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BIBLE STUDY

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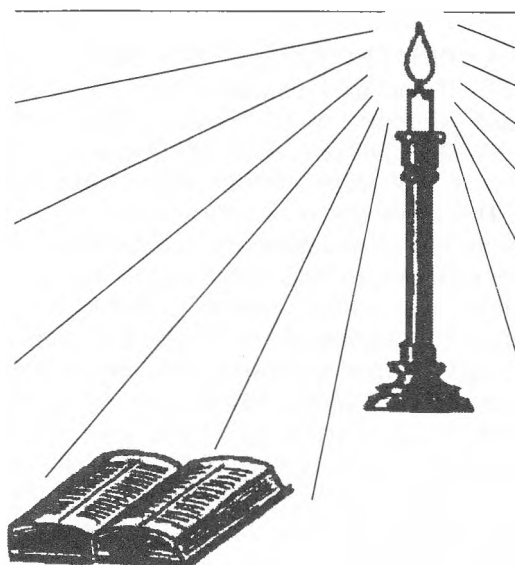
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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern understanding. It

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

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JUST A WORD – “Our daily bread” (Matthew 6.11)

The word used by our Lord in His wonderful model prayer for ‘daily’ provides a hidden link with the every day cares of the housewife. It is a word not used elsewhere in Scripture (except in Luke 11.3, a parallel record) and is not found at all in the language of the educated sections of society in our Lord’s day. It was a word in popular use among the peasants and fisherman, referring to the provision of mundane necessities for the day. It has been found, used in Egypt, at the same time by the women to head their list of commodities to be

purchased in the market for the day’s needs.

It is as though a wife today in making out her ‘shopping list’ were to head it with a word such as ‘dailies’ and enter below it the list of vegetables and other things she must shortly buy for the household’s current needs. So our Lord, with His intimate knowledge of the lives of His followers, gave the promise of Divine provision for our temporal needs by the one word which could fitly describe truly how our every little and seemingly insignificant need is provided for by our God.

NOTICES

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984 Bible Fellowship Union uses computer files to record names and addresses of all readers of the Bible Study Monthly. This is done simply because it is the quickest and most reliable way of keeping records. This method saves us many hours of work each month. The information kept is to be found on the label of each magazine sent out. This information, including readers’ names and addresses, is confidential to Bible Fellowship Union and is never passed to any other organisation. If any reader objects to his/her name and address being recorded in this way, will he/she please write to us or mention it on the renewal form. Such a reader would still be able to receive the Bible Study Monthly regularly with their records kept manually.

MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT In the Lord’s providence we would like to make the Bible Study Monthly as useful and helpful as possible to all its readers. They live in many lands with different Christian and cultural backgrounds. We are always pleased to receive observations about BFU literature.

Such comments may not make us change anything immediately but we will listen attentively. With the Lord’s help we will maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication.

In order to reach all ages we use modern translations. We try to keep articles to a moderate length and seek to use varied presentation. When reprinted material is updated we try to retain original viewpoints. What is published is believed to be of interest to as many readers as possible but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinions of the editor and his colleagues.

INTERNET Bible Fellowship Union, after prayer and serious consideration is now planning to have its own E-mail address that will appear regularly in the magazine as soon as arrangements have been made. We also contemplate having a web-site eventually, where we can more effectively publicise the Gospel message as contained in BFU literature. We invite our readers to join with us in prayer concerning this new venture and indeed in all aspects of BFU work.

COVER STORY In the July/August 2000 issue of the Bible Study Monthly we gave notice of a change of cover for the magazine with some intimation of what the new design might be like. Undoubtedly it will not suit everyone but we hope that it will be generally acceptable. We would like the cover to reflect the contents of the magazine. On the last page of this issue we reprint from February 1939, an explanation of the panels of type which represent ancient writings.

THE TARRYING VISION

A talk for the times

"The Vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Habakkuk 2.3)

The splendid faith of the prophet Habakkuk shines down the ages, a standing reproof to all who have allowed the slow passage of many years to undermine and finally destroy their faith in the coming Kingdom. There is not much consolation in the thought of a world wherein dwelleth righteousness that is still many thousands of years away. The great incentive that led so many despairing souls in the First Century to fling away their sadness and come rejoicing into that wonderful missionary society that was the Early Church was their fixed conviction that the time was at hand and the Kingdom of light was at the doors. The splendid imagery of the Book of Revelation was full of that theme to the early Christians. Little did they realise that two thousand years must yet elapse before the New Jerusalem would in fact descend to the earth to the blessing of all mankind. They interpreted the mystic symbols to refer to their own day and the events of their own times, as they were intended to do. They fell asleep in the secure conviction that the days of evil were numbered and the Rider on the white horse all but ready to cleave the heavens in his meteoric descent to the salvation of men. In their admittedly partial and incomplete understanding of the ordering of the Divine purpose they found all that was necessary to develop Christian fortitude and steadfastness. In that faith they lived, and in that faith they died.

So it was through the successive centuries of the era when the Gospel was being preached. There has hardly ever been a time when the Second Advent of Christ and the speedy ending of this present evil world has not been looked upon as an imminent event. There were times, round about AD500 and again in AD1000 and to a lesser extent in AD1600 when that general belief increased to the dimension of a well-nigh universal expectation. On each of such occasions the belief was founded upon chronology and each time the chronology was proved to be erroneous; but the impetus thus given to a wholehearted and zealous 'watching for His appearing' was the cause of

much blessing. It is not the failure to discern aright the details of the vision that is the cause of falling away from faith and hope, but the failure to discern any vision at all. The inaccurate details can be replaced by more accurate ones as fast as the passage of time reveals their inaccuracy without distorting our view of the vision itself; nothing can fill in for us the details of a vision that has faded into nothingness.

In our own day we need to remember these things. It is not that we have just the same basis for concluding that maybe we ourselves are equally mistaken with those of five or ten centuries ago. Nor may we assume that the world is doomed to continue yet for an unspecified length of time before the transition to the Kingdom becomes an accomplished fact. There are factors in the case which did not exist before. It is reasonably evident today that humanity, left to itself, will fairly soon destroy itself from the earth unless there be some intervention from outside. It is also reasonably evident today that the continuing increase of earth's population will in a very short time render the fulfilment of the Divine promises physically impossible, if the end is not to come soon. That assumes that our understanding of the Scripture doctrine of salvation is the true one. It is true today, as it has never been true before in the Age, that the divine promises to natural Israel have commenced to be fulfilled, and that the preparation of that Holy nation which is to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth has commenced. It is true today, as it has never been true before in the Age, that this gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. No corner of the inhabited earth remains into which Christian missionaries have not at one time or another penetrated with their soul-saving message. All these things are signs of the end; for the first time in history it was possible to anticipate the imminent Second Coming of our Lord and the consequent speedy setting up of His kingdom on earth on a basis other than that of chronology. That is a most important thing. Whatever may be the merits or demerits of any particular chronological scheme, none will deny that the signs of the times and the inexorable logic of events constitute a far more sure and reliable basis on which to found our

expectations. Therefore it is with serene confidence that we in this Twenty-first Century ought to take our stand, as did Habakkuk of old, when he said, *"I will stand at my watch post, and station myself on the rampart; and keep watch to see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complaint."* (Habakkuk 2.1 NRSV). Thus we can view the close approach of those things for which Christians all through the Age have longed and prayed and waited.

These are fine words. They are logical and difficult to refute, perhaps, from the standpoint of reason. Our lives are not altogether governed by reason, and often the discouragement and difficulties of the way and the more immediate appeal of every day happenings make it hard to take and hold to ourselves arguments such as the above, logical and truthful though we know them to be. That was how the children of Israel in captivity to Babylon felt. They knew, in a theoretical sort of way, that after seventy years in Babylon they were going to be restored to their own land and all the glorious promises of God to their nation come true. That belief had not become so much a part of their lives and an object of assured expectation that they could hold it unsullied against the background of their present miseries in Babylon. So they invented that proverb which has become the catch-word of all who could not 'stay the course' through all time since, *"the days are prolonged, and every vision faileth"* (Ezekiel 12.22). What utter hopelessness and despair is embodied in those eight words! Nothing left of all the rosy promise of youth, of all the zeal and enthusiasm with which one set out, maybe many years ago, to serve the Lord God as an ambassador of His Kingdom. The commission renounced, the service abandoned, the hopes dashed, the future black. Bitter and keen disappointment was the lot of many in natural Israel in those dark Babylonian days and it has been the lot of many in spiritual Israel in these latter days also. This past century in Christian history has been a grand epoch of watchfulness and expectation, a time of Bible exposition and understanding, of evangelism and revival, of missionary endeavour and Christian activity of every description, but for many that wonderful experience has proved fruitless. They have consecrated their lives to the cause of Jesus Christ,

and have borne the heat and burden of the day. They have done many mighty and wonderful works in His Name and perchance have led others in turn to the feet of the Saviour. They have then, in the evening time, abandoned their hope and faith in the face of unfulfilled expectations. The Bridegroom has tarried, or has seemed to tarry, for in fact He does not really tarry. He comes 'at the due time' and the test of waiting has found the chink in the armour which all other tests had failed to penetrate. So they sought 'other salvations', or have gone to the world and its mundane affairs and petty interests, or glittering attractions, for consolation, or have retired into their own shells to lament the apparent futility of all their life's work. *"We see not our signs; there is no more prophet, neither is there any amongst us that knoweth how long."* (Psalm 74.9).

But some there are who do keep the vision undimmed. Some there are who endure to the end, *"as seeing him who is invisible"*, and these are they who perceive the hidden truth which explains all things. These are they who know that God once looked out upon a wild chaos that was *"without form, and void"* and because He had faith in Himself took up the great work of making it a home for mankind. These are they who know that God once looked down upon a human creation apparently wrecked and ruined through sin, condemned to return to the dust from which it had been made, but because He had faith in man, continued the development and outworking of His great redemptive plan. He knows that despite the apparent hopelessness of the case, mankind one day will win through to the full standards and standing of the sinless and ever-living sons of God and His faithful ones know that too.

Habakkuk was one of these. His noble words have been an inspiration to the perplexed and discouraged, time after time. No one will ever know, this side of the Vail, how many despairing souls have been induced to pick up the broken remnants of their faith and piece them together and struggle on still to keep the vision in sight. *"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will joy in the God of my salvation."* (Habakkuk 3.17-18). That

was the spirit which led the prophet Joel looking forward rapturously to the Kingdom that shall be, to break out exultantly "*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*" (Joel 2.28). That word really belongs to the Millennial Kingdom itself but there is a very true sense in which the principle it enshrines is applicable now. We who have enjoyed the inestimable blessing of knowing about the coming Kingdom in advance, as it were, of mankind generally, can surely take to ourselves some of the Millennial insight which will be granted to men and women of God in that day. We too according to the tale of physical years or maturity of Christian character, or both, can be of those who 'dream dreams' or 'see visions'. Be it remembered that in the meaning of this verse the 'dreamer of dreams' is the one to whose Spirit-filled mind God can reveal Himself and make His purposes known, as He did to Joseph and Daniel and the Apostle Paul. The 'elder' who dreams dreams is the one who by reason of long experience in the Christian way and a steadfast faith that has survived the years does habitually 'walk' and 'talk' with God. He is one whose ministry is a spiritually profitable and acceptable ministry, one who can interpret aright the outward signs of the development of the Divine plan, and explain the apparent obscure or contradictory features that seem to deny rather than confirm our expectations for the future.

The 'younger' who sees visions, is one who only recently started on the Christian pathway. He directs all his enthusiasm and all his zeal and all his faith into a heartfelt and active consecration of life and all that life holds to the service of God in the interests of His Kingdom. The trials of faith have not yet come to test the staying power of his consecration. All he has is zeal and enthusiasm - and vision! God grant that all such may hold firmly to their resolve until in their turn they become of the 'old men' who can 'dream dreams' because they have learned to walk with God.

So the vision leads on, never standing still, never appearing quite the same to any two people or at any two moments of time but ever enduring, a sure and faithful guide to the heavenly city. Lose the vision and all is lost; we wander aimlessly and blindly in a darkened world indeed. "*Will ye also go away?*" "*Lord to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" Hold fast to the vision and it will lead on with beckoning fingers, the light growing more intense and the outlines of things to come more definite, until the day of fulfilment has dawned and faith is swallowed up in sight.

"*Thus says the Lord God: I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel. But say to them, The days are at hand and the fulfilment of every vision.*" (Ezekiel 12.23 RSV)

AOH

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

7. "Let My People Go"

Moses and Aaron had been to Pharaoh once to demand the release of the people of Israel from slavery. The Egyptian king not only refused but also made the burden of Israel harder to bear. In Exodus 6 there is record that God renewed Moses' commission to deliver the people and this time asserts His authority as the Almighty God of the Patriarchs who had made a covenant with them. First the great leader goes to God's people and tells them what is about to happen. They were not impressed but there is no sign of a rebuke at this stage. Slowly they were to discover that this God who demanded their obedience was also a loving and caring God.

The narrative breaks off to record Moses' pedigree. It clarifies the claims of this man who

had been brought up in Pharaoh's household and who had spent forty years in Midian. There is evidence that this is Moses' own record and not an insertion of a much later date as has been claimed. There are details of Moses immediate ancestry which a later scribe is not likely to have added.

If God didn't seem in a hurry, He never is. Impatience is a human weakness and God was giving Pharaoh an opportunity for repentance. It is not His will that any sinner should die. In the chapters of Exodus that follow there is a repeated statement concerning the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart. Would it not be unjust if Pharaoh was not a perfectly free agent in this matter? It is probably nearer the truth that the words are used by the Lord to indicate His own knowledge and gentle toler-

ance. It was this very unwillingness on God's part to destroy Egypt and wait while the lesson was learned at each succeeding plague that hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is the grammatical sense of the several references, for example "*When Pharaoh found that he was given relief he became obdurate*" (Ex. 8.15 REB). Agar Beet similarly comments upon Romans 9.17, "the heart is *hard* when it is incapable of receiving divine impressions. To harden, is to make less susceptible of such impressions ... each refusal made Pharaoh open to such influences."

The expression in Exodus 9.16 "*I have raised you up for this very purpose that I might show you my power*" has been interpreted to mean that God was making an example of him. It has been shown however that "raised up" really means "let you live" (LXX and Cole - Tyndale). God could have wiped them all out in one disaster but in patience and forbearance gave them further opportunities. To put it another way, God kept Pharaoh standing, by His repeated removal of the plagues, until the Divine purpose in the whole matter was completed and His power shown in all that was done.

Moses and Aaron appear again in the royal presence. The interview with Pharaoh is recorded in Exodus 7.10-13. Aaron did the sign which God had shown Moses but the king called in Egyptian magicians who performed the same 'wonder'. Long arguments have been made as to how they were able to do this. Some have suggested that it was by evil spirits. Others have referred to the clever tricks performed by Egyptian 'conjurers' and the fact that this ancient people had remarkable scientific knowledge to assist them. It might be asked why God allowed them to be matched by the world's wise men but the next move was not in the wise men's book. Aaron's snake swallowed the other snakes. At that point the wise men departed to be mentioned no more. Their very appearance in the records contrasts with the way in which Israel did not share the forthcoming disasters. The king was unmoved and probably noted that his own wise men needed a refresher course to improve their skills to the same standard as that of Israel. "Pharaoh however was obstinate; as the Lord had foretold, and he did not listen to Moses and Aaron" literally the text means "*His heart hardened itself.*" (Exodus 7.13).

The princes and elders of Israel would be

waiting for them only to hear a report of failure. There is no mention of Moses and Aaron being despondent nor of Israel's unbelief. Something has changed and the account now passes straight on to the Ten Plagues. Where formerly they had felt the set back badly, now they were confident. Was it the effect of the 'snake eats snakes' story or were Moses and Aaron able to persuade them that the hand of God was at work with them. A few days later, the staff that had once been a snake was used again, to initiate the sequence of events that led to Pharaoh to say, "*Get out of my sight. Make sure that you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.*" (Exodus 10.28)

The Ten Plagues of Egypt stand as one of the spectacular events of Old Testament history. The debate about their origin has been long and hard. Were they the miraculous intervention by God or freaks of nature? There is no denying the reality of the happenings. Their fame spread to the surrounding nations. Israel never forgot them. They were the subject of triumphal song and poetry for generations. In Psalms 78 and 105 David commemorates the Ten Plagues as examples of God's irresistible judgments. Four centuries later, the Philistines referred to '*the god who broke the Egyptians*' (1 Samuel 4.8). Such was the impression left by those unprecedented disasters.

The difference between these plagues being natural events or their being direct acts of God might not be so marked if we could understand exactly what miracles are. They are sometimes thought to be happenings not within the laws of nature and some people object to the idea of miracles on the ground that a God of law and order would not do things outside natural law. That however presupposes that we know all natural laws and we do not. If we knew everything there is to know about the laws of the universe we might find that miracles come within those laws. Secondly we believe that everything is under the sovereign will of God and we can't comprehend how far God's loving care extends. Maybe that everything that He has created is definitely and directly under His control which means that miracles could happen to those who do not regard themselves as 'God's people'. The difference between Divine intervention and 'the normal course of events' is not so marked on this basis. A

further objection to God being directly concerned with the plagues and much else in the Old Testament is the suffering and death that resulted from the plagues. This difficulty evaporates when we accept that all in their graves are going to come forth at the call of the Son of Man. When those who die as a result of natural or unnatural disasters return from the grave to a life in 'Paradise' they may find that death at that point was a better alternative than the extended misery of a life in a sinful world. Whatever God does is totally motivated by love. Our understanding of God's providential care and intervention in the lives of all who He has created is but in its infancy and when we understand them better we may not find the difficulties of free will and predestination so much of a problem. There are dimensions in the living world of the universe that modern technology does not make clearer. Why should mankind squeal about what God does or does not do when the human race has continually, for thousands of years, promoted the creed of self and the dreadful waste of the earth's resources.

That digression from the main theme of the Exodus was felt necessary because the whole setting of the Exodus provides problems for the modern western scientific mind. If we accept that

the Most High in the administration of Creation orders and exerts natural forces to accomplish His special designs then events such as the plagues in Egypt fit into a reasonable scheme. Such events may have been nearer to the normal pattern of Egyptian life than we now discern but it was the timing of those events that constituted direct intervention. Nothing must detract from the fact that these were signs and wonders that occurred to bring about a desired result in the Divine purpose.

In the next article in this series, the individual plagues will be examined not with a view to explaining them away but trying to enter into the experience of those who were affected by them. Egyptians and Israelites. In this way we may be able to discover for ourselves lessons that affect our own lives. These were real people who felt ecstasy and pain, jealousy and generosity and they were not puppets on a string. The people of Israel to this day remember those events, perhaps with greater feeling than the forebears who experienced them. Today, Israel remembers the miracles that happened at the end of the exile in Babylon and at the end of the Second World War. As old Gamaliel hinted, its not a wise thing to fight against God.

AOH/DN

MARTHA AND MARY

Martha scurried about with plates and dishes, tut-tutting impatiently as she looked towards the group at the other end of the room. Jesus was sitting there quietly talking. Peter, John and Lazarus, and a few others, were giving close attention. Mary, sitting on the floor at His feet, rapt face lifted to His, listened intently. None of them is taking any notice of me, thought Martha, rather bitterly, vigorously stirring her cooking-pot. It is not as though we had an ordinary visitor. When Jesus is here we ought to provide an extra special meal and the house must be specially cleaned. We all ought to wear our best garments and there isn't time to do all that when He comes in like this at short notice. She picked up a brush and dashed in hurriedly to sweep imaginary dust from the already immaculate table and benches where the meal was soon to be served. A noise of pots boiling over in the outer room sent her rushing to her cooking and at that her nerves finally gave way and she fled back into the other room to that intent group in the corner.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to get on with the work by myself? Tell her to come and give me a hand!" The others swung round, somewhat appalled. Mary flushed crimson and buried her face in her hands. Only Jesus remained unmoved. He lifted His eyes to Martha, eyes of sympathy and understanding. Martha felt all the vexation and frustration ebbing away as she looked at Him, and in their place a comforting sense of peace. In an odd sort of way she had an impression that He had known all along how she was feeling and had been quietly waiting for her to come out with it.

"Martha, Martha", His tone was caressingly gentle. She was conscious that He understood; that He always had understood. She had not really been alone; He had noticed and had known. "You are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is really important, and Mary has chosen that better thing. It will not be taken away from her".

Martha was silent. The elaborate meal, ready in

the other room for bringing to table seemed so unimportant now. The house-proud endeavour to refurbish an already flawless home was unnecessary for the Man of Nazareth whose penetrating gaze ignored the externals and saw only that which was in the heart. She loved Jesus and His words and she knew that. How much better to make the most of His visit sitting at His feet as had her sister, and learn of Him. She caught Mary's glance, directed anxiously toward her, and she smiled.

* * * * *

So many have found themselves in the same position as Martha. So busy about the material interest of every day that the things of the Spirit recede into the background. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you," Jesus said on one occasion, and we all, in life's experiences, come each in our turn, to a point where we realise the truth of that saying. So many things in life can be counted loss, and well lost, if we may thereby find Christ and be found in Him. The Apostle Paul esteemed all things of this world the most worthless of rubbish if he might thus win Christ. The experience of Martha, and its recorded sequel, stands for the admonition of all who are Christ's throughout the Age.

Martha's reaction to our Lord's reply to her outburst is not recorded, but there is ground for thinking that she accepted the mild rebuke and learned the lesson it enshrined. This incident is recorded in Luke 10.38-42 and only four or five months later Jesus was guest at another meal in the house of the Bethany family (John 12.1-8). The disciples were present and a supper was prepared. Again Martha was doing the work whilst Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. On this occasion Mary anointed His feet with the precious perfume and wiped them with her hair, an action, Jesus said, that would be remembered wherever the gospel should be preached for all time to come. This time there is no record of Martha manifesting the old impatience. Perhaps, whilst not unmindful of her duties as a hostess and the comfort of her guests, she did strike a proper balance between attention to her responsibilities and attention to the words of Jesus.

Martha seems to have been a strong minded practical woman, much given to organising and administering the affairs of daily life, but sometimes neglecting spiritual things. That she

esteemed Jesus as Lord is beyond question; that she had supreme faith in His Divine power is shown by her words to him following the death of her brother Lazarus "*if you had been here my brother would not have died*" (John 11.21). She possessed a positive conviction of the basic truths of her Judaic faith, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" (John 11.24). She believed with all her heart that Jesus was the promised Messiah. But she does not seem to have been so serene and given to meditation or one who would quietly listen to the message and forget all surrounding outward things while doing so. Even when one foot was planted in heaven the other was planted on the earth.

The Lord has need of such. "*If the whole body were an eye*", asks Paul, in 1 Cor. 12.17, "*where would be the hearing. If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?*" If all were mystics and out of touch with real things, the life of the Church might be lived on a wonderfully exalted plane but the practical issues of preaching the Gospel to the unconverted would most assuredly get sadly neglected. Not for nothing was coined the old jibe concerning some who are "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use". The Lord has need of Marthas as well as Marys in His band of dedicated ones and to think that Jesus in the story was reproving Martha and throwing her zealous service back in her face is to miss the whole point. The word rendered 'cumbered' in Luke 10.40 means to be over-busy, over-occupied, distracted with too many cares, and it comes from a root meaning to rush around ineffectively and aimlessly. Martha was doing too much, more than was necessary, and Jesus told her so. He bade her calm down and let some of the household chores go so that she could spend a little time in fellowship with Him.

Mary was obviously cast in a different mould. Quiet, thoughtful, sympathetic, and deeply devotional, she was probably completely impractical in respect to mundane things. Had both sisters been of Mary's temperament it is probable that Jesus and the disciples would have got no supper at all. But of all who gathered together on those two occasions she was the only one who sensed the tragedy that was so soon to befall them. Whether she knew it or not, she anointed Jesus for His burial (Mark 14.8). The extent of her devotion is shown

by her spontaneous breaking of the alabaster flask of perfume over Jesus' feet. The value of that perfume, as assessed by the jealous Judas at the time at three hundred denarii, was equivalent in modern spending power to about ten thousand pounds. It would seem that Mary set little store by the value of earthly possessions compared with what we would call heavenly treasures. When their brother Lazarus died and news came that Jesus was approaching the house, Mary sat still inside with her grief: it was Martha who got up and went out to meet the Lord, returning then to tell Mary He was calling for her also. At this, Mary in turn bestirred herself to go out and meet him. When, a little later at the tomb, Jesus commanded the stone to be rolled away, it was Martha, practical as ever, and despite her faith that the Lord could raise the dead, who objected that after four days dead the body would be well on the way to corruption. Mary, perhaps, had never thought of that.

Neither of the sisters appear anywhere else in the Gospel narratives. They are seen only at Bethany and there they take their leave, still together, still believing. In that domestic setting they display the two characteristics which must exist in proper balance in every Christian character. The devotional aspect is so necessary to all who would grow up into Christ-likeness and bear fruit in the moulding of a Christian character fitted to the future celestial life. The practical, down-to-earth outlook gives form and body to the heavenly vision and enables the believer to live "in the world but not of the world". Such ministers the goodness of God to men in the same manner as did Jesus when he was upon earth, pouring out His life unto death. Both Mary and Martha are needed in the Christian community, and we, each one of us, need, in our own Christian make-up, something of Martha and something of Mary.

AOH

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

A Bible study of Paul's letter to the Galatians

4. Flesh v Spirit

Paul completes his theoretical argument about Law and Grace, Sons or Slaves, with an allegory taken from Hebrew history. Paul is not teaching the theory of the covenants in Galatians 4 although many students have so used it. Paul clearly states that it is an allegory and it is his way of illustrating what he has been writing about. Paul wants to show that those who have come into Christ are free from legal slavery.

In Galatians 5.13, Paul begins the final part of his letter and in customary style draws the spiritual moral lessons from the theory of the earlier chapters. He answers the question that we should continually be asking, how does Christian doctrine and knowledge affect the Christian life and behaviour. He begins by drawing the battle lines between the old human nature that we inherited and the new spiritual nature that believers enjoy in union with Christ. This is much more than accepting Jesus as our pattern and example. Good as that may be, it is trying to do the impossible by imitating Him in our own human strength. In some respects it is the difference between trying to learn and practice a subject by using a text-book compared with having the master craftsman place his hand on ours for every movement that we make.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul writes of the 'flesh'. The Greek word for flesh, 'sarx', has several meanings and our modern speech does not convey Paul's meaning. The REB translates this passage, "... live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want". This is reminiscent of Romans 7.14-25. What then are these two natures and how do they operate? We were naturally born with a sinful and "unspiritual nature" (REB). Those reared by parents whose lives were dedicated to God, may have something of the spiritual nature developed in their characters. Human nature, now unregenerate and sinful, was originally a creation of God in His image. Something of the original likeness remains, in spite of thousands of years and very many generations of being 'defaced' by sin and rebellion against God. Something too of the animal nature is within us except that we are often driven by habits rather than instincts. Paul found, what many of the human race have found, that there is a many sided tug of war going on inside us and we are pulled in different directions. We live

in an environment of 'the world' and Satan. No wonder that so many are confused and make a variety of decisions about the same thing at different times and feel in conflict with themselves and others. Jesus, the only person without sin, was wonderfully sympathetic and gentle with those around Him who were obviously in a state of confusion and conflict. He knew that many of them didn't want that conflict. He knew also that they had little idea of how to resolve the problems and discover peace. How well He described them as 'sheep without a shepherd'. They were not usually criminals but just ordinary folk who in ignorance found it difficult to keep an unwavering upright attitude. They struggled to do right and Paul cried out, "*Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?*" in Romans 7. There is only one way and it is found in Jesus Christ. Not only did He perfectly resolve conflict within himself, but He is able to do it in others. He can bring peace of mind in a way that no one else can do because He opened the way to peace and then has the power through the Holy Spirit to maintain that peace. What is also vital to the Christian is that Christ can gradually clarify in our minds what is truly of the old nature and what is truly the new life in Him.

Paul has not got rid of Law. He did not promote lawlessness by the arguments in the earlier chapters of Galatians. Rather he was advocating a new attitude to the Law that really is the expression of the will of God. Therefore, since God is love, the real timeless, eternal law is love. Humanity is not without a definition of love. It is important at this time that Christians should understand what love is, because it has been so misinterpreted and made ambiguous in modern culture that the word has almost lost its meaning. Many of those who 'sing' about it have not the slightest idea of its meaning. They make the rules of language as they go along. Jesus gave us a clear insight into the word in His wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan. In the New Testament the word attains its highest point in the love of God Himself. It is a quality that can reach out to the worst enemy and yet it is also that which binds together the closest earthly ties within a family or church. Without it, all else is a waste of time. The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "*Love your neighbour as yourself*".

Then the apostle writes something that might seem very astonishing. The brethren in Galatia

were fighting and 'devouring' each other. How could such a thing possibly go on in a company of consecrated, spirit-filled, followers of Jesus? Looking back over two thousand years of church history, it is apparently all too easy and the process has not stopped yet. The worst thing we can do is to look at other communities of the Lord's people and smugly feel that it doesn't and couldn't happen to us. Paul goes on to list a terrible catalogue of sins in verses 19-21. Although they don't appear to be the cause of trouble among the brethren of Galatia, the history of the church reveals that it would be wrong to assume that such things never happen among God's people. Leaders in high places as well as ordinary folk within the church have been guilty of this gross immorality. They are offences against God, against fellow believers, against people in the world and against the self which does such things. Scripture warns against anyone thinking that he stands because that is just the time when one is most likely to fall. In deep humility and contrition we need to kneel at the foot of the cross and ask for our sin to be cleansed. Taking the lesson a little further Jesus makes it clear, in the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5 that we can be murderers and indecent in our thinking without committing an action. Our thoughts are part of the old nature which we are supposed to have taken off like a coat. This is not a problem to be worried about. Anxious thought or suspicion of others do not make our hearts right with God but putting on the new nature in Jesus and daily walking with Him does. If we are doing that, new life will grow in us and we shall find delight in Him and therefore in others of like mind. Then we shall find old things have genuinely passed away and all things have really become new.

The old nature still lingers in us. The Christians in Galatia had been born again and there was evidence of powerful things through the Holy Spirit in their lives. It was not glaring crime of which they were guilty. It was a religious matter; some would say a spiritual matter. They hankered after the human way of salvation. They could not trust, nor would they let their fellow believers trust, in Christ alone. In their case it was the rite of circumcision. At Antioch it had been the problem of eating the right food with the right people. These were 'things of the flesh'. That which comes between our brethren and ourselves, will

eventually come between ourselves and the Lord and belong to the old nature. Emphasis on the 'right way' to do God's service or the 'right way' to interpret Scripture can become 'things of the flesh'. It is not always what is said and done that is of the old nature but the attitude of arrogance and hypocrisy and these Jesus condemned more than anything else.

Our old nature is to be crucified. The growth of holiness in the Christian life cannot progress while the 'flesh' is allowed to flourish. We need to be decisive and certain about this and see clearly our spiritual objective. The Lord is not training those who can give all the right answers, parrot fashion, so that they can spend eternity repeating some doctrinal catechism. He needs people like Himself who can share His whole life in spreading the way of love and goodness and truth.

The Samaritan who stopped and bathed wounds and poured in oil and wine might have had some difficulty in his interpretation of the Law or in his performance of Levitical ritual but what he did on that Jericho road was in Jesus eyes the 'spiritual thing' to do. What the priest and Levite were going to do at Jerusalem, perhaps in the Temple, seemed to them to be very spiritual, but might be classed by Jesus as thoroughly 'fleshly'. The cup of cold

water, given in the name of the Lord, will earn His approval and make us like Him more than all the 'pious talk' that has ever been said. Let us be sure that our conversation is truly in heaven and not just 'spiritual jargon'.

"But the harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law." In those two verses of Galatians 5, The Apostle summarises Christian character. This is the fruit of the spirit. This is that fruit of which Jesus spoke recorded in Matt. 7.20. Not by their vast knowledge nor by their clever interpretations but by their fruit would we know the prophets in Israel. Nothing has changed. Jesus spoke eternal principles. We may do wonderful signs, we may be eloquent in debate, we may even speak with the golden voice of an angel but citizenship in the Kingdom of God is apparent by its 'fruit'. That fruit is clearly defined in Galatians 5 as qualities of character. Patient gentleness and faithful self-control are the best means of evangelism and not incisive argument. It is love, joy, peace and goodness that really matter when it comes to pastoral care.

(To be concluded)

DN

A FEAST OF WINES – 2

"Come, buy wine..., without money and without price" (Isaiah 55.1).

The marriage feast at Cana to which Jesus was an invited guest, ran out of wine and Mary His mother told Him of the dilemma of their host. The miraculous making of wine without grapes has delighted and taxed the imagination of all familiar with the story, the crux of which seems to have been in keeping the good wine to the last. It can hardly be thought likely that Jesus would employ His wonder working power merely to save the face of an embarrassed neighbour. This, His first of miracles, must have had some deeper significance. The words of the governor of the feast to whom the first cup of the new wine was offered seem to provide the purpose. No doubt he was a connoisseur of vintages. It is easy to see him passing the cup before his nose, sniffing the fine aroma and delicately tasting the liquid before allowing it to circulate among the guests. His wonder was such that he called the bridegroom whom he thought responsi-

ble for this change-about in festal hospitality. Most men gave the good wine at the beginning, getting down to the sour and the second rate when all else was gone but this unusual man had kept his good wine until the end.

