other. John's solicitude for the spiritual welfare of his friend and sister in Christ comes out very prominently in these few words.

His reference in verse 1, to himself as "the elder" may be equally well a reference to his age or his office. The word "presbyter" may be understood either way and is normally interpreted in harmony with the context. John must certainly have been one of the oldest brothers in the Faith at the time—probably not far short of a century of years had passed over his head. It is true, moreover, that all the other Apostles had long since gone to their rest, and it may well be that John in humility had ceased calling himself by the name of Apostle since he was now the only Apostle living, and contented himself with the title of "elder" in its sense of a pastor in the church, perhaps referring to himself as "*the Elder*" as indicative of his realisation that the office of leader or chief shepherd of the flock on earth had now devolved upon him as the sole survivor of those who once walked and talked with Jesus, having known him in the flesh. John was the only one left on earth to have heard the memorable words "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation*".

There is a world of meaning in verse 2 which we can well take to ourselves in these latter difficult days. "*For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*" So many have become apathetic and indifferent, having lost their first zeal and left their first love, often because of disappointment with some one or other aspect of the faith in which they had placed great trust and which did not turn out as they expected. Some have built their faith on chronology, and when the arrival of the set date and nonfulfilment of the expected event has proved their hopes ill-founded, have given up the Faith in despair and disappointment. We need always to remember that if we do properly and completely appreciate the Truth and allow it to take root in us, giving ourselves in complete and unreserved consecration to God, not to a date nor to work nor on a the basis of a

doctrine, then the Truth that is in us will remain with us for ever, and neither the failure of the date or the work or the doctrine will make any difference to that. Even though the work and labour of a life-time disintegrate in ruins about us, all that we have constructed and supported and administered come to an end like the things in the Epistle to the Hebrews that, having decayed and waxed old, are ready to banish away, we can stand up freed from all the obligations and responsibilities that those things have laid upon us and say "Lord, what wilt thou have me do next?" God will never have us idle, neither will disappointment have any place in our lives, whilst we can so profit by our experiences that the Truth remains in us for ever.

Verse 3 is a wonderful greeting. "*Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*" Here in this text we have the ideal expression of the relationship subsisting between the Father and the Son. Spoken of separately, the two are one in the bestowal of these wondrous blessings of favour, mercy and peace. We cannot say these things come from the Father more than the Son, nor yet from the Son more than the Father. John has no use here for the later "Dark Ages" idea that the Son in his mercy stands between a wrathful Father and a condemned world to save that world from the Father's vengeance. Here we have the Father and Son in perfect unison and perfect oneness extending heavenly blessings upon those in this world who are in the right attitude of heart to receive those blessings. Here we have assurance that in the Age to come the Shepherd who goes out to seek and save the lost sheep and the Father who goes out to meet the returning prodigal are working together in the closest harmony, so that, as Jesus himself said, "*I and my Father are one*". To these blessings sent from heaven there are conjoined the twin earthly blessings of truth and love. Neither is very much use to us without the other. Together, they yield us all that we need to make our calling and election sure. Truth regulates our intellectual faculties and love regulates our emotional faculties. Neglect either, and we become unbalanced Christians, either all heart and no head, or all head and no heart. In either case we shall not be of those who will need both heart and head for the onerous work of the next Age. This does not mean that we have to excel in the accomplishments both of heart and head before we can be acceptable to God, as though in one ordinary, everyday person are combined all the attributes of Francis of Assisi and

Augustine. It is not given to many to reach up to the stature of great men. What is really needed is a due balance, so that the heart does not run away with the head nor the head stifle the impulses of the heart. We each of us, need to pay attention to both attributes, to truth and to love, in our lives.

It is in verses 4 to 6 that John impresses this point with a practical and personal application. *"I rejoiced greatly,"* he says to the unknown sister Kyria, *"that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, Kyria, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it"*. Here are truth and love again associated, and this time brought into contact with the commandment and so with our Christian walk, which is a practical application indeed. He finds Kyria's children walking in truth, and he rejoices greatly on that account. That is the Father's commandment and he is glad to find them so. Now he beseeches that they walk in Love, which is also God's commandment. He makes haste to affirm that he knows this is not a new commandment—even though Jesus himself had called it such. *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another"*. To John and his disciples it was no longer a new commandment; they had heard it expounded and commended to them every day of

their Christian lives. But it was still necessary to re-affirm that commandment more constantly and more fervently than the other. Even in those early days it was easier to follow the law of intellectual knowledge than the law of brotherly love.

So it is with us to-day. Too often is love despised as a weak emotional thing of no real value in the Christian conflict, and knowledge extolled as the be-all and end-all of Christian endeavours. Too easily we forget St. Paul's immortal dictum. *"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge . . . and have not love, I am nothing"*. (Cor. 13. 2). Here in this Second Epistle John remains resolutely set upon the theme which appears so prominently in his First, that the Truth of God can only be effectually manifested against a background built up of intellectual appreciation based on absolute sincerity in the quest for Divine Truth, and a heartfelt love for the brethren and for all mankind that is an accurate reflection of the love that God himself bears toward all his creatures. Kyria had evidently brought her children up *"in the nurture and fear of the Lord"* to understand well these things, and John, knowing that thus they had been taught *"from the beginning"* has no fonder desire than that they might continue so to walk to the end of their days, living witnesses to the truth that dwelt in them and should remain with them for ever.

(To be concluded)

A Tyari custom

"The Christians of Tyari, a small town in Kurdistan—Armenia are in the habit of treating lunatics by burying them alive, with the full Church burial service, but leaving a small hole through which the patient can breathe. After twenty-four hours they disinter the lunatic to find that the nervous shock sometimes has beneficial results.

"In one case which came under my notice" (says the Rev. Wigram, an Anglican minister resident in the district) "the man was buried all right and in due time his friends came to disinter him. As soon as the stones were removed he sprang up, crying 'I am risen! I am risen. It is the Last Day!' Then, looking round upon the men who had come to resurrect him, he exclaimed disgustedly, 'But whoever would have expected to see *you* at the

Resurrection of the Just?" (Wigram in *"The Cradle of Mankind."*—late 19th century.)

So many of us are inclined to limit the scope of Divine salvation to a narrow circle of fellow-believers, or consign to Divine disfavour those who may not agree with us on the interpretation of the Scriptures or the practice of the Christian life. Maybe our Master, seeing deeper than do we, does not attach over-much importance to these little eccentricities of ours. But it is good for us to realise that He is quietly choosing his own from every part of the "field", and that we do not well to condemn other earnest souls as unworthy of the Kingdom because in some fashion or another they do not measure up to our own conception of the Divine calling.

“TO KNOW GOOD AND EVIL”

“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil, and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever; therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen. 3. 22-23).

It has generally been assumed that Adam was expelled from the garden to prevent his having access to the tree of life and so living for ever despite his sin. A little thought shows that this could not have been the case; if the wages of sin is death, then Adam's sin ensured his death, tree of life or no tree of life. Perhaps it is desirable to go behind the AV and other English versions to the Hebrew text and see what the Lord actually did say.

The first point to examine is the expression “is become as one of us”. “Is become” is the word *hayah*, which is the verb “to be”, “to exist”. The AV translators rendered this in the present tense, “is” but in fact it is in the past tense “was”, as in Gen. 3.1 “the serpent *was* more subtle than any beast of the field”, and Dan. 8.27 “I Daniel *fainted and was sick*”. “To know” employs a word meaning intelligence, understanding, wisdom. The preposition “to” means equally to, towards, for, according to the context. Adam's practical knowledge of good and evil can hardly have advanced very much so quickly after the transgression. But he must already have had some theoretical knowledge of the difference from the time the Lord first spoke to him, some understanding of right and wrong. This phrase could better be rendered “*Lo, the man was like one of us for the understanding of good and evil*” i.e., before the Fall.

“And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life” gives the impression—with modern usage of the English word “lest”—that the Almighty had to act immediately to bar him from the tree lest Adam should defy the edict—and defy God—, by eating, and so escape the penalty, which, if true, would make mockery of the entire story. Adam, was told that if he ate of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” he would die, with no intimation, stated or implied, that any subsequent eating of the tree of life would be an antidote. An examination of the two words “and now” turns thoughts in a different direction. The Hebrew copulative “*vav*” is either “and” or “but” according to the requirements of the context, whilst “now”,

“*yattah*”, is an adverb of time present, signifying, literally, “this”, “this being so” or “at this time”, descriptive of a present existing condition compared with that obtaining previously. Examples are Neh. 5.3 “*yet now* our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren” and 1 Sam. 27.1 “*Doth not* David hide himself”. Because of the sin, the position has changed; the sentence could better read “*but now, this being so*”.

So to the critical element in the verse “lest he put forth his hand”. “Lest” here is *pen*, from a root *panach*, to turn away from, and is used often, according to Gesenius, when joined to its subject, as a negative conjunction of removing, prohibiting or hindering, having a negative meaning not always evident in modern usage of the English word “lest”. The same word is used thus in Gen. 3.4, when the serpent said to Eve “*ye shall not surely die*”, and Gen. 24.6 when Abraham instructs Eleazar “*Beware that thou bring not my son hither again*”. There are other instances in the O.T. The expression “lest he put forth his hand” should therefore be rendered “*he shall not stretch forth his hand*”.

The passage could therefore reasonably be rendered “*And the Lord said, Lo, the man was like one of us, for the understanding of good and evil. But now, this being so*” (this development having taken place) “*he shall not stretch forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live for ever. Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken*”.

It would seem that the setting of the passage is the fact that man, as originally created and placed in the garden, was made acquainted, by the Lord, of two principles, good and evil, before he had any practical experience of either. In this he was like the celestials who must also be cognisant of the difference. It is a real question how, if he had remained loyal to God and never disobeyed, he could ever come to an appreciation of the sad consequences of sin. He would then never have witnessed sin in operation. But he did transgress, and the Lord said, in effect, “this has changed the situation. He cannot now have access to the tree of life and continue living indefinitely; he must surely die”.

And so in the story he is barred from the tree of life by being expelled from the garden.

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

5. The Powers of the Heavens

And now that world was coming to its end. With the birth of Lamech the father of Noah very few of his generation and none of the next were destined to live out the allotted span before the waters of the great Flood were to come upon them and destroy all that they had built. Methuselah, the man whose life-span of nine hundred and sixty-nine years is the longest of any recorded life, died six years before the Flood. His son Lamech, father of Noah, predeceased him by about thirty years according to the record. The remainder were included with those of whom Jesus said, much later on, that they were heedlessly *"eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage . . . and knew not, until the Flood came, and took them all away"* (Matt. 24. 38-39) But, *"the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small"*. Under Divine supervision and control, the forces of Nature were gathering for the cataclysm which was to put the whole of that ungodly world into an age-long sleep from which in the yet future Millennial day they will awake to an opportunity of returning to, and reconciliation with, God. But as yet they knew nothing of all this; their hearts were set on wickedness and every form of evil, so that when God looked down He saw only that *"the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6.5).

It is only during this present century that the true cause of Noah's Flood has been established with tolerable certainty. So far as the incipient human community was concerned, confined as it was to the general Arabian-Iraq area, its impact was in the form of a gigantic tidal wave coming in from the Indian ocean and flooding the whole of those lands to a depth, temporarily, of probably up to a thousand feet. Geological investigation and examination of the soil has established that. As to the cause of the tidal wave, the work of the German scientist Liebnitz in AD 1690 provided the first clue in his conclusion that in the early stages of the earth's evolution masses of water and minerals were vapourised and flung off to circle round the earth in the way Saturn's rings can be seen to do today; to quote his words *"when the outer crust of the earth had cooled down sufficiently to allow the vapours to be condensed, they fell, investing the entire globe"*. This was elaborated by the 10th century French Naturalist Lamarck who said the great oceanic flood must have invested the

earth long after it became the home of living beings. Immanuel Kant, a little later, asserted that this was the deluge of the Bible in the days of Noah. At the close of the 19th century the American Professor Isaac Vail published his *"The Earth's Annular System"* in which he rationalised all that hereto had been said on the subject, picturing a vast canopy of water circling the skies of the antediluvian world, eventually, in the days of Noah, to descend at the Poles in the form of icy water and snow which not only deluged the planet but changed its climate from Pole to Pole, to its present variable condition.

A great many facts, unknown to these early investigators, have come to light during this present century which support the thesis. Vail was able to claim that the then known rings of Saturn and belts of Jupiter were examples of the same phenomenon. During this present century it has been established that Uranus, Neptune and Venus also possess the same, (Venus as recently as 1974). It seems fairly conclusive therefore that this process did characterise the development of the earth during its preparation as a habitat for man.

The net effect of this, so far as the antediluvian world was concerned, and particularly as respects the equatorial regions where the then human race was congregated, was that instead of men looking upward to a clear sky in which both sun and moon were plainly visible, they would only have been faintly visible if at all, and men saw instead a brilliant expanse of diffused light by the sun shining upon the outer surface of this canopy of water vapour circulating above the denser atmosphere and maintaining its position by centrifugal force as it rotated with the earth. But gravity was also playing its part; as time went on, the canopy was pulled inexorably towards the poles where centrifugal force is weakest, and eventually by gravitational attraction descended, condensing as it did so, to the surface of the planet. That in turn gave rise to the giant tidal waves which emerged from Arctic and Antarctic regions to sweep over the earth. Whilst the canopy persisted, the earth was in a kind of greenhouse condition from Pole to Pole in which vegetation flourished in an air temperature higher than now. Apart from the special region especially suited to man's introduction to the earth, the Garden of Eden, it is probable that terrestrial vegetation was lush and rank with mainly extensive dense forests. Land

would have to be cleared before food could be grown, and this for an extremely limited number of men at the first, with no tools, might well explain the meaning of the Divine sentence after the Fall *"thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"* (ch. 3.16-17). For a good many years they must have had to scratch a living as best they could. Even at the end, Lamech the father of Noah alluded to *"our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed"* (ch. 5.29).

A number of Scripture allusions support this picture of terrestrial conditions during this pre-flood era. So far back as the second creative day, Ch. 1.6-9 describes the development of this water canopy as separation of the waters above the firmament from those below. The word "firmament" here in the AV comes from the Latin *"firmamentum"*, meaning something solid, and this is because in the Middle Ages, when the Ptolemaic cosmogony was the scientific understanding of astronomy, heaven was believed to be on a kind of solid transparent globe encircling the earth. The Hebrew word is *ragia* which means, literally, an expanse. In short, the atmosphere was to intervene between the seas below and the canopy above. Hence the later story of the Flood, when *"all the fountains of the great deep"* (*tehom*, abyss, outer space) *"were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened"* (ch. 7.11). Reminiscence of this comes in Psa. 104.6-9 *"thou coveredst it" (the earth) "with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled-; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. They go up by the mountains, they go down by the valleys, unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over, that they turn not again to cover the earth"*. It would seem that David and his countrymen of the 10th century B.C. knew more about this cosmological phenomenon than is generally realised.