Was there in this incident a hint that He was the bridegroom who would at some future date serve the good wine of abundant life to those who had known only the bitter draught of existence? Some have come to the board of life to be offered its best in riches, titles, high positions and opportunities above and beyond the less fortunate; yet none have escaped the bitter dregs of disappointment, suffering and death. On a broader scale mankind down the centuries has received the wine of life in varying quality and measure. Both people and nations have received blessings, successes and advancement blended with the tragedies, disaster and defeats common to man. The best that human wisdom and skill can provide has been placed upon the universal board. For some there is the best of

the sweet wine, for others second best, for yet others the sour dregs of the dispossessed, the outsiders who take the lowest place at the banquet, the poor bedraggled haunters of the byways and the hedges.

The Lord of the feast, with unerring wisdom and kindness has reserved the best wine to the last. When men are at their wits end and provisions have run out, then the good wine of the Kingdom will be dispensed without regard to status to "whosoever will". With joy will they drink of the sparkling cup of peace and happiness, blessings that only God can provide. The good wine, abundant and rich, will be served with true appreciation when the "feast of wines on the lees well refined" has been made and offered to all people.

Wine on the lees is one without dregs, a sweet, robust vintage notable for richness of colour, aroma and flavour. Such a wine of life has never yet been the portion of mankind. All have tasted tears, partings, pain and bewilderment. Life is God's gift. Free of charge, free of dregs, full of vigour, it will be there for the taking when the kingly Bridegroom makes His feast and bids His guests to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When Jesus took the cup, blessed and shared it with His disciples, He made them one with Himself in spirit, in service, in aim and hope. He said, "*I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God*" (Mark 14.25).

What did He mean by new wine? He was then shortly to drink of the cup of suffering and death of which the literal cup had been partly a symbol. The new wine in the new Kingdom could only mean a brimming cup of new life, blessings of a new nature which would be to all people; and a full realization of the glad tidings of great joy of which the angels sang at Bethlehem. When He drank the full cup of the world's sorrows and sufferings, He tasted death for every man. Nothing was spared Him of its misery. The sins, the treacheries and the humiliations of humankind went into that cup which he drained to its last bitter dregs. By so doing He substituted the cup of woe by the cup of blessings which is to run over for those members of the human race who are ready to discern its value, and eager enough to partake of its sparkling vigour.

The new wine of the Kingdom will be a rare vintage in which the elect, those called and chosen out of every race for a heavenly place in that Kingdom, will drink at the feast with the Lord of Life.

During the twenty centuries of the Gospel age theirs has been a mixed cup. They have shared with their Lord the cup of humiliation and sorrow tintured with the joys of redemption and salvation; with hope in an everlasting future. It will be for them a cup of immortal drink, a vintage without dregs and brimming with all the joys that will far outstrip anticipation or the finest imagination. As it is written, "*No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.*" (1 Cor. 2.9).

At present few love God because He is unknown to the many. They cannot discern Him through the thick screens of ignorance, fear and superstition. They cannot get through the barriers of confusion, of mixed doctrines and beliefs, wares shouted in the market place of society. They cannot see Him, high and lifted up, worthy of worship and trust, through the heavy veils of disaster and death that hide great spiritual truths from the eyes of natural man. A day approaches when these veils will be removed from them, when "*he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations*" (Isaiah 25.7). It coincides with the feast of fat things, the feast of wines. When the shrouds are removed the feast is spread and will be followed by heartfelt appreciation and universal rejoicing. "*Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him!*" Israel, the church and mankind have waited through long centuries of tyranny, deprivation, disappointment, suffering and death. At last the curtain is lifted, the banquet is ready, the invitations are issued and the time has come to swallow up death, to dry the tears, to end the miseries and to begin the songs of praise and joy.

Jesus taught the futility of putting new wine into old bottles. In the East the wine bottle was often the skin of a goat. To put a new vintage into a worn out skin was an explosive, wasteful experience. The same applies in a metaphorical sense. There have been many attempts to put new ideas into old institutions, to infuse new life into dying causes, to pour a new spirit into an old system but it is vain employment. What is old and worn out, cracks and breaks down under the force of new ideas too strong for its waning fabric. The new wine needs the new bottle, the new heavens and the new earth, for the righteousness and justice of God cannot mix with the violent corruption of

this world.

Human philosophies cannot purge the world of its sins, nor can science heal its diseases or save it from death. New ideas strain the old systems until at last they fall apart beyond use or repair. Individuals as well as nations may lament their lack of power to live as they ought. The solution is the same for all, a shedding of the old ways, the old habits, the old beliefs, the old selves. The endeavour of medical men to implant new hearts is only temporary. Human hearts for the most part are cynical, selfish and impure. They are not the sort to be gladdened by the new wine of the Kingdom. There is little taste for all that is just, wholesome, peaceful and lovely. Strange brews which disorder the whole system blunt the relish for righteousness and true goodness. Only a new heart and a new mind will thirst after and enjoy the new wine, and that also is the free gift of God. Cleansed from the evils that defile the earth, from the idols of gain and

pleasure with which men and women have substituted the love of God, a new heart will come as a generous bonus. *"A new heart I give you and a new spirit will I put within you"* (Ezekiel 36.26).

"All things new" is God's unceasing law and universal programme. Old things pass away and all things become new. There is new wine without money and without price which means new life in a new world. There will be new conditions and a new order in a rejuvenated earth; a feast of such blessing it will carry the willing feet of mankind to the very throne of God. Intoxicated with joy, the songs of the revellers will roll on through time and space until all are joined in eternal love.

"Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals crying, Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory." (Revelation 19.6,7)

ISAIAH OF THE GOLDEN TONGUE

He could hardly have been more than twenty years of age when he saw the vision of the Lord and received his commission. He was a clear-sighted youngster who eagerly gave himself to the Lord's service and laboured diligently as His messenger. He must have been turned seventy when he finished his course. In his early days there were brother prophets – Hosea, Micah, Amos and Joel, all in active service while he was in his teens and twenties, but towards the end of his life they had all gone and only he was left. With his death the voice of prophecy was silent for half a century until a new group of prophets came to the front – Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Zephaniah to announce the dissolution of the nation and the onset of the Babylonian Captivity. In that long ministry of more than fifty years, Isaiah established himself as one of the premier prophets of Israel. He saw with crystal clarity not only the shortcomings of his own people and the inevitable fate that awaited them, but also glories of the Messianic Kingdom to be established when the judgements of the present had run their course.

The vision must have been his first experience. It is recorded in chapter six as the means whereby he received his commission to witness and proph-

esy to Israel concerning both judgment and blessing to come. He saw the Lord seated upon a great Throne in the midst of His sanctuary, attendant seraphim, six-winged guardians of His majesty, around Him, and Isaiah prostrated himself as one unworthy to look upon such a sight. But the Lord wanted a messenger, and the lad immediately offered himself, spontaneously and sincerely. *"Here am I; send me."* Here is the true spirit of consecration. No bargaining for reward or recompense; no questioning as to what the commission might involve, of sacrifice, hardship or suffering. Jesus at a later time is depicted as saying, *"Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God"*, and this was the spirit in which this young man only just out of his teens gave himself to God for His service, whatever that service might be or might involve. He was told that Israel would largely ignore his message and that they would resolutely close their eyes and their ears and their hearts to what he had to say. There would, however, be a remnant who would listen, and that remnant would be as the sap in a leafless tree which would in the course of time put forth new leaves and live again. The glowing distant views of the Millennial Kingdom in the second half of his book show how thoroughly he under-

stood and accepted the Lord's mandate.

It is virtually certain that this vision marked the commencement of his prophetic ministry, which of course was primarily a spoken one. The first five chapters of the book most likely record in brief what he had to say to the people of Judah and probably of Israel at this time, the year that King Uzziah died. The captivity of the Ten Tribes had not yet taken place, but its first stage, when the Assyrians took some of the northern tribes away (2 Kings 15.29) was only two years distant. That disaster might have inclined some to listen to his message but in the main men were indifferent. The general attitude in Judah was that even if their brethren of the Ten Tribes should be taken into captivity, Judah would remain unscathed. Isaiah spent the greater part of his life warning them of their mistake but they never believed. A generation after his death they realised bitterly how grievously wrong they had been.

Some four years were spent in this phase of warning the people and priests of Judah concerning the coming judgement and this is epitomised in chapters 1-5. Then came a second commission from the Lord. Isaiah was to present himself before Ahaz, the reigning king of Judah, to give him a message. To understand the message it is necessary to appreciate the political position obtaining at the time. It is recounted in chapter 7, Pekah, king of the Ten Tribes, (here referred to as 'Ephraim', the name of the leading tribe) and Rezin, king of Syria, were plotting together to invade Judah and put their own puppet king on the throne. Ahaz and his people were desperately worried. Had they possessed faith in God they would have known that by no means would He allow any king not of David's line to rule at Jerusalem but they forgot the Lord, and did not think of going to Him with their problems.

This was apparently Isaiah's first contact with the royal house. As a young man of about twenty-four it could have been thought the height of impudence for him to thrust himself upon the attention of the king. Nevertheless he went without hesitation and without delay. The kings of Judah were accustomed to being accosted by the prophets especially when they had been guilty of transgressing the laws of God, and Ahaz was very guilty in this respect. He was an idolator, serving the Canaanite and Phoenician gods more than he did the

God of Israel. At the moment he was apprehensive of the enemy threat and probably more than usually disposed to listen to what the God of Israel was prepared to do for him. The Lord's message was to the effect that the projected invasion would not be attempted; despite the king's faithlessness the Lord was having regard to the sanctity of His dwelling at Jerusalem, and the Lord Himself would deal with the plotting kings. Within sixty-five years, the Lord assured Ahaz, Ephraim would themselves be taken captive by their enemies and be no longer a nation. Ahaz need not fear their threats.

All this came to pass. In order to satisfy all the allusions in chapter 7, this encounter between the king and Isaiah must have taken place in the first year of the king's reign. Two years later Rezin of Syria died and two years later still Pekah followed him to the grave. Sixty-five years from Isaiah's prediction Esar-haddon of Assyria carried the last surviving remnants of the Ten Tribes into Assyria and replaced them by the mixed peoples who afterwards became known as the Samaritans (Ezra 4.2). Isaiah was a true prophet of the Lord.

The next point of time with which the life of Isaiah can be identified appears in chapter 20, when the Lord used him as a three-year sign of the coming invasions of Judah as retribution on the people for their continued unbelief and apostasy. This is set (20.1) in the year of the siege of the Philistine city of Ashdod by Sargon of Assyria, which was approximately twenty-six years from the first year of Ahaz. During those twenty-six years Isaiah witnessed faithfully to the kings, priests and people on two major themes, judgment and blessing. Judgment must come first because of unbelief and disloyalty to God. They would ally themselves with Egypt as a defence against Assyria, playing power politics as the nations of the world do today, and their policies would fail them and lead them to disaster, just as happens now. Eventually they would learn their lesson and return to their God, and then He would accept their contrition and bring blessing upon them, the blessing of the Age of Christ's reign over the nations. These contrasting themes, intermingled in all the prophet's discourses, eventually found themselves woven into the fabric of chapters 8-35. It is a comprehensive record of visions relating sometimes to the troubles of Isaiah's own day and sometimes to

the Messianic reign which is to put all those troubles right and sometimes to both. Without much doubt those twenty-six years of the prophet's life laid the foundations of that clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the Messianic reign that is so characteristic a feature of his later writings.

Another eight years passed; Isaiah was now about sixty years of age, still warning, still reproving, still imparting the word of the Lord to successive kings of the land. Ahaz was dead and the reigning king was Hezekiah, a devout and godly man. The time was the fourteenth year of his reign, and the counsel of the prophet began to be heeded more than in earlier years. So when Sennacherib the Assyrian laid siege to Jerusalem and sent a letter demanding instant surrender, the king did not solicit help from Egypt as had his predecessors; he called in the prophet and laid the matter before the Lord. The consequence of that act of faith was the exercise of Divine power to destroy the invading army in one night, leaving the boastful Sennacherib to make his way back in shame and confusion to his own land. That must have been the crowning achievement of Isaiah's life. The story, in his 36th and 37th chapters, is one of the most shining examples of Divine deliverance in response to faith recorded in the Old Testament.

It was the same year, either just before or just after the Sennacherib deliverance, that Hezekiah suffered a serious illness that threatened his life. In answer to fervent prayer the prophet assured him that God had given him another fifteen years of life (chapter 38). Now, for the first time, there appears a discordant note in the relations between king and prophet. At or about the same time, says the narrative in chapter 39, Hezekiah, delivered from Sennacherib and recovered from his sickness, received representatives from a land the people of Judah as yet knew little about, the land of Babylon. The monarch of that country, a notoriously crafty and skilful enemy of the Assyrians, had sent to Hezekiah congratulations on his recovery and a present. It is likely that Merodach-Baladan wanted to know more about the manner in which the usually invincible Assyrians had been so signally defeated at Jerusalem; he himself was constantly at war with them and might be glad of a few tips. Hezekiah, rather injudiciously, showed the Babylonian ambassadors everything he and his country owned, Temple treasures, armaments, military strength,

everything. They went away, doubtless to tell their master all that they had seen, and Isaiah came in to the king desiring to know who these men were and what the king had shown and told them.

Confidently, perhaps boastfully, the king related the whole story. Probably, feeling a little arrogant now that the Assyrian menace had been removed. "Now hear the word of the Lord" said Isaiah when he had heard all. "The day will come when everything you have shown them will be carried away into Babylon; nothing shall be left". It would seem that Isaiah in that moment realised that nothing could now avert the consequences of the unheeded warnings and admonitions of fifty years; perhaps in vision he already saw Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers looting the Temple and destroying the city, leading the people into captivity and leaving their land desolate. He knew now that it must surely come. He must have left the presence of the king a sorrowful man. There is no indication that Isaiah ever went to see King Hezekiah again.

At this point the book which bears his name suddenly changes its tone and timbre, as well as its theme. Instead of denunciations of Israel's shortcomings and warnings of coming disaster, the last twenty-seven chapters, from 40 to 66, are devoted to an enthralling description of the glories of the Messianic kingdom and the position of Israel in that kingdom. The tone is on a higher level, the literary style more polished and fluent, to such an extent that it would seem to have come from another pen. It is this difference which has caused many scholars to declare that the same hand could not possibly have written this part of the book as wrote the first. Hence the expression 'Second Isaiah' or 'Deutero-Isaiah' (Deuteros – Greek for 'second') so often used to designate the presumed author of this part of the book.

This is not the place to go into the relevant arguments, pro and con for this assertion. Suffice it to say that a very simple suggestion can obviate the need for assuming two Isaiahs on this ground of difference of style.

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, Isaiah was about sixty years of age. For forty long years he had preached assiduously to the people, the priests and the royal court. They had for the most part ignored him. As a statesman he had warned successive kings of the folly of looking to worldly powers like Egypt for defence, but to no avail.

Only on the last occasion, during the invasion of Sennacherib, did the king listen to him, but immediately after that the same king began to enter into negotiations with Babylon, and Isaiah knew that this policy also would fail. What is more likely than that Isaiah at this point decided to retire from active participation in affairs of State and public oratory, and devote himself to writing for the benefit of future generations? His earlier prophecies, up to chapter 29, are consistent with their being transcripts of messages actually delivered by word of mouth, or speeches actually made, uttered in the open air in the hearing of the people, or in the royal court before the king. The latter part, chapters 40-66, exhibit the measured tempo and the lofty flights of a literary composition deliberately and soberly set down in quietude and solitude. The earlier chapters reproduce the impetuous and fervent evangelism of a young man. These later ones mirror the maturity and spiritual insight of one approaching the end of life, whose long familiarity with the guiding hand of God enables him to perceive with increasing clarity the reality of that which lies within the Veil. Tradition has it that Isaiah survived into the reign of Hezekiah's successor, Manasseh. In that case he must have lived into his eighties or nineties. Any man who writes at that age develops a far different literary style from that which characterises his earlier years. This alone is sufficient to explain the difference that admittedly does show up between the earlier and later parts of the book.

So for fifteen or twenty years, after Sennacherib was humiliated and Jerusalem saved, the golden-tongued prophet might well have been living quietly in seclusion. There he penned those gloriously colourful pictures of the Age of blessing that will one day come upon the world and of the felicity that will come to Israel, repentant and restored to God's favour. There he told of the redemptive work of the Messiah, His suffering and His glory. Embedded here is a theme that is peculiar to Isaiah, that of the Lord's 'servant' who will fulfil His creative and redemptive purpose. From chapters 41 to 51 that servant is Israel, purified, regathered, embarking upon its destiny of becoming a light to the nations and playing its part in the turning of the hearts of men to God. In chapters 52 and 53 the servant is our Lord, appearing first in humiliation and suffering leading to death, afterwards rising to

glory and the reconciliation of all mankind. The beginning of this section dwells upon the majesty and uniqueness of God. It then passes on to His call to Israel for His service and to their fitness for that service. Finally it deals with the service itself, the invitation to all mankind to take their place in Christ's kingdom, a service in which also the Christian Church of this Age has its part, although of course Isaiah could not portray that aspect so long before the Church existed. He closes his book with a resplendent vision of a world at peace, sin and evil banished, all men in willing union with God, and the Divine purpose for mankind fully accomplished. He must have laid down his pen with the feeling that the commission given him by the Lord more than half a century previously had carried him to the utmost heights of Divine revelation. Nothing now remained but to yield up his spirit in full confidence that he would one day awaken to see with his own eyes those Millennial glories. By the power of the Holy Spirit he had been able to describe the outlines of those glories for the instruction of all who in later days would seek to know the way of the Lord.

Isaiah was a man of sterling faith and fixed conviction, of keen political insight and consistent loyalty both to God and to his nation. He served a succession of kings with sincerity and candour although his service was not always accepted or appreciated. He saw very clearly that relation between Israel's sin and rejection by the Lord, their eventual repentance and consequent restoration, and their position and duties in His Kingdom. He understood clearly the fact that God never leaves himself without a witness and that even in the darkest hour of apostasy there is always a 'remnant' who retain the faith, a remnant that is always the seed of later revival. He possessed a clear view of the universal appeal of the Gospel: unlike the later Jews, he saw Israel as an instrument, one instrument, in the Lord's hand for the eventual reconciliation of all the willing of mankind to God and the establishment of that order of things on earth that is described in the New Testament phraseology as "Christ being all in all". Above all the seers and prophets of the Bible, Isaiah is pre-eminently the prophet of the Kingdom.

AOH

THE RAS SHAMRA TABLETS

During the year 1929, almost a century since Henry Rawlinson started the fascinating series of discoveries that have continuously added to Biblical understanding, two French archaeologists Professors Schaeffer and Chenet were carrying out investigations at a place on the coast of Syria called Ras Shamra. It is near Cape Fennel and a few miles north of the modern sea port of Latakia. They had found the buried remains of an ancient temple. As they uncovered the room which had evidently been the temple library, there was revealed a considerable number of baked clay tablets inscribed in what afterwards proved to be eight different languages of antiquity. Even after so many 'finds' extending over the past hundred years and spread over all the lands of the Middle East, it was speedily recognised that this was one of supreme importance, and when scholars had given these first tablets some examination a more thoroughgoing expedition was arranged. Throughout the period between 1930 and 1932 a considerable amount of work was done at Ras Shamra and in addition to many more tablets, there were brought to light weapons and implements of bronze, jewellery, pottery and other articles in great abundance. Satisfactory evidence in the form of seals and other emblems bearing the names of certain Egyptian Pharaohs established the date when these relics were buried beneath the ruins of the temple as 1400 to 1350 BC. That was just after the time when Joshua and the Israelites entered Canaan and were engaged in gaining possession of the land and they were not to see the light of day again until discovered in the last century. It was therefore seen at once that these written tablets would most likely prove to be of considerable interest to Bible scholars and probably throw some light on certain Bible narratives, particularly those relating to the time of the Exodus.

Three of the languages in which these tablets are written were still undeciphered fifty years later. The remainder include Egyptian, Cretan, Babylonian and, most interesting of all, archaic Hebrew written in Babylonian cuneiform characters. The nature of the tablets shows the temple to have been the centre of a kind of theological college and many of them record various kinds of ritual observances and instructions. These bear a striking resemblance

to much of the Tabernacle ceremonial given to Moses at Sinai and which became the worship of Israel for many centuries. Now this is a most important as well as most interesting discovery. For two generations prior to 1930 'modern scholarship' had persistently promoted the idea that much of the ceremonial in Exodus and Leviticus was invented by priests at much later times, in the days of the kings, and accredited to Moses to give it authority in the eyes of the people. The general position of Old Testament 'criticism' was that the books of Moses were not to be taken as strictly historical. It was said that even if Moses had in fact lived, much of what is credited to him in the books bearing his name must be assigned to a considerably later date. These discoveries at Ras Shamra therefore have come as a most welcome independent testimony to the strictly historical character of the books of Moses. They show that sacrificial rituals very much like those described in the Book of Leviticus were evidently quite well known in Canaan at the very time that Moses was alive.

The type of religious faith that is revealed by the tablets is polytheistic, that is, it has to do with the worship of many gods and goddesses. At the same time there is frequent mention of the god Elyon, which is the Hebrew name for the 'Most High God'. From the book of Genesis we know that the first recorded name by which God was called, before He was known as Yahweh, the Eternal (to Moses) or El Shaddai, the Almighty (to Abraham), is this very name El Elyon, the Most High God. Genesis 14 tells of Melchizedek, the Priest-king of Jerusalem, in the days of Abraham paid him tribute, thereby acknowledging his recognition that Melchizedek's God was the same as his own. There are other indications in Scripture to the effect that God was known by this name in the earliest ages of earth's history. It seems probable that those in Canaan who, though not of the line of Jacob, which for several centuries had been absent in Egypt, had nevertheless continued to worship the God of Abraham and Jacob and still knew Him by this name. The worship of the 'Most High God' which Scripture indicates prevailed in Canaan in Abraham's time is shown by the evidence of the Ras Shamra tablets to have survived probably in an increasingly corrupted

form, until Joshua arrived from Egypt six centuries later.

These tablets betray some acquaintance, on the part of the writers, with the ceremonial of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, or else with some common source that forms the basis of both. Much the same terms are used to describe similar things. Thus there are references to the peace offering, the trespass offering, the tribute offering, the wave offering, the burnt offering, the first fruits, beside allusions to sacred furniture such as that in use in the Tabernacle, and to the Most Holy, the Court, and so on. Now we do not know, of course, just what inspired the detail of the elaborate Tabernacle design and its attendant ceremonies. We are told that God showed the entire pattern to Moses in the Mount (Exodus 25.40). It would seem that the venerable leader of Israel saw the Tabernacle and all its ceremonies, as in a kind of vision, during the time he was alone on Sinai as recorded in Exodus 24. It is a fact that much of the physical structure of the Tabernacle bore a distinct resemblance to Egyptian temple architecture and some of the furniture can be shown to have had likeness in common with Babylonian temple furniture of many centuries previously. On this account it has been suggested that Moses adapted ideas from older faiths to build a religious ceremonial of his own. What is more in keeping with the Scripture record is to accept the account in Exodus to mean exactly what it says, that Moses was caused by the power of the Holy Spirit to see in vision an exact replica of the Tabernacle as God required it to be made. If, in designing that pattern, the Most High made use of ideas that men had already developed in their past attempts to worship Him, that is entirely within the exercise of His discretion as the Lord of all created things. We do not know in fact just what origin, in the mists of antediluvian time, some of these emblems of worship may have had when men did worship God in the measurable purity of the days immediately after the Fall.

It is probably reasonable therefore to conclude that the ceremonials described in the Ras Shamra tables have some connection with, or were in part derived from the instructions which God gave to Moses in the wilderness. Their existence in these tablets does at least prove quite definitely that such ideas were abroad at that time, and to that extent gives evidence of the historical accuracy of

Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

One other point of interest remains to touch upon. Who were these people who administered this temple and lived in the surrounding countryside? The remains at Ras Shamra show that the city and its people existed there from at least two centuries before Abraham entered Canaan, until about two hundred years after the Exodus. That would be about the middle of the time of the Judges, some little while before Samuel came to Eli at Shiloh. During this long period of about a thousand years all kinds of races and types made their homes in that district. Some of the later tablets have to do with seafaring expeditions; there are registers of ocean-going ships using the port. Remembering that in after days this very country became the home of the Phoenicians, that renowned seagoing merchant people of old time, it may well be that their progenitors were here taking root in the soil. Another class of tablets incorporates legends regarding Terah, a military conqueror under the protection of the Moon-god, who invaded the country with his hosts. One is reminded immediately of Terah the father of Abraham who left his native city Ur of the Chaldees, the holy city of the Moon-god to go to Canaan. Also, how at a later date Abraham with all his "trained servants" (mercenary or "hired" soldiers) defeated and put to flight the Babylonian and Elamite armies in this very land. (See Genesis 14). It would not be profitable to dwell upon or spend time examining the mass of such legend that appears in the tablets. However allusions such as these do go to show that what we now read as history in the early chapters of Genesis was so well known in the days of these tablets that much of it, distorted and intermixed, had already passed into the realm of popular legend.

The true value of Ras Shamra, therefore, is its testimony to the facts that, first, the Bible is true history of the periods with which it deals, and second, that this Bible history is still the fullest and most complete account of those times. It reveals a more detailed and accurate picture of the progress of events in the world's oldest civilisations than any tablets or other records which the researches of men in these last days have brought to light.

AOH

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

*A study of prophecy
passing into history*

2. A Nation Born in a Day

This short series is written against the background of belief held by many students of the prophetic word to the effect that before the Messianic Age commences there is a to be a restored and purified nation of Israel, gathered in the Holy Land. This in fulfilment of the Divine promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and this restored nation is to play an important part in the evangelistic work of that Age.

* * * * *

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them." (Ezekiel 37.8)

This is the second stage in Ezekiel's vision. At first he had seen the heterogeneous collection of disjointed bones lying in the plain coming together and joining themselves to form complete skeletons, lifeless, unmoving but skeletons nevertheless. Now he saw the skeletons growing and changing into bodies; sinews, flesh and skin appearing as if from nowhere and clothing these bones so that now the plain appeared full of recumbent bodies. They were still and without movement, but in every respect complete and perfect, needing only the spirit of life from God to bring life to them and set them to their feet, a living and mighty host.

A very fair analogy can be drawn here between the vision as recorded and the actual development of Israel into a nation in the latter days. In the first part of this treatise, the coming together of bone to bone was shown to picture the slow assembling of the framework of the Jewish State and people. This happened during the period between 1897 when Theodore Herzl set in motion the forces that have resulted in the present situation and 1948 when the Israeli State was formally proclaimed and began its independent existence. Quite logically, the covering of the bones by the sinews, flesh and skin could well picture what has happened in the years since 1948, when the nation has been steadily gathering strength and solidity. That which was a bare skeleton in 1948 is now in fair process of becoming a well-rounded out body.

At the establishment of the State in 1949 there were 650,000 Jews in Palestine, and with the de-

parture of the Mandatory power they were left with a land that was virtually bankrupt, without government, without organization and without resources. Almost every function of modern civilized national administration came to an end and by all the rules, the land should have relapsed overnight into anarchy, a ready prey to the invaders who waited eagerly around its frontiers. Today, little more than fifty years later, there is a population of about six million of whom the vast majority are Jews living and prospering under a well planned and well-run administration. It has won the admiration and envy of other nations and has extended its influences and assistance to other emerging nations in Asia and Africa. Israel may have been a skeleton in 1948; it is most certainly not so today.

First of all, the sinews cover the bones. Money has often been called the sinews of war. In this case money became the sinews of peace. Money, men and immigrants poured into Israel from the very first day of the new regime. The restrictions imposed by Britain in 1936 in a desperate attempt at Arab appeasement, vanished overnight; the doors were thrown open to all who would, of the sons of Jacob, to return. And return they did, from every place under heaven, creating an immediate problem that almost wrecked the struggling embryo nation. Money came too. Many Jews, particularly in America, who for various reasons were not prepared to join in the rush for the land, made their contribution in cash or in financial assistance so that the nation could begin to put itself upon a commercial basis. The bones could not boast of flesh at first, but they certainly began to acquire some sinews, something to give the muscular power which they would need much later on. As the facilities became available so industries began to re-open or to develop. Stagnated or derelict farms began to be cultivated. Struggling communities unable for years to do more than produce enough to keep themselves alive began to organize and increase production so that they could contribute a share to the nation's export business, essential if they were to survive at all in this modern competitive and commercial world. Men came searching for new outlets of business and production, like the Australian who

remembered the sulphur nuggets he found during his war service in Palestine and came back and explored, and started a prosperous sulphur industry. Imaginative schemes were drawn up for exploiting the country's incipient resources, such as the gigantic water pipeline running two hundred miles or so from the headwaters of the Jordan in the far north to the parched deserts of the Negev in the south. This brought the blessings of irrigation and abundant water to the farming communities struggling to make the wilderness blossom as the rose. That pipe-line was a sinew indeed! So the sinews appeared on the bones as the strength and resources, the industries and the trades, began to grow and become established.

After the sinews in Ezekiel's vision came the flesh, clothing the bare bones with a semblance of shape and form. So, after the basis of the new nation's economy had been assured by the provision of men and money, of farm implements and factories, of ships and all the means a nation must have if it is to grow and prosper, came the fruit of these things. Crops, herds, manufactured goods, raw materials gathered from the land itself, minerals, oil, fertilizers, all these began to appear in increasing measure both for the enrichment of the national life and for export, further to enhance the national stability.

At a certain point, the skin began to cover the body, a sign of completion and rounding out of this second stage in the revival of the dry bones. So there came to be social and commercial organizations, established and stable financial and political institutions, and all that makes for a sound national economy. There was an orderly and firmly seated Government administering the affairs of a virile and thriving community conscious of its own potentialities and determined to maintain its own separate identity in a world that at the same time was friendly and hostile according to circumstances. Here was the skin, the medium which held the fabric of the nation together, binding the elements of the body and enabling it to present a united and homogeneous front to the world.

It cannot be said that this second stage is anything like complete at the present time. Israel is a secular state; there is no question of reliance completely and utterly upon the power of God for their national prosperity and safety. Nor as yet is the breath of life from God blowing upon them to give

life to those rapidly developing bodies. The sinews and the flesh and the skin are still in process of clothing the dry bones, and not until that process is seen to be complete can the third and final stage be expected. Just to look at things from the strictly natural viewpoint, it is obvious that the polity of Israel is still upon a very insecure footing. Economically they are only just beginning to become truly self supporting; politically there is internal strife and conflict and externally the ever-present menace of the Arab world, planning and preparing for the day of decision. Religiously, honour is paid to the Bible in the highest circles and religious thought and observance probably stands at a higher level than any European or American country. Yet it cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be likened to the Holy Nation which will at the end, experience the most spectacular of any Divine deliverance which the world has ever witnessed. We must expect the present process to continue until the nation has measurably fulfilled the glowing predictions of Isaiah and Jeremiah. *"They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and the herd ..."* (Jer. 31.12) *"... The people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land"* (Ezek. 38.12) *"Thy waste and thy desolate places and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitant, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away!"* (Isaiah 49.19). *"The seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things"* (Zech. 8.12). Some of these Scriptures draw attention to a problem that is even now facing Israel, the limited area of land available for the rapidly increasing population. Before the loss of territory Israel's area was about 9,000 square miles; the land which God promised to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession, the land which is to become the Holy Land of the Messianic Age and which is to be possessed by the Holy Nation before the work of that Age begins, amounts to many times that area. Somehow or other, before the final onslaught of the forces of evil upon the serene and confident Holy Nation at the full end of the Age, a great accession of territory to the nation has to take

place. ~~How~~ that will come about is not at present clear, ~~but~~ that it must be so is necessitated by the Divine promise and purpose. It is not yet true that the holy city of Jerusalem is delivered from the power of the Gentiles. From 1967 the whole city was under Israeli control, but things have changed again since then. When Jesus said (Luke 21.24) that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled, He referred to Gentile power over Israel as a whole, and at the present time Israel is still dependent upon a great deal of Gentile help and protection. Not until the new nation is standing completely independent of outside support can it be truly said that the treading down by the Gentiles has ceased. The site of the Temple on Mount Moriah, the holiest place in the world to the believing Jew, is still occupied by the Moslem shrine, equally holy to all true Moslems, known as the Dome of the Rock. This is a question that has yet to be settled and perhaps will not be settled until there are far more peaceable relations between the two peoples than is the case at present. These and many similar problems have to be solved and Israel enter much more fully than she does at present into possession of the Land of Promise before it can be said that the clothing of the dry bones with sinews, flesh and skin has been completed. Then the time will have come for the Divine Spirit to breathe new life into that nation that it may live and stand upon its feet, an exceeding great army.

The promise to Abraham envisaged a land of Israel stretching from Sinai to the Euphrates but any development which brings such an extension of territory into view must pre-suppose the peaceful

solution of what is euphemistically termed the 'Arab problem' and the establishment of friendly relations between Israeli and Arab. That such an outcome is not outside the realm of practical possibility was demonstrated when a peace treaty was concluded between Egypt and Israel. One has only to remember that the Divine promise to Abraham was not confined to Israel only. God also declared that He had plans for Ishmael, progenitor of the bulk of the Arab race, that he also would become a great people. Somehow, therefore, it may yet be found perhaps that a quite unexpected turn of events will bring the Arab world into the sphere of Divine purpose at the end of the Age. Here is ample scope for watching with keen interest the day-by-day developments in that land and perceiving how the Divine purpose is moving steadily towards its foreordained climax.

At some future time, then, how far in the future we do not at this time see, the bones will have been completely clothed and the Spirit will come upon the nation. What is the great event which so turns Israel's heart that the Spirit can enter in? That is the next question to answer. The Spirit cannot come unless the people are ready. God cannot deliver unless the people believe and trust; that is fundamental in all His dealings. So before the last great onslaught, when God rises up as He did in the day of battle to deliver His people from their enemies, the people must have been converted. What power or influence will effect that great change? The breathing of the wind of God upon those slain depends upon that.

(To be continued)

AOH

"I thank thee that I am not as other men are." What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the

Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which, separating for ever from the plebeian multitude, rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

If we are indeed building upon that Rock which is Christ, there can be no disappointment, no disillusionment, no discouragement, for we shall be in very truth continually beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, and are being changed into the same image, not because our idols

do not have feet of clay, but because of that very fact. Not because there is nothing in our life that saddens and wearies us, but because by means of these very things we are inspired to lay hold the more tenaciously to that which entereth as an anchor, within the Veil.

THE SAVING POWER OF GOD

7. 'In Christ'

*A study of the
Work of Christ*

This has been a study of the doctrine of the Atonement. It has not been an attempt to make a full and complete study of so vast a subject. We have been primarily concerned with the way Paul dealt with the subject because of all the New Testament writers he has the most to say about it from many difficult angles. He was specially gifted at this kind of theological writing and gives to his exhortations and moral teaching an interesting logical and theoretical basis. Far from providing much systematic teaching on the subject, it is all part of his devotional and practical writing that was stimulated by questions and problems. Yet through it all, Paul, like his New Testament colleagues, was inspired by God's Holy Spirit to provide foundational teaching for the whole Christian Church.

Paul's thorough Jewish background shines through much of his writing. The basis for the Atonement in the Old Testament is Abraham's faith, the redemption from Egypt and acceptance to God through a relationship with Him that began in the Sinai desert. The covenant concept is vitally important to the understanding of the Atonement concerning both Israel and the Christian Church. Atonement is concerned with the relationship between the Creator and humanity that was ruptured by rebellion. Israel's history offers an interesting example of how the relationship can be rebuilt and maintained, even if rejected after that due once again to disobedience. Obedience is the keynote of the covenant relationship between God and Israel and between the Heavenly Father and His children. Yahweh never asked Israel to do something that she could not do. She was cast off from favour not because she broke a law for there was provision for that inevitability in the terms of the Law. Abraham was not perfect and without sin. Israel's rejection of God by persistent wilful disobedience was the cause of God's rejection of His people. This study has not attempted to fully explore the covenant principle nor to see the correspondence between the Law given through Moses and the Law of Christ.

Paul's writings, like the Hebrew Scriptures, take sin for granted. It is sin that had broken the covenant and separated God from His people. It is the removal of sin and its consequences that constitutes the Atonement. This makes possible the restoration of a positive relationship of mutual love and trust between God and His creatures

which was lost in Eden. Although liberal theology a century ago tended to ignore and explain away the entry of sin into the world, British scholarship now treats the Atonement much more from a Bible basis. The doctrine of Atonement stands in opposition to the teaching that man has developed from primitive animal-like behaviour to something akin to God-like behaviour. Man was made in the image of God and that image was defaced by rebellion against Him. Moral 'development' cannot account for any improvement in society or individual behaviour nor will inward moral strivings make any more progress in moral behaviour than did the struggle by 'good' Jews to keep the Law. Salvation for mankind lies in a faith relationship with God in which He alone can provide the means of more reform. This must spring from man's acknowledgement of his inability to help himself and a willingness to accept whatever means God may provide to bring about Salvation. Changes occur in the human condition and moral standards superficially alter according to circumstances. Each generation adapts and adjusts its standards to suit its human whims, comfort and selfishness. This is opposed to the eternal principles based on the character of God that tell us of sacrificial love and the patient pursuit of peace.

It is sometimes difficult for mortals to understand Divine Law and Divine judgment. We must beware of law court analogies. Our western way of thinking is not only distant from the wisdom from Heaven, it is also very different from Hebrew concepts. The idea conveyed in the 'Body of Christ' is similar to the way in which the people of Israel thought about themselves. In studying the Atonement care is needed in the use of words such as blood and sacrifice, wrath and death. There can be no sense in which God wishes to 'get his own back' or wants to manipulate us like puppets. Sometimes love must wound in order to cleanse and heal. Men of God have suffered much pain because they believed it was the way to restore the image of God in their own lives and characters.

Paul's teaching is firmly based in the Gospels and Old Testament. He, like Jesus and the other Apostles, found meaning for their work and worship in the Hebrew Scriptures. The work of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments presents a composite picture with the same principles operating throughout. Although the story develops

and becomes clearer with the approach of the Advent of Messiah, the underlying principles remain unchanged. The Old Testament points forward to the coming of Christ, to his life and death and resurrection. These are the dominant themes in the atonement of man's sin and the restoration from its consequences. Paul looked back at the Saviour's death on Calvary as the great turning point in man's history. He also looked forward to the complete work of salvation when all things would be in subjection to the work of Christ and to the will of God.

Jesus' sacrifice is unique for it is the only means of removing the results of sin and death. Yet in some ways the people of God are called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ and share His experiences. This was part of the teaching of Jesus and the early Church based upon the history and prophetic teaching of the Old Testament. Paul elaborated this, clearly explaining the need of the faith-union between Christ and the Church. This brings us to the question that puzzled Christian thinkers through the centuries about how Divine justice works and how sacrifice can give mankind freedom from sin and death. In some respects Jesus' sacrifice was a substitution for mankind. The picture of giving a ransom is specific in the words of Jesus and Paul. (Mark 10.45; 1 Timothy 2.5,6). It is also taught from Isaiah 53, particularly verses 5-6. Yet we are left wondering how it works, if not why it was necessary. Perhaps John the Baptist's exclamation when he saw his cousin coming towards him, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" would have a very strong meaning for those familiar with the Passover sacrifice and Paul refers to Jesus as "*Christ our Passover*". It is evident that Peter heard John's words and bore his own testimony (1 Peter 1.19). The Book of Revelation is witness that 'The Lamb' is our Lord's eternal name.

Just before His death, speaking after supper in the upper room, Jesus spoke of a doctrine that is the most far reaching of any explanation of Salvation. In those chapters of John, 14-17 the Lord laid the foundation for Paul's constant theme, 'in Christ.' When he expounded the teaching of the resurrection, Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (15.22) wrote "*As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.*" It was like so much more in that chapter, very profound. Earlier in the same letter he had written (1.30) "*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God*

made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption". In those few words the apostle compresses the whole purpose of God, salvation in Christ. That teaching of the Lord, which impressed itself on Paul on the Damascus road, is the centre of our faith, our life and goal, and he shows this in 2 Corinthians 5.17 when he writes "if any one is in Christ he is a new creation" or to use the expression in the Good News Bible "joined to Christ."

That interpretation enables us to see how our sanctification and our suffering for Christ can go hand in hand. God can accept us because we are one with Christ. From the moment that a contrite heart truly repents of sin, the process of being 'in Christ' begins and goes on until at last we are delivered from the body of this death, into the glorious realisation of our hopes in Him and we see Him face to face. To appreciate and participate in this 'abiding in Christ' does not take a complicated intellectual understanding of salvation. All who desire can share this wonderful privilege of being 'in Christ'. He who believes he has been the worst of sinners may share it. He who stumbles seven times may share it. Yet we may never forget or ignore the cost of it all. It is the only way of salvation and we may have it now in the joy of walking and talking with our beloved Lord Jesus. In Him we are cleansed, strengthened and enriched beyond our wildest imagination. But, we cannot let go His hand. We cannot ever forget that He lives in us and we in Him. Oh that we could be conscious of this every second of every day, especially when the old nature rears itself up and confronts our fellow men and women with words and actions which do not reflect the Master. The only thing that stops our fellowship with Him is our own disobedience.

Let the Gospel of Christ through John and Paul have the last word, for they go far beyond doctrine, dogma and theology. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.*" (John 3.16,17 RSV).

"*God who is rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*" (Ephesians 2.4-6 RSV)

WRITINGS OF ANCIENT TIMES

*An explanation of the
BSM cover design.*

The 'Bible Study Monthly' cover design is a reminder that the Word of God, which speaks with such authority to Christians today, has been written by a variety of people at various times and in different languages throughout the world's history. It has been copied, translated and reproduced in many ancient languages as well as in these last days into every modern language under the sun. Abraham, father of the faithful who gave his name to a great nation and later to a spiritual seed, undoubtedly had some part in the recording and preservation of the Word of God. As a well educated citizen of Ur of the Chaldees he was a capable writer of cuneiform script of his day. The top left hand panel in our cover design reproduces the style of this writing. Many of the early records of Genesis as well as certain other parts of the Old Testament must have been originally inscribed on clay tablets in this manner. The account of Abraham's purchase of the field and cave of Machpelah in Genesis 23 is an example of a legal document used for the conveyance of land in his day. Such tablets are now in the British Museum inscribed in very similar terms. The cuneiform writing was still in use in Babylonia in the days of Daniel and Cyrus, and it may be that the famous 'decree of Cyrus' was recorded in the same script and the book which Seraiah cast into the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 51.63) was a cuneiform tablet.

Joseph, and later Moses in Egypt, who became learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and particularly in the learning of the priesthood (Genesis 41.50; Acts 7.22) would be familiar with a different type of writing, the Hieratic, used in the very earliest days of that nation. In all probability those portions of the Old Testament for which Joseph and Moses were responsible were written in a style such as this, shown in the second top panel. In later centuries these earlier records were copied into various forms of the Hebrew language, a typical example of which is shown in the third panel. Greek, Latin and other translations from which our modern versions come having been translated from Hebrew originals.

In more recent times the Old Testament was rendered into Greek and the New Testament added. The fourth panel gives a small section of the Alexandrian manuscript which dates from 500

AD. The similarity of the Latin alphabet, of two centuries later, as shown by the fifth panel, is noticeable and the gradual development of modern alphabets can be traced. With the growth of Christianity in Europe the Greek Bible was translated into Latin, and at length the labours of noble and earnest Christians bore fruit in the first English Bible.

The earliest Anglo-Saxon versions appeared about the year 1000 and one of these is pictured in the left-hand bottom panel. There is very little likeness to modern English characters in this example but the first printed Bible, that of William Tyndale, in 1534 and which is shown next can be seen to be a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. Very soon afterward, between 1568 and 1572, the 'Bishop's Bible' became the first Bible in general use and the kind of type which our ancestors in the time of Queen Elizabeth were accustomed to read, appears in the third panel. In 1611, the 'Authorised Version' was published and a sample of the first 'Oxford' Bible of 1675 is shown in the fourth panel. Now in the twenty-first century we are able to rejoice in the use of evenly printed Bibles as shown in the final panel and bring to bear upon our researches concordances, lexicons and other study aids such as our forefathers never even dreamed could be made possible. It is a sobering thought to reflect that many of the great men and women whose lives, recorded in the Word of Truth are an inspiration and stimulus to us, could read and write only with difficulty. Laboriously inscribing strange symbols on soft clay, or treasuring some carefully copied scroll or papyrus, they were nevertheless able to 'speak and write' as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. We who live today hold in our hands the accumulated writings of four thousand years preserved and translated for our edification. We stand at the portals of that day of which these men dreamed. Surely, we do well to regard with humility and thankfulness the wonderful providence that has preserved the living Word of God through all these changes of language and script. Today, we cherish it in our homes, services and meetings, where we rejoice in our possession of the "*Word of God which lives and abides for ever*".

BSM February 1939



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

huph hinc: madden enpi
ay: Toher agennu he com

Blessed are ye who are pure
in heart: for ye shall see God
and shall fall in love with him
and shall be made like unto him
for ever

"All battles shall be made
mountainous and hills shall
be made low: and the rough
places shall be made straight
and the crooked shall be made
straight"

ye seed of Abraham his servant
Jacob his chosen.
in the Lord our God: his
name be praised for ever

And God shall wipe away all
tears from their eyes: and there
shall be no more death, neither
mourning, nor crying, neither
sorrow: for the former things
are passed away

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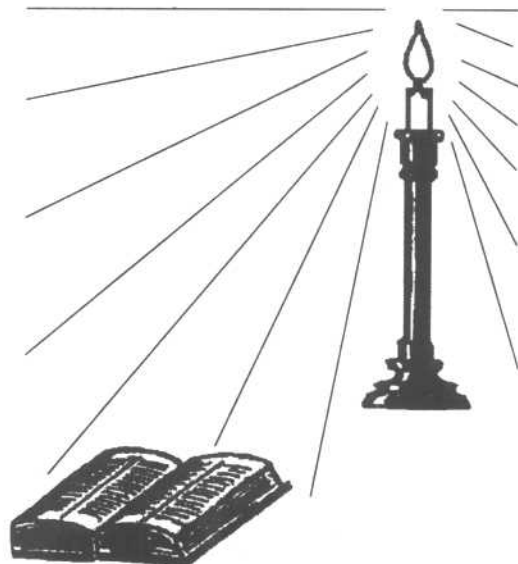
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JUST A WORD – penthein

After Mary Magdalene had seen Jesus in the garden on the morning of His resurrection, she went in obedience to the Lord, to the disciples who were in a state of much grief. They were "sorrowing and weeping" because the Master who they had followed had been crucified and all their hopes for the future were dashed. Their sorrow involved separation and loss. The depth of their grief is held in the Greek word '*penthein*' which is the strongest word that can be used concerning grief. It is frequently linked to tears and is the open grief that cannot be stifled. It was the kind of grief which Jacob felt when he lost Joseph; none could comfort him as he thought some wild beast had torn him to pieces (Gen. 37.34). Similarly, it was the sorrow that Samuel felt for Saul in the king's separation from God (1 Sam. 15.35). David also grieved deeply for Saul and Jonathan and later for his own son killed by Joab in the forest during their conflict. (2 Sam. 1 & 2 Sam. 19.1) These were all occasions when the mourner felt the loss very deeply.

This definition of '*penthein*' makes its use in Matt. 5.4 very impressive. Jesus said "blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted" which becomes even more moving as recorded by Luke 6.21 "Blessed are you who weep now, you will laugh." What did the Lord mean in those words?

To summarise the interpretations of commentators, there is a double meaning. Firstly, the mourning is for personal sin. There can be no bliss of the kingdom of God, nor the joy of being 'in Christ' until we are really sorry for our sin. Before we can be reconciled to God and come to know Christ, our hearts must break because of our part in His death on the cross; then we may have new life in Him. The other aspect of the definition resides in our grief for men, women and children enduring the terrible consequence of sin. Disease, inadequate shelter, clothing and food, as well as man-made disasters, all bring suffering. How sorry are we for this desperately sad state of affairs? How ready are we to shed real tears for the afflictions of mankind and even more for the sufferings of the church? Yet Jesus is saying that there is no bliss for His followers until they have passed quite definitely through this experience. Yet if we share this with the Lord, so shall we share the experience of wiping away all tears from all faces.

William Barclay paraphrases Matt. 5.4 thus "O the bliss of the man whose heart is broken for the world's suffering and for his own sin, for out of his sorrow he will find the joy of God".

(For further study – Job 14.22; Hos. 4.3; 10.5; 2 Cor. 12.21; Jas. 4.9)

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NOTICES

Your attention is drawn to the list of publications on the back page of this issue. All leaflets and booklets are sent free upon request. It is helpful if requests are specific in both titles and

quantities.

A year ago we mentioned the reprinting of the booklet 'The Virgin Birth of Christ' and copies of this publication are now available.

Gone from us

Sister Marion Robinson (*Hitchin*)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

*A Bible study of Paul's
letter to the Galatians*

5. Bearing and Forbearing

Paul draws the threads of his discussion with the Galatian church to a climax by showing how the law of Christ really works in practice. He has shown, as did the Lord, that keeping the law of Moses could become a great burden. Now he is to show that in keeping the law of Christ, they were to become 'burden bearers'. Underlying this demonstration of Christ-like maturity are three qualities, gentleness, discipline and humility. These are brought out in the last verse of chapter 5 and the first verse of chapter 6. We cannot really bear the burden of another Christian until we have learned to forbear.

Paul does not specify precisely what the burden is that we are expected to bear on behalf of our brother in Christ. When a person does something that is wrong, primarily that is an offence against God and He is the one who must forgive to provide cleansing through Christ. If the offence is against us, we don't need to wait until the person who has done wrong says 'sorry' before we forgive them. Jesus did not (Luke 23.34), nor did Stephen (Acts 7.60). But by our very attitude of gentle patience and willingness to avoid any form of provocation, we can help to restore the friendship with our brother or sister. Being 'in the right' can have the effect of making us conceited unless we have the spirit of the Lord (Gal. 6.3). Only by real humility of heart and motive can we have the desired effect upon the one who has done wrong. It is very valuable study to look carefully at the way in which Jesus handled people who had done wrong. His sense of moral values was so different from human standards and rules and therefore the way He dealt with 'sinners' is sometimes surprising. It certainly was to some of the 'religious' people of His day.

'Bearing' is another word for carrying or supporting. Cain was afraid of bearing the blame for his sin (Gen. 4.13) and Judah offered to bear the blame if Benjamin failed to return to Jacob. At the end of Galatians 6 Paul wrote of bearing the marks of the Lord Jesus in his own body. From the prophets we learn that Messiah was to bear the iniquities of the sinner (Isa. 53.11). The word 'bearing' doesn't tell us much unless we know what is borne. In Galatians 6 the burden in verse 2

is not the same as that in verse 5. The Greek word that is used in v.2 relates to something heavy or burdensome; something that presses down or perhaps today the word 'stress' carries the meaning. In v.5 the Greek word has no reference to weight and might be used of a soldier's pack. Paul is therefore thinking in v.2 of those things which come to a Christian as a result of events and over which he has no control and which may bear him down. In v.5 he is concerned with the duties and tasks which each of us must do for ourselves. God did promise through the words of Psalm 55.22 that we may cast all our burdens on to Him. Jesus is man's great burden bearer and invites the weary and heavily laden to discover how easy His yoke is and how light His burden (Matt. 11.30). To Him we must take the burden of every sin and lay it at the foot of the cross. Peter in his own experience took many burdens to Jesus and in later years wrote that we may cast all our care upon Him. (1 Peter 5.7). From another angle we may in the words of John Stott "remember that one of the ways in which Jesus bears these burdens of ours is through human friendship".

Forbearance is a God-like quality. Several times in the letter to Romans as well as his addresses recorded in Acts (14.16 and 17.30) Paul makes a point of showing that God has not punished mankind as it deserved. Rather He delayed action towards the sinful race until a time when He knew it would rightly fulfil His purpose. So Paul in discussing the righteousness of God and man's redemption in Romans 3.21-26 writes "*This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he has passed over former sins ...*" Linked to this thought is long-suffering from the Greek word '*makrothumia*' which Barclay calls the 'divine patience'. It is not surprising that the Apostle, again writing of God's long-suffering in Romans 9, quotes from Hosea for that prophet's life was a reflection of God's incredible patience with Israel. Barclay quotes Chrysostom's definition of '*makrothumia*' which is "the spirit that could take revenge if it liked but utterly refuses to do so". It is one of the components of '*agape*' love in 1 Cor. 13 and is a characteristic of every mature Christian believer. Unless a leader of

the church has this quality well developed he can never do pastoral work successfully. In Galatians 6 the burden that Paul is calling us to share with another may have nothing to do with wrongdoing. Many of the trials and temptations that challenge our faith are part of the discipline that enables us to grow. Spiritual maturity doesn't just happen by living easy human lives. It is developed through complete submission to the Lord's will that may take us through hardship, pain and hard work. In many ways, those who belong to Christ can share these things, if only by standing alongside, gently and patiently showing their oneness together with them. Sometimes it means advice offered in total meekness. Sometimes it means really doing or giving something that will bring the needy brother or sister through the experience victoriously.

One of the most impressive examples of burden bearing, perhaps unwillingly given at first, was by Simon Niger on the road to Calvary. He bore the Lord's cross, forced upon him by Roman soldiers. Yet who of the Lord's followers, in retrospect, would not want to have done the same action for their Saviour. It is fairly clear from Luke's evidence in Acts, that Simon became a disciple and had a wife and sons who also followed the Lord. Did he not learn much that day as he sweated under the load of timber? Were not his eyes opened to the lonely man of Galilee whose attitude was such a contrast to all those around Him such as the brutal Roman, the arrogant Jew and the fearful follower of the Master. Some of those especially dear to Jesus today are carrying a cross for His sake. Can we share the burden? Some of those who once walked with Him have lost their way and maybe need a helping hand to find their way back. Some are just filled with pain and need to know that another cares. Opportunities pass too quickly for us to hesitate. Yet we are powerless to act unless we do so in Christ's strength and wisdom. We need to pray that the Lord will make us sensitive to the need and sensitive in the way we try to meet that need.

There are some very interesting examples of burden bearing in the Scriptures, each of which could make a study in itself. A wise and faithful servant bore the task of finding a wife for Isaac and thus removed the responsibility from the ageing father Abraham. That old patriarch bore a different load when he interceded for nephew Lot with God's honoured messenger. There was the time

when Israel journeyed to Canaan that Moses bore the great load of leading and judging Israel. A wise father-in-law suggested that he should share the burden with other leaders among God's people. Ebed-melech's dramatic rescue of Jeremiah from the pit into which the King had ordered the prophet to be thrown, was a wonderful example of sharing the burden in witness to the righteousness of God. It is clear that in the life of the Lord, women took some of the strain of daily needs. Jesus told that most famous of stories about a Samaritan who bore a burden on his donkey to save a man's life. Jesus gave us an acted parable of burden bearing in the washing of the disciples' feet. Men and women who loved God throughout recorded history provide us with ample encouragement to help another along the way and remove some of the stress which living a godly life can bring.

Throughout a meditation upon bearing another's burden there must always be the recognition of the way in which it is done; gently, patiently and humbly. Bearing the burden must be done gently because the load may be chafing or causing exhaustion or creating a sense of depression. We must be gentle, simply because that was the way our Master did things. We must be gentle because unless we are, our efforts to help will be of no use. We cannot ease the pain by bullying a person into believing they ought to bear the burden. We cannot lighten the load by rough handling. If we look back in our own experience, those who have helped us most have been gentle and patient.

The load may be troublesome because of foolish behaviour or ignorance. Maybe the weight should have been carried more sensibly and necessary precautions taken to avoid problems. It is no help at all in the moment of stress to be reminded of these things; all that is wanted now is the kindly hand which can 'ease the burden'. Above all, it needs to be done in humility – or to use Paul's frank words in chapter 5.25, "*let us have no self-conceit*". If the motive for helping someone else is to display our own 'spiritual development' we do harm to others as well as ourselves. Yet true burden bearing is that which makes a church and its members strong. It is the most effective way to witness, for by this shall all men know that we are disciples of Jesus, in that we love one another.

DN

THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE

A Study in
Divine purposes

1. Paul and the Athenians

"Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art or imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17.29, 30).

The times of Divine action in the outworking of God's plans are several and varied. The Scriptures speak of "Times of Restitution". We begin to realise the significance of that expression and look forward to the promised restoration. They speak also of "Times of the Gentiles" and for many years past students of the Holy Word have traced the course of those times through human history. They have watched and waited for their end. Now the Apostle Paul, speaking to the wise men of this world, the philosophers, thinkers and debaters of the glory that was Greece, speaks of "times of ignorance". Was it a mere figure of speech, a flowery embellishment with which to round off his discourse; a polished antithesis to mark in sharp relief the knowledge that he was bringing them from God, the knowledge of Jesus and the Resurrection? By no means, for these "times of ignorance", says Paul, span a period and are to have an end. That end is marked by the cessation of God's tolerance of the condition of "no-knowledge", and a universal command to repent, that the light of the knowledge of God's Plan might begin to overspread the earth until it covers the land as the waters cover the sea. There were definite causes that had produced those "times of ignorance", and they had occupied a definite place in the Divine Plan, but now their end had come and another and totally different work for mankind on the part of the Most High was to take their place.

The unhappy translation "*winked at*" in the AV does not convey a true impression of Paul's exposition here. God did not by any means condone or ignore the conduct of man or the darkness of this world. The Greek word used is one that means the 'looking over' and beyond a thing. It was as though God, surveying these times of ignorance from the standpoint of His great knowledge, looked beyond them to another time when men would hear the call to repent and come

to the light that then would be shining, and in coming, find salvation and life. The word does not mean that God "over-looked" in the sense of "letting bygones be bygones". There is a law of retribution in the Divine dealings with man that will apply to all men everywhere and in all ages. God "looked beyond" the "times of ignorance", and guided the destinies of this world meantime, not according to man's present deserts, but in the light of his future possibilities.

These few words of Paul, spoken to the intellectual pagans of his own day, throw a flood of light upon this very important aspect of God's dealings with man. It has been the usual custom to ignore the long millenniums that stretched between Creation and Christ as though they had no particular usefulness or importance, except for the relatively short span during which Israel was receiving its national training under the Law. But a close examination of Acts 17 reveals a clear understanding, on Paul's part, of the vital place those ages occupy in the Divine scheme of things. They were years in which man, though ignorant, was making his way more or less blindly towards the light. Until he had arrived at a certain stage in that progress the revelation of Christ could not be made to man because none would be found able to understand. When in the fullness of time some could appreciate Him in the way He must come, and accept Him and set their lives to carrying on His work, then, the times of ignorance must come to an end, and God could set in motion the great forces which were destined to complete His plan for humanity. As a first step in that proceeding, He called upon men in a fashion He had not called and could not call before, to repent.

"*Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship*" said Paul to his listeners, "*him declare I unto you*". The Greeks had built up a complete pantheon of deities, descriptive of all the attributes of God and all the outward manifestations of His working which they could perceive; but they were not satisfied. There was still something about God that they did not understand; an understanding of His ways to which they had not attained. The elaborate mythologies and philosophical speculations that they had formulated and in which they indulged

still failed to satisfy the more reflective among them. So groping blindly for more light they had erected, among all their, shrines and images, this altar "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD", and trusted that one day He would reveal himself to them.

They listened as Paul told them how that far away in the days of Creation, the Unknown God had made the world, and all that is in it, and placed man upon it. In consequence of the Fall and all that it entailed of man's ignorance and blindness concerning himself, God had ordered the course of the nations in history, and their geographical distribution over the earth (*"having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation"* vs. 26). They had struggled in their blindness to a position from which some of them at least could receive Christ and become His instruments of blessing to all the rest. *"That they should seek God in the hope that they might feel after him, and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us"* (vs. 27). There is progression here, a progress from utter ignorance to a measure of knowledge, and then, when the call to repent has been sounded, and heard, and heeded, onward still into that full knowledge which is the prized possession of the sons of God.

The "times of this ignorance" in Paul's address, commenced at, or soon after the Fall, and they ended with Christ. It was Paul's object to convince the Greeks of the significance of the times in which they lived. A great step forward in the Plan of God had been taken. In the past, men had struggled blindly towards the light, and the highest and best of their conclusions had been enshrined in the Greek philosophies which Paul was now dismissing as ignorance itself. God looked beyond man's failure to know and understand Him aright and was now revealing a complete and satisfying message of life in the person and work of His Son. The solution of all the problems and speculations, the searching and questioning of the past, was expressed in the simple exhortation "Repent, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved".

So the Times of Ignorance were brought to an end on the Day of Pentecost by God's command to men to repent. There can be no disputing the meaning of the words. They stand, clear and unmistakable. From the dawn of history God had looked upon His creatures' endeavours to

understand the mysteries of life and death, of good and evil, and knowing His own future plans had permitted their errors and mistakes and wanderings in devious and dark ways. He knew that all this experimental striving, as it were, was necessary to prepare men's minds to receive the great revelation He planned to give them. It would not have done to reveal Christ at the time of Abraham, nor yet at the time of Moses. Human minds were altogether unprepared to receive the truths He must bring. They were too undeveloped by far to understand *"the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus"* and the principles of Christ's kingdom. By the time that Caesar Augustus ruled the world there were some who could understand and who would respond, and it was at that point that God changed His course of dealing, and commanded all men, everywhere, to repent. That call to repentance is intimately connected with the beginning of world judgement, the judgement and retribution that must come upon the world for its evil, and the further development of God's plans for world conversion during the Messianic Age.

At Pentecost, there came a great change in the possibility of men's understanding of God. That change brought with it responsibility. The hearing of the message could no longer be flouted. Men would now be expected to understand and begin to weigh up for themselves the implications of this new word of authority that had come into their lives.

The exhortation to repent was not a request: it was a command. It was a command having the same force as that other command, given to man at the time of the first creation. *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die"*. Failure to heed and obey this command to repent will have the same result: there is for the unrepentant, after full opportunity, only death, the cessation of that existence which God has given but of which the recipient will not make rightful use. Neither was the command addressed to a select few, nor to an arbitrarily chosen small number. It was to all men. *"Now commandeth all men everywhere to repent"*. That fact has to be taken into account in our understanding of the work of the Age that commenced at Pentecost.

Perhaps there has been a tendency to differentiate too sharply between the works of the

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Christian and Messianic Ages. Some have said that God is not dealing with the world at present: He is dealing exclusively with the Church, and the turn of the world will come in the next Age. That is not a complete expression of the truth. From Paul's point of view, as he contrasted man's helpless striving before Pentecost, and God's work of reconciliation since Pentecost, this whole period from Pentecost to the end of the Messianic Age, is one great span of time. The command to repent goes out at the beginning of the Age and applies to all men. All do not hear the command at first; for many of them the word will not come until after the Kingdom is established. The heralds of the Kingdom, the messengers of God, must first take up the proclamation and bear it through the earth. *"Ye shall be witnesses unto me in Judea, and Jerusalem, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth"*. During the first two thousand years a comparatively small number of people hear and respond to the Gospel. Those disciples, because of their experiences in this life, will be equipped and qualified to carry on the work in greater power in the next Age, so that all men, even the resurrected millions who themselves lived during the "Times of Ignorance" may hear the command to repent and, if they will, obey.

This is the basis for missionary zeal. The plain fact is that God at Pentecost, commenced to

reconcile the world to himself in Christ. There are two great stages in that work of reconciliation. The first is the selection and preparation of the company through whom the major portion of the work is to be done. It is one great work as a whole, and it was at Pentecost that the Father looked down upon a blinded and ignorant world and, as it were, said "it is enough: behold the way of salvation: turn and repent, and come to Me". From that time forward it has been the privilege and commission of every consecrated follower of the Lord Jesus to herald far and wide the cry that must continue yet for another thousand years before it has achieved its full purpose: *"Repent, believe the gospel and live"*. That is why the Christian faith is, and always has been, and always will be, a missionary faith. That is why the church or sect or group that loses its missionary zeal and ceases to proclaim abroad the faith that is in it, must inevitably perish. With Paul, we must say *"Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel"*. The times of ignorance have ended, and we who are God's ambassadors are sent forth to bear His message, that will not cease to be preached until all of earth's millions have heard and made their final decision. For God now commands all men, everywhere, to repent.

(To be continued)

AOH

The Christian African Relief Trust (CART) has had a remarkable year. During the period 9 September to 25 November the charity sent 40 foot containers to Zambia, Liberia, Malawi and Cameroon and 20 foot containers to Senegal and Benin. The transport costs alone were £ 19,200 for these six huge containers. They carried food, clothing, medicines, books and magazines as well as many larger items for household and community use. Administrative costs are borne solely by the trustees and those who labour to sort, pack, repair and send these goods do it as a labour of love. Their only reward is 'job satisfaction' and surely their Master's approval. During last year they

opened a 'charity shop' and produced Christmas cards. They continue to need the support of those who care about this relief work. Useable clothing, typewriters, computers are all eagerly received. If you know a source of second-hand Bibles, preferably in current English, BFU would be glad to know about it. We already send surplus magazines, Bible study books including concordances. There are several depots around the country that collect these items. Further information is available from:-

Guildford G Tompkins, White Gates, Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield. HD8 OLR

Chapter and Verse

The Old Testament was first divided into chapters during the 13th century by Cardinal Hugo, and then into verses by Rabbi Nathan and

first incorporated into the printed Bible by Robert Stephens in his edition of the Vulgate, published in 1555.

OUGHT MESSIAH TO SUFFER?

A seasonal
meditation

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24.26)

It was an enthralling talk which Cleopas and his companion had with the stranger they encountered on the way to Emmaus on the day of the Resurrection. Enthralling because it brought into focus all those apparently contradictory Old Testament prophecies of the Christ they knew so well and understood so little. They had so often thought over them, hearts uplifted as they read of the glory of the coming Messiah. Their minds puzzled as they laboured through the eloquent descriptions of the One that must suffer and die before the purpose of the Lord in the restoration of His people could be fulfilled. Suffering and glory; both were on the sacred pages but in their impatient longing for the realisation of the golden days of Messianic power they turned away from the suffering and thought only of the glory.