A rather obscure expression in Ch. 2.5-6 is illuminated by realisation of the existence of this water vapour canopy. *"The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground, but a mist which went up from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground"*. The vegetable world—grass, plants, trees,—of the third day had come into existence but as yet there was no rain. The explanation was first noticed by Vail. Rain as now known is caused by solar evaporation from the oceans carried in the

form of clouds over the land where it condenses again into water and falls as rain, seeping into the earth and so to the rivers which run into the oceans and so the cycle is repeated. But in the antediluvian world under the canopy there was no wind to carry the clouds even if they could form, for winds are caused by dissimilar temperatures and under the canopy the world was of equal temperature in all parts, But this very condition induced another process. The sun shining upon the canopy on one side of the earth during the day warmed the atmosphere which absorbed moisture from the ground (the *"mist which went up from the ground"* (Ch.2.6) until the air was laden with moisture (as in a present day greenhouse). When night came and that side of the earth was turned away from the sun the atmosphere cooled and consequently shed its load of moisture—the colder the air, the less moisture can it hold in suspension. Instead of the present localised impact of rain-storms as dictated by wind direction and power with consequent drought in one place and floods in another, this must have been a gentle up and down movement of a saturating mist which watered the whole face of the ground every night. This is Vail's explanation.

Next comes the rainbow—it is clear from the narrative that the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds after the Flood was a new phenomenon, a sign from the Lord that He would never again desolate the world by a flood. It would have had no meaning if Noah had seen one before. The rainbow is caused by sunlight passing through raindrops and being refracted into its constituent colours when it meets the eyes. There being no rain before the Flood there could therefore be no rainbow. This reference in Gen. 9.12-17 is corroborated by a similar reference to the rainbow in the Sumerian legend of the Flood, written at a much later date, where it is poetically likened to a necklace of jewels round the neck of the goddess Ishtar, Venus. That obviously is a corruption of the original story originating when the worship of many gods—and goddesses—had developed.

So the general picture of the antediluvian world is one in which the entire world possessed a genial climate and more or less equable temperature, warmer and more humid than now, windless and rainless, a consistent climate and the seasons marked by only moderate changes of temperature as the earth moved on its axis relative to the sun. The sky by day was a shining expanse of diffused light and by night, even when moonless, would still maintain a clear twilight due to the refraction of

sunlight as it encountered the canopy and then slanted downward toward the sunless side of the earth. Nights must have been much shorter.

Of that final six centuries of the old world the only record is contained in a few verses of chapter 6, where the story of the apostate angels is recorded very briefly and the Lord's intimation to Noah that He was going to bring that world to an end. There is the rather cryptic remark in Ch. 6.3. "*The Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years*". Why the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, should be thought to be "striving" with man in that antediluvian Age is not explained, nor yet what is really meant by the hundred and twenty years. It is evident that the translators had a little trouble with this verse, for various authorities, ancient and modern, have insisted that "strive" should have been rendered, variously, abide in, be humbled in, call; none of these alternatives help much to elucidate the meaning.

The usual explanation of the verse is to the effect that after the coming Flood the life-span of man would be limited to a hundred and twenty years. This is manifestly not the meaning, for the first thousand years after the Flood the life span was from five hundred to two hundred. It was another thousand years before the usual figure was down to a hundred and twenty. And even until the present time there have been cases of men living up to a hundred and fifty or so. Something having a more definite relevance to the time of the Flood must be inherent in this verse.

A possible clue is afforded by the Septuagint rendering, translated from the Greek Bible of our Lord's day; "*my spirit shall certainly not remain among these men for ever, because they are flesh, but their days shall be a hundred and twenty years*". "strive with" becomes "remain among" and "man" singular becomes "these men," plural. The Douay, from the Latin, goes part of the way with "*shall not remain in man for ever*". It is known that there were three different versions of the Hebrew Bible during the two or three centuries before our Lord, possessing various minor differences in wording like those between our Authorised Version and Revised Version and so on. The translators who rendered these into the Greek version, the Septuagint, some two and a half centuries B.C. had to select which of these minor differences they would adopt. In the Second Century A.D. the Jewish scholars called the Masorites undertook the task of preparing a "standard text" Hebrew Bible

from these same versions, which standard text, known now as the Masoretic, had to be treated similarly. Hence the occasional differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible of today. This instance appears to be one of the differences. But which is the right one?

The word "strive" in the AV, is in Hebrew, "*dun*", and this is its only occurrence. There is another Hebrew word *lun* (sometimes *lin*) which does mean to remain, continue, abide. If in fact the Masorites used a version which had an incorrectly spelt word "*dun*" instead of *lun* then the discrepancy between the two would be explained. The difference between the singular "man" and plural "men" is only one letter in the Hebrew so that the Septuagint may well preserve the original text. The same word in Hebrew has the same meaning both of "with" in "strive with", or "in" or "among" in "remain", so the two expressions do match up fairly well.

In which case what did the Lord mean, if He really said that his spirit was not to remain among "these men" for ever because they are flesh? Obviously there was no sense in which the Holy Spirit of God was residing in or with men in that degenerate world in which every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil, and that continually. But the word *ruach* not only denotes the Spirit of God, it also means breath. The breath of life is the spirit of life. "These men" are not men yet to be born in a future age whose lives are thus to be limited. Perhaps this is a word the Lord gave just one hundred and twenty years before the Flood. "Ever" here is "*olam*", meaning an age or long period of time. Men heretofore had been living some nine hundred years. But no more. The life-breath of God which kept them alive was to be summarily cut short by the Flood one hundred and twenty years hence.

There is another possibility. Verse 3 applied to men reads awkwardly between verses 2 and 4, which refer, not to men of Adam's race, but to the *nephilim*—almost as if it ought to come between 4 and 5. And why say "these" men, who are "also" flesh. All of Adam's race were flesh. Is there a possibility that the Lord was referring, not to Adamic man at all, but to those semi-human creatures the *nephilim*? It has already been shown that this word is a Hebrew transliteration of Akkadian *napistu* - *ilu*, meaning "life-breath of God, and that they, though of human form, were probably in fact unreasoning and savage animals and as such, like the entire human and animal creation, possessed the breath of God, but would return to their

dust when their lifespan had ended, as it did when the Flood came. Did the Lord mean to indicate that the scourge of these *nephilim*, who "also were flesh", similar in physical body to Adamic men, would come to their end at the expiry of the hundred and twenty years?

Noah would have been four hundred and eighty years old when those words were spoken. Was that the first intimation he received as to precisely when the catastrophe would occur; Noah was clearly responsible for concluding the genealogical list which is chapter 5 of Genesis and that list includes the death of Methuselah which was only six years before the Flood. Then, but before the Flood came, he ended the record with the subscription in Ch. 6.9. "*These are the generations*" (the family

histories) "*of Noah*".

So that world approached its end. The world of man, sunk in depravity and lawlessness, long since having abandoned God and his righteousness, groaning and suffering under the tyranny of the Nephilim and unable to find release. Up in the skies the forces of Nature moving into position for the final act in the drama, when the earth was to be swept clean in preparation for a fresh start.

And in the darkness God found his man, one in all the multitude who stood out from his fellows in his stand for righteousness, and in that man the Lord ordained the way of salvation for the children of Adam. He looked down upon a well-nigh corrupt earth, "*but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*".

(To be concluded)

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Mark 4, 3-23

"*There went out a sower to sow*" (Mark 4.3).

So simple a beginning to a story but how full of potential instruction. In the sowing of seed there reposes infinite possibilities. On the one hand, arrant failure, if weather is unpropitious and the soil sterile; on the other, continuing growth and fruitage, further seeding, and increase through season after season that may never end. The deserts of the earth are the cemeteries of bygone plants and trees that once flourished but whose seeds eventually perished and failed to reproduce their kind; the lush pastures and thick forests of the earth are the descendants of countless generations of plants that fruited and seeded and brought forth anew year after year because the soil was good, and sun and rain played their part. All this was inherent in the word-picture Jesus drew for the multitude that this moment was gathered by the lake-side to hear his teaching.

The parable is evidently intended to illustrate the various degrees of receptiveness to the Gospel message displayed by different hearers. Here is the reaction of every man who evinces any appreciation of the Word of God and the appeal of Jesus Christ whatever. Here are the varied results of the lodgment of the seed of righteousness in the hearts of men. This parable is fulfilled over and over again as generation succeeds generation, in all the years that have elapsed since Pentecost to the present. It is not, like some of the parables, a picture of some aspect of the end of this Age or the characteristics of the coming Kingdom of God. It is

not a dispensational parable. It is the story of the impact of the Gospel upon the mind and heart of every one who gives heed, if only for a moment, to its message, and the ultimate consequence of the impact.

"*There went out a sower to sow*". A simple approach, but how direct! The vision is flashed as in a moment on the screen, and we see the wide, ploughed field awaiting the seed, the pathway skirting its borders, the line of rocky boulders and large pebbles, cleared from the field, lining the pathway in rugged profusion, and the sower himself, striding along the narrow track, his hand already in the capacious bag of seed slung across his shoulders. "*There went out a sower to sow.*" His methods were not as the methods of to-day. To and fro across the field he must needs walk, scatter the seed handful after handful, trusting to wind and rain to spread it evenly and bed it down into the soft ground. No drills to turn up the ground and soften it to receive the seed; no great wheeled machines to accomplish the task in a fraction of the time human hands would require to do it. No mechanical aids at all; the seed was simply broadcast over the waiting ground and found lodgment where conditions were favourable. So it is with the message of Jesus; it succeeds best when it is sown without the artificial assistance of man's devising, publicity schemes and organised pressure groups and the like. As with Paul, who knew nothing among the Corinthians "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" following the relative failure of

his more intellectual approach to the philosophers of Athens, so with all who would be efficient "sowers". The simplicity of the Gospel is its greatest recommendation.

But as the sower walked along the edge of the field the winds carried the seed across the hard, beaten pathway he had just left, and there it lay, bleaching in the sun. He went on his way, and the flocks of birds, watching from a safe distance, swooped down quickly on that pathway and quickly devoured every visible shining grain before the return of the sower caused them rapidly to take flight and settle on the trees bordering the field, watching. There was nothing he could do about it. The seed had to be sown broadcast so that at least every piece of good ground received its quota, and in the process it was inevitable that some should fall on ground that was completely unresponsive. Perhaps in another season of sowing that same ground, softened by rain and broken up by man's labour, might receive the seed again and this time allow it to germinate and bear fruit. God does not limit his offer of salvation to one opportunity only; it is open for so long as there is any chance or possibility of response, and hearts that may at the first be hard and unyielding may eventually by the circumstances of life or the persuasiveness of God become soft and receptive and at the last produce the fruit of the good ground. But in the meantime, the word of God falls on the ears but leaves no lasting impression. Idle it lies, finding no real lodgment, no vibrating chord, until Satan, the arch-deceiver, by one of the many means at his disposal obliterates the transient impression which had been made and it is as if the word had never been spoken at all. Like Israel in the days of Ezekiel *"Thou art unto them a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not"*. The word spoken has vanished as surely as did the seed on the pathway after the birds had swooped.

Now he was coming back, a little farther from the path this time, but even so, much of the seed fell among the piles of rocks and boulders which separated path from field. It was safe enough there in the nooks and crannies; the birds were unable to reach it and there was a certain amount of soil and moisture which allowed the seed to germinate and grow. But later on, as the green stems began to show above the pieces of rock, the fierce heat of the sun dried up what moisture there was and the tender green shrivelled up and vanished away, for there was nothing in which the roots could spread

and find sustenance. The seed was, after all, only seed. It had within itself the power of life but must take to itself the constituents of growth, the soil, moisture and air necessary to enshroud that life in a material entity which would ultimately play its part in the economy of the world. So often it happens that there is a conversion inspired by the enthusiasm of the moment, engendered perhaps by the emotional atmosphere of a revival meeting or the apparent attraction of finding a life of peace and satisfaction "in Jesus" without realising that such a life is going to involve more than just taking the word from him without doing anything about it or beginning to "grow up in him". Such will receive the word with every manifestation of appreciation and gladness. "This is what we were looking for" say they, and for a while they are very vocal in their expressions of joy and appreciation. But presently there is difficulty, opposition or persecution. Perchance they become disappointed or impatient. Things are not as they expected; the test of time finds them out; the life of consecration to God's service is too narrow, too onerous. It involves giving up things they do not wish to give up. They are like the man who having put his hands to the plough, looked back, and so manifested his unfitness for the Kingdom of God. These, then, like the seed falling upon the rocks, endure for a time, but when the sun's heat beats upon them, they wilt and vanish away.

Turning the corner of the field, the sower trampled over a patch of weeds and thorny scrub. Unheeding, he scattered his seed over that patch and it germinated and grew, strong and healthy at first. But the weeds and thorns grew too, and faster and stronger than the wheat, and soon there could be seen only a few pallid fruitless stalks half-hidden among the fast spreading thorns. Discouraging for the sower; the weeds and thorns had only been incipient and barely noticeable when he scattered the seed. Later on, after he had left the field for sun and rain to do their work, they grew so strongly and quickly that the stems and leaves resulting from the good seed became eclipsed and ultimately completely submerged. The nature of the ground may have had something to do with it; weeds normally grow in poor ground, soil that has become deficient in the essential constituents required to make good plants. Perhaps prolonged fertilising was what was wanted here, and a clearing away of weeds and thorns so that in another season seed might be sown that would have a better chance of maturing. At any rate God has provided a future Age for such a re-fertilising

and elimination of all that offends so that the seed may be sown again in ground that then may be found more responsive. But this does not appear in the parable, for Jesus was talking about the Gospel as it is preached in this Age, the Age in which it is possible for the *"cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in"* to *"choke the word"*. So here must be seen those who attain a more advanced position at first. More resolute, more determined, they are not easily turned aside by opposition or persecution. They ride over the disappointments and disillusionments and become pillars of strength in the Christian community, and as the years pass by it seems impossible that they could ever fall away. Yet they do fall away. Some meet with success in business and become wealthy in the riches of this world; some attain high honour among men; some have their attention distracted by other aims and pursuits and interests. Imperceptibly at first, but none the less surely, their progress in the things of the Spirit slows, and stops, and so they become progressively surrounded and hidden by those interests of this world upon which their hearts have become set, and at last, they are seen no more.