Why had there to be suffering? Why could not Christ have come in all the fulness of His Divine power and entered straight away upon His ordained work of reconciling whosoever will to God? Thus He could bring to pass the ultimate reality so vividly pictured in the Book of Revelation, where the dwelling place of God is with men, and there is no more death, no more sorrow and crying because the former things are passed away and all things are become new. It may be answered that before all these things can occur mankind must be redeemed from the death sentence that rests upon the entire race, inherited from Adam. So Christ must first die, giving His humanity a Ransom for all, before He can breathe new life into the dead and set their feet upon that Highway of Holiness, which can at the last lead them to the happy condition described in Revelation. Even so we must ask the question today as it was by those earnest souls of so many centuries ago, why did Christ have to suffer? Could He not have died naturally and quietly immediately after His baptism in the Jordan, even gone literally into death in the very baptising waters? Thus He would give His life for the world in a moment, relinquishing His humanity. Could that not entitle Him to commence the work of resurrection of all in their graves immediately?

Had that been possible surely that is the way

God's plan in Jesus Christ would have been carried out. How can it be thought that God, who is love, would deliver His beloved Son into the suffering and ignominy that surrounded His earthly life and death, if it was not necessary? The very fact that our Lord was called upon to tread this pathway of suffering is full evidence that this was the only way. *"Was it not necessary for Messiah to suffer these things,"* He said to those two wondering disciples, *"and then to enter his glory?"* There must be a definite connection between the suffering and the glory; the one is an essential pre-requisite to the other. It was not that God **would** not confer the glory without the prior suffering, it was that He **could** not. For some fundamental reason clear to the Father, and also to the Son, even though not at all clear to us, it had to be that Christ must first suffer and after that, enter into His glory. So Peter referred to the prophets of old time when he wrote of *"the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"*. (1 Pet. 1.11)

The supreme purpose for which our Lord came to earth and took upon Himself our human nature was that He might achieve the salvation of men, their deliverance from the effects of sin and their restoration to the Divine likeness, that they might be fitted for the Divine purpose. This great work is not to be accomplished by waving some kind of magic wand above men's heads, nor yet by reciting the laws of God to them and expecting them instantly to obey. Man at first had the opportunity of attaining the Divine likeness by heeding God's commands but proved unable to attain the goal that way. So sin entered, and with sin came suffering and death, even upon those, says Paul *"whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam"*. So it is through suffering that man comes ultimately to his destiny in glory, just because there is no other way. Maybe we think of this as a destiny attained by the learning of lessons taught by hard and bitter experience. Or perhaps there is some deeper principle that is hard to understand which decrees that perfection can only be reached through suffering. Either way it is clear that this is the way which man must pass. It is also the way that our Lord passed. He was of God, and with God in the ages before man was; He came to earth, having

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emptied Himself of that heavenly estate and took upon Himself the bondman's form of human nature, still retaining His oneness with the Father, the omnipotent; yet we are told that while in the flesh He "*learned obedience through the things which he suffered*". (Hebrews 5.8). That word 'learned' means literally to learn by practice or experience; 'obedience' means to render submissive acceptance, the obedience of one who conforms to God's commands. The writer to the Hebrews in the next verse goes on to say that "*being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*". Something more than the act of dying on the cross was necessary and something was imparted to our Lord in consequence of His suffering which was not there before. This would enable men eventually to attain union with God. Earlier the same writer (2.10) said "*In bringing many sons to glory it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering*." The word 'author' signifies the place where the cause of anything resides. The power by which Jesus will turn the hearts of men to God, now and in the coming age of His kingdom on earth was given to Jesus by virtue of His sufferings. Until that was accomplished He was not ready or able to commence His great work of reconciling man to God. So the test must be understood as His being made perfect or complete for this particular work, by His suffering.

Perhaps a glimpse of the hidden principle that demanded this situation is given by the words of Hebrews 2.18 "*Because he himself passed through the test of suffering he is able to help those who are in the midst of their test*". It is as though He says to those who need His aid, "I have walked this pathway of suffering and I have come through triumphantly. Now I can show you the way with sympathetic understanding and positive knowledge, for I have gone this way myself". Jesus can only save the fallen by actual identification with them, in all their troubles and all their suffering, experiencing all the injustice and violence and hardship which is their lot and bearing it with them. A word from the Old Testament about the relationship of God to His people Israel, expresses just the same principle. "*In all their distress he too was distressed and the angel of his presence saved*

them" (Isaiah 63.9) If the Father shared the sufferings of His wayward people, could the Son do less?

Christ's sufferings are part of the grandest theme of the Scriptures, everlasting life in Christ and only in Christ. So said Peter, "*Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*." (Acts 4.12). Life for the world comes through Christ, highly exalted and given a name that is above every name but the sufferings had to come first. Is the seed of life rooted in the soil of suffering? Is there a law of creation that says that life can only be born out of suffering? Does this contain the answer to the problem of the Divine permission of evil? Was Jesus thinking of this when He spoke of the seed of corn thrown into the ground that it may die and afterwards spring forth into new life to bear much fruit? When He talked about men eating His flesh as bread, consuming it utterly until it was no more, that it may be for the life of the world, was this in His thoughts? The youthful prophet Isaiah receiving his first Divinely appointed commission to take God's word to Israel, was told of a leafless oak which had suffered all the vicissitudes of summer and winter, and now stood, a bare hulk destitute of apparent life. But those same adverse processes had created the living sap which in a new year would rise again into the tree and bring forth leaves and flowers and fruit. So is the holy seed to apostate Israel, said the Lord to Isaiah. So is the new life inherent in the glorified Christ to the suffering and death that preceded His resurrection.

Before the creation of man there were untold ages during which the earth was being prepared for life through aeons of geological time. The elements of which this planet is composed were passing through stupendous transformations and mighty convulsions with fire, frost and water all playing their part. All the strife and upheavals and turmoil culminated in the quiet serenity of Eden and man entered into the home prepared for him. So life came out of chaos. But until all that preliminary work, violent and savage as it was, had been accomplished there could be no life. Out of the suffering of the inanimate creation was born the life of living man.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, lord of all Egypt, could never have attained to his high office had he

not first endured the school of physical suffering. Envied and hated by his brethren, sold as a slave into Egypt, unjustly condemned and left to languish in prison, he suffered for much of his early manhood. But suffering developed those elements of character which enabled him to discharge with wisdom and judgment the duties of his later high position and all the responsibilities of his regal glory. So he became the means of salvation to his father's family and their preserver and life-giver.

Moses was prepared for his historic mission in the school of mental suffering. Perhaps it is not easily realised what those long years in Midian meant to Moses. At forty years of age, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and deeds, intensely keen to lead Israel to the Promised Land, all his high hopes were dashed to the ground in an instant. *"He supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them"* said Stephen at his trial *"but they understood not"*. Moses, for all his zeal and ability, was doomed to spend forty years in a camp of Midianites, keeping sheep. It was that experience in Midian that prepared him for leadership in Egypt. There was the opportunity for calm, leisured reflection on the ways and the laws of God that fitted him for the office of Lawgiver to Israel. There he learned the knowledge of the ways and byways of the trackless wilderness in which he pastured his flocks that enabled him to lead the people unerringly to their desired haven. Out of Moses' travail in Midian was born that which ultimately became the salvation of Israel.

If Job had never endured the darkness of his sufferings to emerge into the light, purified and enriched by his experiences, he could not have said to God, *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee"*. These men accomplished their great works like our Lord, *"made perfect through suffering."*

Not only is the suffering of Christ related to His resurrection life; it is also related to His resurrection power. This is shown by Psalms 2 and 110 and the letter to the Hebrews. At His ascension Jesus

told His disciples that *"all power is given unto me in earth"* (Matthew 28.18). Then the Father set Him at His own right hand *"far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named ... and put all things under his feet"* (Ephesians 1.21). This was the result of His experiences on earth and which Scripture declares fitted Him for His mission of reconciling man to God. *"Therefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7.25). Paul adds his testimony; *"For this very reason Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living"* (Romans 14.9). At the resurrection He was empowered to deal with men in a new way that had not been possible before. *"Let all the house of Israel know assuredly"* said Peter on the Day of Pentecost *"that God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2.36). Out of suffering, willingly and patiently endured, according to the will of God, was born power that will eventually save all mankind.

We are called to follow in His steps, to endure hardship and suffering as He endured it. So we may be associated with Him in the work of reconciling mankind to God. When toward the end of his life Peter penned his letter to his converts he exhorted them to *"rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy"* (1 Peter 4.13).

The experiences of life arising from our dedication to Christ's service are preparing us for the future. It is not only the Lord the spirit but also the Bride who calls all men to take of the fountain of the water of life. Both Bridegroom and Bride will play a part in giving life to the world. Like their Lord, every member of the church will have learned obedience by the things which they have suffered, and again like Him, being made perfect, will share in offering eternal salvation to all who obey God.

(Abridged from BSM 1981)

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There is only one way to live in peace – it is by leaving tomorrow in the hands of God and faithfully serving Him today, is the best preparation for tomorrow. Protect tomorrow by faithful living to-

day. We may not boast of tomorrow, but we may boast of God who will take care of the morrow. Faith never boasts about the coming days, but faith rests in God who governs them.

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THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH

*Lessons from the life
of a man of prayer*

1. The King's Cupbearer

This story opens in the imperial palace of Artaxerxes, Persian Emperor in the fifth century B.C. He was a wise and tolerant king, giving his subjects as much freedom as possible. He had inherited the great empire of Babylon together with other conquered lands, hence the land of Israel was included in his vast domain. In his service at Shushan, capital of Persia, was a Jew named Nehemiah. Like many of his fellow nationals, he was part of Israel's exiled nobility. His position in the royal household would carry many privileges, providing him with every comfort and giving little cause for complaint. Yet Nehemiah's heart was in far off Jerusalem and he eagerly sought information from travellers concerning his brethren in Judea. News from his homeland was bad, and the plight of God's people was truly an unhappy one. The stories he heard made him long more than ever to return to the land of "the Promise", to see the rugged hills of Judah and to help to restore to Israel her ancient heritage and national prestige.

The King was an observant man and he readily detected the sorrow reflected in the face of one who served him at table. Enquiry soon revealed the cause of Nehemiah's distress, and permission was given to him to go to Jerusalem as governor of the city. Artaxerxes also supplied military protection for the long and hazardous journey, and requisitions to obtain building materials to restore the walls of Jerusalem, which were in ruins. Two very important principles emerge from this first episode in the story of Nehemiah. His first reaction was to pray about his great trouble. He had learned to trust the King of Heaven rather than the kings of the earth and thereby God opened the way for Nehemiah's successful audience with the King.

Israel as a nation had sinned, and according to the prophecy of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 4.25-31, they had been scattered and exiled by a foreign power. Nehemiah does not blame someone else for this situation but links his own name with those who had sinned. His prayer, found in Nehemiah 1.4-11, is remarkably like that in Daniel 9. Daniel and Nehemiah exhibit a wonderful spirit of humility and express to God their repentance for sins which they have not committed. Neither of

them were responsible for Judah's exile, because the fate of the children of Israel was sealed by their idolatry and general disobedience to their covenant with God, long before Daniel and Nehemiah were born. It was not their fault that Jerusalem had been sacked and God's holy temple thrown down.

It is an important lesson for us because we so readily blame other people for the distress in the world and for the lack of spirituality in the Church. This was the beginning of Nehemiah's success. He went before Almighty God with a repentant heart and thus the floodgates of God's mercy and mighty power were opened to him. It is to be noticed that this was not the repentance of a flagrant sinner who forsook a wicked life for the first time. This was a fine upright child of Abraham who realised that he constantly fell from grace and was in need of Divine forgiveness. To those who have come into Christ the same principle applies, as in 1 John 1.7, 8; *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* Throughout his great work, Nehemiah constantly resorted to prayer, particularly in any special crisis. His prayers were not vague, abstract sermons about the plan of God, but earnest, practical entreaties for help, guidance and strength. Such is the example given by all true servants of God from the time of the Patriarchs until the present day. Like Daniel, Nehemiah probably practised the Jewish custom of special hours of prayer, of which we read in our Lord's day.

Regular, frequent prayer is the solution to many of the difficult problems which beset the Church of God in this twenty-first century. The hindrances to our unity and to our preaching of the Word of God to unbelievers would vanish if prayer meetings became a regular feature in the worship of God's people.

We in England, where complete religious freedom has been protected by the government for more than a hundred years, enjoy the same privilege that Nehemiah experienced while living in Persia and Palestine. He was guarded on his journey from Shushan to Jerusalem. He did not obstinately refuse Gentile assistance, but gladly ac-

cepted the credentials given to him by Artaxerxes. God does not expect us to make ourselves odious in the sight of the world merely for the sake of it. Godly men have frequently throughout the ages acknowledged and received the help which this world has given to the Divine purpose. Jesus never showed antagonism towards the civil powers, and Paul solicited the aid of pagan Rome in order that he might further his missionary work. Provided that righteous principles are not jeopardised, we ought to take advantage of civil liberties to advance, not our own interests, but the interests of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another essential aspect of serving the Lord is to be willing to sacrifice the comfort and security of a fine career in secular life. Nehemiah is a wonderful example of this. We must be ready to give up those things that we hold dear according to the flesh in order that our spiritual life may develop, and make our service more effective.

There are many things around us in our

everyday lives which hinder our service for God. Our daily occupation, worldly wealth, a comfortable home, entertaining pleasures, the accumulation of knowledge, all of which might be beneficial and given to us by Divine providence, yet they can, and frequently do, distract God's servants from fulfilling their duty. When the voice of the Lord calls us from the things of this life, let us relinquish our grasp upon them and cling more surely to the unseen, eternal things which will never perish, as mentioned in Hebrews 12: 27-28.

These two principles, a repentant and prayerful heart and a willingness to deny self of earthly comfort and ambition, are essential if we would embark upon any great work for God. We must recognise that we can do nothing alone, but be fully devoted to the will and purpose of God, and live in an attitude of prayer and communion with our Heavenly Father.

(To be continued) DN

GOD'S HAND IN NATURE

*Teenager's Essay
of fifty years ago*

Everything in Nature proclaims the fact that God is an artistic and wise creator and designer. Nothing was created hurriedly or carelessly, but even the smallest microscopic creatures were designed and made with great care. Throughout nature, from these tiny organisms to the great wonders of the universe, everything that God has made is perfectly symmetrical and suited to its own mode of life. All man's attempts to fly are copied from the birds, so well are they constructed for that purpose.

When we think of the heavens, the beauties of sunset and sunrise, and then think of the great God who made them all, we realise how privileged we are to be able to call Him "Our Father", and to know that He cares for each one of us individually. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:3-4)

However skilful man may become in textile manufacturing he can never produce satin as soft as a rose petal, or thread as fine as that which spiders weave. The masterpieces of the world's greatest artists cannot compare with the delicate designs of a snowflake or the wings of the tiniest

insect – creations of our Great Artist. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matthew 6:28-29)

The more we consider the wonderful works of God, done for the benefit of the human race, the more we see what a loving Father He is, and how grateful we should be to Him. "The Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." (Psalm 19:1)

All these things which the Lord has made bring praise and glory to His name. How much more, then, should man, whom God created in His own image, praise Him.

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." (Psalm 150:6)

Praise the Lord ye mountains tall,
Larch and pine and crocus small
Streamlet singing night and day,
Harebell bowing neath the spray

Praise the Lord with us together
Gentian, thyme and fragrant heather.
Join creation's joyous strain
Praise Him, praise Him yet again.

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THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

3. Descent of the Spirit

*A study of prophecy
passing into history*

This short series is written against the background of belief held by many students of the prophetic word to the effect that before the Messianic Age commences there is to be a restored and purified nation of Israel, gathered in the Holy Land. This is fulfilment of the Divine Promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and this restored nation is to play an important part in the evangelistic work of that Age.

The fulfilment of the third phase of this vision lies altogether in the future. We do not yet see the descent of the Divine Spirit upon Israel although that epoch-making event is plainly foretold in Scripture and many of its associated effects minutely described. It is a happening that will be clearly evident to the peoples of earth; one about which there can and will be no mistake. There is no doubt therefore that it has not yet happened, and Israel is still a nation without spirit; a body without breath. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones has been justified by history only about halfway up to the present.

"Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet an exceeding great army." (Ezekiel 37. 9,10).

This is one of the most telling passages in the Bible where the analogy between breath and wind and the Holy Spirit is set forth. It is more than an analogy; there is a definite relationship and there is much in the revealed purpose of God, which becomes more lucid when the connection between human life, the powers of Nature, and the operation of the Holy Spirit is understood. Here in this vision Ezekiel calls upon the four winds to breathe into this vast army of recreated but inert bodies and instil life into them, that they may live. In verse 14 the reality is expressed as the putting of the Spirit into the restored nation of Israel. *"You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you*

shall live, and I will place you in your own land, then you shall ye know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and have done it says the Lord" (37.13-14). The same Hebrew word '*ruach*' is used in the Old Testament for 'wind', 'breath' and 'spirit'. The Hebrew language recognises an affinity between the two ideas, that of the life-giving breath which animates a man's physical body and makes him a living being, and the Divine Spirit which is the channel of life from God to man. Right at the beginning we have this conception; *"the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"* (Genesis 2.7). The whole story of man's creation is built around the central truth that all life comes from God and is continually dependent upon God; it is the withdrawal of God-given life because of sin which brings death, and death is thus the antithesis of life. So here in the vision of Ezekiel the reality is the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon the newly awakened people of Israel. This is to bring them to life that they might take their rightful place in the outworking of the Divine purpose at the end of the Age.

This coming of the Spirit is with power. That is always the case when the Holy Spirit descends to give new life. The verbal form rendered 'breathe' in this passage is '*naphach*', which is also used for breathed in Genesis 2.7 above quoted. But no gentle, quiet inflow of air is indicated here. The word has the implication of turbulence or irresistible force. Although it is nowhere else used in the sense of breathing, '*naphach*' is also translated *"I see a seething pot"* (Jer.1.13); *"out of his nostrils goes smoke as out of a seething pot or caldron"* (Job 41.20). *"I have created the smith that blows the coals in the fire"* (Isaiah 54.16) *".. into the midst of the furnace to blow upon the fire, to melt it"* (Ezekiel 22.20). A seething, blowing, rushing, tumultuous blast which forces its way into every nook and cranny and makes its presence known with energy and power; that is the entry of the Spirit when God sets His hand to perform a great and momentous work. So it was on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples and the work of this

present Christian Age began. *"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2.2-4). That is how Ezekiel saw the four winds come together, sweep down from the sky, and breathe life into those slain bodies, that they might live. So it was that they received strength and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army.

The Hebrew prophets were very definite that the Spirit will thus one day come upon Israel and fit them for their destiny. The preceding chapter (36.26,27) of Ezekiel's own prophecy, is full of it. *"A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new Spirit will put within you... and I will put my spirit within you"*, and Isaiah (44.3) says *"I will pour my spirit upon thy seed"* and again *"My spirit that is upon thee ... shall not depart ... henceforth and forever"* (59.21). The magnificent apocalyptic vision which constitutes the subject of Zechariah chapters 3 and 4 culminates in a Divine declaration that the great mountain which is the symbol of evil is to be destroyed by the instrumentality of the Lord's servant. *"... not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts"* (Zech. 4.6-7). It is that same power and that same Spirit that the new governors of Israel in the End Time are to pledge themselves and their people to loyalty to that same Lord of Hosts. (Zech. 12.5). It is this that makes Israel a living force, incapable of harm from her enemies and irresistible in the work she has been Divinely ordained to accomplish – to be a light to the nations and to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49.6). That is purified and consecrated Israel's mission in the Messianic Age, the Age which is to succeed this present one and the commencement of which is signalled by the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing intervenes, one obstacle the removal of which is necessary before that people, now gathering strength in what will one day become the Holy Land in truth, can experience the descent of the Spirit upon them. That obstacle is unbelief. Until the people believe, until they repent, until they come to God in faith and loyalty and trust themselves to His power and leadership, the Spirit cannot come. Never yet has an unbeliever been filled with the Spirit. Never yet has one become a

member of the Kingdom of Heaven without first putting off the works of darkness and putting on the armour of light. The bones may have come together, bone to bone, by the power of God; the flesh, the sinews and the skin may have formed around them. Not until there is faith and surrender can the Divine Spirit enter with its life giving breath and form that assembly of dead bodies into a living and potent force for the evangelisation of the world. So as we look upon prophecy passing into history we can expect to see noteworthy progress in the creation and development of a nation in apparent fulfilment of all the old prophecies relating to Israel. We cannot, however, expect to see another Pentecost until first there is repentance, surrender, faith and prayer, and a waiting on God just as the disciples did in the Upper Room two thousand years ago. Until that position is reached the nation is not ready for its destiny and the work of the Messianic Age cannot begin.

What will bring about such a national repentance, for national it will be? Temporal prosperity is hardly likely to do so; the tendency is usually in the reverse direction. The achievement of security from present threatening enemies, if security can be gained by the normal methods of political and military action, is more likely to breed self-assurance than to increase faith in and reliance upon God. *"Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses."* (Psalm 107.12-13). Throughout Israel's history, when they apostatised and forsook the Divine covenant they fell into the power of their enemies and went into captivity. So soon as they turned to the Lord in repentance He delivered and restored them. The highlights of Israel's history were the occasions of their deliverance from the Philistines in the days of Samuel, the Moabites in the days of Jehoshaphat, and the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah (1 Samuel 7; 2 Chronicles chapters 20 and 32). And each time it was because they turned to the Lord in faith and He delivered them. The prophetic Scriptures speak of one final trial of faith that is yet to come upon Israel, when in vision the prophets see all nations gathered against Jerusalem to battle, and God delivers them. Zechariah and Ezekiel, Habakkuk and Isaiah are all quite certain

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about it and give, each in his own characteristic fashion and as guided by the Holy Spirit, a vivid pen-picture of the event. Perhaps it is in that great crisis that the faith and belief of Israel comes to the surface and God is able to come forth from His place and fight for them. As the prophets say He will come forth and fight, because at last they cry unto Him in their trouble and receive from Him in return the spirit of grace and supplication which, to Zechariah at least, marks the turning point in Israel's history. (Zech.12.10)

When will all this take place? If what is now to be witnessed in the development of Israel is indeed the clothing of the bare bones with flesh, sinews and skin, how soon before the Spirit descends to finish the work? Not before the full end of the Age, for the conversion and purification of latter day Israel, no less than the deliverance from their enemies, mark the time when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ, that He may

reign for ever and ever. There is much in the prophetic Scriptures to fill in the details of that final troublous time when God comes out of His place to intervene in earth's affairs and set up the kingdom of righteousness which has been promised for so long. Every time there is political trouble in the Middle East the eyes of many Christians are turned in that direction; one day of course their watchfulness will be rewarded and the end will come. In the meantime we can only go on looking at the flesh and sinew building upon those bare bones. We know of a surety that as truly as the dry bones have become whole bodies in our own day and before our own eyes, so will the Spirit sweep down from above at God's set time. This will cause Israel, the earthly missionary nation of the Messianic Age to *"live and stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army."*

THE END

AOH

The Disciples -Kingdom or Cross

A Bible Study

When Jesus led His disciples on the road to Jerusalem, and to Calvary, they did not seem to understand what was happening. The following questions invite us to enter into their thoughts and feelings.

1. Who said "You are the Christ"? What do you think he meant by this? Luke 9.18 ff
2. Who was a temptation to Jesus? In what way? Mark 8.31 ff
3. Who witnessed the transfiguration? What did it make them expect? Luke 9.28 ff
4. Who asked what reward Jesus would give to those who left everything and followed Him? What was the reply? Luke 18.28 ff.
5. Which disciples understood what was going to happen to Jesus? Were they hopeful? Luke 18.31
6. Whose mother asked for her sons to be Jesus' chief aides in the Kingdom? What was the general reaction? Matt. 20.20 ff.
7. Who thought all the disciples would be killed along with Jesus? How did he react? John 11.7, 16 ff
8. Who was sent to prepare for the Last Supper? Did they know it was a goodbye meal? Luke 22.8 ff.
9. Who did not understand what Jesus meant by washing the disciples' feet? What in fact did Jesus mean by it? John 13
10. Who said he was ready to die for Jesus? Did Jesus remember what he said? John 13.37
11. Who realised that Jesus was going to leave the disciples, but did not understand where he was going to? How did Jesus react? John 14.5
12. Who did Jesus take with Him to pray in the garden of Gethsemane? Was it any use? Matt. 26.37
13. Who resisted Jesus' arrest? Did Jesus back him up? John 18.10
14. What happened to all the disciples after Jesus arrest? When did we next hear of them all being together? Matt. 26.56
15. Who followed Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house? Did Jesus see them there? John 18.15
16. When Jesus was dying, who did He ask to look after his mother? Why that person? John 19.27
17. Who ran to the tomb when they heard Jesus' body was missing? What did they see? John 20.2
18. Who would not believe in the resurrection without proper evidence? Did Jesus sympathise? John 20.24 ff.
19. Do you think the disciples found the last days with Jesus encouraging or depressing?
20. What questions would you have asked Jesus? If you had been one of the disciples, what might you have tried to do differently? GC

THE JUSTICE OF DIVINE LAW

A Doctrinal Essay

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6.7)

The Apostle Paul, addressing the Church, announces a principle of Divine Law which applies to the Church and to all men everywhere. Hosea expresses the same truth, saying that if we sow to the wind we shall reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8.7). Solomon says if we sow iniquity, we reap vanity (Proverbs 22.8). Paul writes that if we sow sparingly, we reap sparingly, and if we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9.6). This is true whether we sow wild oats or good wheat.

In view of the harvest of the world's sowing we are told that *"the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"* (Proverbs 15.3). It is further said that God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12.14).

When will this reckoning time come? Now in Malachi 3.15 we read *"Henceforth we deem the arrogant blessed; evil doers not only prosper but when they put God to the test they escape"*. So with the Psalmist (Psa.94.3,4) we enquire *"How long shall the wicked triumph and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?"* Paul replies that the Lord *"hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained"* – Jesus Christ (Acts 17.31). We need to take heed to the prophet Malachi again, who raises the suggestive question *"But who can endure the day of His coming and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be a swift witness ... against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the sojourner and do not fear, says the Lord of hosts"*. (Mal. 3.2,5)

The Scriptures refer to the great judgment of the Day of the Lord – the day of trouble with which this era is to close; variously described as the day of wrath, of vengeance and a *"time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation"*. When will this time of judgment come upon all nations with their corporations and civil, social and religious organisations of men? Will it only touch the lives

of those living at the time or is it to deal with all generations of the past? Our Lord answers the question when He says *"... the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."* (John 5.28,29 RSV). The whole Messianic Age is set forth as a 'day' of reckoning, even for every hurtful word (Matt. 12.36); and by submitting and learning obedience under those judgments, those of mankind who obey, will be gradually raised to perfection.

It may be asked to what extent justification of a sinner, through faith in the precious blood of Christ, may avoid the course of the law which demands that a person must reap what he has sown. Will his new relationship to God save him from the harvest of former wrongdoing? The Scriptures, as well as observation, assure us that our justification before God does not remove at once and without our co-operation all the results of previous transgression. The harvest is similar to the sowing. Those who are penitent and forgiven have the promise of grace to help in the battle against inherited and cultivated weaknesses. So we read in 1 John 1.9 *"God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*. It is in this cleansing process, which follows justification, that the believer must of necessity suffer from some of the destructive results of a past course of sin and reap the 'reward' of former sowing. While the Lord will be very merciful in dealing with such, nevertheless as a wise Physician, He will not spare the necessary experience to eradicate the deep-seated evil tendencies of long cultivation in the past.

Sometimes distinction is made between natural and moral law. Both are of Divine origin and accomplish the Divine will. Divine will is the operation of certain fixed principles of righteousness that have as their object the peace and happiness of all intelligent beings under its jurisdiction. Obedience brings a reward of happiness. Disobedience incurs a penalty. If we hold our hand before the fire, it is warmed and comforted. If we put our hand into the fire, it will be burned and we suffer pain. The law of nature

was designed to bless us but it will punish us if we violate its proper use. Not only so, but it is prepared to grade its penalties in proportion to the aggravation. If we put our hand into the fire for a short time it will be scorched; if we persist a little longer it will blister. If it is there longer still it will be consumed. Applied to the cooking of food, fire will reward us with a savoury meal but applied improperly the food becomes undesirable and unfit for use. Water is one of our greatest blessings but if the law of nature is disregarded it becomes an agent of death and destruction. So throughout the laws of nature we may trace a form of requital.

The same may be said of moral law. If we violate the principles of righteousness we deface the image of God in our lives. Impure thoughts write dark lines upon the character which may even be seen in the face. Pure, just and noble thoughts illuminate the face and make the pure character transparent to those who look. Operation of moral law is as sure and reliable as that of natural law.

Recompense, reward or penalty, may be delayed and is presumed by some that their behaviour will not realise its harvest. Individuals and nations have long presumed to act upon that hazardous idea but should listen to the Apostle's warning, "*Make no mistake about this: God is not to be fooled; everyone reaps what he sows*". The operation of this law is apparent upon all classes and nations. The pages of history reveal that all nations have reaped a bitter harvest and amid harrowing scenes have come to an end. They rose, and struggled and flourished. Pride and prosperity produced unreal security that in turn resulted in lowering moral standards. Their decline was followed by their fall. They reaped what they had sown. Nations of the world now face the most terrible crisis of their existence. Unparalleled trouble must overtake them. They have sown seeds of selfishness now they must reap the whirlwind of terror and destruction in national and social organisations.

The operation of this law is just as certain for individuals. Every thought harboured, every disposition exercised and cultivated becomes a component part of individual character. The character is somewhat tender in early life but becomes fixed in the course of years. If the character has grown in righteousness and truth, according to light pos-

sessed, whether of conscience or revelation, the ripened fruit of a benevolent character is a blessed harvest. If the character has grown in depravity, self-gratification and degradation, the terrible fruit is a fearful penalty.

Such a person when repentant and trusting in the Redeemer will be freely forgiven. They are fully absolved from condemnation through Christ who bore its Divinely pronounced penalty of death. Nevertheless, fruit of the sowing is shown in the character. Evil tendencies must be rooted out and a good character formed at painful cost but it is valuable experience. God is just not only to forgive our sins but to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Eradicating evil dispositions, bias and appetites, deep rooted and long cultivated, will cause great disturbances to the soil in which they have grown. Pain as well as joy will accompany their removal as they are replaced by the graces of the Spirit.

The Lord is a wise Physician, merciful and tender with His patient as necessities of the case permit. All will be shown their need of His aid and no patient will be treated further except with their own consent and co-operation. With the Church this treatment takes place now and is the transformation of life ready to be released into the perfect spiritual body at the resurrection. The 'over-comer' – the true believer – passes through difficulties, cleansing, trials of faith now. Such, on approval by the Lord, will not be judged in the age to come, (1 Cor. 11.32) but share His work of judging the world and recompense them according to what they have done now, good or evil. (1 Cor. 6.2) Our Lord said "*There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be made known*" (Matt. 10.26; Luke 12.2,3). In that day a murderer will face his victim, the robber will face the one he robbed, the slanderer the one whose character he defamed. The facts and motives must come to light and the terms of reconciliation will be equitable and known to all. History has proclaimed the characters of people like Nero and it is necessary that they should face the victims of their ignoble cruelty in the light of new and healthy public sentiment. Truly such will awake to "*shame and lasting contempt*" even in their own eyes as they see their horrid crimes. As new standards of upright character begin to be felt they will the more fully realise the depth of the pit

of depravity that they dug. Even generous forgiveness of those they injured and outraged will bring great humiliation. Proverbs 25.21,22 and Romans 12.20 suggest that coals of fire will be heaped on their heads. In some measure, all must share in this humiliation because there is *"none righteous, no not one"* (Romans 3.10). All will need to pray *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others"* and it will be a time of melting and mellowing of all hearts. The Lord will take away the stony hearts and give to all a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36.26)

The only standard of judgment in that time will be character. None of the false standards of wealth, noble birth or aristocratic power, by which men and women are so often measured now, will have any value then. People will come from the grave, shorn of former wealth and power, and heredity will be nothing to boast about. The same conditions that expose past evils in the operation of natural law will also show the kind actions of those who have helped others and these too will be

recognised and appreciated. Some reap in this present life as their good works become apparent (1 Timothy 5.24) but whenever, the Lord's assurance is that even a cup of cold water in His name will not go without reward (Matthew 10.40-42). Some in their depraved condition will have to clamber over mountains of misdeeds but all can reach the height of perfection.

Christ *"brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel"* (2 Timothy 1.10). Since then proportionately as mankind has come under the influence of the Gospel, their responsibility has increased, whether they accepted, rejected, opposed or ignored it. *"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (John 3.19)

This is our judgment day. The judgment of the world will proceed upon the same principles. They will first be brought to the light of Truth and be judged on the use or abuse of that knowledge.

AS (Abridged - BSM 1959)

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

8. The Plagues

At the time of the Exodus, Egypt had reached a high point in its power and glory. Its palaces and temples, monuments and other works of architecture were the admiration of all nations. Then in the seventh year of the reign of Amenhotep II, Pharaoh of all Egypt, a succession of unparalleled disasters humbled the pride of Egypt leaving them in the dust, stunned and sorrowing. With a mighty hand and stretched out arm the Almighty, the Eternal, delivered the children of Israel from bondage that as a dedicated people they might serve Him without restraint in a land of their own.

Moses left his second interview with Pharaoh knowing that God would now exert His mighty power to deliver Israel. Moses knew that God would let loose the mighty forces of nature with more than usual intensity until in terror Pharaoh would give His people their freedom. Moses would know of God's judgment by water and fire on previous occasions. There came a morning when Pharaoh and his court went to the river and found Moses and Aaron waiting for them. The prophets sternly warned the monarch of the consequences of his refusal to acknowledge the

Lord and release Israel. Aaron stretched his staff over the water and it turned to blood so that fish died, the river stank and the water was undrinkable (Exodus 7.21-22).