And now the sower is well into the field, his strong hands flinging handful after handful of seed over the soft, yielding soil, where it will lie and germinate, and grow stronger and taller, receiving nourishment from the soil along with the benefit of sun and rain, until at last it stands, proudly erect, a golden glory awaiting the coming of the reaper. This is the kind of labour and reward that every witness for the truth as it is in Jesus desires to experience and receive. *"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields"* He said *"for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal"*. That is the vision which inspires every one of the sowers as he goes out like that worker in the parable, ardently scattering the seed on ground which he

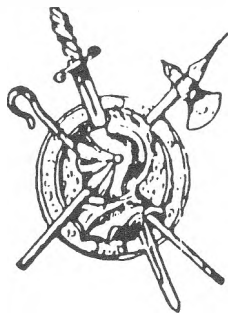
knows to be good, and because he has that knowledge already sees in his mind's eye the harvest that will surely come. Despite the wayside, the stony ground, the weeds and thorns, there are still those who not only hear the Word and receive it into sincere hearts, and allow the Spirit to do its great work, but throughout life, be it short or long, remain faithful to their covenant with God, in steadfast faith looking unto Jesus who is not only the Author but also the Finisher of their faith. These survive all the vicissitudes of storm and tempest, the gales of wind and the crushing hail, by virtue of their strong roots penetrating far down into the good soil and taking firm hold thereof, their long, shapely leaves reaching up into the air to receive the sun and rain which is God's gift, attaining at the last that full-fruited maturity which the Apostle Paul in Ephesians calls *"the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4.13).

To the end this parable talks of individuals, and the response of individuals to the message of the Gospel. Although it is true that the sowing in good ground eventually produces a company of dedicated and tried and approved believers associated together in one Church which is the Body of Christ, a means in his hand for the reconciliation to God of *"whosoever will"* in the Messianic Age, there is no reference to this or trace of it here. The sown seed comes to maturity because it was sown in good ground but there is no intimation of the ultimate purpose for which it was sown or the use to which the crop will be put. That belongs to a different sphere of thought. There is no question of reaping or harvest here. The end is reached when the sown grain has reached the stage of bringing forth fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold, it matters not. After the full cycle of development has been traversed, the sowing of the seed of the Word has brought forth its fruit in the life of the individual, and that individual is ready for God's purpose.

"Vox Populi, Vox Dei."

Alas, poor fallen human nature! How little it is to be relied upon! How untruthful is the proverb, *"Vox populi, vox Dei"*—*"The voice of the people is the voice of God"*. If we could suppose the world filled with perfect men and women, in the image and likeness of God, and actuated by the spirit of holiness, then, indeed, we could suppose that the voice of the multitude would be the voice of God. But the very reverse is not infrequently the case; the voice of the people is often the voice of the demons who are deluding them, as the Apostle intimates, saying, *"The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not."*

In accord with this thought, that the judgment of the world is not to be depended upon under present conditions, is our Lord's suggestion to all of us, *"Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world" (blind, still servants of sin, in fellowship instead of opposition to the principles of selfishness now prevailing) "the world would love its own. But now ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world, that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruitage should be perpetual."* To us, then, the voice of Jesus is the voice of God, and we his sheep hear his voice and follow him.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

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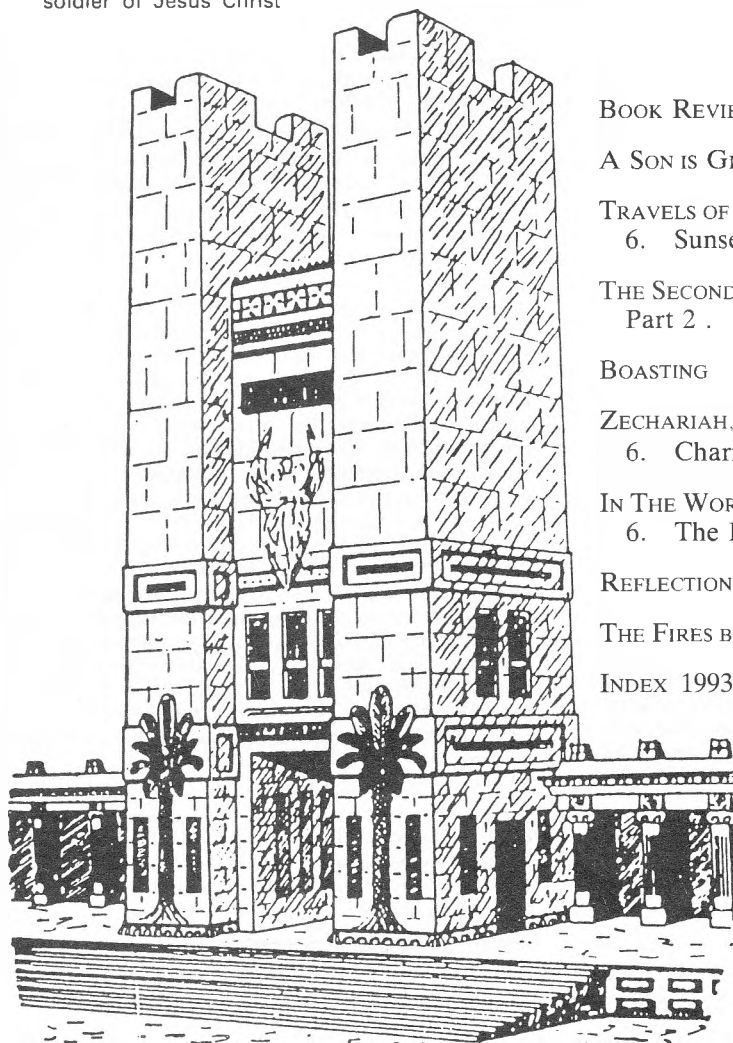
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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BOOK REVIEWS

Narratives of the Hebrew Bible. D. W. Gunn & J. N. Ferrell. 263pp. Oxford University Press. 1993 £35 ISBN 0-19-213244-X.

This is "concerned with the correct way of interpreting Biblical narratives" by "reading these narratives as we might read modern novels or short stories". It does not necessarily support the historical veracity of Bible narrative, but offers literary criticism of the text by modern standards. It particularly cites certain characters. Adam-Eve, Abraham-Sarah, Tamar-Judah, Jephthah, Jonah, Daniel/Nebuchadnezzar showing some of these in a more unfavourable light than is usually assumed, in others illuminating some common misconceptions, such as Jonah's flight from God. That regarding the request of Achsah the daughter of Caleb derived from a single verse in Judges is excellent. The stricture on Daniel's "repetitive style" ignores the fact that this is a characteristic of the Sumero-Babylonian literature of his and earlier days and tends to confirm the historic authenticity of the Book rather than the opposite. The suggestion that Abraham sold his wife to Pharaoh in exchange for goods and slaves is certainly not Biblical; the text attributes the initiative to the "princes of Pharaoh" and perhaps Tamar of Judah was unnecessarily labelled when all she did was to invoke the action of the times which afterwards became the Levirate Law, the nearest living relative to raise up a son and heir to the dead. It is suggested that "Eve did not sin; she opted for reality" and that "God put the tree of knowledge in the midst of the garden but failed to consider the outcome". On the other hand there are some penetrating flashes of insight; "The plot of the Book of Jonah could have involved Jerusalem or Samaria instead of Nineveh – and stayed the same". Perhaps the most revealing word is that which closes the book – speaking of the effect of the Bible in

whatever manner it is interpreted – "They may be uncovering a world in need of redemption and healing and a world-view much in need of change".

Indexes: General, Bible names, Texts cited. Full Bibliography.

"Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets" J. F. A. Sawyer. 180 pp. PB. Oxford University Press. 1993 £9.95. ISBN 0-19-826209-4.

The author undertakes the ambitious task of surveying the field of Biblical prophecy from Moses to Malachi, investigating its nature and principles. The treatment is analytical, largely on the basis of the prophet's own inner impulses.

The background is of the "critical" school and this envisages the suggestion that many of the prophecies were written after the events they predicted, as in the case of Daniel and Antiochus. This does not detract from some penetrating comments on their messages – Hosea, a good exposition on human relationships; the transformation of Amos from a prophet of doom to a prophet of hope, the outlook and character of Jonah. Stress is laid on the relevance of O.T. prophecy to N.T. doctrine, and, perhaps, importantly, an admission that the theme of many prophecies is the foreseen end of this Age and its transformation into a new Age of peace and prosperity. A minor slip on page 88; the Bible does not state that Uzzah met his death by fire from God (in fact it was probably heart failure upon the sudden realisation that he committed the unforgivable sin in touching the holy object). A printer's error on page 107 where "kills" should be "spills" thus spoiling the sense. The book deals very adequately with the human expression of the prophetic consciousness without touching on the Apostle Peter's dictum "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit".

There is a general index, index of texts cited, and Bibliography.

New B.F.U. Address. Readers are reminded that on and after 1st January 1994 the central address will be 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham, NG13 9JL and correspondence should be sent to that address.

Renewals 3,4,7, & 9000 series. Desirable streamlining of routine has dictated some alteration to the traditional dates. The usual March date for the 3000 series is now changed to November/December issue. Readers in all four of these ranges will therefore find renewal slips in this issue and it will be appreciated if these can be returned as soon as possible. Readers, especially those in the 3000 series, who may have sent monetary gifts during the last few months are not expected to contribute again, but from now on all renewals will be invited in November for the ensuing year.

For U.S.A. readers. We are advised that the P.B.I. address for literature supplies, including the "Plan in Brief", announced in the Sep/Oct issue is now changed to 2905 East Sunset Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226

Gone from us



Sis. Amy Pampling (Milborne Port)



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

A SON IS GIVEN

*A Christmas
Discourse*

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder." (Isa. 9. 6).

Long centuries before Jesus was born, and Christmas became a Christian festival, the peoples of Bible lands—Assyria, Babylonia, Canaan—made the end of December a time of celebration and rejoicing. It marked the change of shortening days and the turning of the sun to climb higher in the heavens; it gave promise of ripening crops and the joys of harvest. The ancient Babylonians used to drag their Yule logs into their homes on what corresponds to our Christmas Eve and consume them by fire; the following morning they decked with gifts the Tree of Life which they pretended in symbol had grown from the ashes of the dead log—the prototype of our "Christmas tree"—thus, said they, would life come out of death, in due time, by the favour of the gods.

Where did they get the tradition from, tradition so strangely true to fact? Was there some lingering memory of the true faith once held and taught by their common father Noah, their racial ancestors Shem, Ham and Japheth, the patriarchs of their families like Peleg and Heber? It would almost seem so! For it is true that out of the ashes of death will come new life; that after the destruction of the dead wood of this world there will arise a Tree of Life whose fruit shall be for food to mankind and whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations, rich gifts indeed for the sons of men, in that greatest of all Christmas festivals when the Kingdom of light and life has succeeded upon the ending of this world of darkness and death.

Isaiah had something of this in mind when he saw the vision of the Great Light. Like so many of the prophets' revelations, he viewed this representation of things to come against the background of his own day. There is a temptation to read the thrilling passage "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," as though it were a completely disjointed piece of revelation sandwiched unthinkingly into a passage dealing with the local troubles of Israel in the prophet's own day having nothing to do with the subject of the Kingdom. That is not so; chapters 7 to 12 of Isaiah's prophecy comprise one complete and harmonious presentation of Millennial truth in which the vision of the Everlasting Father finds its proper place. And in order to understand the full harmony that exists between these wonderful chapters we must endeavour to put ourselves in the

prophet's place and look at them through his eyes.

The story starts with Isaiah's seventh chapter. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel the "ten-tribe" kingdom, have joined together to attack Judah, the "two-tribe" kingdom of which Ahaz was the apostate king. They have besieged Jerusalem, but the Lord has not yet suffered them to take it. The people of Judah are nevertheless greatly afraid, for they have long since abandoned their faith in God and they know not where to turn for help.

This is Isaiah's opportunity. At the bidding of the Lord he goes forth to meet Ahaz and give him an assurance that the Lord is going to defend Jerusalem—for his own Name's sake; certainly not on account of any piety or faith on the part of the wicked king. But Ahaz does not believe; he does not want to believe. *"If ye will not believe,"* says Isaiah, *"surely ye shall not be established"*. Therefore a second word came to Ahaz. *"Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God."* commands Isaiah. But Ahaz said, *"I will not ask, neither will I prove the Lord"*. His rebellion is deliberate and calculated; it cannot be excused. Therefore the message of condemnation, already given to the ten-tribe kingdom. A young woman shall bear a son, and call his name Immanuel. That son is the sign; before that child has grown to youthful maturity, Assyria shall have desolated Samaria and ravaged Judah. Ten-tribes, and some from among the two-tribes, shall have gone into captivity for their sins. The seventh and eighth chapters trace the sad history of that terrible time of the invading Assyrian hosts; the people, said Isaiah, would finally look unto the earth, *"and behold trouble and darkness, dimness and anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness"*.

Now these were not just empty words, spoken by the prophet after the manner of a gramophone record. Isaiah, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit, was *seeing* these things, future though they were, and he described what he saw. His prophetic vision showed him the grim Assyrian warriors marching through the land, and fleeing multitudes pressing on brokenly before them. He saw the deeds of violence, the slaughter of helpless captives, the brutal treatment of women and children, the burning villages, the desolated vineyards and pastures, the clear Judean skies clouded and darkened by drifting smoke. As he gazed upon that dread scene his prophetic vision sharpened, and in the spirit of his mind he was

carried over nigh on three thousand years of time, to see the events which this Syrian invasion in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah pictured. He saw the last great onslaught of the forces of darkness, the hosts which we call the armies of Gog and Magog, descending upon God's ancient people at the end of this age. Isaiah still beheld Assyrian soldiers, he still identified the people and the villages and the scenery of the land he knew, but with that mysterious certainty that is sometimes our own experience in dreams he knew that he was looking now at a scene representing the end of this Age and the time of the greatest deliverance of all; and as he looked, straining to see into the murky blackness which all but shrouded the vagueness of the moving figures, men, women and children writhing under the terror that had come upon them, he saw something else, something which caused him to look up and break into the tremendous declaration that commences at verse 2 of chapter 9.