This may have been in June during the annual flood of the River Nile. Pharaoh may have been taking part in the worship of the Nile-god, for Egypt depended on the inundation of streams and canals to irrigate their land. It has been observed that at this time of the year during the flood period, the Nile takes on a reddish colour due to the growth of masses of plankton. If this is so then what happened when Aaron raised his rod was an extreme case of a familiar happening that affected ponds and reservoirs. The people dug along the river banks and this indicates that some filtering action took place to provide them with clear water. The general assumption that the magicians tried to imitate what Moses and Aaron had done is probably incorrect. What the wise men of Egypt may have done was by incantation and ceremony attempt to reverse the process and neutralise the effect of the miracle. They apparently failed as the river remained in this condition for seven days.

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In each of the first three plagues the magicians tried to counteract their effect. What they did was make the situation worse – more frogs. At the third attempt to beat Moses at his own game they declared that the hand of God was at work and that they could do nothing about it. Their spells and 'crafts couldn't produce gnats or ticks, flying or larval. It was also significant that the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was not affected by the disasters. Slowly the magicians realised that things were happening in a way that they could neither copy nor rationally explain. At the same time the boldness and confidence of Moses and Aaron was growing. While much of this drama was being enacted beside the river bank, between the leaders of the two nations, individual people were suffering the awful consequences of having no water to drink in a hot land and coping with the swarms of frogs that found refuge in every pan and oven. Egypt, like every other land, had experienced disasters before. Stoically the ordinary folk went about their tasks and tried to make the best of a bad job. One hundred and twenty days after the first festival, the river reached its maximum height. King and people indulged in holiday celebrations to mark that the waters had done their work. As they receded the people commenced to sow their seed in the rich sediment. But 'thanks' to the Nile-god were again marked by Moses and Aaron confronting the king with 'Let my people go'.

Maggots and flies and disease of their livestock gradually wore the people down. While leaders talked, the ordinary people suffered inconvenience and discomfort that grew into pain and loss. The attitude of their arrogant and hypocritical king went up and down like a yo-yo. The first signs of cracking appeared in Pharaoh's bravado when he offered to allow Israel's men folk to go a little way into the desert to offer sacrifice. Later, he went a step further by saying that all the people could go without their animals. This man, whose word had been law, could no longer be depended upon. He was trying to defy someone infinitely more powerful than himself and he didn't admit it readily. The year wore on. As one lot of crops disappeared in thunder and hail there was hope that others would appear with the changing seasons. As they looked out of their homes in early March and saw the barley in the ear, the flax in

blossom and the wheat and rye half grown there were signs of hope. Within two weeks they would look again and see the desolation wrought by the locusts removing all their prospects of a better year. They must have wondered where it would all end. Could nothing or no one stop the terrifying happenings? Why was Pharaoh so intransigent? Could he not see that his land was in ruins and that sooner or later, those who brought wealth and food and comfort to his home would be gone. While ever the world's rich and powerful are kept in comfort and supplied with all they need, they have little care about the vast masses of people who suffer in such situations. It is the same in war. While ordinary folk struggle on, the world's great intellects try to explain away what is happening. They refuse to believe that these terrors will continue until they repent and seek the will of the only One who really can help. Men have rebelled against the great Creator and don't want to admit their failure to live as they should. Egyptian workers and thinkers must have pondered their empty dreams and wondered what was happening to their rich land. How quickly did it occur to them that God couldn't forever tolerate the kind of cruelty and robbery against the people of Israel that they and their leaders had perpetrated? They did not see the removal of the plagues as signs of the goodness and kindness of God but only a signal to revert to a callous hearted refusal to do His will.

As we read through Exodus chapter 10 it becomes apparent that the Egyptians, first people and then leaders wanted to see the backs of the Israelites. Pharaoh no longer had their support yet his changes of mind indicated that he only desired to remove the immediate calamity. There was no real change of heart. As the wind blew across Egypt and the locust disappeared, with the prospect of his people dying in a famine, this proud man refused to bow to the demands of the despised Hebrew. How often it has happened in history. The reaction was swift, perhaps no more than a week away. Darkness, that could be felt, strangled the nation. It represented the moral decay of this people and its king. It may have been a sandstorm or it may have been a severe fog but it did not affect Goshen. Moses and Aaron trod the familiar road to the palace. "There shall not be a hoof left behind" said Moses to Pharaoh and the king lost his temper. He ordered Moses to see his face no

more or he would die. Moses, the greatest of leaders, swept out with the words "You have spoken well, I will see your face no more." Moses was very angry, but why was it so? The kind of man he was, and the kind of God he was yet to encounter on the holy mountain, could hardly have made him feel triumph in the death of those boys of Egypt. Only anger at a man who could be so blind and ruthless that he cared for none but himself. Moses almost certainly had personal friends; Egyptians who were to be bereaved of their loved children. Perhaps he remembered that this man's grandfather had tried to slaughter the boys of Israel in the Nile.

Before Moses lay all the preparation for the Passover and travelling out of the land. The first verses of chapter 11 must be a parenthesis of what occurred before the ninth plague. Moses did not see Pharaoh's face again. During the intervening period before that terrible blow fell, the people collected valuable items; part of what was due to them after the years of slave labour. It was not a sham or deception. The words for lend and borrow were equally applicable in asking for a gift.

The Egyptians knew well that they would see

neither Israel nor the 'gifts' again and were only too ready to see them gone. As they gathered the wealth of the people of Egypt, so they gathered together things needed for the Passover. They would not see that the celebration would continue through many centuries to come. The children's excitement would grow as the lamb was brought into the home. The adults had many tasks upon which they must concentrate, urged on by the exciting prospect of a journey to another land and the reality of leaving the land of their affliction forever. But the excitement and joy would be mixed with pain. Pain at leaving so much which had been their home for centuries. Perhaps pain also that Egyptians would be grieving over their lost children. Fear also as to whether their children would be saved and of the arduous days ahead as they travelled. Going out into the unknown was not all 'milk and honey'. Some were old and some would be handicapped. There would be foreboding in many hearts. Yet this was to be their day of triumph as they planned and packed and prepared for that long journey.

AOH/DN

RAHAB OF JERICHO

*An Old Testament
character study*

A woman mentioned approvingly in the New Testament as an example of sterling faith, is Rahab the harlot of Jericho, who gave shelter to the Israelite spies sent to reconnoitre the city before its destruction. The writer to the Hebrews says, "*By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had walked around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab because she welcomed the spies was not killed with the unbelieving.*" (Hebrews 11.30,31). James, discussing the relation between faith and works, asks (2.25) "*Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did, when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?*" These allusions are based upon the story as we have it in Joshua chapters 2 and 6. Matthew in his genealogical record indicates that this same Rahab married Salmon, leader of the tribe of Judah, who had a son called Boaz. He stands in direct line of descent between Abraham and Christ (Matt. 1.5) thus this otherwise unknown woman of Jericho is an ancestress of our Lord.

Jewish rabbinical sources many centuries ago made the suggestion that the word here translated 'harlot' can also mean 'inn-keeper' and that in reality Rahab was a most respectable custodian of a hostelry at which the spies booked in for the night. This hypothesis owes its existence to the rabbis' desire to avoid a stigma in the ancestry of King David. The idea is perpetuated by some Christian commentators with the same intent in respect of Jesus. There is no foundation for the idea; the word occurs some ninety times in the Old Testament and never means anything else in Hebrew than the mediaeval English term by which it is often translated. This little fortress town, only two hundred and fifty yards long by a hundred wide, is most unlikely to have had need of an 'inn' of any description. Such places existed only in the country districts where travellers might be caught after nightfall, and then only in much later times. Scholars tell us that at the time of the Exodus and earlier the whole idea of inns and hostelries for travellers was quite unknown; those caught out at

night slept under the stars.

After forty years sojourn in the desert following the Exodus, Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan waiting for the word to march. The river lay between them and their goal but they had been assured that God would remove that barrier at the crucial moment. Five miles from the other side of the river, inside Canaan, lay the military frontier fortress of Jericho, a town surrounded by high walls, crammed with defending soldiery and thought to be impregnable. It probably contained a number of Egyptian troops, for Canaan was still nominally under the sovereignty of Egypt, although for many years now the land had been in a state of turmoil and rebellion, and Egypt had very largely abandoned any attempt to govern. But Jericho was obviously the first strong city to be besieged and captured as soon as the host of Israel invaded. So Joshua sent two trusty men across the river to investigate the defences.

The town was not large; a man could walk right round it in ten minutes. The spies, dressed like the people of the land apparently gained entry at twilight before the gate was closed and explored the little settlement unchallenged. They found it closely packed with small flat-topped houses and a central solid building which was the abode of the garrison.

Professor John Garstang carried out archaeological excavations at the site of this city from 1930 onwards and found two massive walls about ten metres high, the outer one two metres and the inner one four metres thick with about a five metres space between them. In many places masonry and very large timbers had bridged the two walls. Houses had actually been built upon the walls straddling between the inner and outer wall. Garstang believed that he had discovered the remains of the Jericho of Joshua's time. Later scientists and in particular Kathleen Kenyon showed that what Garstang had discovered was built a thousand years before Joshua. The media, as usual, loved the 'debunking process' and as usual only told half the story. The walls such as Garstang found could have stood for a millennium as Miss Kenyon demonstrated in her next 'dig' at Jerusalem. Later still she commented that further finds at Jericho showed "that a town of that period existed (14th century BC) and matched with

Garstang's description. She further suggested that what she had seen might have been a fragment of a Canaanite kitchen.

As Joshua's two men explored the town they noticed that the inhabitants were terrified of the Israelite menace and were not likely to offer much resistance once the walls had been breached. After all, the population in a town of that size could hardly have exceeded two or three thousand and there were six hundred thousand Israelite warriors threatening them only a few miles away. By this time it was dark and the city gate closed. The intruders had to find concealment for a few hours and make their escape in the morning when the town opened for normal business. They solved this problem by getting themselves accepted for the night at the house of a harlot named Rahab. Probably they felt that the presence of strange men at such an establishment would be less likely to excite suspicion than anywhere else. They could hardly have known that, despite her profession, Rahab was a woman who exercised belief in the same God as they did. Was there a Divine overruling in the choice? Rahab was prepared to run a grave risk in protecting them.

They had not been so fortunate in escaping detection as they thought. Someone had seen them go in and was suspicious. Before long representatives of law and order were knocking at Rahab's door with a demand that the men be produced. Rahab was evidently quick-witted. The house had a flat roof like all in Jericho and on Rahab's roof there were laid out a quantity of freshly cut flax for drying. She evidently had a second source of income, in connection with some aspect of the local textile industry. She quickly hurried the spies on to her roof and concealed them under the flax. Whilst the investigators searched her house she blandly admitted that two men had been with her that night; that as usual she had asked no questions and eventually sent them on their way. Where they went afterwards she had no idea and was not interested, but if, as asserted they were enemy spies it was not likely that they had gone very far. If her interviewers would stop wasting time in her house and go after them they might yet overtake and capture their men. The officers appreciated the point of this argument and were promptly out of the house and down the street. The city gates closed after them and they

spent the rest of the night in a fruitless search of the countryside between Jericho and the fords of Jordan five miles away.

In the meantime this very practical woman had gone up to the roof and engaged her guests in very serious conversation. *"I know"* she said, *"that the Lord has given this land to you; terror of you has fallen upon us and the whole countryside is panic-stricken. We have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you, when you came out of Egypt ... and our courage failed; your coming has left no spirit in any of us, for your Lord God is god in heaven above and on earth below."* (Joshua 2.9.11). That is quite a striking testimony from one whose life was lived among idolaters and who probably had learned but little of the God of Israel. Perhaps Rahab was already sick of the life she led and was looking for the light, as others were to do centuries later when they found Jesus. Israel had camped in the desert just over a hundred miles away for forty years and some knowledge of their laws and standards and the God they worshipped must have filtered through into Canaan, carried by wandering nomads and caravans of traders from time to time during that period. The northern edge of the Sinai desert was close to the Egypt-Canaan highway and travellers were constantly passing by. Rahab may very well have heard something of all this and in her heart wanted to know more of worship so much loftier in its tones and ideals than the sensual religions of Canaan. At any rate, on this night when the men of Israel came to her she took her stand with the people of the Lord, and in so doing, one might hope and reasonably expect, turned away for ever from the old life.

The two men readily agreed to her request that as reward for her service to their cause they would ensure that she and her family were spared the doom that was to fall upon the city. *"When the Lord gives us the country we shall deal loyally and faithfully by you."* With that assurance she planned their escape. This was providentially an easy matter. Her house was upon the two walls and a window gave access to the exterior of the city. *"She let them down through a window by a rope, for the house where she lived was on an angle of the wall"* (2.15). Under cover of the friendly darkness they made their way down the rope to the ground and following Rahab's instructions headed

westward away from Jordan and "into the mountains" – Mount Kuruntul which still rises 900m. immediately behind the site of ancient Jericho. There said she, they must remain hidden three days before venturing back to the lowlands and the river. Evidently she had anticipated several days search before the hunt was called off. Her judgment appears to have been sound for "they had searched all along the road, but had not found them." Eventually, the intrepid pair arrived safe and sound in the camp of Israel and reported to Joshua the result of their mission.

A fortnight later the city fell to the besiegers and was utterly destroyed. Faithful to their promise, and in obedience to the command of Joshua, the two spies went in amidst the turmoil and the fighting to the house now marked with the scarlet thread hanging from the window. This was the agreed sign that those within were waiting and trusting in the integrity of the promise. So they were brought forth. Rahab, the woman of faith, her father and mother and all her family, and conducted to a place of safety away from the fighting. They were the only citizens of Jericho to survive. The ferocity of Joshua's troops saw to it that everyone else was slain, the city levelled to the ground and consumed by fire. *"And"* concludes the ancient scribe who compiled the Book of Joshua, speaking still of Rahab, *"she dwells in Israel to this day"*. If the book was completed in that generation this need only mean that she was still alive and amongst them, but it is unlikely that this is the meaning. It was always believed in later times in Israel that Rahab became the wife of Salmon and in such case this expression would refer to the perpetuation of her descendants in Israel. No reference to a marriage is found in the Old Testament and in fact Rahab is not mentioned again. Matthew states definitely that Boaz was born to Salmon and Rahab; this information must have been taken from a documentary source and he would not have relied upon mere tradition.

The marriage raises the question of Rahab's nationality. It was against the laws of Israel for an Israelite to marry any of the "women of the land" i.e. native Canaanites, Hittites or any other of the Hamitic race (descendants of Ham). There was not, however, the same objection to Semitic women, descendants of Shem. Zipporah, wife of Moses, was of a tribe descended from Abraham

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through Keturah. Rahab believed in the God of Israel and had faith in Him, in preference to the Canaanites' gods; besides making Salmon's choice of her as a wife easier to understand.

A very significant fact is that Rahab's name is included in what has been called the 'gallery of faith' in Hebrews 11. This chapter has long been renowned for immortalising certain 'heroes of faith' of Old Testament times, whose sterling faith and deeds springing from that faith, placed them in a special position in God's sight. Out of sixteen names selected by the writer to the Hebrews, two only are women. One is Sarah the wife of Abraham and the other is Rahab. That the writer was subject to the Holy Spirit when making his selection is hardly open to question. This woman of ancient Jericho, despite the kind of life attributed to her, in

the sight of God possessed a character and strength of faith that made her fit for selection. The scrap of history concerning Rahab the harlot shows her loyal, far-seeing, resourceful, courageous and above all, inflexible in her faith that God is true and the purpose of God will certainly be carried out. If in fact, as appears to be the case, she did indeed marry Salmon prince of the royal tribe of Judah, and so became ancestress of Israel's Messiah and the world's Saviour, we again have an example of the wonderful power of God who can make vessels of honour out of weak and common clay. We are reminded of this truth that God looks not at a man or woman's past, only at their present condition of heart and the possibilities that lie in them for their future.

Revised from BSM 1966

DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD

Driving is a microcosm of the Christian life. Disciples are always learning or re-learning. Their life is one of discipline, and nowhere more than on the road – where **watchfulness** and **concentration** are of the essence.

Christian qualities have great scope for exercise there. Take **sympathy**. The driver needs first of all a fellow feeling for others: for fellow road users and not least for one's passengers. An awareness of one's own physical condition can also be critical to one's decisions; and a sensitivity to the vehicle and its most efficient use. Keeping the accelerator steady can contribute to economical running as well as keeping following traffic happy.

Awareness of the needs of the local and global environment may regulate the vehicle's use. (The solar car is a long way off and use of fossil fuels demands moderation.)

Christian **gentleness** is involved in all of this and sensitive driving will minimise the use of fuel. The adage 'it takes petrol to brake' can help one to think ahead and save both fuel and brake linings. Travelling at the optimum speed for fuel consumption can be another advantage to both the engine, the driver and the environment. Looking ahead. On fresh ground prior study of a map can save both time, fuel and temper.

Christian **service** to the community can govern one's choice of vehicle and its use can be an advertisement of one's commitment to others to

the glory of Christ.

The option of letting oneself be driven may be available to us and so reduce congestion and pollution in city centres, to the benefit of children and everyone.

Perhaps the greatest Christian quality is essential for safe and co-operative driving, to wit **patience**. Readers may like to list other Christian qualities which are of great value on the road, as well as on the road of life. An advanced driving test such as ROSPA's might open one's eyes to a number of these.

Some drivers have forbidden themselves to drive at twilight, pub-closing time, when in a hurry or when tired. A break at such times can be salutary as well as safe. **Wait on the Lord.**

The following prayer is from a mid-century wall plaque and is well worth memorising.

JT

MOTORIST'S PRAYER

Give me a steady hand, a watchful eye,
That none may suffer hurt as I pass by.
Thou givest life, I pray no act of mine
May take away or mar that gift of Thine.

Help me to use my car for other's need
Nor miss through lack of wit or love of speed.
The beauty of Thy world, that thus I may
With joy and courtesy go on my way.

Anon

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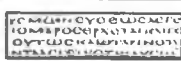
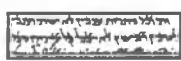
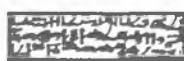
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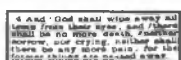
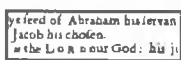
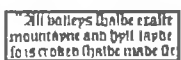
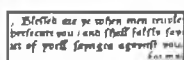
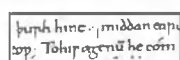
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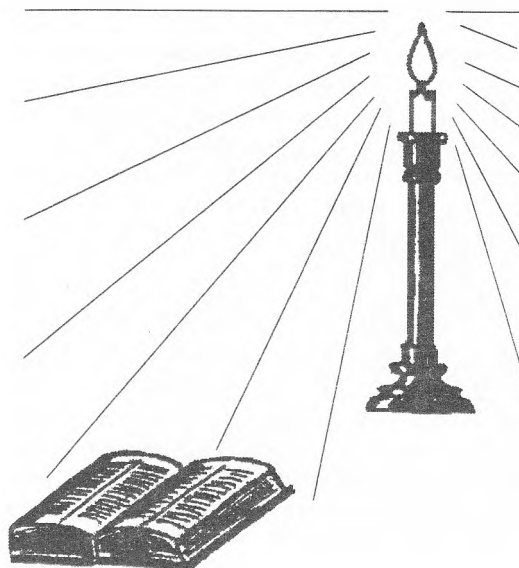
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stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and His reign of peace and justice on earth. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

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JUST A WORD – ekklesia

The word '*ecclesia*' or more properly '*ekklesia*' is a word that has connections within the English language. In the Bible there is the Book of Ecclesiastes and in the Apocrypha there is a book called Ecclesiasticus. Matters relating to Church organization are referred to as 'ecclesiastical'. The word 'ecclesial' (Concise Oxford Dictionary) is defined as an assembly or church and comes from '*ekk-lestos*' meaning 'summoned out from'. The *ekklesia* in Athens in pre-Christian times was the 'convened assembly' of citizens and had extensive democratic civil powers. William Barclay points out that *ekklesia* has a Hebrew background, and in the Septuagint it is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* the root of which means 'to summon'. In the OT AV *qahal* is sometimes translated 'assembly' and sometimes 'congregation'. The RV is more consistent. Barclay says that Hort insists that *ekklesia* does not mean 'picked out' of the world but is used of people 'summoned out' to do their duty. The word *ekklesia* was useful to the Septuagint translators because it was a political word with no religious connections. The spiritual meaning of the word is therefore built up within the Bible. (Psa. 22:22; Heb. 2:12). Paul used the word with reference to individual congregations but it also described his vision of a world-wide church. Israel was the Assembly of Yahweh summoned for a purpose. Similarly those who follow Christ are part

of the Church of God. The word only occurs three times in the Gospels; in Matthew 16, 18 and in 18:17 twice. The word in the Acts refers to the 'whole community of Jesus' followers', developing as the Church grew. It is not that small individual churches make up the one world-wide church or that the Church of God is split up and spread abroad. The concept in the New Testament is not of splinter sects – they are of man's making. Whatever assembly of Christian believers we are in, we should be in the Church of God. Christ's people belong to Him and He is with His church wherever it is found. To the extent that we are out of fellowship with the Church, we are out of fellowship with the Head of the Body who is Christ. It is God's church, founded by Jesus Christ on the Apostles. No church of Jesus Christ is of human origin. So Paul writes to Timothy, and calls the '*ekklesia*' the house of God. There are parallel expressions: for example: the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16); seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29); spiritual house, holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5); elect race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people of possession; people of God (1 Pet. 2:9,10); family of God (Eph. 3:14,15) and Temple of God. (Eph. 2:21).

DN

Barclay – New Testament Words; Fuller in Theological Word Book of the Bible; Grimm-Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon

NOTICES

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THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE

*A study in
Divine Purposes*

2. Creation to the Flood

The times of man's ignorance commenced very shortly after the Fall. The Scriptures are very brief in their account of those early days in human history, but even in their brevity there is a great deal of solid information, and the most important characteristic of that age, man's rapid descent into sin and degradation, is clearly shown. To such an extent had that downward course affected all mankind that by the time of the flood, something in the region of two thousand years after the Fall, it was recorded that *"every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually"*. The original mental and moral image and likeness of God that had been impressed upon the first human beings at the time of their creation had been almost entirely lost, and with that the knowledge of God had departed. Notwithstanding the near-perfect physique and mighty intellectual powers of the men of the antediluvian age, had God not intervened at the time of the Flood the human race would have very rapidly passed into extinction. What seems at first sight to have been a merciless massacre of helpless creatures and a renunciation of the Divine purpose in creation was in fact the only way by which human life could be preserved on earth. The old wicked generation was removed and a righteous remnant preserved alive whereby a fresh start might be made.

Mankind did not come to this sad pass all at once. The process of degradation and sinking into ignorance was a gradual one. There is evidence in the early part of Genesis that the first few generations after the Fall consisted in the main of godly men and that God was worshipped in sincerity. Whilst the defection of Cain evidently led his posterity into sinful ways more rapidly than was the case with the other sons of Adam, even Cain showed some reverence for God at the time of punishment for his crime. It is important to notice that upon his banishment Cain *"went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt ... in the east of Eden"* (Gen. 4.16). It would appear that the first human family still dwelt in the "presence" of God, that is to say, with some definite acknowledgment of His rule in their lives. Although sin had entered and begun its defiling and corrupting work in their hearts, minds and bodies the first human family continued to respond to God. In spite of the

expulsion from Eden and a measure of separation from God that accompanied the Fall they had a form of worship before Him. So much is implied by the fact that both Cain and Abel brought of the fruit of their labours an offering to the Lord, a recognition that all they had achieved in life was due to Him and His bounty. These early progenitors of our race were the ones who preserved and handed down the story of Eden and immediate subsequent events. The faithfulness with which its dark shadows as well as its lighter views have been recorded is evidence that those who passed them on and wrote them down were men who, despite their sin-stricken condition, had reverence for God and a desire to serve Him still. At the birth of Seth, which must have been after Cain's departure, Eve showed by her words her personal faith in God. Still later, in the time of Enosh the son of Seth, the Chronicler records that *"men began to call upon the name of the Lord"* (Gen. 4.26). It was as though only then had apostasy from God become sufficiently clearly marked that it became necessary for pious men to proclaim themselves God-worshippers, as distinct from the remaining godless portion of the human race.

The Cainite Lamech had two wives, an indication that in his day, that of the sixth generation, knowledge of the original principles behind the institution of marriage was being lost and those principles violated. At much about the same time Enoch, of the line of Seth, was especially noted for being a God-fearing man. *"Enoch walked with God ... and God took him."* At that point the veil drops over the Scripture record and nothing more is revealed about the course of human history until the time of the fallen angels and of the Flood, events which terminated Time One of the "Times of Ignorance."

Scripture gives no indication of the date of this angelic rebellion unless it be the rather vague *"hundred and twenty years"* of Genesis 6.3. Jewish tradition placed the event in the days of Jared, which might easily have been a thousand years before the Deluge. It is difficult to believe that the corrupting influence of the rebellious angels upon mankind could have continued so long. Jewish tradition also represents men as crying to heaven

for release from the oppression of the angels, and sending to Enoch, in the mountain retreat to which he had been translated, imploring him to intercede with God on their behalf. But there can be no certainty as to the length of their disastrous rule.

We leave the first thousand years of human history with the impression that men had retained much of the original knowledge of God imparted to their first parents in the garden and that despite the entrance of sin and death there was still the endeavour to worship and serve God. Much of this may have been due to the personal influence of the first pair. It is likely that both Adam and Eve retained their faith in God for many centuries at least after the Fall, and in all probability did all they could to implant that faith in their children. There are only two recorded utterances of Eve, but they are both significant. At the birth of Cain, her first-born, she said (Gen. 4.1) *"I have acquired a man from the Lord."* There was recognition of the sovereignty of God in that word, and perhaps an expression of faith in the original promise that God would one day, by means of the seed of the woman, undo the harm that had been caused by her sin. This conclusion is intensified when, many years later, a hundred and thirty if the Hebrew chronology is followed, or two hundred and thirty if the Septuagint, Seth was born and Eve said *"God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew"*. (Gen. 4.25) Here is an interesting thing. Seth was born after the murder of Abel. Eve must have had other sons, not named in the Scriptures, between Abel and Seth, for Cain's fear was that *"everyone that findeth me will slay me"*. There must have been a goodly number born of Adam and Eve and grown to maturity before the birth of Seth. How then did Eve come to know that it was through Seth that the promised seed should come five or six thousand years later as we know the case proved to be. Is it possible that Eve was in fact the first of the prophets; that she, first of all, prophesied concerning Christ? If that is so, must she not have been a godly woman, in the midst of her fallen condition looking forward to the day when God should arise to make an end of sin?

When, a millennium later, the curtain rises on the stage already set for the great Flood the world presents a very different picture. God could find only one righteous family in all that generation, and all other flesh had corrupted its way upon earth, men were ten or twenty generations away

from Eden and the Fall. Adam and Even had been dead more than a thousand years; and the story of Enoch, the righteous man who disappeared from amongst men because God had taken him, was already seven hundred years old. To the men of the Deluge generation, Adam was as far back as would be the coming of the Saxons to Britain and Enoch as remote as William the Conqueror. The stories of those early days as we now have them in Genesis, and the knowledge and worship of God, was preserved only in the family of Noah. Ignorance had come to the full and men had built up a world replete with all that life could offer in the way of indulgence and self-gratification. We have no means of knowing to what high degree of civilisation they had attained but with their powerful physique and mighty intellects, not so impaired by millenniums of progressive degeneration as are ours, it must have been considerable and God was ruled out of all their thoughts and all their actions. It was a time of steady descent into every kind of sin with no sign of release, and because even the very idea of repentance had not appeared, no possibility of release. Peter tells us (2 Peter 2.5) that Noah was a *"preacher of righteousness"*. It is evident that his preaching was unheeded. The flood came and took them all away without knowledge, without hope, steeped in their sins, lost for ever ... unless God had devised a way of reclamation in some coming day. It is in confidence that God has in fact devised such a plan that we see a world of meaning in Paul's words to the men of Athens.

It was after the flood that men began to reason in their minds, as Paul did before Felix, of *"righteousness, temperance and judgment to come"* (Acts 24.25) but their reasoning was crude and immature. There was still no idea of the nature of sin and no understanding of repentance. Men were making efforts to regulate their lives in an orderly fashion and to establish some standard of justice and right dealing. There was however no realisation at all, outside the very narrow circle of those who did know and worship God, that only by means of a full knowledge of God and a full acceptance of His ways would their problems be solved and their hopes fulfilled. It is not surprising even in our own day, five thousand years later, that the majority of men have made little progress in that direction.

(To be continued) AOH

"REJOICE ... PRAY ... GIVE THANKS"

*Exhortations from
Thessalonians*

"Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks." (1 Thess. 5.16-18)

The difficulty in these three injunctions is their absoluteness. It is easy to rejoice on occasion, but to rejoice evermore is a different proposition. To pray at times, regularly, is common, but to pray without ceasing is another matter. It is a pleasant thing to be thankful in spirit and to give thanks for benefits received, but isn't the giving of thanks for everything expecting just too much?

In this chapter the Apostle Paul gives us twelve brief and pointed rules for Christian conduct. Nine of these have to do with our relationships with others. The three just quoted refer to our relationship with God and since that is as children to a Father, these are statements of what He expects of us as His children. Viewed in this light they will be seen to be not only possible but reasonable and necessary. They represent characteristics relevant to the home, both natural and spiritual. We will examine them from this point of view. Stated in terms of the home life, they represent the three common qualities of happiness, fellowship and gratitude.

"Rejoice evermore." Every good parent wants his child to be happy, so much so that the father cannot be happy if the child is miserable. It is impossible to be happy to order. Joy can only come as a result of circumstances that promote happiness. These may be intermittent and brief, or deep and lasting. Only if they are deep and abiding is happiness possible. All young life is naturally joyful through the exuberance of natural spirits. To this a child may add special occasions for joy such as birthdays, Christmas time and holidays. None of these sources of joy is permanent. They all pass away. In the proper home, however, the child has a deep and abiding source of happiness. This is found in his trust and hope centred in his parents and the assurance of their love. To realise how supremely important these are, think of what it would mean to him to be suddenly bereft of his parents' fond love and care and sent to be brought up in an institution for orphans!

In like manner our heavenly Father wants His children to be happy and is affected by their joy. We read that Jesus exulted in spirit when the disciples were overjoyed at some experience.

"Rejoice evermore" is a personal message from God, to every one of His children. He gives us many special occasions for joy in the natural blessings with which our cup runs over. Like the natural child, however, the deep and abiding source of our joy is in Him, in our faith and hope in God, and the realisation of His love. Permanent joy can only spring from permanent sources and the three principles which abide, Paul tells us, are faith, hope and love.

The joy of Jesus consisted in the fact that He was supremely 'God conscious'. This world was to Him no alien place but a mansion in His Father's house. It was the Father that caused the sun to shine and sent the rain; made the lilies grow and noted the sparrow's fall. How much more then would the Father look after His own children. Enough for them to know that *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"* (Matt. 6.8). Like Jesus we too may joy in God; joy because of our faith in Him for He will not give us a stone for bread, a serpent for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg. He knows, He loves, He cares, nothing this truth can dim. We joy in God also because of our hope in Him. Having called us, He will qualify us and perfect that which concerns us. Under training and discipline now, we eagerly anticipate the time of our adoption, our coming of age, when we shall enter fully into our glorious inheritance. Above all we rejoice evermore in the everlasting love of God. *"He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up to death for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?"* (Romans 8.32). We rejoice evermore in the love of Christ that passes knowledge. We can say with Paul, *"I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8.38,39)

"Pray without ceasing." The idea is that of fellowship. This is characteristic of the natural home. The parents want their child's confidence and the child instinctively goes to them with all its joys and sorrows, doubts and fears, plans and perplexities, receiving in return instruction, advice and encouragement. This sense of being in

fellowship is continuous, unless there should occur some estrangement that, so long as it lasts, produces a cloud over the lives of both parties. These principles operate in the spiritual life. God wants His children's confidence. Nothing is too small or trivial to take to him. "*The prayer of the upright is his delight*" (Proverbs 15.8). We cannot go too often to our Heavenly Father, nor tarry too long in His presence. There is also in addition to those specific times of communion, a sense of being in fellowship with God provided that no estrangement arises to interrupt it. When the conscious mind is occupied by life's necessary duties, the vast region of the sub-conscious can be tuned in to the wavelength of the Father's love, and spirit with spirit can meet.

If we would enjoy a sense of continuous fellowship with the Lord, it is important that we have daily, definite times for communion. The mid-week prayer meeting has proved to many of the greatest help to their prayer life. Both with regard to this also our daily private devotions, the word of God should be taken as a basis. Just as we meet in fellowship on the basis of the Divine Word when we gather together as a company of the Lord's people so when we meet with the Lord in private, or in united seasons of prayer, the Word of God should be basic and central. Samuel Chadwick in his book on "The path of prayer" speaks thus of his own experience. "I read through the portion in a prayerful spirit again and again, then go over it clause by clause on my knees, turning its statements into prayer and thanksgiving. Before I found this method, I used to try to work myself into a praying mood but I lacked resourcefulness and praying became 'prayers' again, and listening, a void. Prayer has been an experience of thrilling wonder, creative meditation and real fellowship since it has been instituted, quickened and inspired by the Word of God."