"The people that walk in darkness," he cried in exultation, *"have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."*

Away there on the horizon, beyond the tops of the eastern mountains, above the darkness of the present terror, the glorious radiance of coming day was racing up the sky. The time of light, the time of life, was come, and the darkness would soon be overpast. The Lord was coming as it were from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran, his glory covering the heavens, and his brightness as the light of day, as the sun. Isaiah saw the Assyrian soldiers cower and flee before that terrible radiance, the arrows of Heaven's artillery raining upon them, and all their armies put to flight. The Lord had risen up to the defence and deliverance of his people, and from behind the hills there came into sight the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings. And the people, so lately bound in the darkness and in the shadow of death, rejoiced in this great appearance which had delivered them from the kingdom of darkness and brought them forth into the kingdom of light. That is what Isaiah saw, and for the moment all thought of his countrymen's present troubles and dangers was forgotten, the while his eyes drank in their fill of those resplendent glories symbolising earth's Millennial day.

This is the Christmas vision indeed, the turning of the old, darksome, dying year into the new, lightening, living age of light and life for all men. Here is at hand the time of promise and of gifts unto men, the prospect of harvest and all the joys

that come with harvest, the toil of ploughing and harrowing but a memory. Here in very truth is the day for which Isaiah so long had looked, and concerning which he was yet to preach and teach persistently and consistently through many dark years. But for the present the vision was leading him onward into a glory of revelation.

"Thou hast multiplied the nation; thou hast increased the joy." So the Margolis version has it, and Rotherham confirms with *"Thou hast increased the exultation; thou hast made great the joy."* (The "not" in verse 3 of the A.V. is an incorrect rendering). *"They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."* Here is a picture of mankind, freed at last from the fear of evil things and evil men, from death and all that death implies, "multiplied" upon the fair Millennial earth, destined to be the home of resurrected hosts. Isaiah sees here the beginning of the Millennial kingdom; perhaps he saw, or thought he saw, the promised multiplication of his own nation, Abraham's seed, "as the sands by the seashore" but it is just as correct to apply his prophetic outburst to the greater increase of all men, the entire human family, in that day. He had just seen the great light burst upon a world of evil and put the darkness to flight; now he sees the consequent increase of men and the increase of their joy. *"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."*

Why do they thus rejoice? The next verse supplies the answer. *"For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."* The rout of the Midianites in the days of Gideon was one of Israel's greatest victories. The brave three hundred, having nothing but lights concealed in earthen pitchers, by that means and that alone defeated the enemy host. Did the Holy Spirit suggest that defeat of Midian to Isaiah with set intent? Is it not true that this coming greater defeat of the powers of greater evil at the end of this Age is going to be because another "three hundred" will have had their inner light revealed by the breaking of their earthen pitchers? *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father!"* (Matt. 13. 43).

"For every boot stamped with fierceness, and every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire." Thus runs the Margolis rendering, and other translators agree with the

thought, not easily discernible in the Authorised Version, that the rejoicing is on account of the implements of warfare, the armour and clothing of the soldiery, and the grim relics of war, being all consumed in the fire. *"He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth."* War is no more; the time of peace has come, and the devouring fire has consumed all the institutions of unrighteousness.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Was it that Isaiah heard, eight hundred years before it floated over Judea's quiet fields, the angels' song of Bethlehem? Did the Holy Spirit in some wonderful manner convey to his attentive mind those strains that later fell upon the ears of the shepherds? It reads almost like a song. *"Unto us a child is born . . . unto us a son is given . . ."* Mysterious, sweet cadences, rising and falling on the calmness that has succeeded the vision of slaughter. *"Unto us a child is born . . . a child is born!"* That surely must be the fulfilment of Divine promise, the birth of earth's new King, come to rule in righteousness. *"Unto us a son is given!"* The truest son of Israel that Israel would ever know, a prophet like unto Moses, a king like unto David, a priest like unto—Melchisedek; yes, a priest upon his throne. *"A child is born! . . . a son is given!"* So the music must have gone on as Isaiah listened. *"Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord . . . Unto us a child is born . . . a son is given . . . and the government shall be upon his shoulder!"*

The heavenly song fades away—perhaps the vision passes from his sight also, but the inspiration of the Spirit is strong upon Isaiah and he opens his mouth, only partially comprehending the significance of his words, yet knowing that they have to do with that coming Day for which he looks.

"His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor." The comma ought not to be there. The expression is a combined one. The word for "wonderful" possesses the meaning of exceptionally singular or unique, something as it were beyond the understanding of mere man. When Manoah asked his celestial guest his name, and the angel told him it was "secret" the same word is used (Jud. 12 18). The word "counsellor" is one that is used of royalty's closest confidants and advisers (as King David's counsellor in 2 Sam. 13. 12). Our coming King is, then, in the first place, the Wonderful Counsellor. Of whom is He the confidant? Surely of his Father and our Father, who will do nothing without revealing his purposes to the beloved Son

in whom his plans are centred and by whom they are executed. In the visions of Revelation one like unto a slain Lamb takes the sealed book from the hand of the Deity upon the Throne and reveals what is therein written. We do not know, we cannot visualise, the intimacy of fellowship and oneness of understanding that must exist between the Father and the Son, giving such depth of meaning to Jesus' own words, during his earthly life, "I and my Father are one". Surely He indeed is the One who *"was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him"* (Prov. 8. 30). Yea, indeed, his name is "Wonderful Counsellor".

But it is also *"the Mighty God"*. Not *El Elyon*—"The Most High". Not *"El Shaddai"*—"The Almighty". Not *"Jehovah"*—"The Eternal One". The Hebrew is *"Gibbor El"*. *Gibbor* is the word for giantlike, powerful, mighty, and the giants and mighty men of the Old Testament are *"gibborim"* (the plural form of *gibbor*). But *El* itself means "mighty one". The plural form, *elohim*, refers to God himself or to the heathen gods, or to angelic or supernatural beings, or even to mighty men, as in Psa. 82. 7 (*"I have said, ye are gods, and all of you children of the Most High"*) so this name "the mighty God" really means "the mightiest mighty one". Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom is committed all power in heaven and earth? Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom every knee in heaven as well as on earth, is to bow, and every tongue, angelic and earthly, confess? *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death."* There is a wonderful passage in the Apocryphal *"Gospel of Nicodemus"* in which the risen Lord is pictured as storming the gates of hell and rescuing its hopeless inhabitants. *"When the prince of hell heard"* (that Jesus was coming) *"he said"* (to Satan) *"I adjure thee by the powers which belong to thee and me that thou bring him not to me. For when I heard of the power of his word, I trembled for fear, and all my impious company were disturbed . . . And while Satan and the prince of hell were discoursing thus to each other, on a sudden there was a voice as of thunder and the rushing of winds, saying . . . Lift up your gates, O ye princes: and be ye lifted up, ye gates of hell, and the King of Glory will enter in . . . And the mighty Lord appeared in the form of a man, and enlightened those places which had ever before been in darkness; and broke asunder the fetters which before could not be broken; and with his invincible power visited those who sat in the deep darkness by iniquity, and the*

shadow of death by sin." This is assuredly our Mighty One, to whom has been given all power in heaven and in earth, and will exercise that power to overcome death and all evil and establish the reign of everlasting righteousness.

What then of his third title—*Everlasting Father*? Does He here usurp the prerogative of the One upon the Throne of Creation, the God and Father of us all? We know at the outset that such a thing can never be. At the close of the Millennial Age, when Christ the King will have subdued evil and vanquished death, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power that opposes his benevolent and life-giving sway (1 Cor. 15: 24), when mankind are, at long length, reconciled to God, and in full perfection of life have entered upon their eternal inheritance, *"then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."* (1 Cor. 15: 28). The thought in this title is that given by Rotherham; the *"Father of Futurity"* or the Father of the Coming Age. It is Jesus who has redeemed and purchased the entire human race by means of his own death on the cross; it is Jesus who receives them back to life in the Millennial Age soon to begin, and becomes their Mediator—the mediator between God and man during the remaining period of man's insufficiency. It is Jesus who gives them life; who by means of his priestly and kingly work will so influence the hearts and minds of men that all in whom is any possibility of reclamation will eventually repent and be converted, and come to Jesus, the Lord of Life, that they might have life. He will be the world's great Life-giver, the world's Father, during that Age and the life that men will receive they will receive at his hands. As it is in Adam that men die, so it is in Christ that men will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15: 22).

In so many ways He will be a father to redeemed humanity. *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd"* sings Isaiah *"and gently lead those that are with young."* There will be such infinite patience and understanding in that day. No longer will there be the hard, unyielding iron of the law, demanding its "pound of flesh", its demands against the sinners. There will be instead the wise, loving albeit firm discipline of the understanding parent, and a growing up into maturity, "whosoever will", under that paternal rule. The wilful sinner, if he will not repent, must remain a sinner still, but at the end he finds himself shut out of the Holy City, for

he has rejected life, and without life he cannot enter (Rev. 21: 27). But he that overcometh will be presented at the end before the Father Himself and experience the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

The Prince of Peace! There is no mistaking the meaning of that name! It brings to the mind at once all that is fondest in the dreams of men, in the hopes and beliefs of those who to-day are the Lord's disciples. "Peace on earth; goodwill to men." So many have given up hope that it will come; but we know differently. *"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."* (Psa. 72: 7-8). "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." (Psa. 85: 10-11). *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever"*. (Isa. 32: 18).

Not only is He the prince of that peace which is to be man's inward possession, peace of heart, of mind, of soul, that peace with God which is the result of justification in his sight (*"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God"*) (Rom. 5: 1), that peace which comes with the realisation of human perfection and possession of everlasting life. He is also the Prince of that outward peace which will be characteristic of human society in that blessed day. The same passage in Isa. 32 tells of that. *"My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places"* (vs. 18). What a contrast to this present day of distress and trouble, strife and tumult! *"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid."* (Micah 4: 4). In every picture of the future day that we have, this thought of peace is prominent and predominant. *"I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream."*

This is our King! This is earth's King, disesteemed as yet by those who will, one day, many of them and most of them, become his devoted and adoring subjects. *"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice even for ever."*

TRAVELS OF ABRAHAM

6. Sunset

The birth of Isaac, the child of promise, at Gerar soon had its repercussions. It was between twenty-five and thirty years since Abraham first entered Canaan and he was now a prosperous farmer and stock breeder occupying two substantial areas of land, one at Hebron and one in the vicinity of Gerar some forty miles distant, absorbing the energies of a large labour force whose families depended on him for their living. He had one fifteen-year-old son and another recently born and the continuance of his family tree seemed assured. It was now, perhaps, that he began to feel settled in life and could begin to take things more easily.

It was not to be. Trouble loomed on the domestic front. Gen. 21. 8 records that *"the child grew, and was weaned and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned"*. The time of this occurrence is a little difficult to determine. In modern times the weaning of a child is normally at an early stage in the child's life; in this case it is said that *"the child grew"* a word which means literally *"to become great"*, and implies at least some years of life before the word fits. The account goes on to say that Sarah saw Ishmael the son of Hagar *"mocking"*, and this aroused her resentment. This word in the particular grammatical connection means to play with or make sport with, and this again is more likely with a child several years old. It has been suggested that weaning in the East is, or was, delayed until the child was four or five years old; whether this is so or not the balance of probability seems to be that the incident happened when Isaac was about three to five years old and Ishmael therefore seventeen to nineteen. Some playful familiarity between these two at such ages would be the most natural thing in the world.

Sarah, however, did not see it that way. She was still bitterly resentful of Hagar and Ishmael and also apprehensive that the elder lad might yet supersede her son as the principal heir of Abraham. *"Cast out this bond-woman and her son"* she said to Abraham contemptuously *"for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac"*. The depth of her resentment is shown by her use of the term *"bond-woman"*, for according to the law and custom of the time Hagar had become a free woman upon the birth of Ishmael and was Abraham's legal second wife, and there was nothing Sarah could do about that.

The patriarch was in a dilemma. *"The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his*

son". But the Lord intervened and told him to accede to Sarah's wish; He himself would take care of the couple and eventually Ishmael would become the father of a great nation. That word, incidentally, was amply fulfilled. A substantial proportion of the Arab peoples now in Arabia are descended from Ishmael; the prophet of Islam, Mahomet, claimed descent from Ishmael, and some of the tribal names of the Arabs are those of some of the sons of Ishmael.

Abraham, of course, knew nothing of all this, but he probably realised the wisdom of the Lord's instruction. There was going to be no peace with Sarah and Hagar in the same house. So, early in the morning, he *"took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar . . . and sent her away"* and she *"wandered in the desert of Beer-Sheba"*.

Abraham has been criticised for an apparently heartless action in sending a woman to almost certain death in the wilderness. It was really not like that at all. His plan was to separate the two women, at least temporarily, until the storm blew over. Some twenty miles from Abraham's headquarters lay the oasis of Beer-Sheba where the immediate sequel shows that his stockmen had dug a well and evidently made a little local centre for his widely spread interests. (It was not called Beer-Sheba at that time; it was just a place in the open country where they had found water, as yet unclaimed, although it became the subject of dispute with the king of Gerar's herdsmen very soon afterwards.) What more natural than that Abraham should instruct Hagar to make her way there and settle down with his stockmen until he judged it safe for her to return. The bread and water was sufficient for the day and she could be there before evening.

Unfortunately the girl lost her way. There were no roads, only occasional track-ways, the countryside largely desert with occasional fertile areas surrounding springs of water and her goal probably no more than a collection of huts. Ch. 21.14 and 21 intimates that she wandered in the *"wilderness of Beer-Sheba"* and finished up at last in the wilderness of Paran. A look at the map shows that she must have passed the Beer-Sheba settlement five or ten miles or so to the south and after that got completely lost. She probably encountered a camp of Bedouin in the desert and threw in her lot with them, and there the lad Ishmael grew to manhood.

"At that time", runs the account, Abraham's

short sojourn in the vicinity of Gerar came to an end. He could have been there only three or four years. The occasion was the usual one in that land at that time, a dispute over water. He had apparently for some time occupied this extension of his holding twenty miles away where his servants had dug a well for their needs. The men of Abimelech king of Gerar had forcibly ejected them and taken possession of it. The king, oblivious of this, had come to Abraham with a proposal for an agreement of eternal friendship, recognising that Abraham's growing influence in the land made him a person with whom friendship was preferable to hostility. The story is recorded in chap 21.22-32. Abimelech protested his ignorance of the seizure and the outcome was a pact, a covenant, attested by a gift of sheep and cattle by Abraham, signalling agreement that the well, and presumably the area of land which it served, was rightfully the preserve of Abraham. The affair having been amicably settled, Abraham was left in undisputed possession. Abraham named the place Beer-Sheba, meaning "the well of the oath", in memory of the agreement, and moved his headquarters to that place. He had been in the vicinity of the king's city of Gerar only about three or four years, and the cluster of huts at Beer-Sheba, which had probably already been there for some time, probably entered into a phase of considerable building activity and extension. It was on or near the road which ran northward to Hebron and Damascus and southward to Egypt and this must have been a good business move, probably opening up some new markets for Abraham's products. The town, of course, is still there, and preserves the ancient name.

It is possible that Abraham realised that this was going to be his last move, for the incident closes in vss 53-54 with the intimation that he planted a "grove" there, and called upon the name of the Lord. The word "grove" in the A.V. usually denotes an "asherah", a grove of trees devoted to idolatrous worship and ceremonies. Here, though, it is "*eshel*" meaning a tree or trees memorialising a significant event, and this strengthens the supposition that he felt he had come to the end of his journeying. This in fact was the place of his dwelling until the day of his death.

Abraham did make one more journey of a few days and that must have been the most momentous of his life—the well-known mission to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac at the behest of the Lord. Many have been the theories purporting to explain how Abraham came to think that the Lord had commanded him to do this thing, but

none can deny the plain fact that the narrative declares quite positively that in fact the Lord did so, "*Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering*". That must have been a staggering blow. After all the years of hoping and waiting, of the unavailing episode of Ishmael, at last the unexpected birth of Isaac, with all the accompanying promises of God, the growth of that son to his present probable age of about fifteen—and now commanded to slay him by his own hand! The burnt offering was traditionally an act of thanksgiving to God for benefits received, such as plenteous crops in time of harvest, and part only, the best part, was offered to the Lord in recognition of his munificence. But here Abraham was to offer all. With Isaac dead, there was nothing left, and all the golden promises of future blessing for mankind through the line of Isaac were become null and void. Truly the works of the Lord are mysterious, and his ways past finding out, Abraham must have thought disconsolately, as he pondered the Lord's word to him.

But another thought must have come to him also. If he was to make an offering to the Lord at all, it must be that which was most precious to him. Nothing less than the best would do. And that most precious thing to him was his son Isaac, in whom all the promises rested. And still another thought. The God who gave and then took away, could as easily give back. The writer to the Hebrews declares that "*God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*" (Heb 11,19). He would do as he was bidden, and leave the outcome to God.

The rest of the story is well known, how the two of them journeyed to Mount Moriah fifty miles away, and prepared for the sacrifice on the very spot where in much later years the Temple at Jerusalem was to be built, and how at the last minute God stayed his hand and provided a ram for the purpose and Isaac was reprieved. So they returned home again, with Abraham having passed the supreme test of faith and earned the unqualified approval of the Lord.

It was probably only a few years after this happening that Abraham received what was probably quite unexpected news. The story is told in chap 22. 22-24. "*And it came to pass after these things*" (the offering of Isaac) "*that it was told Abraham, saying Behold, Milcah, she hath also borne children unto thy brother Nahor*", and then follows their names, eight of them. The inference is that Abraham knew nothing of this heretofore. The information probably came to him from merchant traders making their way through

Beer-Sheba on the road from the north to Egypt. It emerged that Nahor was now living at Haran and like his brother was a stock-breeder and farmer. Nahor and his wife Milcah, Sarah's sister, had remained in Ur of the Chaldees when the others had emigrated to Haran more than sixty years previously but had evidently in their turn moved to Haran at some later date unknown to Abraham. One of their sons was Bethuel, father of Rebekah who eventually became the wife of Isaac. This might well have been the first news of his elder brother Abraham had received since he himself left Ur of the Chaldees.

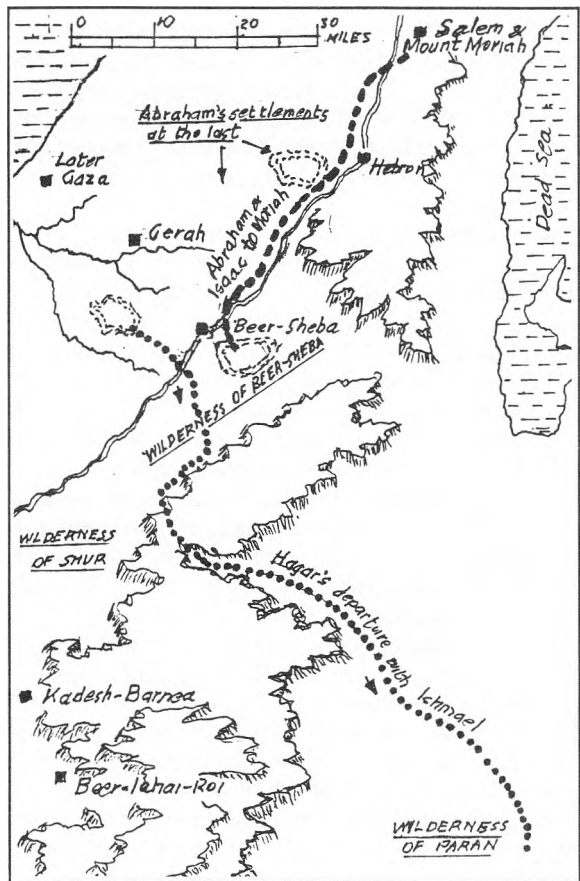
There comes now something like a twenty year break in the narrative during which nothing of moment happened except that at some time during this period Isaac, now a young man, started farming on his own account at Beer-lahai-roi, sixty miles south of Beer-Sheba, where Hagar met the angel at the time of her flight from Sarah. Whether this betokened a further extension of Abraham's own activities or was Isaac's own venture is not clear but this remained Isaac's headquarters at least until his father's death.

But now, long before that climax to the story, there came another bereavement, equally close to home. His mother Sarah, who had shared the vicissitudes of her husband's career for so many years, died at Hebron at the age of a hundred and twenty-seven years. It is not said why she was at Hebron when Abraham was at the family home at Beer-Sheba. Perhaps she was on a visit; Abraham still had business interests at Hebron. At any rate chap. 23 tells of the burial ceremonies, how Abraham, possessing no suitable burying place there, negotiated with his neighbours for a suitable tomb. His old Amorite friends, Mamre, Eshcol and Aner (ch. 14, 13) were apparently no longer there, or at least had now been joined by a tribe of Hittites, the "sons of Heth" (ch. 23.5). So Abraham bargained with one Ephron the Hittite for the purchase of a field possessing a suitable cave, the cave of Machpelah, (ch. 23.9) and after a typical piece of Eastern bargaining the tomb was his.

The tomb is still there, in a crypt below a Moslem mosque. Abraham is a revered prophet to Moslem as to Jew and Christian and the tomb has been jealously guarded for nearly four thousand years. It is claimed that the remains of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, are still there, but no one really knows if that is so, nor perhaps will know until the coming resurrection when those worthies live and stand again upon

earth. But there, in that crypt below that mosque, is the place where the three great faiths of the world, all united in the worship of the One True God despite their differences, are united in one.

There is no record of any more travels of Abraham. He was now a hundred and thirty-seven years old probably beginning to feel the weight of years. He apparently spent the rest of his life quietly at Beer-Sheba. But now one thing began to trouble him. Isaac, now nearly forty years of age, was as yet unmarried. The evidences are that at this time in world history marriage and fatherhood



was generally at an age of fifty or sixty years but Abraham would not be the God-fearing man he was if he did not feel that before his own death he should play his part in securing the continuance of the line through which the Divine promise would eventually be fulfilled. And it was unthinkable that Isaac should be joined with his neighbours, Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, all of alien race. The bride of Isaac must be of Semitic blood.

It was then that he thought of the news he had so recently received regarding the children

of Nahor his elder brother, away up in Naran.

The story occupies the whole of chapter 24, a long chapter of sixty-seven verses in the A.V. It is a well known one, how Abraham, unable now to make such a journey himself, entrusted his steward Eliezer with the task of going to Haran, finding the house of Nahor, by now boasting children and grandchildren, and inducing a suitable one from among them to become the bride of Isaac and returning to Abraham with her. On the surface it would seem a fantastic quest with little hope of a successful outcome, but Abraham's faith came to the top. "*The Lord God of heaven*" he said "*will send his angel before thee and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence*". And that faith was justified when Eliezer, after a journey of some six hundred miles, reached the object of his quest, found that the first person he spoke to was of the family of Nahor and in fact the destined bride of Isaac.

Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, must have been about twenty years of age to fit into the time scale of the two families. None of Nahor's children were born before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, and this family was entirely new to Abraham. Perhaps the most remarkable part of the story is the willingness of Rebekah to trust herself to this stranger on a six hundred mile journey to marry a man she had never seen, and that of her father and family to allow it. The same faith in God which characterised Abraham's family was evident here and so it was that a few weeks later Isaac, walking on his land at Beer-lahai-roi, met his bride

And now the sands were running out. There is no more to say about the "*father of the faithful*" beyond the account in chapter 26 of his marriage to Keturah. The name is a Semitic one, meaning "*fragrance of incense*". It is most unlikely that the patriarch would take any woman not of his own race and Keturah was perhaps a daughter of one of his own Semitic servants whom he had acquired from Pharaoh many years earlier. It is just possible that she was one of the handmaidens who had accompanied Rebekah on her journey to Isaac (ch. 24,61). Keturah bore him six sons which implies that the marriage must have taken place immediately after Sarah's death, with Abraham then aged one hundred and thirty seven years old. Then ch. 25.6 tells of his giving "gifts" to the "*sons of the concubines which Abraham had*" and sending them away into the "*east country*" to leave the succession of Isaac to his major property

unchallenged. These men must at the time have been at least in their thirties which would imply their birth at least during the closing years of Sarah's life. (It is sometimes suggested that Keturah was also a concubine on the strength of 1 Chron. 1.32 but this cannot be so. The writer of Genesis 25 uses the word for wife "*Ishshah*" in vs.1 and the regular word for concubine for the others in vs.6. It is more likely that when Chronicles was written a thousand years later, the writers, scandalised that Abraham should take a legal wife after Sarah, used the word for concubine in their account, to soften the implication. The writers of Genesis 26 were Ishmael and Isaac, as evidenced by ch.26.12,19, and they must be allowed to know more about it than the priests of the 8th Century B.C.)

"And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred three score and fifteen years. Then Abraham yielded up his spirit and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people" (Ch. 26,7-8).

Isaac and Ishmael together buried him beside his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. There was never any enmity between these two and it is very possible that they, living their lives within a hundred miles or so of each other in the south country, had been in friendly contact for many years. Although Isaac was, and is, the seed of Promise, spiritual and natural ancestors of those who in time to come shall be the Lord's agents in blessing all families of the earth, it is equally true that the Lord said Ishmael also is to be the progenitor of a great nation because he also was Abraham's seed. The enmity is there today, but it is significant that in the prophetic foreview of the last attack by earthly powers and interests on the natural "Seed" when the Lord comes forth to deliver, the onslaught of "Gog and Magog" described by the prophet Ezekiel, the long catalogue of nations pictured as joining in the onslaught does not contain one Semitic name. They are all either of Japhet or of Ham. Does that mean there is to be a reconciliation before the final crisis. At the present time that would appear unlikely. But even if not, when the day comes, as come it must, when the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael come face to face with their common father, raised from the dead to his destiny as one of the leaders of the nations, and stands before the two peoples of which he was the common father . . . What then?

The End

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 2.

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (vs. 7.)

These words are virtually a repetition of those in the early part of chapter 4 of John's First Epistle. There were many theories abroad in John's own day which would, as we would say, "deny the Ransom". They were directed toward doing away with the reality of Jesus' earthly life, denying that the "Man Jesus Christ" was in actual fact the Son of God sent down from heaven, trying to find some doctrinal philosophy which would do away with the necessity of believing that Jesus did indeed die on the Cross, descend into the grave, and rise again on the third day. So they supposed, variously, that the visible man Jesus of Nazareth was an ordinary man of Adam's race in whom the Divine Spirit Jesus dwelt for three and a half years, from Jordan to Calvary, taking his departure at the moment the human man died on the Cross, or that the whole appearance of Jesus on earth was a phantom, a kind of optical illusion, the Divine Spirit being himself invisible but manifesting himself through an appearance like unto a man having no reality. All such theories deny the very basis of the Atonement as we understand it and as John understood it. To him, as to us, the Word was made flesh, born of a virgin, and lived on earth a Man amongst men, experiencing the joys and sufferings common to men. His death on the Cross was a real death and for that short time in Joseph's tomb He was truly dead. His resurrection on the third day was a true resurrection and from thence He sat on the right hand of God, "from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead". All this was essential doctrine to John and it is essential doctrine to us. We cannot maintain Christian faith without it and we cannot "profess and call ourselves Christians" unless we believe it. Hence John is by no means extreme or fanatical when he brands all who refuse thus to confess that Jesus came in the flesh as deceivers and antichrists.

We must note here that the creeds of Christendom themselves claim that Jesus came in the flesh: Christian churches in general do hold to the reality of our Lord's humanity. The old gnostic and other theories of John's day no longer have any influence among responsible Christian people. Certain small groups of "mystics" who try to create synthetic religions compounded partly of Christian ethics and partly of Hindu or other Eastern philosophies

do propound views somewhat akin to these First Century heresies but such groups are manifestly far removed from practical Christianity. It is true to-day, as it was in that of John, that the real test by which professing Christians should be tried is the one that is before us here. "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" It is true that not many have a really accurate understanding of the manner in which He laid aside the glory He had with the Father before the world was, and became Man, but if at any rate it is believed that He did in fact come to the world as Man, and did literally die on the Cross, and was truly resurrected then at least there is no ground for the charge of being an antichrist.

"Look to yourselves, that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward." (vs. 8.)

The A.V. has "we" in this verse, but it should really be "ye". John is exhorting his friend and sister in Christ to continued zeal and faithfulness. Like the Apostle Paul thirty years previously, Sister Kyria had fought a good fight and kept the faith, and now a crown of righteousness was laid up for her "against that day"—the day when all who should "sleep in Jesus" throughout the Age were to receive the things for which they hoped and prayed. But even at this point there is danger of backsliding and consequent loss. That was made clear in John's First Epistle and it is made clear again here. This verse has been a constant warning and exhortation through all time since John first inscribed the words upon his sheet of papyrus. To-day it is used as a word of greeting, a message sent from one to another, valued because of its combined assurance of glory to come and warning against losing that glory by carelessness when it is almost as it were within our reach. The very language reminds us that if we do fail of gaining the prize it will not be because God has been unfaithful but because we have been. We are not bidden to look to God lest we lose things, as though He would deprive us of them if we are not diligent in holding him to the compact. We are bidden to look to ourselves, lest we lose. That is where the danger lies. He ever abideth faithful; He will not let go our hands. We may insist on being unfaithful; then it is we who separate ourselves from him and go our own way alone. So we need very carefully to watch ourselves, that we maintain our confidence and faith steadfast to the end.