"*In everything give thanks.*" There is progression in these three qualities. Joy leads on to fellowship and fellowship to thankfulness for everything. The child, early in life, learns that though it is his father's desire that he should be happy and that his own happiness is bound up with the happiness of the child, this does not mean that everything is ordered with a view to the child's immediate pleasure. The boy might much prefer play to school, holidays to lessons, idleness to

industry, but the discharge of his parental duties makes it necessary for the father to insist on training and discipline. Many things not in themselves easy or pleasant must be experienced and it is a special joy to the parents when the child understands and appreciates the situation, and accepts it not in a negative spirit of mere resignation but in the positive spirit of thankfulness.

So it is with God and His children. This quality of thankfulness is underlined. After saying "*In everything give thanks*" Paul adds "*for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*". It is God's special message conveyed to us by the life and teaching of our Lord. It is His special message because it is so difficult and because the possession of this grace implies a very close walk with God and maturity in fellowship with Him. It is easy and delightful to give thanks for many, many things.

"When all thy mercies, O my God,
my rising soul surveys;
transported with the view, I'm lost
in wonder, love and praise.

For all things beautiful we thank Him, for days of sunshine bright with praise, when all our life is set fair. But when life's sky becomes clouded and the surges rise and rest delays to come; when youth has gone and health and strength begin to fail; when loved ones are removed and we are left lonely; it is not easy then to give thanks for everything.

Sometimes some of God's people are called upon to experience specially trying conditions. Like Job they are outstanding examples of suffering but thank God, like Job they can also be outstanding examples of the power and grace of God. Job was a spectacle to angels, as we are, and by his unswerving loyalty and love vindicated God's glory and discredited the Adversary. This too is our great mission, to make God's victory over the Devil moral before it is physical, when the Lord shall take hold of him and bind him. Job's sufferings have been an inspiration to countless numbers of the Lord's people because of his patient endurance. He stands among the great cloud of witnesses urging us forward. So it may be with us if we are called upon to suffer in a special way. Our example may encourage others to take up and bear more bravely the lighter loads that they

are carrying and fainting under. Job, because of his special trials, received a special vision of God, whereas before, he had only heard Him. So it will be with us. Paul stands before us as one supremely tried and yet so supremely blessed with the abundance of the revelations that he expresses himself thus *"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison"* (2 Cor. 4.17).

"In everything give thanks", for all things work together for good to those who love God. This may not be apparent to us now but sometime we will understand. We are like the tapestry weaver of old with the pattern to work from hung over his head, and working away with the reverse side of the cloth

to him. Blindly he works the shuttle back and forth with the varying colours, dark and bright, unaware of how beautiful is the work he is doing as seen from the other side. So it is with us. Until our weaving is finished and we get to the other side we shall not see the glorious outcome nor understand the meaning of the many things that perplex us now. How grand the assurance that working to His pattern the Lord will be able by and by to present us faultless in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Let us then rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks for as His dear children, God expects this from us.

FAS

THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH

*Lessons from the life
of a man of prayer*

2. Building the Wall

When Nehemiah reached Jerusalem, he immediately commenced to prepare for the restoration of God's ancient and holy city. In the state in which he found it, with its walls in ruins it was the laughing stock of the neighbouring peoples. So he set out by night to examine the walls and discover personally how great the task was that lay before him. Afterwards he spoke frankly to his fellow Jews and invited their co-operation. The walls of Jerusalem could never have been built in fifty-two days without comradeship and determination. It needed undaunted courage and willingness to serve the Lord shoulder to shoulder.

The men whom he approached to help him were equally sensible in their reply to Nehemiah. They might have been jealous of this outsider who had so recently arrived from an alien country. He had come under the protection and with the authority of the monarch who 'oppressed' Israel. They could have felt insulted by his suggestion to restore the city walls, a work which they should have done already. They might have doubted Nehemiah's integrity and intentions and believed his motives to be false. Instead they recognised that the good hand of God was upon this new governor of Jerusalem and they rose up willingly to support him. They realised that their national destiny was at stake, and if the glories of Israel's former days were to be restored, here at last was the opportunity for which they had been looking. They accepted Nehemiah on trust, submitted to his plan for

rebuilding the walls and followed him as their leader.

These memoirs of a great statesman give to us some very useful lessons for the Christian life. We too must face the fact that spiritual Zion is not all that it should be. During the past century and a half materialism, social revolution, the increase of pleasure and material advantages for everyone, have tended to make life easier for the Christian Church. We become apathetic in days of comparative peace and security. We must make a genuine examination of that part of the 'wall of New Jerusalem' entrusted to our care to see if there is not a great deal of repair work needed to strengthen the bulwark of our faith. Have we over the past years been doing all we can in the Lord's service? Are we content with the progress we have made? Much of the walls of the Holy City are like they were when Nehemiah first arrived from Shushan, ... in utter ruins.

The sense of oneness exhibited by the Jews in our story sets twenty-first century Christians a lesson worthy of imitation. It is essential to our service for the Lord that we should willingly co-operate with our fellows in the Christian way. Firstly, there are those in our own Church or Fellowship. Our natural differences and fleshly impediments are likely to hinder our unity in serving the Lord. The Devil is quick to notice this and to magnify it out of all proportion.

There is opportunity for all true servants of God in this work, just as there was in Nehemiah's day,

the elder, the scribe, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the ruler and the artisan. They all found a place along the walls, doing their share of the work, faithfully endeavouring to do that which had been put into their hands by the Lord. This does not mean that the baker, the perfumer, the ruler of the city all suddenly became professional bricklayers. Nor did they all build the same piece of wall, in fact many of them built that portion which was just outside their own house.

So it is with Christians today. All, whatever their religious affiliation, in whatever church or group God has pleased to call them, if accepting Jesus as their Saviour may share the great work of building Zion. It is up to us all to extend the willing and loving hand of fellowship and comradeship, for all are one in Christ Jesus. This will not cause every child of God to flock into the same church or other place of worship. But there is a common union in Christ that will give us the desire to work together rather than work against other Christian people. May we say with God's people of old ... *"Let us rise up and build"*.

Nehemiah's troubles were not over when once the great work had begun. In fact that is just where the problems seem to have commenced. Had he not been possessed of a very wonderful faith and been a man who constantly resorted to prayer, there can be no doubt that this remarkable task would never have been completed. Human strength and ingenuity alone would have been quite inadequate to withstand the opposition of the Adversary of God.

At first their enemies laughed contemptuously and ridiculed the efforts the Jews made to rebuild their city. They received a first rebuke from the faithful Nehemiah in these words... *"The God of heaven will grant us success. We, his servants are making a start with rebuilding. But you have no stake, or claim, or traditional right in Jerusalem"* (Nehemiah 2.20). So the wall was built in spite of the sneers of Sanballat and Tobiah, and in answer to further jibes and sarcasm Nehemiah besought the Lord in prayer and the builders worked so much the harder. The Samaritans and Ammonites were very angry and dismayed at this response to their unkind remarks and were determined to spoil the work by other means.

The first move by the enemies of Israel to frustrate the great work which Nehemiah and his

countrymen were doing was a subtle infiltration of armed men into the ranks of the Jews. Nehemiah prayed and then encouraged the people to remember the Lord and not to be afraid. They set a watch against spies and enemy soldiers. Plans were made to help each other if an attack was made against one particular section of the new wall.

In the midst of all the troubles from without came internal disorder which also threatened to stop the work of the Lord. The nobility of Jerusalem had so badly treated their fellow Jews that many of the people lived in poverty and slavery. The equity of Israel's laws, given through Moses, should have prevented just those conditions developing. There was no excuse for the Jewish aristocrats and Nehemiah acted promptly. He told the nobles plainly that they lacked in righteousness before the Lord and that their treatment of fellow Jews was a reproach to their nation. The governor's rebuke was accepted and acted upon, perhaps the more so because of Nehemiah's upright life. The leaders repented of their oppression and readily promised to deal more justly in future. Again, there are lessons to be learned by those who have positions of power and authority in any community of God's people however large or small. The haughty spirit of self-defence does not take God's work forward. It is the repentant heart and the recognition of everyone's place in His church, that enables His work to go forward. This is not a matter of outward appearance or superficial judgment but the real undercurrent of how 'ordinary' Christian people really feel about leaders among them. Is everyone able to discover their gifts and use them well? No one, however young or old, able or apparently less able, is insignificant among the Lord's brethren.

Meanwhile, around Jerusalem, the allied opposition, headed by Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, were consulting together how they might best overthrow the city. They tried enticing the governor from his stewardship in order to do him 'some mischief.' They tried to frighten him with false accusations of treason. They threatened his life. But each effort was frustrated in the same manner, for Nehemiah besought the Lord in prayer for strength and guidance. The source of his power and ability, lay in his contact with heaven and he found comfort and peace in his friendship with God.

What an inspiration to us! Does the Devil meet with such formidable opposition today? Is there such unshakeable trust in the Lord and such irreproachable zeal in His service? Wherefore all the hindrances to work in spiritual Zion? When the world laughs and jeers at our efforts to serve our King are we able to stand firm, confident that our labours of love are not in vain? Our unbelieving neighbours are quick to cast doubts upon our faith and to tell us that our hopes will come to nothing, just as the Samaritans did to the Jews. We may be able to refute the scoffer's arguments or to withstand persecution but to be laughed at is sometimes more difficult to endure and we are likely to become very discouraged. May Nehemiah's example of unflinching courage and constancy in prayer, urge us to seek God's help more readily that we may not fear what men may try to do to frustrate the work of God.

As in every age, the Devil will appear in a number of guises. Sometime his agents are openly the enemies of God and brazenly seek to render ineffective the work of His people. Frequently however the approach is more subtle and the sabotage is done in secret ways. There are many exhortations in the New Testament 'to watch'. Are these references to observing the political drama in the world around us? Do they not refer to a thorough examination by each believer of his or her own heart? It was our Master who said "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (Matt. 26.41) and years later writing to the Colossians, Paul admonished that church with "*continue steadfastly in prayer being watchful in it with thanksgiving*". Peter exhorted the brethren to "*Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*". (1 Peter 5.8). Each of these texts might have been the words of our Old Testament hero urging his faithful band of workers to greater building efforts. But they are in fact the words of Jesus and of two of the foundation members of the New Jerusalem. God's purposes move on from one era to the next but the great fight between good and evil remains the same in form and principle. By devious means Satan has blinded the eyes of God's people to the great 'building project' which our Heavenly Father has in hand. To some he has said that this is a work which embraces the entire world and hence their labours have sometimes been

dissipated in places where they were not required. To others he has insinuated that the work is completed and so they have ceased from their tasks before they were done. Upon others he has poured scorn and contempt until they have given up in despair. Let us each one examine our own lives, not daring to pluck the splinter from our brother's eye lest we are blinded by the log in our own. (Matt. 7.3,4).

Just as the work upon the building of Jerusalem suffered because of internal disquiet, so the Christian church has been hindered by discord and strife throughout its long and chequered history. Human ambition and selfishness have frustrated the efforts of those who have toiled for spiritual Zion. Immediately prior to the Lord's death His closest followers were quarrelling about who should be greatest among them. Today, in many quarters the same lesson has still not been properly learned.

Our message for the world is peace and good will whatever aspect of truth we emphasise. Whether we preach repentance or consecration in this life, or Christ's kingdom for all men in the world to come, the underlying spirit is the same – that of reconciliation to God. But the power of our message is lost if there is not genuine brotherly affection among ourselves. Instead, as Nehemiah said of his fellows, we are a reproach to the people of God.

In spite of the trouble from without and troubles within, the New Jerusalem will be finished and it will be God's hand through His servants that will accomplish it. Let us see to it that we work for Him and not against Him. The work does not stop there, merely to be an object of beautiful craftsmanship. Cities are not an end in themselves but are built for a purpose.

(To be continued)

DN

DISCIPLINE

Discipline and discipleship are two sides of the one forward movement of the soul. The disciple is not a mere follower, as so many imagine. Thousands followed, and still follow, Christ without being disciples. The disciple puts himself under the discipline of the Master in order that he may learn from Him.

Gone From Us

Sister Marion Robinson (*Hitchin*)

APOLLOS

"Behold I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold he is coming, says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 3.1) The reader closed the roll reverently and laid it down. He turned to face the congregation. The eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed upon him and the Christian, Aquila, seated at the back, leaned forward to listen.

"My brethren, sons of Israel, children of the covenant, heirs of the Divine promise to Abraham, to you is the word sent. Woe betide you if you fail to perceive the day of this visitation. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. If you will comprehend it and accept it, you will inherit the promises made to our fathers and enter in. If you reject it, then the Kingdom will be taken from you and given to another people who will bring forth fruit."

Silence reigned. This Egyptian Jew from Alexandria was speaking to them in a manner not normally experienced by these Greek Jews of Ephesus. Their religion meant a great deal to them, surrounded as they were by all kinds of pagan faiths and deities, but in the comfortable exercise of their legalistic rites and rituals they had in measure forgotten the ancient promises which were Israel's mandate for existence as a people. Now this stranger was awakening half-forgotten memories in their minds, and some among them began to remember that they were, after all, a people for a purpose. Thoughts were broken as the speaker resumed...

So might Priscilla and Aquila have first seen and heard Apollos. Luke records it this way, *"There arrived at Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, powerful in his use of the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was full of spiritual fervour; and in his discourses he taught accurately the facts about Jesus, though the only baptism he knew was John's. He now began to speak boldly in the synagogue where Priscilla and Aquila heard him; they took him in hand and expounded the way in great detail. Finding that he wanted to go across to Achaia, the congregation gave him their support and wrote to the disciples there to make him welcome."* (Acts 18.24-27)

So he entered the Christian community. Paul

had gone to Corinth where he had founded a church, during the course of his first missionary journey, taking with him Aquila and Priscilla who then settled in Ephesus whilst Paul continued his journey. There was as yet no Christian community in Ephesus and the three worshipped and ministered at the Jewish synagogue where their ministry seems to have been accepted and appreciated. After Paul's departure Apollos made his appearance and seems to have been equally acceptable. He appears not to have been a Christian as Aquila and Priscilla but he had accepted the message of John the Baptist and counted himself one of John's disciples. This fact, together with the presence of a 'group' of John's disciples in Ephesus twenty-five years after his death (Acts 19.3) is an interesting indication of the persistence of his ministry into a second generation. It is similar to a group that gathers round some noted minister today and persists for many years after his passing.

Apollos hailed from Alexandria in Egypt, a city where a numerous and powerful Jewish community had existed from much older times. There was no Christian church there as yet but the Church at Alexandria is reputed to have been founded by Mark, writer of the second Gospel, but that must have been rather later. The reason for his coming to Ephesus is not stated. From the scanty references to him in the New Testament he seems to have been free to move about as he wished and perhaps he was an itinerant missionary like Paul but in the interest of John's message more than that of Jesus. If so, Aquila and Priscilla changed all that.

At Ephesus Apollos was convinced of the truth of Christianity and he became a Christian. He seems to have been a vigorous, resolute and eloquent speaker, studious and learned. He might well, as a young man, have sat at the feet of the famous Jewish philosopher and theologian Philo of Alexandria. Apollos survived till AD 68 so he could well have seen John the Baptist in his earlier days and probably did do so and was baptised by him. He most likely never came in contact with Jesus. Now he was perhaps in his forties and vigorously propagating John's message, which means of course that he was one who sincerely looked for the coming of Christ and His kingdom. Like most Jews, he expected a victorious conqueror at the head of a mighty army bent on

destroying the Roman occupying power and establishing a Jewish kingdom in its stead. The 'Way of the Lord' in which he 'was instructed' or perhaps educated must have been the current interpretation of the prophecies concerning the Messianic Kingdom. The way of the Lord of Isaiah 40.3 and similar passages was the triumphal procession of the coming Messiah as He assumes kingship to reign over the earth. He had probably worked up the message of John the Baptist into a kind of systematic theology.

By the time Paul returned to Ephesus during his second missionary journey, some two years later (Acts 19.1) Apollos had left. He had gone to Corinth and was already influential in the Christian community there; so much so that a party spirit had developed, some proclaiming themselves adherents of Paul and others of Apollos (1 Cor. 1.12). It is very probable that the two men were very much alike in their characteristics and abilities, the most noticeable difference lying in a closer adherence to the letter of the Mosaic Law and a lesser interest in the conversion of Gentiles on the part of Apollos than that of Paul. Thus the Jewish members of the church at Corinth might well lean towards Apollos whilst the Greeks and Romans to their champion, Paul, and so the schisms of which Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1.11 quite naturally developed. It might well be that Apollos was no less dismayed at this development than was Paul, for after a very short stay in Corinth he was back again at Ephesus before Paul had completed his two-year sojourn there which was terminated by the riot in the city stadium (Acts 19.23-41). It would appear from 1 Cor. 16.12 that Paul wanted him to go back to Corinth but he refused, probably because he did not wish to encourage the spirit of partisanship that his ministry there had unwittingly created.

This is all that is known of Apollos' ministry. Paul went to Jerusalem and from there to Rome and his first trial. It was to be some eleven years before he was in the vicinity of Roman Asia again and he was then a prisoner en route to his final trial and execution; he never visited Ephesus again. Nothing is known of Apollos during that period. He may have stayed in Ephesus at least for the time and ministered with Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla. He may have journeyed among the communities Paul had established when he was free. His name only appears once more.

Paul was acquitted at Rome in the year 62. It is

not known where he travelled for the next five years or so. Following his visit to Nicopolis on the west coast of Greece, he was on his last pilgrimage among the churches when it was interrupted by his arrest at Troas and his dispatch to Rome and his death. Writing to Titus, one of his old companions and fellow ministers, now in Crete, he requested Titus to come to him at Nicopolis and to help Apollos and Zenas (the lawyer) on their travels. (Titus 3.13). Paul may have been planning further fields of service for these friends for Apollos was still in active service and ready for more. It is assumed that they reached Paul and set out on whatever new commission they were given. At that point Apollos passes out of sight. Nothing more is known of him. He served zealously and loyally in concert with Paul at Ephesus, Corinth and Crete at least for some thirteen years to A.D.68. Then, doubtless, for a further period until in his turn he was laid aside to await his 'crown of life'. Jerome in the third century, the early church historian, says that after Paul's death Apollos went back to Crete and finally returned to Corinth where he eventually became the leader and bishop or presiding elder of that Church.

Many scholars now agree that Apollos may have been the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. The ascription of that letter to Paul is known to have no valid authority. Whilst several others have been suggested as the writer, the nature of the Epistle, the manifest familiarity of the writer with the Mosaic ceremonies, and various other considerations, point to Apollos as the most likely choice. It is thought that it was addressed to the Jewish believers at Ephesus and written at some time after Paul's death. Some scholars believe that the Apocryphal work known as the 'Wisdom of Solomon' was also written by Apollos.

Zealous, active, studious, learned; an eloquent speaker and a fluent writer, this man may well have exercised a much greater influence among the early Christians than the brief allusions to him in the New Testament would suggest. He was more like Paul in many ways than any of the others whose names are familiar. He may well have been a veritable pillar of the Church. If indeed he is the unknown writer of 'Hebrews'; then Christians of all generations owe him, by God's grace, a debt immeasurable beyond words.

THE LORD'S GARDEN

*A pen picture from the
Song of Solomon*

The beauty and virtue of the glorified Church of Christ transcends anything we can visualize. Various pen pictures are drawn in the Word for instruction and encouragement, each with its distinctive way of revealing to us some aspect of the graces and qualities which must be developed by all those who would be united to the Lord. Among these pictures is one in the Song of Songs which is not only beautiful as viewed by the natural eye but also conveys to the mind something of the character, the development and the blessedness of those who belong to the Christ. This is the picture of the Lord's garden. Let us look at what is described in Song of Solomon 4.12-16.

As we approach, we see that it is surrounded by a high hedge, *"a garden enclosed, a fountain barred"*. It is not for every eye to behold, but reserved for those who can appreciate its beauty and respect its sanctity. As we enter, a wonderful blending of nature's colours meets our eyes. There is an *"orchard of pomegranates"* ablaze with their beautiful blood-red flowers. Among the trees there are bushes of camphire, small shrubs with pale green leaves like lilac, covered with sweet smelling white and yellow blossoms. Cinnamon too, in abundance; small trees like laurel, with broad ribbed leaves and white blossoms. The larger trees, similar to our mountain ash, are frankincense, with their long glossy leaves and green star-like flowers, tipped with red, giving forth a fragrant lemon aroma. The aloes and the thorny myrrh although not so colourful, supply the background of darker greens and one remembers their usefulness in the perfumes obtained from the bark and roots. Down by the spring, stately calamus reeds sway in the breeze and on the slopes there is grass-like spikenard. Peeping out from among the trees and shrubs there are myriads of yellow, crocus-like flowers, the saffron. To complete this pleasing picture, note the crystal springs bubbling along between gently sloping grass-covered banks and the dancing fountains sparkling in the sunshine.

Not only is this garden pleasant to the eye, but it radiates a wonderful, subtle perfume arising from the mingling of these aromatic plants and flowers. Someone aptly wrote: "A garden composed of plants diffusing such odours must have been like a bed of perfume; and every breath of heaven which

passed over it must have filled the surrounding atmosphere with a richness and sweetness unsurpassed in all the world".

What does this picture convey to the mind? The blood-red flowers of the pomegranates speak of the Ransom sacrifice, which makes salvation possible, and the golden fruits with their abundance of seeds and rich juice, from which in that land, a refreshing drink was made. These speak of the fruitful days of the Kingdom when the later fruit of that sacrifice will be brought forth. Calamus is the 'sweet cane' of Isaiah 43.24 and aptly pictures love, the motive that prompts the sacrifice of God's people. There can be other motives that are not acceptable, as we read in Jer. 6.20, *"To what purpose does frankincense come to me from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me"*. The inner bark of the cinnamon is used as spice and as a medicine, reminding one of the great joy which Jesus had, and which we as His Church can share by complete obedience to the Father's will. Such joy is indeed as the spice of life, and is the sure cure for many of life's ills.

Myrrh was distilled from the gum that exudes from the plant of that name, and was used as a perfume, and for embalming. In Psalm 45.8 it is said of our Lord *"your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia"*. This last ingredient of the anointing oil (myrrh) which so pervaded the atmosphere in which our Lord, the High Priest, moved, seems to represent that peace which comes from complete trust in our Heavenly Father.

O blessed peace of a perfect trust,
That looks away from all;
That sees thy hand in everything,
In great events and small;
That hears thy voice – a Father's voice –
Directing for the best –
O blessed peace of a perfect trust,
A heart with thee at rest.

Myrrh was also used to make a drink to deaden pain. So we find the painful experiences of life easier to bear, if, being willingly submissive, we maintain that peace of mind which can only come through perfect trust in a loving Father. Combined with aloes, myrrh was also used to preserve the bodies of the dead (John 19.39); the fragrant

centre-wood of the aloes was used to embalm the body of our Lord. What sweet memories of His loving words and actions remained with His disciples! Do myrrh and aloes preserve fragrant memories of other lives?

Camphire provided the women of the land with a delicate perfume. From the leaves they made a dye to ornament their fingernails. So with the ornament of 1 Peter 3.4, *"Your beauty should lie, not in outward adorning ... but in the inmost self with its imperishable quality of a gentle, quiet spirit, which is of high value in the sight of God"*.

From the aromatic root of the spikenard came perfume and ointment. The 'precious perfume' (not ointment) which filled the house with its aroma when Mary opened her alabaster jar and anointed the Lord, came from the spikenard, and this clearly pictures that deep love and devotion which all the Lord's followers should have for Him and His brethren. In Song of Solomon 1.12 the Bride says *"While the king reclines on his couch my spikenard gives forth its scent"*. So when we meet together, our love and devotion for each other should be as sweet perfume. A very costly perfume is obtained for the style and stigma of the saffron; costly because of its rarity. From it is also obtained colouring and flavouring for bread and drink. This can picture the Christian grace of gentleness of speech, so essential to a rounded Christian character. Paul exhorted the Colossians *"Let your language be always seasoned with salt of grace"*. If it is, men will have cause to say of us as they did of our Lord *"Never man spoke like He spoke"*. The wise man says (Proverbs 25.11) *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver"*.

Frankincense is a bitter aromatic resin, from the shrub of that name. It was used in the meat offering and in the offering of the first fruits. It was placed on top of the bread of the presence in the Tabernacle. It was not used with the sin-offering or the jealousy offering as they brought iniquity to remembrance. So frankincense seems to picture our appreciation and gratitude as we acknowledge God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and give to Him our all. It may also be associated with devout earnestness. Frankincense was an ingredient of the incense used in the Tabernacle ceremony, and may symbolize praise and heart adoration by the sacrificing priests. Both myrrh and frankincense although sweet perfumes are

bitter to the taste and only yield their full aroma when brought into contact with heat, as when the incense was crumbled over the fire in the censer of the Golden Altar in the Tabernacle. So we, as members of the Bride of Christ, can only yield the perfume of gratitude, praise and heart adoration, as we are obedient and submissive in the fiery experiences of life and bring forth the 'sweet savour' so pleasing to our Lord and Master.

Such a garden must have filled the surrounding atmosphere with a richness and sweetness unsurpassed. A Christian can and should manifest to an ever-increasing extent the graces which this garden pictures, so that the atmosphere in which we move may be permeated by the same sweet perfume which surrounded our Lord as He moved among men at His first advent. To do this, we need a plentiful supply of water of life. This brings in view the last part of the description of the garden (verse 15): *"a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon"*. These symbols combine to give the thought of a superabundance of water. The well of living water may well refer to the great storage cisterns which Solomon constructed at El Burak, which later supplied water for the service of the Temple in Jerusalem. So likewise, we have an inexhaustible store of living water, shut up in the eternal heavens. Of the 'streams of Lebanon' another has written: *"There is a deep rupture in the side of Lebanon; both sides steep and high, clothed with fragrant groves from top to bottom. Everywhere is refreshed with fountains falling down from the rocks in pleasant cascades, the streams all uniting at the bottom to form a rapid stream that murmurs pleasantly through the valley. What an apt picture of the wonderfully refreshing streams which combine to form the glorious river of truth which it is our privilege to enjoy."*

Following the bridegroom's description of his bride, she herself continues, *"Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits."* (v.16). The first part of this verse reminds us that adversity (north wind) as well as felicity (south wind) should cause us to yield the same precious perfume, but also that it produces an abundance of fruit which will satisfy our beloved Lord when He comes into His garden.

AS

SPIRITUAL MANHOOD

A study in 1 Cor. 13.11

Spiritual law is as fixed in its principles and operations as is physical law. If it were not so, the physical could not be used so frequently as it is for illustrations of spiritual things. Thus, for instance in spiritual life, as revealed in the Scriptures, we have duplicated those principles, so well known in physical law, of growth and development; first the blade, then the ear, and afterward the full corn in the ear; first the infant, then the boy, and afterward the full grown man. So we have the babe in Christ, then the growing child, the young man and finally the full stature of a man in Christ. (Heb. 5.13,14; 1 John 2.12-14). In both cases there is also a marked similarity in the process of development. As in nature both plant and animal life are sustained by appropriate nourishment, food, light, heat, air, etc. thus strengthening them to perform the various functions of their being, so the spiritual new man in Christ must have appropriate nourishment that he may continue to live and grow. There is a difference, however, to be observed between the physical and the spiritual life in the process of development and that is, the former matures quickly, while the latter is of slow growth, a plant to bloom in eternity.

As babes in the family of God we only grasp our adoption as sons when we have renounced the pomp and glory of this world and turned fully to God, claiming no righteousness of our own, but accepting the righteousness of Christ. No one is a babe in Christ who still cherishes sin in his heart, or fails to recognise his need of the covering of Christ's righteousness. We are first converted and turned from sin to God and righteousness. We learn Christ and put off the old man, and put on the new, which is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4.24). We are renewed in the spirit (disposition) of our minds and we become sons of God and babes in Christ. From that infant standpoint, which has in it, undeveloped, all the elements of the man, the duty and privilege of such is to grow, to develop in Christ. We are not to content ourselves with the lisping and prattling of infancy, nor with the milk diet suitable to that age, but making due use of these as stepping-stones, go on to perfection.

It was in view of such considerations that the Apostle penned the words of this text. He had passed from the early stages of Christian character

to higher degrees of development. Yet was not counting that he had attained perfection but that was the mark for which he was aiming. (Phil. 3.13,14). He had, however, passed beyond both infancy and boyhood to the stature of a young man in Christ. Looking back over the pathway of his Christian experience, he recognised these different stages, and recorded his thoughts, "*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*". (1 Cor. 13.11)

This was true both of his natural life and his spiritual life; the reference being specifically to the latter, of which the former was an illustration. By this he draws our attention to the fact that if we have been children of God for some time we should be able, on looking backward over our Christian experience, to trace a degree of advancement towards the mark of perfection. While as babes in Christ our hearts must always be loyal to God and true to righteousness, our very inexperience often causes us to stumble. Our knowledge of the right ways of the Lord is very imperfect and our powers of discernment are unskilled and so we have much to learn both of revelation and experience. The child in Christ has his own childish understanding, thoughts and ways, and his brethren in Christ should not expect from him the wisdom of the sage. Nor should he himself presume to have such wisdom; for only through knowledge and the discipline of experience does wisdom come; and then, only when we have allowed them to work in us the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

For our growth and development in the Christian character God supplies all that is needful in the way of nourishment, and it is our part to make use of all the help He sends. By study and meditation upon His Word of truth, by prayer and communion with God, we partake more and more of His Spirit, and are led into a closer acquaintance both with the Lord Himself, and also with His works and ways. By exercise of strength thus gained in active service of the Lord, we are prepared to receive more and more of the fullness of His grace, and so to go on from grace to grace, and from one degree of advancement to another.

Notwithstanding these principles of Christian growth and development, it is a sad fact that many

who can point with exactness to the day and hour when first they gave their hearts to the Lord, instead growing up as men in Christ they have gone back. This is so in spite of receiving the Holy Spirit, the seal of their adoption, and they have to say

"Where is the blessedness I knew; when first I sought the Lord?

Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His Word?"

It is a thing of the past with them, and its joys have fled. Why? It is because they have failed to appropriate the means of grace that God has supplied, and because, instead of striving against the downward tendencies, they have allowed those old dispositions, to rise up and re-assert themselves. In some cases a desire for something new and strange has led away from the truth into the forbidden paths of human speculation, philosophy and science, so called, until the mind became bewildered and confused in the labyrinths of error, the snares of the wicked One. In other cases the measure of truth possessed has been held in unrighteousness. The tongue has been permitted to wag in the service of sin and uncleanness, manifesting unkindness, lack of Christian courtesy and forbearance. These have led to evil surmising, self-exaltation, pride and boastfulness, and these unholy indulgences have not been striven against nor repented of and hence the spiritual decline.

It is for these causes that the blessed sense of fellowship and communion with God, experienced when first the Holy Spirit set the seal of adoption upon the heart, has been lost. God cannot dwell in a heart so unfit for His presence. No Christian can look back to the time of his first experience as a child of God and recall any such evil dispositions at that time. Had his heart been in such a condition then, God would not have accepted him and it is only as we strive against sin that we can continue to abide in His love and favour.

Who cannot look back to his first experience in the Christian life and remember how the love of

God filled his heart and overflowed, especially to them of the household of faith, a love that could bear well the beautiful description of 1 Cor. 13. 4-7 "*Love is patient and kind; is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" (RSV)

Realising such to be the will of God, this was the attitude of heart which the seeker after God sought to attain; and such an attitude he was enabled to realise when the Spirit of adoption sealed him as an accepted son of God. Yet God, who remembers that we are dust, that we are morally weak from the Fall, knew with what difficulty we must endeavour to maintain this condition of heart and mind when assailed by temptations, and worn with disappointments and trials of life. Nevertheless, He does look for the cultivation of these graces of character in us. He has a right to expect us to live godly lives and to wage a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. Therefore, notwithstanding these experiences, the mature growth of Christian character should find our first love deepened into a more steady, constant and enduring thing, not characterised, perhaps, with so much of the gush and flutter of youth, but rather with the mellow benedictions of a more nearly ripened character.

That the church in this sifting and proving time will be individually tested as to character, as well as to faith, is certain. The prospective heirs of the kingdom must, like their Lord, be tried and tested in every point; and it behoves everyone, therefore, to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, and diligently to cultivate such a character as will stand every test applied to it. But in the hour of testing let none mistake love of peace for love of righteousness. Let us see to it that the same mind dwells in us that is in Christ, our pattern. So shall we be children of God beloved and owned of Him.

BJD

Thomas Carthew, a missionary in East Africa, was amazingly powerful in his presentation of the Gospel. One day when he was teaching the Commandments to his congregation everything went calmly until they reached number eight. "Thou shalt not steal" thundered Carthew. "Thou shalt not steal," repeated the congregation. There was a pause. "Thou shalt not steal - coconuts," an-

nounced Carthew. This was an unexpected innovation and dead silence reigned. "Say it!" demanded the preacher. In hesitating tones came the response, "Thou shalt not steal coconuts". "Now say this: Thou shalt not steal - fowls," and so on through the whole list of petty pilfering, until the subdued congregation felt the power of the applied Word of God as never before.

THE HEAVENLY VISIONS *A brief survey of Revelation*

Mankind is living in difficult days. It is not so difficult for those who have a complete trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. By God's kindness we have been called to fellowship in Christ as God's sons, and He has revealed something of His purposes and how they work out. We know in part and it is still a walk by faith, perhaps increasingly a walk alone with the Lord. So the triumphant words come home to us "*Behold, I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of hell and death*" (Rev. 1.18). The word '**Behold**' occurs frequently in the Bible, marking out important things; 'fix your attention' 'stop and think' 'spend time in consideration'! Here it stands at the beginning of a book, which is declared to be the Revelation of Jesus Christ to show things, which must shortly come to pass. This is the Heavenly Father's message to all in Christ throughout this Age, including us. "*And he (Jesus) made it known by sending it to his servant John*". It had to be given in signs and symbols. How else could it have been given?

The title of the Book is one key. The Greek word is '*apokalupsis*' meaning 'to take off the covering; to unveil'. The book reveals Jesus in glory, Jesus in action, in grace and power and might, in judgment towards the Church and last as the victorious King of Kings. It reveals the Church in His care, the Church in the world, the Church judging the world. It reveals the forces arrayed in opposition to God and the outcome. There are visions intended not so much for the early generations of the church's history as for those undergoing the wilderness experiences of which the Book speaks; we are still in those experiences and in the closing period when the final crisis is imminent. Thus we recognise our Lord's special care for His church.

There are two main sets of visions; heavenly and earthly. The heavenly scenes are dwelt upon here as of special interest, in line with Paul's words in Ephesians 2. 4-6, "*But God ... made us sit with him in the heavenly places*". It should be possible at least in part to understand these heavenly visions given by the Father for the comfort and assurance of His people.

The first introduction (1.13-18) is to the Lord; one like unto the Son of Man. "*God has highly exalted him*" says Paul but John had known him personally as the Son of Man, remembering the

days when he walked and talked with Him. In the vision John saw His glory as the actively engaged High Priest, clothed in appropriate garments – a robe to the foot and a golden girdle. He was in God's service, moving in the midst of the seven lamp stands which are the seven churches, symbols of the entire Church of this Age. His hair, white as snow, portrays knowledge derived from experience. His eyes a flame of fire are wisdom in excellence. His voice as the sound of many waters is the Church called from all nations. In His right hand the seven stars are angel messengers speaking of complete control, power and protection. In His mouth is the sharp two-edged sword of absolute truth and perfect judgment. His countenance is as the sun in his strength, for nothing is hidden from Him. His feet are as burnished copper in their perfection speaking of activity in all these qualities. What a contrast this is to Isaiah 53, yet it is the same Jesus! All that glory came upon John with overwhelming force and he fell at His feet as one dead. But the Lord laid His hand upon John saying "*Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore*". He is now the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, not of the dying priesthood of Aaron, but in His glory He "*remains a priest forever*" (Heb. 7.3). John was appointed to record all that transpired, that each of the churches might be encouraged, strengthened and prepared to meet that little portion of these tremendous events that would affect them. What does this mean for those who live at this end of the Age? The revelation of Christ in glory is but a prelude to His revelation in grace. "*He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*".

Chapters 2 and 3 are not records of visions but messages from the Lord which in view of the declared object of the Book must be applied to the entire Age. Most likely they were very necessary admonitions to the local assemblies. The whole course of the church can be traced in its experiences as shown in history from the beginning to the present. The importance of such messages from the Lord demands the heeding of the principles embodied. They are of two kinds; first, judgments consequent upon failing to abide in Him, and second, qualities necessary in those who would overcome. The messages are seven in

number, addressed in the first instance to seven of the leading assemblies in Roman Asia, churches to whom John had ministered before his imprisonment on Patmos.

Ephesus is judged for backsliding and in danger of total loss; but there is an exhortation to love the Lord; a glowing, growing love. Such a love will be rewarded by everlasting life in a garden in which God walks.

Smyrna is under persecution and suffering in which only the faithful, rich in faith and love, can stand. To them is awarded the crown of life which cannot be annulled.

Pergamos has the doctrine of Balaam and is trying to serve God and Mammon. Here is danger from the desires of the flesh, seeking ease and release from spiritual control. But for the faithful, the promise of the hidden manna, and a white stone, a trysting stone which the Lord will honour if the possessor is faithful.

Thyatira has ceased to love or maintain attachment to the Lord. The faithless are under condemnation and in danger of trouble. But we have an advocate and there is need for watchfulness, for there is a promise of power over the nations in the day of Christ's reign.

Sardis is a name based on works esteemed by men, but in the Lord's sight they were dead. But some were still living close to the Lord and would yet be owned by Him their names recorded in the Book of Life.

Philadelphia were faithful to opportunities of service but no word of judgment; only the assurance of His presence and the Word of God as a Lamp for guidance.

Laodicea is a church without spiritual life, blind and naked, it is rejected as useless. There a call to follow the Lord who promises personal fellowship. He will not forsake but will fulfil His promise of partnership in His throne.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the heavenly scene and pictures God receiving worship from all in heaven as the Almighty, the supreme Lord of the Universe. This is followed by the vision of the sealed scroll containing the outworking of His plan and purpose. The emphasis is upon the character of the Lord: strong as a lion, humble as a lamb, a slain lamb, the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. John wept and until such could be found there was cause indeed to weep. But now the Lamb emerges

as the one having the right to open the sealed scroll and become executor of the Father's purpose. So is pictured the church, complete in heaven and every creature upon earth joining in a song of praise and adoration to the Heavenly Father who planned and the Lamb who gave His all for their salvation.

The breaking of the seals reveals the knowledge of our omniscient God respecting all that should occur before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Anointed. Particularly must be noted the plight of those described under the fifth seal, a time of oppression and suffering for the saints. Apparently forsaken, but not really so, they are given the assurance of acceptance. But the time of judgement was not yet; their number was not yet complete. So we are led onward to the vision of chapter 7 describing the sealing of the servants of God. Who is the angel from the east having the seal of the living God wherewith to effect this work? Who else could it be but our risen Lord? And who are the sealed? Surely Ephesians 1.13,14 is sufficient to answer that question. There Paul says *"In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory"*.

Chapter 8 presents a new vision. The seventh seal is opened and there is silence for a short time. Here, it seems, is the completion of the opening of the scroll of God's purpose in outline. Subsequent visions will reveal greater detail within this framework. Before these commence there stands here the High Priest offering incense *"with the prayers of the saints"*. This is one aspect of the ministry of our Lord throughout this Age. The place it occupies in the Book is strategic, in the midst of the past, present and future trials as they have affected and will affect His church. Verse 5 mentions certain effects that arise from the prayers that come into the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

The next vision of importance is that in chapter 10 in which the cloud and rainbow clad angel descends from heaven in glory as the Lord begins His great work of preparation for his Kingdom. John, representing the Church, received the little book which gave enlightenment concerning the then conditions of Antichrist's rule. This brought

persecution, upheavals, controversies, thunder and lightning and these latter picture those illuminating truths then coming to light. The time of judgment is to be no longer delayed. There is a flood of truth upon every subject that Satan can no longer suppress.

So to chapters 14 and 15 in which we have a preview from heaven of events yet to come concerning the winding-up of earth's affairs. It is a grand picture of the Lamb on Mount Zion in company with the Elect. Verse 13 shows that some members of this company are still upon the earth and are joined to Him as He calls. It is time to open the Books for this is the judgment of the Age. The Lord is faithful and he has all things under control. Evidence for this is in the visions of chapters 16 and 17 picturing final aspects of judgment directly inspired from heaven, under symbol of the pouring out of seven bowls of wrath. The bowls are of gold; the messengers wearing white linen, demonstrating their inherent purity and righteousness, fastened with golden sashes of Divine service. This speaks of the proclamation of truth upon every subject, often with devastating results. One judgment after another comes upon the evil systems of earth until finally the seventh bowl is poured out upon the air – Satan's seat, bringing about the utter ruin of his empire. Suddenly in the midst of all this comes the warning to Christ's own; "watch, keep your garments unspotted for He comes". He comes as a thief, silently, unobtrusively, as He prepares to establish His kingdom of righteousness. So to chapter 19 and the great proclamation, "It is done". Now the "Bride of the Lamb" has been united with her Lord in heaven. "Faith will vanish into sight; hope be emptied in delight, love in heaven will shine more bright". This is when the announcement is made "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb"

This is not the end. Now we see the Lord accompanied by His saints, and possibly other heavenly beings, advancing upon the earth to make war upon, and to stamp out, every evil thing. This is a spiritual war; it is the triumph of truth over error. Christ claims His authority as King of Kings and exercises that authority. His name is Faithful

and True, the Word of God. The sword in the vision, proceeding from His mouth, is the Sword of the Spirit, speaking and acting in righteous judgment. The visions of chapter 19 culminate in the final overthrow of all the systems of evil in the world and run on in the beginning of chapter 20 to show the victorious Lord using the key of the abyss to dethrone and imprison the devil, the erstwhile "prince of this world".

Thus the way is cleared for the last and brightest of the visions, the world's new government in operation, the outpouring of blessing upon whosoever will accept it, leading to reconciliation with God and a state of human perfection beyond the power of our imperfect minds to appreciate. In the richness of the symbols which adorn these last visions we have on the one hand the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, symbol of the world that is to be, the acme of perfection as is symbolised in its equidistant measurements. The city rests upon the foundation truly laid by the twelve apostles, the only possible enduring foundation the salvation provided by Christ. Only through Him is pardon, cleansing, renewal and restoration to human perfection. He, the King of kings and Lord of lords, requires absolute loyalty from every individual, and that loyalty will be tested. All this is shown in the visions of the Holy City. On the other hand, we have the Bride, presented in beauty, presented under figures of dazzling whiteness and purity as precious stones of varying values, but all treasured by the Bridegroom. "*They shall be mine said the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels*".

Thus in these vivid pictures, is the bright clear promise of the dawn during the darkest hour which comes just before. "I am the bright and morning star", says the Lord. It is the last of His titles to be given us in the Book of Revelation. He is the Sun of righteousness who will arise with healing in His wings as said Malachi the prophet. In that rising shall all families of the earth be blessed. Let us set our course by that Morning Star, girding up our loins with determination, knowing that our deliverance draws near, and that our Lord and Saviour is ever with us even to the end of the Age.

TWW

The inclination we all have to settle down and make things comfortable for ourselves has directed very much of Christian effort into a wrong

channel. The importance of things seen and temporal has overshadowed the unseen and eternal.

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

9. The Passover

Moses and Pharaoh had parted for the last time. Nine terrible disasters lay behind them. The Egyptian wanted to see the back of their Israelite slaves and heaped upon them a very great deal of wealth. For their part the people of Israel were ready to leave Egypt. It was a tremendous undertaking to move something like three million people with their animals and property across rough uninviting terrain to another land several hundred miles away. At that time they had no idea that they were going to travel more than twice that distance and take forty years to do it. Hopes would be high and expectations great. Only the more thoughtful Israelites would be aware of the dangers and difficulties.

How much the ordinary Egyptians realised what was about to happen to their land in terms of a social and military crisis, the Bible does not disclose. It would be bad enough when the full tragedy was revealed. The Israelites may have known more, as they bustled about, making preparations not only for the journey ahead but also for the immediate need of the Passover meal. It was April, known in Israel as Nisan. It was the seventh month in their social, civil calendar but from now on Nisan was to become the first month of each year for religious purposes.

The women would be baking bread without the customary bit of sour dough that normally cause their loaves to rise. These would be much harder than usual and would readily become dry. So their staple diet would not go mouldy during the coming weeks. It became known as the bread without leaven, hurriedly made by the women as their men folk packed and loaded the 'stuff' and rounded up the animals. As the day of the great 'move-out' approached they selected a top quality, year old lamb and took it into the household. The little Israelites undoubtedly made a great fuss of the young animal but the interest was short lived. The blood of the lamb was to be the protection of every first born child. Members of every home in the Israelite enclave had to splash the blood of that lamb on its doorposts and lintel. This was God's command so that His messenger would avoid bringing death that would occur among the Egyptians. The lamb was to be roasted and eaten

with herbs and dry bread. They were to eat the meal dressed ready for the journey. They must remain under the 'protected roof' through that night of the 14 of Nisan until daybreak. What thoughts went through the minds of those little 'first-borns' as they waited for dawn to break. The children would ask a lot of questions. Thus was born the ceremony of the Passover, an observance that made Israel unique among the nations and which has been kept faithfully through all their years of exile. It is a living testimony to those events so long ago. No other national ceremonial or memorial is as old as the Passover. For more than three thousand years it has been repeated annually in every part of the world where the descendants of Jacob live. Each time a lamb is killed and for several days they eat the dry bread. Each year a child would formally ask the meaning of the Passover meal and each year the story would be told of how God kept His people safe amid the destruction and death of the Egyptians.

Exodus 12 gives a full record of the Lord's instructions. It says much for Moses' skill as leader that this meal could be eaten in all its solemnity and yet so many people could be ready for the journey. Israel lived in Goshen separate from the Egyptians. The people of the land had suffered much. Now they were smitten by mourning of unimaginable proportions. Israel were not a crowd of disorganised slaves or even refugees. These people held their heads high for they were highly cultured and knew exactly what was expected of them. They moved into their great destiny as God's people with dignity and careful planning. The doubters and those who had materially profited from the Egyptian experience might have hampered them. But such would not be listened to at the stage of Exodus. The malcontents would raise their voices a little later when the going got rough. With them went many other people; some perhaps the result of mixed marriages "or else" (as Cole suggests) "semitic groups who took the opportunity to escape".

For the Egyptians too this would be a night to remember. How could a God of love be involved in such wholesale anguish and mental suffering? Several hundred thousand first-borns including

many innocent children would be involved. Could not their deaths have been avoided? It is not easy to give glib answers to such questions. Jesus knew the mental agony that the death of a loved one can bring. God is the giver of life and in His wisdom. He sees fit to take that gift away. It's not that God is morally bound to prolong life but that His great love, established in the Old Testament, and so magnificently demonstrated in the New Testament, must some day make amends for what may seem to some a cruel act of a despot. In fact the real despot was the king of Egypt. We can be reassured by Dr. Farrar's words, "man's destiny stops not at the grave, many who knew not Christ here will know him there. In some way or another, before the final judgment, God's mercy may reach them and the benefits of Christ's atonement be extended to them beyond the grave". It may be that it was necessary to demonstrate that all people on Earth are one of another, so that the evil of one man inevitably has its effect on many others. The death of the firstborn was the consequence of Pharaoh's hard heart. Had he created a gulf between himself and every right thought and action? Again in the words of Farrar, "It is impossible for us to estimate the hardening effect of obstinate persistence in evil, and the power of the human will to resist the law and reject the love of God".

Pharaoh gave in. Before morning dawned he had summoned Moses and Aaron for one last message saying "Up with you! Be off, and leave my people, you and the Israelites, go and worship the Lord, as you request; take your sheep and cattle, and go; and ask God's blessing on me also." The Egyptians urged on the people, and hurried them out of the country, 'or else' they said 'we shall all be dead.' The people picked up their

dough before it was leavened, wrapped their kneading troughs in their cloaks and slung them over their shoulders". A picture of great haste. The meal of the previous night was to be completely eaten or consumed by fire. As good environmentalists they left no mess. That meal was to stand them in good stead for the first long trek. The Egyptians helped them on their way. What did they do for the people of Israel? Give them wagons and animals to carry their burdens, their infirm and their little ones. At least they did not delay them. Did many Egyptians go too? Aliens seem to be among them according to Ex. 12.48. The Lord is a perfect organiser and Israel discovered that all goes well if He is obeyed. Did they look anything like the pictures seen on television a few years ago when two million people walked from one African country to another? By God's grace, the people of Israel have always been ingenious when it comes to mass movement. They overcome obstacles and remain a distinct people. On this occasion their means of communication must have been interesting. Was it by horseback or by beacon? In any event it would take some time to fully mobilise the people at Succoth and get them moving across the border. For the hard, bitter Egyptian monarch this was a moment of desperate failure and ruin. For Moses, one of the greatest men to cross the world's stage, this was the moment of triumph for which he had been looking. The God He served was God who could be trusted. This was God who kept His promise and could lead His people to their assured home in Canaan. At that moment that is how Moses and the people that followed him must have felt. Moses got up, and was gone and with him God's eternally chosen people.

Someone has remarked that as the sharpening of scythes in harvest time does not mean lost time and energy, so also time spent in prayer is not lost as respects the affairs of life. Unquestionably the best men and women in the world are those who pray, and pray regularly; who bow the knee as did Daniel. Unquestionably the moments thus taken from earthly affairs are well spent and bring more than commensurate blessings upon the worshipper and all with which he has to do. Unquestionably it is impossible to live a consecrated life in neglect of prayer. What would Daniel have been without his

praying time? How would his faith in God have persisted in that heathen land? How would his loyalty to principle have maintained itself in the midst of corruption had it not been for his communion with his maker? To the Christian this privilege is still further enhanced by a realisation that "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," in whose all-prevailing name we may approach with courage the throne of heavenly grace, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need (Heb. 4.165)

CTW from BSM 1939

"THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH"

*Prophet of
three mountains*

1. Zarephath and Cherith

"And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah." (Luke 1.17 NIV)

These were the words of the angel, Gabriel, to Zechariah when John the Baptist's birth was announced in the Temple. What would they convey to the old priest about this coming son? What indeed would they mean to those people in Israel who were looking for the "*redemption of Jerusalem*"? There was something about that great man of the desert that captured the imagination of the faithful in Israel. The last of the Old Testament prophets had said that before the great and terrible Day of the Lord could come, Elijah would be sent to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children (Malachi 4.5); another puzzling statement. When the three apostles saw the vision on the Mountain of Transfiguration they identified one of the two with Jesus as Elijah. How did they recognize him? Why should Elijah be one of those to appear and not one of the other prophets? The disciples asked Jesus about Elijah coming as they descended the mountain (Matt. 17.10-13) and He applied the figure of Elijah to John. Elijah's life had parallels with that of Moses and he stands out as stemming the tide of religious corruption that came with the worship of the Baal. He called Israel to repentance.

Perhaps one of the reasons why John the Baptist was so popular with the ordinary folk who came to him for baptism was that he reminded them of Elijah. Both prophets wore a cloak of camel hair tied with a belt. This woven material was impervious to the fine dust of the desert where they both lived away from the madding crowds of the cities. Their food was simple and their way of life close to their Creator. In John the Jews hoped for the kind of judgment upon evil and Israel's enemies which Elijah had delivered. John appeared suddenly like Elijah had done and stood against the powerful monarch of his day. Yet Elijah was described by James as "*a man just like us*" (James 5.17) who in spite of human weakness and failure, has so much to teach us about spiritual power.

Elijah appears on Israel's scene in the reign of King Ahab in the 9th century BC. He was a man from the country, Gilead beyond Jordan and probably didn't take kindly to the luxuries and

perversities of city life in general and the royal court in particular. We don't know anything about his background, his parentage and home life, but he was certainly going to have an interestingly frugal life for the future. He announced to the King that he had prayed to God that the heavens should be shut up and that there would be no rain until he should give the word. God then directed him to a hiding place by the small river Cherith which ran into the east side of Jordan. There he would have enough to drink until the brook ran dry and he would be fed by some black friends – ravens, birds that normally feed on carrion. Elijah obeyed at once and was soon tucked away in a ravine, from those who might seek his life. Making bold statements about there being no rain was not popular in a land so dependent on natural watering where most people lived on the bread line. What had brought about such a situation?

Israel was ruled by a king who, at times, seems to have been under the thumb of his wicked wife. Jezebel was a Sidonian princess, daughter of a King Ethbaal and the marriage agreement, brokered by Omri, was part of his defence against Syria. The word of the royal priest-kings of Melquart was law. Their moral code was corrupt and not like Israel's rulers who were subject to God's Law. When Jezebel became Ahab's wife, she expected the same rights and privileges that she had enjoyed in Sidon. When she moved into Israel she brought with her a supporting cast of many priests and prophets of Baal. She also brought a whole range of pagan ideas that had readily infected the people of Israel so that spiritual and moral standards deteriorated. Violence was rife and conduct between men and women no longer had the sanctity which was expected in Israel. This sin centred in the heathen temples themselves. Their land rights in which Israelites were stewards, were neglected as the rich and royalty became more powerful. Worse than all else was that the worship of the true God had given place to the corrupting worship of the Baal. Israel needed a shock to bring it to its senses.

Rain, like all other material blessings, is a gift from God. God has a right to withhold his gifts if, in the long run such withholding is for the lasting

benefit of those who are so disciplined. God was about to withhold the gift of rain because there was no better way of demonstrating to the people of Israel that what they were doing would result in the complete destruction of their nation. Moses had warned Israel of the consequences of worshipping other gods and Elijah believed the word of the old lawgiver. So he prayed that most terrible of prayers and the natural rains would only be restored at the intercession of Elijah. Until then Elijah withdrew from society.

For three and a half years the prophet enjoyed a time of spiritual strengthening for he spent the time alone with God. It was a time when he could discover the truths of Psalm 62. *"For God alone I wait silently; my deliverance comes from him. He only is my rock of deliverance, my strong tower, so that I stand unshaken ... Put no trust in extortion, no false confidence in robbery; though wealth increases do not set your heart on it. One thing God has spoken, two things I have learnt: 'Power belongs to God' and 'unfailing love is yours, Lord'"* (vv.1, 2, 10-12 REB). This Psalm contrasts faith in the living God with the dead philosophies of pagan religion. As those 1260 days passed so Elijah would watch the brook slowly dry up. It is an experience that many Christians share with the prophet. As they trust in the Lord they find material things of this world slipping away from them. It is then that they really discover what God can do, and how they grow spiritually when the diversions of this life vanish. The world and its gods are really powerless and know nothing of the living God of Elijah.

It was time to move. The black angels that had brought him meat were no longer coming. The source of water had dried up and the God of Israel had already prepared a place for His servant to lodge. Elijah went to Zarephath. Of all the places to go we might well have said that this would be the last. Zarephath was on the coast, so close to Sidon, the very place from which Elijah's adversary Jezebel had originated. Had it been Simon the pharisee who prayed, (Luke 7.36-50) he might have said 'No Lord, not help from a woman, and certainly not a woman of Sidon, and ... this one has a child'. As Elijah walked through the foreign village he saw a widow collecting sticks. Like all poor folk in the area, she found times were hard during the famine. She wanted to make one more

little meal and cook her last cake which she and the lad could enjoy and then die of hunger. Elijah asked if he could share the meal and naturally the woman was hesitant. She gave hospitality to her visitor and that was her salvation. From then on the widow never found her barrel of meal and her jar of oil was empty. Day in and day out there was enough for her son, and herself and Elijah. It was a lesson that she would not forget. The man of God brought new life to her home at a time when many would be surrounded by death. She had to be grateful for the day Elijah walked into her life. Elijah made it clear who was the giver of these gifts.

One day the little lad who had survived the famine because his mother had shown hospitality to the prophet of God, suddenly died. The mother was beside herself and readily blamed the first person who came to mind. The man of God was immediately blamed but not because he had done wrong but because the woman feared that she had herself sinned. She feared that she was being judged for some past wrong doing. It doesn't appear to have occurred to her that God who had cared for them up till now was also able to come to her aid. Elijah took the lifeless form of the boy to the room where he slept. Was this the first example of the 'kiss of life'? Quietly the prophet wrestled in prayer with God; then laid his face against the boy's face. The young life returned as he began to breathe again. Elijah gave the boy back to his mother. It is a very moving story and demonstrates the attitude of this tough man of God.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing about this story of Elijah at Zarephath is the reference made to her in Jesus' remarks to the people of Nazareth when he read the lesson one Sabbath. There were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah but God sent the prophet to a Gentile in the land of Sidon. It was a lesson that would help to change people's attitudes and make them ready for the Kingdom of God. Occasionally the Old Testament is criticized for encouraging racial discrimination because the people of Israel were told to separate themselves from other peoples and nations. They were forbidden to follow their ways and to avoid mixed marriages. The experiences of Elijah and the message he had for Israel show clearly the truth of the Scriptures. Israel must avoid the wrong practices and beliefs of neighbouring nations. When a person of another land had within them the

spirit of belief in the Lord and trust in His promises, they enjoyed more privileges than unbelieving members of the favoured people of Israel. What a wonderful parting word did the widow utter when she said "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth". No wonder Jesus found her such an example of belief. He too helped a woman of Sidon. We need to see the principles of truth as they really exist; principles of life and reality not vague interpretations.

The days of the famine were coming to an end. Elijah bade farewell to the woman and her son who had looked after him for perhaps two years. He headed south-east towards Samaria and as he went he met an old friend. Obadiah was a servant of the King. He had looked everywhere for Elijah. The King desperately wanted to see Elijah. Food was probably running short in the palace after three

years of drought. Ahab was afraid for the welfare of his horses for whom he could find no pasture. We might have asked what Obadiah was doing in the service of this unregenerate King of Israel. Elijah doesn't seem to have done so. Eventually he did reappear in the palace at Samaria and was immediately confronted by Ahab. What a greeting Elijah was given 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel my enemy' but Elijah turned the accusation back at the king and said that it was he and his father's house that had troubled Israel. It was Ahab's behaviour that had caused the drought. He challenged the king to test whether Yahweh was the true God or the Baal. The challenge was accepted and Elijah prepared himself for the contest.

(To be continued)

DN

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

1. Chapter 1 verses 1-38

*Notes to
aid personal
Bible Study*

Author: Luke, native of Antioch wrote c.AD63; a literary classic in Greek but included Hebrew/Aramaic documents. Luke, a physician (Col. 4.14) used medical terms not used by other NT writers. A companion of Paul he travelled much perhaps researching while Paul was held in Caesarea. Characteristically Luke writes about women, children, non-Jews and 'sinners'. He includes praise and prayer. He gives birth and childhood stories and a genealogy all from Mary (an eye witness). Luke provides accurate historical background. He shows that salvation is for all and that "there are no limits to God's love" (1). Acts is Luke's sequel to the third gospel.

Challenge: How can we emulate so gifted and humble a Christian as Luke?

Is our praise in the Gospel? (2 Cor. 8.8) Is our message accurate and impartial?

1.1-5 Luke's introduction to the Gospel

Luke is writing about real facts *pragma* (2) Theophilus is unknown but Luke gives him a title so was he important? Why was the Gospel written? Who were the eyewitnesses? What is its value to us now? Why was it necessary to write an 'orderly account'? *Kathexes* mean logical or artistic order not necessarily chronological (2).

1.5-25 Zechariah's encounter with an angel

It is "the threshold of the supremely important

period in the history of mankind" (3)

What do we know of Herod the Great? Did he die in BC4? Since the time of David there had been 24 orders of priest to serve in the Temple at Jerusalem. There were thousands of priests so an individual priest might serve once in a life-time. The people waited to be blessed during the time of 'the burning of the incense'.

What was Zechariah praying for? A child? The consolation of Israel?

Heaven had been silent for 400 years – how would we feel about seeing an angel?

Note Malachi 3.1; 4.4 Luke 2.25. 'Fear not' 'Don't be afraid'; words frequently said by God's messengers in response to human fear. Does this record remind us of any other promised child's birth? The angel's message is poetical as well as prophetic. Is it correct to say that John was not a priest or Nazarite but was linked to both? (4). From birth he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Note Mal. 4.5,6, but what did these quotations mean to Zechariah? The parallels with Elijah are fascinating. Several commentators suggest that 'Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children' refers to 'godly fathers' (or patriarchs) who had become estranged from ungodly children (descendants) but now would be reconciled (5) How do modern translations interpret the Malachi

quotation? Did Zechariah do anything wrong? How was he different from Abraham? (Gen. 15.8) Was dumbness a 'punishment'? How would we feel? Childlessness was looked upon as a tragedy in Israel. Elizabeth may have suffered much. The next six months was a very quiet time for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

1.26-38 Gabriel's visit to Mary "Amazing... mysterious... glorious" (6)

What was 'the sixth month' (v26). Nazareth was in Galilee, west of the lake and 70-80 miles north of Jerusalem. Mary and Zechariah each made a response to the angel. How do they compare? vv.18.34. Mary always gives the impression of being very thoughtful and the angel's greeting caused her puzzlement rather than unbelief. She may have wondered why she should be honoured or 'highly favoured'. Do we find the idea of conception by a virgin difficult? (Isa. 7.14) The name 'Jesus' meant 'The Lord is salvation'.. It was not uncommon in Israel. It was really more like 'Yeshua' and so similar to 'Joshua'. Mary and Joseph each had a meeting with Gabriel. How did they compare? (Matt. 1.18-25). Their betrothal was more binding than modern engagement. Mary received the highest favour that any human could have, yet she was in mortal danger from those who would exact the Law's penalty on any who gave birth outside wedlock. How would she feel? She also had a tremendous responsibility? What qualities did she need?

Gabriel's message recalls God's covenant with

David and prophecies about Messiah (2 Sam. 7.14; Ps.2.7; Ps. 89.27.28). Mary's son was "truly God's son whose birth would be brought about by God's Spirit. ..reminiscent of the glory of God coming to rest on the tabernacle" (7); v 32 also makes it clear that he was 'son of David', reaffirmed by Paul (Rom. 1.3). *Basileia* genuinely means 'sovereignty' so the Kingdom of God is the sphere of God's rule (8). Commentators (9) interpret "rule over the house of Jacob" as God's spiritual kingdom and leave the literal house of Jacob out. How far should we take this 'spiritualizing' to be the meaning of Scripture? When is it valid? Was there nothing 'literal' about the angel's message? Messiah comes to Israel. Poetic language, of which Israel has the finest, should not be confused with 'spiritual interpretation' Like John, Jesus was called 'great'; how is this different from the human idea of greatness?

Mary's faith was equal to the tremendous announcement. Why did she visit Elizabeth? Mary's faith made her submissive and obedient. 'Handmaid' (*doule*) means slave-girl (10) and she obeyed her Master at whatever cost. Does Mary's submission and obedience challenge us?

DN

(1) Barclay 'The Gospel of Luke' in the Daily Bible Study series. (St. Andrew Press)

(2) (3) (6) (9) Geldenhuys Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Marshall Morgan & Scott)

(4) (10) Morris 'The Gospel according to St. Luke' (IVP)

(5) Lowe 'Malaachi' in Ellicott's Bible Commentary (Marshall)

(7) Marshall New Bible Commentary (IVP 1994)

(8) Vine An Expository Dictionary of NT words.

A vision of the future arises. I see a world where thrones have crumbled ... the aristocracy of idleness has perished from the earth. I see a world without a slave and man at last free. Nature's forces have by science been enslaved. Lightning and light, wind and waves, frost and flame, and all the subtle powers of earth and air are the tireless toilers for the human race.

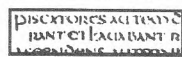
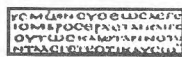
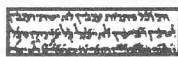
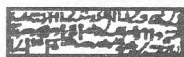
I see a world at peace, adorned with every form of art, with music's myriad voices thrilled; where lips are rich with words of love and truth; a world in which no exile sighs, no prisoner mourns, a world on which the gibbet's shadow does not fall; a world where labour reaps its full reward, where work and worth go hand in hand.

I see a world without the beggar's outstretched palm, the miser's heartless stony stare, the piteous wail of want, the livid lips of lies, the cruel eyes of scorn.

I see a race without disease of flesh or brain, shapely and fair, perfect harmony of form and function, and as I look, life lengthens, joy deepens, love canopies the earth; and over all, in the great dome of Heaven shines the eternal star of faith.

These lines penned by one of Christianity's bitterest opponents reveal a conviction that truth and righteousness must prevail.

Robert Ingersoll (1833-99) taken from BSM 1939



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

huph hinc. midan ena
top. Tobirageni be com

Blessed are ye when men curse
persecute you / and shall rejoice
at of your joy for ye against you

All believe that be exalte
mountayen and byll layde
so is croked that be made be

ys seed of Abraham his servan
Jacob his chosen.
the Lo R s our God: his jn

4 And God shall wipe away all
tears from their eyes; and there
shall be no more death, neither
mourning, nor crying, neither shall
there be any more pain: for the
former things are passed away.