"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the

doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." (vs. 9.)

This word "transgresseth" does not mean a mere departure from the right way or path. It does not indicate a lapse into some erroneous or inaccurate understanding of some element of the faith. The Greek means to go forward or beyond or in advance. The reference is to those who claim to be entering into a state of "advanced" doctrine so far forward of what has been revealed by the Holy Spirit that they are in fact running in front of God. He grants "meat in due season for the household of faith" and allows the veil obscuring further understanding of Divine truth to be drawn aside more and more as fast as his people are able to comprehend that further understanding. It is good and praiseworthy for any of us to seek the being always watchful in following that enlargement of understanding whenever the Spirit leads. But we also have to remember that for each of us individually as well as for the Church as a whole there must be the times of halting to assimilate the new truths revealed and to consolidate the ground gained. Progress in Divine truth is always characterised by this alternate advance into new light and then the halting while that new light is fitted into the fabric of Christian life and belief. Now the Apostle is not denouncing that kind of advancing neither is he branding as transgressors those who thus seek to know ever more clearly what the Lord is revealing. He is talking rather of those who in their eagerness to find something "new" or something "different" wherewith to "shine" before their fellows, would go beyond what God is opening up and themselves add to the revealed Word. That is how the 20th Century translation puts it, in words that seem accurately to represent John's thought. "Who goes beyond the limits of the teaching of Christ has failed to find God." In modern parlance, the man has over-reached himself. Rather than rest content with the rate of progress in Divine Truth which the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit affords him, he would force his own way forward and blaze his own trail through the unknown, putting his own imaginations for doctrines and his own words for God's. It is not surprising that in such case, to use the words of the 20th Century, he "fails to find God".

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (vs. 10-11).

This needs thinking about. It is true that many

believers are so dogmatic about their own doctrinal outlook that a text such as this is very gladly and literally received and all who do not subscribe to their own outline of doctrine and agree with them in every matter of Christian belief are unhesitatingly relegated to this category and cut off from fellowship. The thoughtful Christian knows, however, that this cannot possibly be the meaning of John's exhortation here. It is quite absurd and illogical to expect all of Christ's disciples to view every doctrinal teaching in just the same light. Differences of viewpoint arise for a multitude of reasons, many of them quite outside our own control. There is not a shadow of justification for suggesting that failure to agree on some aspects of Scripture teaching, whether it be in connection with the time or manner or object of the Second Advent, the relation between the symbols of spiritual truths themselves, details of prophetic interpretation, or any other such matter, justifies the application of this verse to any fellow-believer with whom we may have such a difference. John is talking, not about these secondary doctrines, but about the fundamental basis, the primary doctrine, of our faith, "What think ye of Christ?". It is the one who denies the humanity of Jesus Christ while upon earth who is to be excluded from the benefits of fellowship, the one who refuses to accept the basic Scriptural truth that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". It is the one who denies that we stand in need of salvation and without Christ and his atoning sacrifice can never receive salvation that must not go on his way with the sound of "God speed" ringing in his ears.

In this our day such people fall into two classes. There are those who find no place in their theology for the Fall of man, the condemnation to death, the necessity for the coming of Jesus in the flesh to give his life a ransom for all, and in his resurrection to become Lord of all, of the one class. There are the modernists, materially-minded believers who disown the same things and disclaim belief in the miraculous element in Scripture, who likewise have no place for a suffering Christ. In both cases the particular theology of the group may have much to commend it; there is usually a high appreciation of the ethical value of the teachings of Christ and a great reverence for him as a Teacher, but that is all. Human salvation is to come by a conscious and deliberate conformity of one's self to the example of Christ, by one's own power. There is no admission that fallen man is quite unable to do such a thing unaided. Like Israel of old the cry is "all that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be

obedient" and, again like Israel, no realisation at all that the thing is impossible.

So these are they whom we are not to receive into our houses nor bid them God speed. The injunction is not to be held to apply to the ordinary conventions of politeness and courtesy, but to the closer circle of Christian fellowship in the Church. Such are not to be granted the privileges of the brotherhood, the spiritual communion of fraternal intercourse of the *ecclesia*. "*What concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*" (2 Cor. 6. 15). The basis of our fellowship is the ransom for all given by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That Ransom, and the doctrines upon which it depends and which are indissolubly associated with it—Fall. Condemnation, Repentance, Justification, Reconciliation, resurrection—are the fundamental doctrines upon which we must be agreed and without which we cannot have fellowship. Other doctrines are secondary and there is room for difference of thought provided we respect our brother's views and display tolerance in the expression of same, and there is no excuse for divisions on that account. We all would surely do as well to re-examine our own position in these matters and see to it that in contending earnestly for the faith we do choose the fundamental doctrines about which to contend.

The word "God speed" here is a translation of a Greek salutation which had the significance of wishing prosperity and success and was used in correspondence in much the same way as we begin our own letters with "Greetings" and perhaps close them with "all good wishes". Acts 15. 23 is an example of Christian usage of the word: "*The Apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles*" and so is Jas. 1. 1 "*James . . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting*". Such good wishes, insofar as the practice and service of the Christian faith is concerned, should not be extended toward those who come under the ban of the Apostle in verses 7-10 of this Epistle.

John has a great deal more to say, but for reasons unexplained he preferred to finish his

Epistle at this point. The rest was to be said by word of mouth. "*Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with pen and ink—but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full*" (vs. 12). The 20th Century says "I would rather not trust it to pen and ink". The shadow of persecution was still dark over the Church; perhaps there were matters to be talked about, truths to be taught, that in the then suspicious attitude of the civil powers were best not committed to paper. John expected to see his sister-in-the-faith Kyria at some future time and promised that all the rest would be said then, to their mutual edification and joy. And so with his usual thoughtfulness he closes this brief letter with the final greetings from those who were with him "*The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen*". (vs. 13.) A little homely touch, these young people in the Truth taking advantage of this opportunity to send their personal greetings to their aunt according to the flesh, their sister according to the Spirit, in the faraway city, and in so doing attaining for themselves an immortality that they never for one moment suspected. We do not know their names, until the great assembly beyond the Vail. But we know them to be our brethren and sisters in the Lord also, and we reach hands back to them over the span of two thousand years and see in them some of the great army of unnamed ones who have preceded us in the Christian walk and been faithful unto death. Perhaps this is the most encouraging thought we can take in concluding our consideration of this short Epistle. In all the ages of the Church's history there have been unnamed ones, quietly pursuing their allotted tasks and treading their allotted paths, known only to their Saviour and Master, but brought safely home by him at the last. So it can be with us; we may never have done anything spectacular or stood in any prominent position or been known by any but the tiniest circle of brethren, but Jesus knows our names and watches our course in life, and will welcome us just as warmly as the more well-known ones, when we reach Home.

The End

The defects of a preacher are soon spied. let a preacher be endued with ten virtues, and have but one fault, that fault will eclipse and darken all his virtues and gifts, so evil is the world in these times. A good preacher should be able to teach plainly and in order; he should have a good head, a good power of speech, a good voice, and a good

memory, and should know when to stop; he should be sure what he means to say, and should study diligently; he should be ready to stake body and life, goods and glory, on its truth; and he must suffer himself to be vexed and criticised by every body.

Martin Luther

BOASTING

To boast is not an endearing characteristic in ordinary human society. Yet it is common to every sphere of life. It is customary in sports and the arts. It is the norm in advertising and commerce. Children like to think of their popular hero as 'the best'. As one turns back the pages of history the story is the same; arrogant boasting from the lips of kings, politicians and generals. The Bible contains its own catalogue of braggarts, from the Evil One who was determined to be like the Most High to the king who died as his subjects worshipped before him.

The objective in boasting is so often power and wealth. It affects those involved by fostering pride and arrogance. It encourages distortion of truth if not outright lies. It stirs up envy and bitterness. Worse, it has provoked rebellion against God. Pharaoh boldly challenged Moses by saying "*Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go ?*" (Exod. 5.2). Israel felt inferior to other nations while they had no king. A humble man, Saul the Benjamite was given the task. Once in power his attitude changed. Power corrupts and this self effacing young man grew arrogant and envious of others. Goliath dared to defy God and challenged the Israelites to find a champion who could stand up against him. His boastful words to David went before a fall. When David desired to boast, albeit subtly, of his armed forces, he took a census and his people suffered the consequences. Boasting is the opposite of trusting in God. Benhadad, king of Syria, boasted that he would sweep across Samaria but was reminded by the king of Israel "*Let not him that girds on his armour boast himself as he that puts it off.*" (1 Kin. 19.11). As Sennacherib hammered at the gates of Jerusalem he boasted against the Lord as Pharaoh had done. The story ended with similar results. Nebuchadnezzar had achieved much in building the empire of Babylon. He had shown wisdom in his exploits and government, yet his pride also went before a fall. He spent years of humiliation as an animal of the field. The power building game and the accumulation of material wealth does not develop a character which God can use in his purposes.

With the Scriptures there is an exaltation of

spirit which has a different objective from boasting and it promotes good qualities of character. This finds its noblest expression in Jer. 9.24. "*Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord"* (RSV). It is fascinating the way the words "glory" and "boast" have been used in translating this and its quotation by Paul in 1 Cor. 1. 30.31. The apostle was writing to Christians who had developed cliques within their church. They boasted of their group-leaders, their knowledge and their spiritual gifts. Paul insists that they may only glory or boast in knowing God personally.

It is important to notice that there is a distinct difference between boasting that exults in what is good and boasting which distorts truth and is done for personal advantage. The difference is clearly shown in the Authorised Version where the Greek words are distinguished by using 'glory' (2 Cor. 12.2), and 'boast' (Rom. 1.30). Most modern translators have found it difficult to update the word "glory", which is not used so commonly today. This has resulted in the word "boast" being used to translate two quite different Greek words. However, the context often gives a clue as to whether it is permissible boasting or not.

The Greek word used in Rom. 1.30; 2 Tim. 3.2 and Jas. 4.10 is derived from the charlatan wanderer who sold medicines. he tried to persuade ordinary folk that his remedies would cure far more than they actually could. Paul generally uses the word "*kauchaomai*" in his exultation about godly things. Incidentally, it was this word that scholars of 2000 years ago used in the Septuagint in Jer. 9. 23.24. Paul rejoices in the Lord and their experiences together. In his second letter he specially makes a point of his "joy" in sharing the sufferings with his Saviour. Perhaps this is best summed up in the apostle's words to the Galatians (6.14 RSV) "*... far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*"

Christianity is clear as to rules of life and duty. There is no mystery left about the directions to man, yet there is a Divine mystery enfolding it, which tells of its Divine origin, and promises a fuller revelation when man is fitted to receive it. If it were not so, we would call it man's invention. We turn from Revelation, because it contains

some things we cannot comprehend; yet we plunge into a deeper, darker mystery, when we embrace the theory of an external, self-existing universe, having no intelligent creator, yet constantly creating intelligent beings. Can anyone understand how matter creates mind?

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

6. Chariots of Judgment

The last of the visions is simple in its elements. Two mountains, from between which come four chariots, passing before the watching prophet and his angelic guide to proceed in differing directions until they are lost to sight. Apparently insignificant, but in reality full of meaning.

"There came four chariots out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of brass" (copper) (ch. 6. 1). What is signified by the two mountains? The Hebrew text has the definite article *"the two mountains"* as though something specific is intended, not just mountains in the general sense. What could such an expression have conveyed to the Israelites who first heard Zechariah's words? Mountains consisting of solid copper are unnatural to say the least, but every Israelite was well acquainted with the Divine promise to their forefathers concerning the land they were to inherit *"a land . . . out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper"* (Deut. 8.9). Primitive Israel existed in what we call the Bronze Age, in which copper held the place today occupied by steel, and the land of the mountains of copper, to every true Israelite, was the land of Israel. The two mountains of the vision, then, might very well picture the dual kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as they existed side by side in the years before the great captivities.

Against the background of these two kingdoms are displayed the four chariots. The foremost one was drawn by red horses, the second by black, the third by white, and the fourth by what the A.V. calls *"grisled and bay"* horses (ch. 6. 3), actually *"dappled strong"* horses. *"Amutstism"*, rendered *"bay"*, is a word meaning strong, active or nimble, as applied to horses. (The A.V. *"bay"*, meaning a deep red, arises from the desire of the A.V. translators to find a place in verse 7 for the red horses appearing in verse 2 who otherwise have no assigned destination, and is based upon the assumption that *amutstism* should be read *adamim*, for which there is no warrant). In reply to the prophet's query the revealing angel told him that these chariots were the *"four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of the whole earth"* (ch. 5. 5), that the one drawn by black horses goes into *"the north country"* and is followed there by the white, and that the dappled ones go into the south country. Here the A.V. confuses the issue by postulating an extra chariot drawn by the *"bay"* going *"to and fro*

through the earth" and this has to be corrected. The sense of vs. 6-7 is that the dappled ones go forth first toward the south country, and that being active or nimble (the *"most strong"* as the Douay version has it) proceed to penetrate other parts of the earth. They *"sought to go"*, says the narrator *"that they might walk to and fro through the earth"* (vs. 7). This expression *"to and fro"*, is derived from the verb *halak*, *"to go"* continuously as with settled intent, in specific directions not otherwise defined but not necessarily an alternative on a single path as is meant by the present usage of *"to and fro"*. Our modern term *"hither and thither"* more accurately represents the term to us today.

Now what is the explanation? It will not escape notice that the colours of the first three horses are the same as those of the riders in the vision (ch. 1. 8). (The notes in chapter 1 have already shewn that *"speckled"* in that chapter should properly read *"black"*). The fourth colour, *grisled* or *"dappled"*, is new. It must also be noted that although four chariots come before the prophet's attention only three are assigned destinations. Of the first, the red, nothing more is said.

As a symbol the chariot pictures judgment, usually Divine judgment. *"For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury . . ."* (Isa. 66. 15). *"The chariots of God are twenty thousand . . . the Lord is among them, as in Sinai . . . to God the Lord belong the issues from death, but God will wound the head of his enemies . . . such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses"* (Psa. 68. 17-21). These chariots, said the angel, are synonymous with the *"four spirits—or winds—of the heavens"*, and the four winds of heaven are also used as a symbol of Divine judgment. The eloquent passage in Psalm 13 illustrates that. *"The earth shook and trembled . . . the Lord thundered in the heavens . . . the foundations of the world were discovered, O Lord . . . as the blast of the breath of thy nostrils"* (Psa. 18. 7-15). *"With his mighty wind shall he (the Lord) shake his hand over the river and shall smite it"* (Isa. 11. 15). Speaking of his judgment on Israel, God says *"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not"* (Zech. 6. 14). Hence these four chariots are vehicles of Divine judgment, symbols of the wrath of God going out to whoever and whatever is represented by the *"north country"* and the *"south country"*.

Consistently in the Old Testament Babylon is depicted as the "north country", the land of the north; although geographically it lies east of Israel the fact that its invading armies had to descend on the Israelites from the north in order to avoid the intervening desert gave rise to the name. The "south country" is Egypt and Arabia. With these facts in mind the interpretation of the vision begins to take shape. It is a picture of Divine retribution overtaking the powers which through history had oppressed and enslaved Israel, or were yet to do so. The standpoint from which the chariots are viewed is that of Zechariah's own day and this explains the omission of the red horses' onward progress. As in chapter 1, the red horses represented Assyria, the power to which Israel was enslaved in the first of the great captivities, and in Zechariah's day judgment on Assyria had already been executed. Assyria, with its capital city Ninevah, disappeared from history a century before Zechariah lived. That chariot had already passed on its way. "*I will break the Assyrian in my land*" the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah "*and upon my mountains tread him underfoot . . . the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?*" (Isa. 14. 25-26). The red chariot of judgment upon Assyria appeared to Zechariah's prophetic consciousness but he did not see it proceed on its mission because that was already past history. Assyria had fallen and was no more.

Not so the case with the chariot of black horses. That again as in chapter 1, pictured Babylon and the judgment to come upon that land. Said the angel (vs. 6) "*the black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them*". The white logically picture Persia, as in chapter 1. Divine retribution began to come upon Babylon in Zechariah's own lifetime; he was there at the time and he witnessed the fall of the city and the death of Belshazzar its last king. Although Persian rule commenced there and then the Babylonian nation continued and the city did not disappear at once; something like two centuries elapsed before Babylon completely lost its commercial importance and the city reverted to its dust. Judgment was being executed all that time. And more or less contemporaneous with the latter part of that period the succeeding

empire, Persia, began to receive its due at the Lord's hand by the agency of Greece, so that by the time of Alexander of Greece that white-horsed chariot also had completed its mission. Both Babylon and Persia in turn had suffered the fate of Assyria their predecessor even as the Hebrew prophets had foretold. It is of these chariots that the proclamation of vs. 8 is made: "*these that go toward the north country have quieted my Spirit in the north country*". That word quieted means to permit rest or to pacify. The downfall and destruction of the successive empires. Assyria Babylon, Persia, as it were satisfied the Divine justice; after the chariots of judgment had completed their work the Divine Spirit was "pacified" so far as those lands were concerned. Something like this must have been in the mind of Jeremiah when he contemplated the same kind of retribution coming upon other of the enemies of God. "*O thou sword of the Lord*" he declaimed "*how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge . . .*" (Jer. 4. 7. 6). Here in the case of the "north country", the sword of the Lord, at last, was quiet.

There is still the forth chariot to consider. This went forth "*to the south country*". In Zechariah's day this was yet to come. After the fall of Persia the dispersion and exile of Israel lay in the south and west rather than in the north and east. Greece succeeded Persia as Israel's overlord but there was no captivity in Greece. From this time the dispersion of Israel was, first, south into Egypt and Arabia, and later, about and after the time of the First Advent, when Rome succeeded Greece, into North Africa and Europe, the west. So the dappled strong horses may well represent the variable but mainly harsh rule of Greece which sent so many of the sons of Israel southward, followed by the fall of Greece and of Egypt before the armed might of Rome. Then came the time when the "strong" of the horses began to go "hither and thither" through the earth. Just as the power of Rome has extended throughout the earth—the Mediterranean world which is what the Old Testament means by the term—and just as the dispersion of Israel has extended similarly, so does the chariot of judgment follow, bringing Divine displeasure upon every vestige of evil rule and evil power until

all is destroyed before the coming of earth's new King. Perhaps this fourth chariot is still going "hither and thither" through the earth and the disruption and disintegration so prevalent today is the final manifestation of its presence. The whole earth has entered into judgment, but afterwards comes the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Thus seen, this last of Zechariah's visions pictures the progressive judgments of God upon evil powers in the earth preparatory to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. From the re-establishment of Israel in the sixth century B.C., pictured in the first vision, the prophet had seen in symbol the development of the Christian Church, the preparation of the earthly Holy Nation, the dawn of the Messianic Age with its light and life, its standards of right and wrong, the elimination of evil, and the completion of retribution upon the evil forces of this world. Now the vision comes to an end. As commentary upon the whole he was now to engage in a kind of symbolic charade in which he with his fellows would present in dramatic form a picture of the Millennial world which is yet to be, and this is the meaning of the remaining passage in chapter 6.

Verses 9-15 tell how the word of the Lord came to Zechariah telling him, in effect, that three men were coming from Babylon, apparently bearing gifts of gold and silver to the Jewish community. He was to take a portion of this tribute, and of it construct a crown with which, in a symbolic ceremony, he would crown Joshua the High Priest and proclaim him as the Lord's anointed, the "Branch", a Messianic title. Thus consecrated, Joshua was to reign as a royal priest in the day of the completed Temple, and foreigners from far-off lands would come and share with Israel in the work and service of God. All of which was a wonderful idea never realised in that day; Joshua never became a ruler on a throne, and foreigners were never accepted within the ranks of Israel. The entire proceeding was a prophecy of a then far future day.

"Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown." This is the R.S.V. rendering of vs. 10-11, supported by other modern translators. The A.V., based on the

Vulgate, has confused the text and rendered it difficult to understand. The plural "crowns" as in the A.V. refers to several circlets of which the single crown is composed (this incidentally is the meaning of the "many crowns" of Rev. 19. 12.). it was a common thing for visitors from the Jewish community in Babylon to visit their brethren in Judea bringing valuable gifts for the new Temple. None of the four individuals here mentioned can be identified elsewhere in Old Testament history although two Jedaiahs, both priests, were in Judea at the time of Zechariah. Suffice it that these three had come from Babylon with their gifts, that Zechariah met them and went with them to the home of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, and there made this crown. Evidently Joshua the High Priest was present, and probably a company of others, so that Zechariah was able in an impressive fashion to crown Joshua and declare the Divine decree.

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts:

*Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH,
For he shall build the Temple of the Lord,
And he shall bear the glory
And shall sit and rule upon his throne.
And he shall be a priest upon his throne.
And the counsel of peace shall be between
them both"* (vss. 12-13)

This can only be understood as a Messianic prophecy and the whole proceeding as a tableau depicting the ruling power of the Messianic Age. To depict Joshua himself as a crowned ruler in Judea at that time would not only be treason in the eyes of Persia, for Judea was a subject State, but treason against God, for the one who was to become both king and priest and dignified with the title of "the Branch" (of David) must come of Judah, the royal tribe. Joshua was of Levi, the priestly tribe. Thus the interpretation must be carried forward into the day when the Royal Priest, the one *"after the order of Melchisedek"* (Heb. 7) assumes his office and power "in glory", and this points unmistakably to our Lord "at his coming and his Kingdom". To this the language fits. "The Branch" is his title as the scion of David's house, the *"root and offspring of David"* (Rev. 22. 16). He *"grows up out of his place"* from the days of his humanity at his First Advent to the glory of his Second Advent. He shall sit and rule upon his throne both as king and as priest with complete harmony between the two functions;

"the counsel of peace shall be between them both". One could picture this declaration as the Divine announcement to all the world at the time of the investiture of earth's rightful King in the dawn of the Millennial Age, calling all men to take heed to the new world order headed by this Priest-King for their salvation.

It is noteworthy that whereas Joshua was used in chapter 3 to prefigure the cleansing and development of the Church during this present Age he becomes, in chapter 6, the symbol of the reigning Christ in the next; it will not escape notice in this connection that the Church is destined to be associated with her Lord in the kingly-priestly work of that Age so that the use of Joshua as a symbol of both "Christ the Head and the Church which is his body" is perhaps not altogether accidental.

"And the crown shall be, to Heldai, and to Tobiah, and to Jedaiah, for a memorial in the Temple of the Lord. And they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord" (vss. 14-15). Two minor corrections in the text have to be made. "*Helem*" in vs. 14 is obviously "*Heldai*" as in vs. 10, this is evidently a copyist's error at some early date, the *daleth yod* (DI) at the end of the word having been mistaken for *mem* (M), a mistake due to similarity between the characters if written somewhat carelessly in the manuscript. "*Hen*" in the same verse is not a proper name and by some translators is linked with a word meaning favour or kindness; thus the R.V. and others render "for the kindness of the son of Zephaniah" which removes all disparity between this verse and verse 10. It is now possible to take a look at the apparent meaning of the statement. The crown, following its use for the ceremonial crowning of Joshua, is said to be laid up in the Temple as a memorial to the three pious men who brought the original gift from Babylon, and to record the "kindness" of Josiah the son of Zephaniah who received them into his house and provided a place in

which the ceremony could be performed. Since the entire proceeding has its setting in the Millennial Age and the "crown" is laid up in the newly built Temple after the Priest-King has been crowned and therefore presumably entered upon the duties of his office, the Temple can hardly represent other than the edifice built during that Age, the all-righteous system of world government instituted and presided over by our Lord and his Church—corresponding to some extent to the Holy City of Revelation. Within that system of administration there will be a memorial of some who in a past time brought their gifts away from the lands of unrighteousness, and within the confines of a friendly house contributed their symbol of faith that the time for the reign of earth's great Priest-King had come. If we take it that those three unknown men, Heldai, Tobiah and Jedaiah, pictured all of Israel who in the Last Days come in faith, away from the lands of the old world into the friendly land which is to be the nucleus of the Kingdom on earth, and for a short time join concert with those who, like Josiah the son of Zephaniah, are already in that land living in faith and hope, expressing their belief in the imminent coming of earth's new King, then perhaps the house of Josiah can symbolise the land, and the four figures in the tableau, the people, whose faith and works immediately prior to the establishment of the Kingdom in full sight of all people will be remembered for ever—a "memorial in the Temple of the Lord.

Logically enough, it is then that "*they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord*". In that glorious Age men will come from all nations, from earth's remotest bound, to play their part in the building of the new social system which is described so succinctly in the New Testament as "*a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness*".

To be continued.

God took time to frame the world and to fit it for human habitation; time to give the world its necessary experience with evil; time to prepare for the advent of Christ as the world's redeemer; time for the preparation of the church to share in his glorious reign; and time must be allowed for the shaping and adjusting

of the individual affairs of all his people. God has not forgotten when the answers to our prayers seem to tarry long. He who heeds the sparrow's fall and numbers the very hairs of our heads is not indifferent to the faintest call or the smallest necessity of his humblest child.

IN THE WORLD THAT WAS

6. The End of the World

He is one of the most famous men in history and the first of them all to live, celebrated in epic and legend, a subject of serious investigation on one hand and semi-humorous comment on the other, renowned as the man who built a ship in which to save his family when the rest of the world perished in a great flood. No other man has been the hero of a catastrophe so overwhelming that many refuse to believe that it ever happened, despite the physical evidences to the contrary brought to light in modern times to the contrary.

The patriarch Noah was born six hundred years before the onset of the flood with which his name is forever associated. He was the son of Lamech, in the ninth generation from Adam the first man, but since the generations in those days were some two centuries apart that was a long time earlier. A remark by Lamech in Gen. 5. 29 is the only one recorded in all that long period when he said, at his son's birth, "*this shall comfort us concerning our labour and toil of our hands because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed*". It is evident that the human community, even after so long a span of subduing the uncultivated land outside the original Garden, was still finding the going hard. Perhaps Lamech was one of the earliest upon whom the prophetic spirit had been conferred and he knew by Divine inspiration that this child was destined to be a world deliverer. There is an old Jewish legend recorded several centuries before Christ which declares that when Noah was born he was such a strikingly beautiful child that his father Lamech was amazed and when the newborn babe immediately began to praise the God of heaven, Lamech straightaway went to his own father Methuselah for counsel. That worthy, being equally nonplussed, journeyed to "the ends of the earth" to his own father Enoch with the problem. Enoch told him that because of the sin of the angels and the corruption of mankind, there would be a Deluge and great destruction for one year but that this babe Noah would be saved with his three sons and repopulate the earth. Just a legend, probably an example of the "religious fiction" of the times, but it does show the veneration with which the patriarch was regarded in later times.

Lamech died before his father Methuselah, thirty five years before the Flood. Methuselah himself ended his life of nine hundred and sixty-nine years, the longest recorded of any man, six years before that event. In the past, when the

Masoretic chronology as presented in the Authorised Version was virtually unchallenged, he is presented as dying at the time of the Flood itself, and this led to a theory in the early years of this century by one Arthur Gook that the meaning of his name was "when he is dead, it shall be sent", referring to the Flood. Thus he was supposed to be a living warning to mankind of the imminence of judgment. The idea was based upon the Hebrew words *muth*, to die, and *shalach*, to send, thus meaning "dead – send", which is not very informative. In any case the Hebrew language did not exist until fifteen hundred years after his birth; if the name had any meaning at all it would have been in the antediluvian language, which is quite unknown. The earliest known language, about a thousand years after the Flood, would make the name mean "*Man (or men) preaching peace*" which has a likeness to 2 Pet. 2. 5 where Noah his grandson is said to have been a "preacher of righteousness". There may be some substance in the ancient insistence – outside the Book of Genesis – that Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah were all godly men; perhaps there was one ancestral line from Adam through Seth and Enos in which the true faith was never lost. In such case it might well be that with the death of Methuselah six years before the Flood, as given in the pre-Christian manuscripts, Noah and his sons were the only true believers left. That this was the case is inferred by the fact that none others but those were saved from the catastrophe.

Of the life of Noah during the first five hundred years nothing is known. The remark in Gen. 5. 32 that "*Noah was five hundred years old and Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth*" need only mean that at this age he concluded recording the genealogy which forms the subject of Gen. 5 and passed on to the separate story of the angelic incursion and the subsequent Flood, in which his three sons were, with him, intimately concerned. Shem was born ninety-eight years before the flood and it is likely that Japheth was the eldest. Since all three were married at the time of the Flood they must have been, in accordance with the times, at least a hundred years of age to be old enough for parenthood. The one clue to a slightly earlier time in Noah's life must lie in the cryptic statement in Gen. 6. 3 concerning the limitation on the life of "these men", whether men or "*nephilim*", to one hundred and twenty years. This would have

been in the four hundred and eightieth year of Noah's life.

The "population explosion" previously referred to was now attaining fantastic proportions. On the basis previously referred to (Ch. 1 this series) that the average family throughout comprised twelve children born between the parents' ages of 160 and 500, which is consistent with modern proportions, the number living two thousand years from the first pair would have been about six hundred thousand. A century later it would have attained a million and by the time of the Flood nearly one and a half millions would have experienced the disaster. Because of the very small number born during the first thousand years – not more than six hundred or so – the vast majority of the human race born to Adam were still alive at the time of the Flood. They would have been occupying an area perhaps two or three hundred miles each way, no larger than England. If sprung from one pair as stated in Genesis, the antediluvian world could have been no larger than this and so far as mankind was concerned could well have been limited to the area whose geographical location is well defined in Gen. 3, modern Iraq and Arabia.

Noah himself may well have had children before the three whose names are mentioned. Shem, Ham and Japheth obviously were born at the close of the child-bearing period, Noah's fourth century. He may well have had other children at an earlier time, but if so, they must have been unbelievers and uninterested in their father's faith and activities. By this time they would have had families of their own. There were two more generations after Noah during the final four centuries, but of them nothing is recorded. All the emphasis at this point in the narrative is in the faith and obedience of Noah himself as he obeyed the Lord's instructions.

So the stage was set for the final act in the drama. The Lord appeared to Noah and told him of the coming Flood and that only he himself, his three sons and their four wives would be saved. He was to build a vessel suitable to withstand the onset of the Deluge and bring into it specimens of all the local animals with sufficient food to sustain them whilst they were in the Ark. That turned out to be just over twelve months. Even by modern standards, the project was a colossal one. A structure five hundred and forty feet long, ninety wide and fifty-four high would daunt the design capabilities of even modern ship-builders. At least six thousand tons of timber would be needed for its construction and the fabrication of such a huge

vessel which could be trusted to float without breaking its back as soon as placed in the water would have demanded technical skill of the highest order. There can be no doubt that the antediluvians had made considerable progress in the arts and sciences during that two thousand years.

The Lord gave Noah directions for the size of the Ark and some details of its interior structure but in fact a tremendous amount of professional calculation and design would have to be undertaken before a tool could be raised to fell the first tree. Even that would be a major task. The Hebrew text says it was to be made of "*gopher*" wood; a lot of time was spent by 19th century commentators trying to find out just what kind of wood that was. Lingual experts have found the answer, "*Gopher*" is the Hebrew transliteration of the Sumerian word "*gipparu*", meaning forest timber of any kind. This part of Genesis was originally written in the Sumerian language long before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. In his day, as now, the Euphrates/Tigris plain grew no trees except the date palm, but the Iranian mountains to the east were thickly forested with giant oaks and cedars. From here the timber was probably obtained for the Ark; even so, something like two or three thousand of those giant trees must have been felled, cut to size and transported perhaps a couple of hundred miles to the erection site before work could begin. The size of the Ark is known almost beyond dispute, being stated by Moses in Genesis as 300 cubits long by 30 high and 50 wide, naturally by the then Egyptian cubit of 21.6 inches, whereas the 8th BC century Assyrian tablet found by George Smith expresses it as 600 long by 60 high and 60 wide, by the original Sumerian cubit of 10.8 inches, both agreeing therefore on a length of 540 English feet. The difference in the figures given for the width is accounted for by the fact that the clay tablet inscriptions are easily defaced by handling after thousands of years' burial in the ground. The Sumerian sign read by Smith as 60 only needed the obliteration of two small wedge shaped marks to have originally read 100 and so come into line with Genesis. (The figures on this tablet, during the early 20th century, have been entirely obliterated in this way; this is a common trouble with inscribed clay tablets). The actual size therefore was 540 English feet long by 54 high by 90 wide (or following Moses example and in deference to modern usage, 160 metres long by 16 high and 27 wide. The reference in Gen. 7. 20 to fifteen cubits probably indicates that the occupants found that the Ark was floating with one half of its height submerged and this in

turn, since the loaded weight of a vessel is equal to the weight of water displaced, leads to the calculation that the loaded weight of the Ark was 27,000 tons. An approximate estimate indicates that probably about 6,000 tons of timber was used in its construction: the cargo therefore would amount to some 21,000 tons – much of it food for the occupants for twelve months, but also doubtless, in considerable degree all kinds of articles and materials wherewith to set up the normal activities of life when it was all over. There must have been some signs, in those closing days of the old world, that the forces of Nature were gathering strength for the final act. If the Valian thesis is correct in detail, the aerial canopy was now visibly moving towards the poles and tending to the catastrophic descent. The skies may not have been as clear as they are today but there would probably have been a noticeable difference. If so, it went unheeded, for Jesus is authority for the statement that *“they knew not, until the flood came and took them all away”*. The preaching and warnings of Noah had gone unheeded. In a sense the position was as it is today, when after millenniums of human history during which Nature has remained relatively unaffected by man’s presence on earth, the present depopulation of its resources and pollution of land, sea and air is appreciably creating a condition in which life will become impossible. Such voices as are raised against this continuing process go unheeded and humanity proceeds to what would surely be the disappearance of the human race in measurable time if it were not that the imminence of the Divine Kingdom on earth will arrest the process and create a new order in which Nature will come into her own. Said Jesus, in talking of his Advent and the conditions on earth which herald the Advent *“except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved . . . but those days shall be shortened”* (Matt. 24. 22).

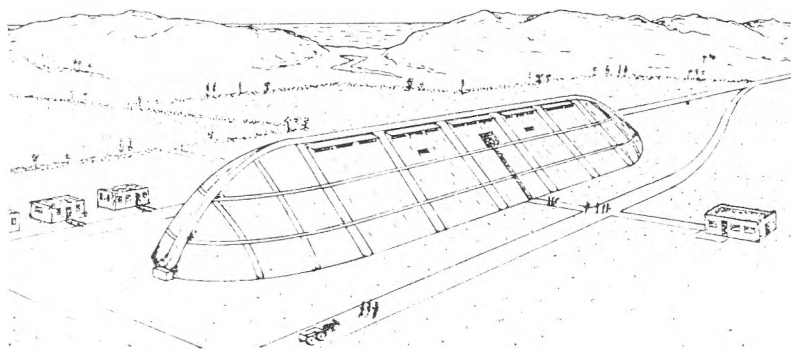
And so at last, the work was finished and the Ark stood waiting. There must have been a great

deal of scoffing and ridicule on the part of those who had witnessed the progress of the work over the term of years. No one else believed; no one else had any faith in God. *“Thee I have seen righteous in this generation”* said the Lord to Noah (Gen. 7. 1). That word was spoken during the six years following the death of Methuselah, who could have been the last God-fearing man of the old world apart from Noah and his sons. Had there been any others they would have been saved. But there were no others.

So they went in, and all was silent. There is some element of doubt how long they waited. According to Ch. 7. 1 the Lord told them to come into the Ark because in seven days’ time the Flood would come. In verse 23 it is stated that it came *“the selfsame day”* that they went in. The two statements can be harmonised by assuming that they were given seven days’ notice to complete their preparations and get inside. Obviously the storage of goods and provisions would have been completed – several thousand tons of such would require weeks of work – and probably the animals were safely installed and being looked after. An analysis of the story shows that the wild carnivorous animals, called in the O.T. “beasts of the earth” or “beasts of the field” were not taken in. They survived on the surrounding mountains, untouched by the Flood. Those in the Ark were the *“behemah”*, the mainly domestic and herbivorous animals, called “cattle” in the O.T. They need not have been so numerous or extensive as is popularly supposed. Perhaps it was that at the last minute the Lord gave the signal, and that this is the meaning of the expression in 7. 18 *“the Lord shut him in”*.

And the jeering, scoffing, unbelieving crowds, tired of gazing upon the silent structure with its closed door, went back to their eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not Until

The End



Possible size and appearance of the Ark

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH

"Through faith we understand that the worlds came into being and still exist at the command of God." (Heb. 11.3).

Man is not responsible for the existence of the earth. It revolved in space long before it was leased out to his race. Were it not under the control of a merciful and wise Intelligence, it could be shaken like a paper bag and there would be few men left. The things men have built upon it would quickly disappear, but the earth itself on its strong foundations abides forever. Such is the difference between God and man, the Infinite immortal and the finite mortal.

"In the beginning God created". The words are addressed to the readers of faith. There is no long speculation on spontaneous combustion, no scientific dissertation on a slow and complicated evolution of species from red-hot lava or dead matter, to animate, intelligent existence. In the beginning God! From that great source of invisible power came the visible. Globe vegetation, the animal kingdom and man were God-made. The same power keeps them going, holding the earth in its place. Not the earth only but the whole vast, mysterious universe, the work of his fingers, are upheld by the word of his power.

Beside all this awe-inspiring grandeur what is man, *"the microbe seeded on a sixpence"* as one of his more jocular students of the skies has been pleased to describe him? The Word of God describes him in rather more gracious terms as *"created a little lower than the angels"*. Faith accepts this statement as defining the true status of man in the ranks of living creatures. Man, made upright in the image of God. God, for the first time in his works of creation, allied to flesh and blood the Divine parent of a human race. Searching for the springs of life the scientist looks first in primeval mud, then to the apes, then to the stars,

exalting his evolved creature to a place in the heavens. Faith sees man fallen from his first estate, a little lower than the angels. It is not interested in space but in salvation, the only means by which man and the earth may be restored, reconciled with the Maker of both to their original beauty and harmony.

Science has produced enough power to destroy the earth and its contents. God safeguards the earth from any such calamity. He will save the race whose welfare he has watched through many ages, for whom He has made such bountiful provision. Man must come face to face with his Maker on his own doorstep, not in the heavens nor in the haunted swamps of the dinosaurs, but on the earth where he belongs. The intelligent, responsible human being, minted out of the dust of the earth, beautifully formed and mentally endowed with superior qualities, to rule a flourishing productive planet must attain the ideal of God's purpose.

This is faith's answer to the fears and perplexities of the modern world. The kingdom of God is beauty, peace and perfection. Through much tribulation shall the earth and her peoples enter that kingdom, but enter it they will and must, because God has spoken the word.

The Power which produced order out of chaos, the Voice which commanded light and rebuked the oceans, which put living creatures in every part of the globe, adapting them to their places, will at a fore-known hour rebuke evil. The tumults of man will cease and the earth will enjoy her rest. Because faith understands that He made the earth for his own purposes, that He produced man from its various elements, that He has kept faith with the human race, it accepts with full assurance of faith that he will complete that purpose. *"As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"*.

the brethren are not in the darkness respecting the dawn of the Millennial morning, and they rejoice in the inspired testimony that, although "weeping may endure for the night (of sin's predominance), joy cometh in the morning" of the great day of the Lord. And as the dawn of the new day, the day of Christ, becomes more and more

distinct, many besides the brethren can and do see signs that "the night is far spent and the day is at hand"; and by and by, notwithstanding the dark clouds and terrible storm of trouble that will temporarily hide the signs of morning from them, all the world will awake to the fact that *"the morn at last is breaking"*.

THE FIRES BURN LOW

"Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9. 16).

The life story of the Apostle Paul is testimony to the passionate conviction with which he penned these words to the Corinthian Church. Just as fraught with meaning as his other declaration of similar import *"for me to live is Christ"*, enshrining his fixed determination to proclaim abroad throughout his life the evangel he found on the Damascus road. The Christian faith is a missionary religion and without the evangelical fervour that leads its devotees to proclaim aloud by every means within their power the message they have received, that faith becomes a sterile and useless thing. The man who serves the Lord Christ merely to ensure his own eternal salvation and has no heed for others who also need the message is likely to find himself in the company of those others when, at the last, our Lord makes up the personnel of that devoted company which is to constitute the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5. 18-20), his instrument for the conversion of the world in the Millennial Age now so evidently close at hand.

There is a maxim which was quoted more frequently a couple of generations ago than it is today: "the Christian community which loses the missionary spirit signs its own death warrant". History testifies to its truth. More than one quite notable reform in the Christian world, having its rise around the person of some celebrated preacher or evangelist, has grown and prospered in the power of a significant advance in the understanding of Christian truth, a significantly clearer and deeper understanding of the Divine Plan and perhaps the importance of the times in which they live. The impulse to spread the message — and perhaps success in winning the interest and support of the many who become adherent in their turn — evokes an enthusiasm and creates a fellowship which then becomes a force in the Christian world which for a term of years plays an important part in the onward development of Christian truth.

But that generation passes, with its leaders, and its successor in its turn. And now the pioneers have nearly all gone to their Lord, and the third knows of the battles and labours — and the success and triumphs — of those days only by repute. Then comes the fourth generation, born long after the first fresh enthusiasm has run its course and

subsided and that fourth cannot even visualise the zeal and euphoria which characterised the first. So the movement becomes quieter, more addicted to submerging the original emphasis upon complete and utter consecration to the Lord's Cause to a position below the other interests of this life — career, family, spare-time pursuits. And because this is more characteristic of the denominations generally, they begin to recede into that same background and forget — if they ever understood — the advance in Divine revelation which created the fellowship which they inherited. And so the lamp goes out in the Temple of God, because Eli has gone to sleep.

But always there is Samuel, resolute and eager to maintain and hold aloft the light which galvanised those early pioneers to do the work they did. Though the love of many wax cold, as our Lord said it would; though the great deeds of the past and the proclamation of the message which was once shouted from the house-tops be heard now only in muted guise, there still remain those who once caught the vision and gave themselves in utter devotion to the furtherance of that gospel, the gospel of the kingdom, which Jesus said must be proclaimed in all the world for a witness before the end could come. These are they who can say with Jeremiah the prophet of Israel in a day which was so frighteningly similar to the day in which we now live *"his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay"* (Jer. 20. 9). Though all Israel reject his message — and they did — he was determined to proclaim it to the end — and he did. And in the end he was vindicated, for what the Lord had commissioned him to declare came to pass. That outcome was to Israel's dismay but a vindication of the progress of the Divine Plan and of the prophet.

To-day, more than ever, we need the spirit of Jeremiah. He began his course as a young man of perhaps twenty-five under good king Josiah when the people were true worshippers. He lived through the reigns of four successive bad kings and saw Israel desolated at the last. But he never lost faith. Like him in spirit, we to-day are called to continue, without faltering, the proclamation of the word which is in our hearts: *Christ is Lord; the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*