Vol. 78, No. 4

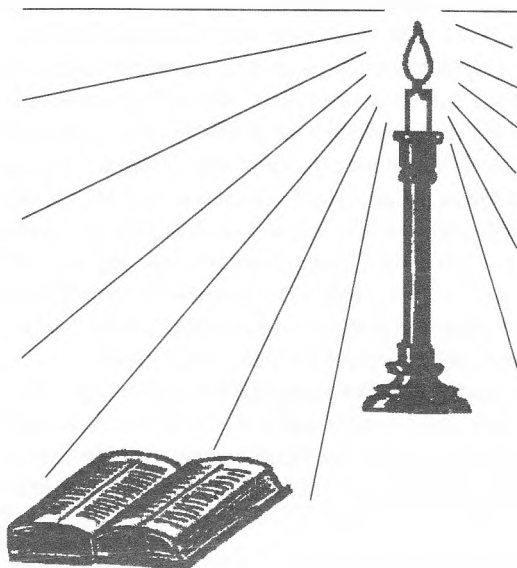
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH – Prejudice

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. ‘Come and see,’ said Philip.” (John 1.46 NIV)

Prejudice is pre-judgment. It is forming an opinion without examining the facts; it is hastily accepting a conclusion without investigating the evidence upon which it rests, it is allowing ourselves to be hood-winked and deceived, when the slightest reflection would keep us from such mistakes. It is being satisfied with hearsay, when we should demand the proof; it is rejecting everything at first sight that does not confirm our former convictions or suit our former tastes or agree with our preconceived ideas. It is a revolt against the unpalatable and distasteful; it is a deep-seated reluctance to part with that to which we have been accustomed – a persistent hesitation to accept as true what we have not hitherto believed. It is unwilling to admit that we can do wrong and others right. It favours or condemns upon the slightest pretext; it recoils or embraces as it is moved by caprice. (Selected – BSM 1980)

That quotation from twenty-one years ago may seem a little harsh and negative, but those who are ‘non-conformist’ in the broad sense of the word know how prejudiced the world can be, and that

not only in matters of religious faith. The scientific and medical establishments have been, and can still be, very prejudiced against the ‘alternatives’. But prejudice is not all on one side in these kind of arguments. Politics appears to be run on the basis of prejudice – conscience and ‘free-vote’ are rare. Even in the sphere of art and music it is sometimes difficult to accept what is ‘new’. Our humanity is frail particularly that which resides within our skulls. It is easier sometimes to be ruled by our emotions rather than our intellects. More important to the child of God is the need to be ruled by the Holy Spirit. Where there are differences of opinion, one side very rarely, if ever, has a monopoly of the Spirit. Prejudice about ideas and interpretations can be alarming. Pre-judging a brother or sister in Christ can be disobedient or even disastrous.

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer. – J.M.Scriven

“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” (Acts 10.47 NIV)

NOTICE

Gainsborough House is a Christian retirement centre in the small town of Milborne Port on the border of Somerset and Dorset. The main house is a Victorian villa that has a dining room, two lounges and a meeting room. There is a guestroom in the house and vacant flats may also be used by temporary residents. Permanent residents each have their own self-contained flats. They receive a mid-day hot meal cooked by our residential housekeeper, Mrs Corrinne Vaughan. Fees include council tax, water rate, light and fuel, contents

insurance and TV licence. Residents can enjoy formal and informal worship and fellowship. Corrinne is a dedicated and very caring person in complete charge of the centre. The local countryside is beautiful, the seaside is reachable in an hour or so, and the local towns provide very good shopping centres. Enquiries may be made direct to The Housekeeper, Gainsborough House, 48 Gainsborough, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 5BB or to Bible Fellowship Union central address.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

It was near the beginning of the great age of Hebrew prophecy that 'light' became generally symbolic of knowledge and understanding. Much earlier than that, Moses, in his last discourses to Israel recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, made allusions to blindness and darkness. In the Psalms there is a rich profusion of praises such as "*The Lord is my light and my salvation*". The same theme recurs in the colourful language of Isaiah who saw so clearly the conflict between good and evil and contrasted it in the analogy of light and darkness. He readily understood the condition of his own people Israel and how blind they were to the goodness and truth of Almighty God. He realised how depraved they had become and that they stood in need of the light of God's Word to reveal their sin. Isaiah was given wonderful visions of a brighter day when Israel's eyes would be opened to the splendour of their God; when they would live in the light of His perfect law. More than this, the prophet visualized the great missionary work which Israel as a nation would do, in taking the Word of God to the Gentile nations. Upon them the light of truth had never dawned; to them the revelation of God had been limited to a hazy knowledge of the material creation around them. For long centuries they had stumbled along, one here and one there yearning for enlightenment and searching for truth. It is equally clear from the records of Israel's prophets that the 'chosen people' were for the most part as blind as their heathen neighbours. They did not realise that traditions and customs of long past ages were inadequate to solve the problems of their own day. They failed to appreciate the increasing light reflected in the message of their lonely seers.

Isaiah saw the broader vision of the Messiah's work in that He would reveal God to all peoples. This is shown in chapters 42 and 49 when the prophet wrote those memorable words "*I will give you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*" Israel never attempted in any degree to fulfil that prophecy. After the return of the exiles from Babylon and Persia there came the development of Judaism, and the associated hatred of all foreigners. So intense was this hatred in the days of the early Church that when Paul was addressing his fellow countrymen

in Jerusalem (Acts 22. 21) the mere mention of the word 'nations' kindled an uproar among the crowd. He had declared that the Lord had sent him to preach to the Gentiles and they sought Paul's immediate death. They were spiritually blind to the purpose of God and therefore knew nothing of His great love for all mankind.

When Jesus was taken as a baby into the Temple to be presented to God according to the Law, the old prophet Simeon took the child in his arms. He then quoted from Isaiah "*For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples: a light for revelation to Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2.31,32). Simeon had been like a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem, waiting for the first gleams of the 'Sun of righteousness'. Now he had seen and proclaimed and his task was done. He was happy to depart and wait for the glorious shining forth of the Messiah in His kingdom when darkness will be dispelled for ever.

Quite early in His ministry, Jesus preached in His home town of Nazareth. He read from the prophet Isaiah, "*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*" (Luke 4.18,19; Isa. 61.1,2). As Jesus sat down He informed his audience that the prophecy He had just read was now being fulfilled. Then He went on to remind them that when the prophet Elijah needed lodging, he did not find refuge in Israel but went to a widow in Sidon. Similarly, Elisha could have healed many that had leprosy in Israel, but instead, he healed Naaman from Syria. With but a few words Jesus swept away the racial and social barriers of His day and showed that God was interested in men and women of all nations. This was manifest in Jesus' attitude to the various people that He met during His public ministry. His interview with the woman at the well, near Sychar in Samaria, is a very remarkable example of this fact. He, a prophet of the select Jewish race; and the woman, a foreigner with a bad reputation, was sufficient to keep them on opposing sides of the road. Yet He talked with her and she became an evangelist on

His behalf, taking the 'Good News' to her own people (John 4.39). Jesus readily agreed to heal the centurion's servant and commended the Roman officer for his great faith, the quality of which, he said, he had not found among the people of Israel (Luke 7.9). Towards the end of his life, Jesus went to the borders of Phoenicia. While there, a Gentile woman pleaded with the Lord to heal her daughter. Jesus' answer implied that His healing power was reserved for His own people. Yet it is clear from His final words to the woman that He was really interested in the demonstration of her faith. His compassion was the response to that faith, irrespective of race and colour. Incidents like these laid the foundation of the missionary work following Pentecost by the early Church. It is not true that Christ's message was originally confined to Israel, and that the broader evangel was an after thought conceived by the Apostle Paul. The directive for the witness of the early Church is to be found in the Gospels by our Lord himself, and confirmed by Him just before His ascension (Acts. 1.8). When preaching His last sermon about the 'end of the age' Jesus made it clear that "*This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations*" (Matt. 24.14). This statement was enlarged upon in post-resurrection talks to the disciples, recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, each account emphasizing the instructions that the first disciples were to go to preach and teach all nations, making new disciples and witnessing to everyone. They had no doubt about this for He had set the example, and if they were to follow in His steps they must likewise spare no effort to broadcast the message of salvation.

On several recorded occasions Jesus described Himself or was described as "*the light of the world*". John, very early in his gospel writes (John 1.4) "*In him was life and the life was the light of men,*" and a little later "*That was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world*". Towards the end of His ministry Jesus said publicly "*I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life*" (John 8.12). Again "*I have come as light into the world, that whosoever believes in me may not remain in darkness*" (John 12.46). Such words angered the pharisees and religious leaders of the Jews, for they looked upon

themselves as the only source of enlightenment concerning the Word of God. Yet their teachings offered no solutions to the problems that worried ordinary people. The teachers and lawyers were more interested in disputes about words and abstract ideas that were only remotely connected with a true understanding of God and His purpose. Consequently authoritative statements of Jesus and the stories that He used to illustrate His point, came as a great flood of light on the experiences and difficulties which men and women encountered in their daily routine.

Through the ages God had sent prophets who were each permitted to reveal a little more of the purpose of God. They lit lamps that burned through the centuries, lighting the path of men and women. They were beacons guiding men to the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4.6) His light uncovered the hidden mysteries of men's own sinful hearts. His light revealed the love in the heart of the Creator. His light shone down the ages, pointing men to a day when the glory of God would cover the earth as waters cover the sea. He used language that ordinary people understood. His message was simple and clear, impressed upon their minds by pictures from Nature with which they were familiar. His sermons were full of life and movement, yet His manner was gentle and peaceable. This was not the oratory of Cicero, nor the philosophy of Aristotle, for Jesus never had the formal education of the learned scholars of His day. Yet the power of His Word was such that it turned the tide of evil in the first century AD. But for the spread of the Gospel the condition of that society might have brought a calamity that would have destroyed the human race as it had done in the days of Noah. More than that, the sayings of Jesus were the source of inspiration to the apostles and early Fathers, and from Him sprang all that is noblest and greatest in this world.

Just as Jesus was the reflection of His Father, so His disciples have reflected Him. They too have become "*the light of the world*" being shed forth as He said, first in Judaea and Samaria, then to Syria, Asia Minor and Rome. The light beamed forth eastward to the ancient civilizations of India and China, northwards to Russia, southwards to Africa, westwards to Europe and America. As Paul proceeded in the earliest of these movements from Jerusalem, he stood one day in a synagogue in

Antioch in Pisidia and quoted the words of Isaiah which the aged Simeon had said when Jesus was a baby in the Temple. *"For so the Lord has commanded us saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of earth'"* (Acts 13.47).

In his second letter to the Corinthians (chap. 3) Paul tells his Gentile readers of the story of Moses when he went up the mountain to meet the Lord. Not only was there a wonderful revelation of the law and purpose of God to the great leader of Israel, but his actual physical face caught some of the effulgence of light which came from the Divine presence. His face so shone that the people of Israel could not bear to look upon him. The Apostle uses the story as an illustration of how the glory of God is reflected from the true believer. He concludes with these words, as translated by Phillips *"We are transfigured in ever-increasing splendour into his own image, and the transformation comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."*

The Christians at Ephesus, prior to their conversion, had lived in depravity such as is only known in heathen lands. In chapter 5 of his letter to them Paul reminds these believers of their earlier lives and went on *"Live then as children of the light. The light produces in men quite the opposite of sins like these; everything that is wholesome and good and true. Let your lives be living proofs of the things which please God. Steer clear of the activities of darkness: let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are... It is even possible (after all, it happened to you!) for the light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also."* (Ephesians 5.8-13 Phillips)

Those who have really caught the vision of the crucified Saviour, and who live daily in the presence of God, cannot help being radiant Christians. Many unbelievers will be like the Israelites of old who could not endure the brightness of Moses' face. They will make any excuse to turn away from the light of the knowledge of Jesus because, as Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4.4 *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"*. The conflict between light and darkness has continued through every age. Some like Paul on the Damascus road, have seen the light and been temporarily blinded. The purity and power of that

light has convicted them of their sin and they have been led to ask the question *"what shall I do Lord?"* Acts 22.10. In turn, those so converted have gone forth to spread the light until it has found its way into every part of the earth.

The gospel of Jesus has stopped at no human barriers and has been the means of bringing together true believers of every social and racial group. Rich and poor, old and young, irrespective of colour, class and natural roots, have been bound together as Christian brethren in one family showing up the darkness that is in the world. But the Church has often withdrawn into the shadows and the light of truth has been interrupted. To off-set this there have been those radiant souls, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who have spread the light wherever they have gone. By their self-denial and courageous testimony they have dispelled the darkness of sin and given new life and hope to those who were blinded by Satan. Much darkness yet remains in the world as selfishness and strife bear witness every day. No one tries any longer to hide the awful fact that men cannot live alongside each other in peace and contentment. Compassion and humility are disdained today as they were in every generation before. These conditions which prevail now are not a signal for gloom and despondency among the Lord's people. The prevalence of sin and darkness is an indication that the first rays of sunshine cannot be long delayed over the hilltop. This is but the intense darkness before the dawning of a bright and happy day, when men and women will be awakened from their long sleep in the darkness of the ground and come forth to the call of the Saviour of the world. Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah *"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."* (Isa 60.1-3 RSV). There is a reference back to this prophecy of Isaiah by John in the Revelation when in chapter 21.23-24 he writes *"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it"*. These words have yet to be fulfilled. God's ancient people Israel

have never enjoyed the full light of the glory of God. The remainder of the nations of the earth have remained, for the most part in darkness since the days of the Flood. However, God has provided the means whereby all peoples of every tongue shall have a full and fair opportunity to rejoice in the light of His Word. In that day there will never

again be those things that are done in secret, matters of shame in darkness. When the 'Sun of righteousness' shall reign over the earth light and joy shall flood every heart and everybody that is broken shall be made whole. All men everywhere shall gladly give allegiance to the King of love and light.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR THE GREAT KING

It has been said that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon in the 6th century BC is the most well known king of antiquity, and this not so much because of what secular history can say about him, but the vivid narratives of the Book of Daniel. It is true though that a great deal is known about him apart from what Daniel and Jeremiah have recorded, and some knowledge of this does help to fill out the picture, which is already familiar to students of these two Biblical books.

The connection of Bible history with this monarch arises from the fact that in the closing years of the kingdom of Judah, the last four kings 'played power politics'. They took sides in the continuing conflicts between Egypt on the one hand and the declining power of Assyria plus the rising power of Babylon on the other. They usually chose Egypt as their ally and protector, and in so doing made a grievous mistake, as Isaiah had predicted more than a century earlier and Jeremiah constantly told them at the time. The climax came when Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon supreme over all the Middle Eastern nations and brought the political manoeuvres of Judah to an end by overrunning the country. He transported its inhabitants into exile in Babylon, an exile which was only ended when Cyrus the Persian in his turn subjugated Babylon and became the new ruler but that was long after Nebuchadnezzar's death.

Jeremiah relates the history of those troublous times in detail from the standpoint of a dweller in Judah. Daniel gives the corresponding picture of life at the same time in Babylon, where he had been taken with the exiles and where he spent the rest of his life. To Daniel we are indebted for what we know of the character and actions of this famous king. There was Nebuchadnezzar's dream image, a picture in symbol of successive earthly empires ultimately succeeded by the kingdom of God on earth. There were the three men in the fiery

furnace. Finally, his unaccountable period of insanity when he fancied himself to be a wild beast, and his recovery and conviction of the power and supremacy of God. These are among the great epics of the Bible.

Ancient histories outside the Bible, as well as the testimony of his own inscriptions, reveal Nebuchadnezzar in the light of a capable soldier and leader; he has been acclaimed one of the greatest of military conquerors. Only once in the course of his almost constant campaigns extending over thirty years did his forces fail to achieve victory. He was a great builder of palaces, temples and other imposing edifices in the Babylonian cities that owed their existence to his indefatigable energy. He excelled in the arts of peace as he did in the arts of war. Deeply religious and possessed of a spirit of devotion to his wife and family led him to conceive and execute a stupendous project which afterwards was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. It was because his queen, a princess of the neighbouring country of Media, obliged to live in flat and tree-less Babylonia, pined for the mountains and forests of her native land. Nebuchadnezzar constructed a range of artificial hills and valleys planted with trees and shrubs, supported upon a lofty structure of three high brick viaducts built one upon another with streams and brooks fed by a hydraulic machine from the Euphrates far below. Thus built, the hills and trees appeared as though suspended between heaven and earth, whence they became known as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

A close insight into the character of Nebuchadnezzar is afforded in the Book of Daniel. The Jewish youth, of royal blood but not in line of succession to the throne, was taken to Babylon as hostage, with others, at the beginning of his reign. He advanced rapidly in favour with his royal master on account of his sobriety, integrity and

insight, qualities which the king was ready to appreciate. In consequence he became the king's Chief of State and close confidant throughout his reign and was in a position therefore to present the monarch in a true and accurate light.

Energetic, enterprising, far-seeing, and a keen judge of character; this was king Nebuchadnezzar. The last quality is especially noticeable when Daniel and his three companions, all youths, were brought before him after their period of education and training in the wisdom of Babylon. He saw at once that despite their youth they were already superior in wisdom and understanding to the reputed wise men of his court, and he immediately took them in attendance upon his own person. That they were but youths, and of the despised and conquered Jewish race, mattered nothing to him. He took them on sheer merit and nothing else. When, a little later, Daniel interpreted the king's dream of the image, having first described it in detail although Nebuchadnezzar had related its nature neither to Daniel or anybody else, he instantly acknowledged the superiority of the God of Daniel and promoted the latter to high office. It is true that allied with these characteristics there was an irascible temper that would brook no opposition and no failure to obey his commands. The wise men of his court were unable to interpret the dream and he ordered their summary execution, without appeal or mercy, and only the timely intervention of Daniel saved them. When Daniel's three companions refused to bow down and worship the idol image he had set up, he commanded them to be bound hand and foot and cast into the fiery furnace, despite his previous high opinion of them and the exalted office to which he had raised them. Only when he saw them walking about unharmed in the midst of the fire accompanied by one whom he took to be a messenger from the gods, did he as precipitately change his attitude, call to them to come forth and humbly acknowledge the power of God. He was a ruthless autocrat but he was an honest man, amenable to being shown the error of his ways.

Perhaps the most illuminating sidelight on this man's character is in the realm of religious belief. He was an ardent devotee of the gods of Babylon and a special worshipper of the Babylonian god Marduk (Bel in the OT), who was the national god of Babylon as Yahweh was of the Jews. A great

deal of his energy and resources were spent in building, restoring and beautifying the temples of the gods and promoting their service. He is reported to have introduced congregational worship among the Babylonians, in which the entire populace joined in praise and prayer to the gods. Constantly, in his inscriptions, does he stress his loyalty to the gods and concern for their service. His success in warfare he always attributed to the power of the gods exerted on his behalf. There is not much doubt that his ready acceptance of Daniel's God stems from these convictions. It was not that he became a convert to the Jewish insistence on only one God and that all others were idols, rather that he accepted and acknowledged Daniel's God as one among the many gods in whom he believed and certainly superior in power to most of them. As an example of the depth and passion of his feeling, here is one of his prayers, addressed to Marduk the god of Babylon, on a tablet which has survived to this day.

"O eternal God, Lord of all being as for the king, whom you love

And whose name you have proclaimed, as is pleasing to you;

Lead aright his life; guide him in a straight path.

I am the prince, obedient to you the creature of your hand

You created me. And with dominion over all people you have entrusted me.

According to your grace, O Lord which you dost bestow on all people

Cause me to love your supreme dominion, Create in my heart the worship of your deity,

And grant whatever is pleasing to you, because you have shaped my life."

Could any Christian monarch pray to God in more fitting terms?

The most notable incident in the life of Nebuchadnezzar so far as the Bible is concerned is the period during which his mind gave way and he imagined himself to be a wild beast and acted like one. Daniel chapter 4 tells the whole story. It occurred within a few years of the end of his reign. He had desisted from military campaigning, having conquered every nation there was available to conquer – and was resting in Babylon when he had a strange dream that Daniel interpreted as a warning. He was becoming swollen with pride at his own achievements, both in the military sector

and in the magnificence of the city he had built, and Divine judgment was imminent unless he mended his ways. Whilst in the act of boasting of his achievements he was seized with a mental malady which today is called lycanthropy, the condition in which a man imagines himself to be a wild animal, usually a wolf (hence the name) and behaved accordingly. Daniel's narrative shows clearly that this is what happened here. For a period the king was unfit to rule and he roamed the area in which he was evidently secluded for safety, eating grass and sleeping in dens in a completely irrational state, until the judgment was lifted.

Obviously so disgraceful an episode in the monarch's life would not be recorded in the official annals and no independent confirmation of Daniel's narrative has been discovered. But Berossus the Babylonian historian of the 3rd century, only three hundred years later, does speak of a mystery connected with the end of the king's life, saying that "he fell into a state of mental depression, if not of bodily illness, and died after a reign of forty-three years." The Greek historian Megasthenes, at the same time, says that Nebuchadnezzar, while on the roof of his palace, was possessed by a strange god, after which follows some kind of prophecy put into his mouth concerning the overthrow of Babylon by Persia, and finally an obscure statement about someone being "cast out to wander ... a solitary exile among rocks and caverns, where only beasts and birds live..." Although vague and confused, this extract, which comes from Megasthenes through Abydenus (2nd century BC) and Eusebius (3rd century AD) had so many points in common with Daniel 4 that it can well be taken as corroborative evidence.

The last recorded military campaign of Nebuchadnezzar was in the 37th year of his reign when he finally subjugated Egypt. There were no inscriptions at all, except this one, for the last nine years of his life. It is likely that the madness came on him in his 38th year and lasted perhaps four years, leaving him a year of life at the end. (The 'seven times' of Daniel 4.32 has sometimes been interpreted as indicating seven years' madness but this is not necessarily so. The expression really means a complete or stipulated period of time whatever its true length). Berossus indicates that during this period Queen Amytis acted as Regent, assisted by her counsellors – of whom Daniel would have been chief. Eventually the king's

reason returned and he was restored to his kingdom; he had learned his lesson. His own testimony was "*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for all his acts are right and his ways are just, and he can bring low those whose conduct is arrogant*" (Daniel 4.37 REB)

"*You yourself are this head of gold*" said Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar when he interpreted the dream of the image, (Dan. 2.38) and that was literally true. Nebuchadnezzar was the man who built up the power of Babylon, by military conquest, during his long reign. After his death the empire progressively disintegrated until only twenty-three years later Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon and the "breast of silver" succeeded the "head of gold". As a young man he was present at the fall of Nineveh when the Medes and Babylonians jointly brought the empire of the Assyrians to an end and Cyaxares the Median king and Nabopolassar the father of Nebuchadnezzar shared the territory of Assyria between them. The bargain was sealed by the marriage of Amytis the daughter of Cyaxares to Nebuchadnezzar. Seven years later Nabopolassar died and his son became king.

There were at least three children of the marriage. One son, Avil-Marduk (Evil Mereodach of 2 Kings 25.27 and Jeremiah 52.31) succeeded as king. Of the two daughters, one became the wife of an army general, Nergal-sharezer, who was present at the siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 39.3) and became king after Avil-Marduk's short reign. He died soon afterwards. The other, Nitocris, married another high-ranking official named Nabonidus who eventually became king. Their son was Belshazzar the last ruler; Belshazzar was therefore the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar (as indicated in Dan. 5.11.22) the term 'son' in the OT is used also for our term grandson). The 'queen' of Dan. 5.10 was Nitocris, in actual fact Belshazzar was not the true king, but acting as Regent during the absence of his father in foreign parts so that Nitocris was still Queen of Babylon. A year after Nebuchadnezzar's accession he invaded Judah and King Jehoiakim of Judah yielded submission (2 Kings 24.1). It was at this time that Daniel and his companions were taken hostage to Babylon together with the treasures of the Temple (Dan. 1) but Jerusalem was not harmed and the people generally left in peace. Seven years later he was back again and took King Jehoiachin captive into Babylon with some three

thousand men and women of Judah leaving Zedekiah on the throne as king. This was the time at which the prophet Ezekiel went into captivity (Ezekiel 1.2). Eleven years later still, Zedekiah having rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem and this time destroyed the city and the Temple, put Zedekiah to death, and took all but the peasantry into exile in Babylon, leaving the land more or less desolate. Following this he spent thirteen years laying siege to the merchant city of Tyre. The fall of this city meant that an important share of the world trade was diverted to Babylon. The incident of the gold image and the fiery furnace probably immediately followed the fall of Tyre, in about the thirty-third year of the king's reign. At the same time Ezekiel was beholding and recording his vision of the Temple of the Kingdom (Ezekiel 40 to 47) which closes his prophecy. Four years later, Nebuchadnezzar completed his conquest of Egypt. This was the last great power to hold out, and it could have been this final victory, making His master of the Middle East, that induced the inordinate pride leading to his insanity and degradation into the life of an animal. Here must be placed the dream of the tree and Daniel's pleading with the great king to turn away from his megalomania and back to his former life of just and upright dealing, a plea that went unheard. For the next four years or so, while the great king remained in his demented state, it is probable, if Nerossus be correct, that Daniel himself, in conjunction with the Queen, ruled and administered the empire of Babylon. Then came the king's recovery and his acknowledgment of the supreme power of the God of heaven, and about a year later his death. Tradition says he was eighty-four when he died; he was more likely to have been round about seventy.

Perhaps the most interesting speculation about the complex character of Nebuchadnezzar is the sincerity of his conversion upon his recovery from insanity. The narrative Daniel 4.34-37 is depicted as being, not only the words of the king, but either written or dictated by him. This short passage is a

most interesting document. He unreservedly acknowledges the supremacy of the God of Daniel, and calls him "*the Most High*", "*the king of heaven*," "*he that lives for ever*" whose dominion is everlasting he who does according to his will "*whose works are right*" and "*whose ways are just*". One might feel well justified in assuming from these words that at the end of his life Nebuchadnezzar renounced the gods of Babylon and became a convert to the God of Judah.

There is no evidence one way or the other. Not a single inscription after the time of his madness has been found. That of itself may be significant. Each year of his reign up to the last nine years is profuse with tablets, dated for the particular year, recounting his deeds and achievements, and invariably ending with protestations of loyalty to the god Marduk. Is it possible that there were tablets written during that final year by or at the behest of the repentant king and that they were carefully collected and destroyed by the all-powerful priests of Marduk after the king was no more? Is there a likelihood that Daniel 4.34-37 was inscribed upon clay tablets by the king and that one copy, in Daniel's possession, was saved from destruction and preserved for all time in the book Daniel compiled?

One thing is certain, Nebuchadnezzar did not ascribe his affliction and his recovery to his own god Marduk, for Marduk was not the god of heaven. Behind the many gods and goddesses of Babylon there were three principal deities. Enki, lord of the sea and waters under the earth, Enlil, lord of the earth and air above it, and An the supreme god, the god of heaven. Marduk was a lesser god, reputedly the son of Enki. In ascribing all power and authority to the God of heaven, the most famous king of Babylon was rightly moved. At the end of a colourful and vigorous life, influenced it may well be, by the unswerving faith and spiritual counsel of the Hebrew lad who remained his friend and chief counsellor throughout his life, it is very possible that he died "*not far from the kingdom of God*".

EXPERIENCE

Christian experience, therefore, is something entirely different from experience as it is known to the unconverted. As a Christian looks back over his life, he can find countless illustrations of the

way in which the Lord has caused good to come of evil, and of the way in which events that were thought at the time to be heralds of misfortune have turned out to be as a door opened in heaven.

THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE

*A study in
Divine Purposes*

3. From the Flood to the Exodus

From the time of God's covenant with Noah immediately after the Flood, to the call of Abraham, a thousand years later, there is no record of the Divine dealings with man. Nor is there any indication that any man, even of the line of the chosen 'seed' through Shem, was especially notable for his faith and piety. The only occurrences that are noted in all that period are the city building exploits of Nimrod and the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10-11). There is nothing here to give any idea of the extent to which men had progressed in their knowledge of God. The story of the great Tower certainly indicates degeneration in the other direction. The statement of Joshua in his parting charge to the children of Israel (Joshua 24.2) is significant. He declares that Abraham's ancestors, down to Terah his father, served other gods. Laban, grandson of Abraham's brother Nahor, possessed and worshipped images of household deities (Genesis 31.19). It is evident that the uprightness of Noah and his sons had been lost in the intervening generations and perhaps was only recovered in Abraham.

Although the Bible says so very little about this period there is a tremendous store of written records now in the World's museums which were made during this time and from these it is possible to form a very fair idea of the state of men's minds in those days. So far as the ancestors of Abraham, and their fellows in Ur of the Chaldees and the neighbouring cities in the south country were concerned, the records show them to have been a deeply religious people, but their devotion was not inspired by love or by reverence but by fear. Their mythology embraced a great number of gods and goddesses but the incentive to sacrifice and worship was the propitiation of those deities that their anger and wrath might be averted. It was almost as if men realised instinctively that they were in a condition of enmity with God and must find some way of reconciliation with Him, but did not know the way. Dim recollections of a happier past lie embedded in the Chaldean religion and their folklore and poetry. They wrote and sang of a time when there was no evil on the earth and all men dwelt in happiness. They spoke of a Tree of Life and of the Water of Life. In one of their oldest

poems, the '*Epic of Gilgamesh*', the hero goes through many harrowing adventures in order to find the Plant of life, only to have it dashed from his fingers by a serpent in the moment of success. The laws of Hammurabi, a king who lived at about the time of Abraham, give evidence of a sincere attempt to administer the realm along lines of justice and right doing, so much so that his 'code' is studied and quoted by men of law even today. The people told each other of Oannes, the mysterious being who had come up out of the sea to teach them all the arts of civilisation and the ways of life - a very evident tradition of Noah, who was in fact the author of all that they had and knew. There was a glimmering of light in those dark minds; some of the hymns to the gods breathe the spirit of repentance and supplication, and in the Gilgamesh Epic the hero is told by the immortal being who had, long before, escaped the Great Flood (Noah) that "so long as there is hatred in the land, so long will death come to every man". There was at least that realisation in the minds of a people who had nothing but a few dim and distorted recollections of a nobler past to guide them in such search for truth as they were disposed to undertake.

In the land of Canaan, a thousand miles from Ur of the Chaldees, there lingered in the days of Abraham another worship, that of El Elyon, the "Most High God". That worship continued until the days of Joshua and the entrance of Israel into the land, but by then, judging from the written records that have been discovered, it had become hopelessly corrupt. Perhaps in earlier days, long before Abraham, it did represent a tolerably pure and true remembrance of the faith that was in Noah. There was no doubt that the "Most High God" was the same as the God of Shem and of Noah and of Enoch. The Scriptures give one significant glimpse of this worship that was general throughout Canaan for many centuries. When Abraham returned from the defeat of the invading Chedorlaomer and his army (Genesis 14) there met him outside Salem (Jerusalem) Melchizedek, the "Priest of the Most High God". Abraham bowed down before him, acknowledging his authority, and gave him tithes of the spoils.

Would Abraham, the father of the faithful, the friend of God thus do obeisance before this man unless he recognised him to be a servant of the true God, of his own God? He certainly would not have done so. It is clear that Abraham knew the 'Most High God' of Canaan to be the same who had called him out of Ur of the Chaldees and promised him this land as an inheritance.

Melchizedek was a Priest-king, a King of the land, as well as its Priest. That is not only declared in both the Old and the New Testaments, it is also confirmed by records discovered by archaeologists. Documentary tablets now available show that a line of Priest-kings calling themselves 'Priests of the Most High God' ruled in Jerusalem for many centuries right up to the time that the Israelites crossed Jordan. They claimed to hold their position by decree of the 'Most High God' and to be independent of any earthly rulers. The last of those Priest-kings was Adoni-Zedek, who was slain by Joshua (Joshua 10.1, 23-26). By that time the system of worship of which he was the head had become corrupt and idolatrous; there was no true knowledge of God in Canaan. The Priest-kings had long since given a form of allegiance to Egypt, and the life of the Canaanites was such that God, in His wisdom, decreed that they be blotted out from under heaven. Once again the light had failed; once again it had been abundantly demonstrated that man, even with the advantage of a reasonably clear knowledge of God and His ways at the start, was unable by his own unaided strength in his fallen and sinful condition to maintain that standing before God. The men of Canaan, in those days when they worshipped the Most High God, failed and fell because they needed a Redeemer, and the due time for the Redeemer was not yet come, and without that Redeemer their knowledge and their piety availed them nothing. Abraham in his day must have found much in their worship and much in the ministry of their priest-king Melchizedek with which to sympathise. Joshua six centuries later, found nothing, nothing but a system of superstition and idolatry with which the worship of Israel's God had nothing in common, and he swept it all away.

God had called Abraham. Despite the prevailing ignorance and darkness there was a new light in the world. For the first time in human history there was definite outward evidence that

God was moving to the fulfilment of His promise and the execution of His purposes. God had called Abraham and the world now saw a new thing. Here was a fully consecrated man, his life devoted to the divine service, being led and used as the first of many instruments and agents in the work that is to culminate, at last, in the overthrow of sin and the reconciliation of 'whosoever will' to God.

There is no hint in the Bible of any such thing as consecration or dedication to God's purpose and service before Abraham. He was the first, but after him there has never been a time when God has been without His consecrated servants in the earth. The work begun in Abraham has progressed ever since without remission or interruption. With every fresh development in the outworking plan of God the light of knowledge and understanding grew brighter. In Abraham the downward course of ignorance was checked. From then, although men were still in the Times of Ignorance, they had at least begun the long upward climb that led to Pentecost.

Abraham was an educated citizen of Ur, a city-state that occupied a high place in the scale of world civilization. Obedient to the Divine call, he went to Canaan, a land whose cities were elaborate and whose peoples were as civilised as those of the land from which he had come. Scorning the life of a town-dweller, he adopted the simple pastoral mode of living, that he might the better follow God. He knew God as El Shaddai – God Almighty – and that simple fact shows that he was already in advance of the Canaanites, who in their worship of El Elyon – the Most High God – did not realise the 'all-power' of God as did Abraham. Perhaps this was the starting place of Abraham's faith, that God is not only the Most High, remote, detached from the affairs of ordinary men, but is also All-powerful, His might stretching unto and bending toward earth that He might do all His good pleasure. The Sumerians and the Canaanites limited the power of God; to them He, like themselves, had often to suffer the onslaughts of evil forces without being able effectively to repulse or destroy them. Abraham knew better; God was all-powerful and had the whole fate and destiny of all mankind at His own pleasure. Whatever He purposed, that He could most surely perform, for He was El Shaddai – God Almighty. Abraham's faith was built on that understanding.

Thus it came about that at the end of the times of the patriarchs, when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph had been laid to rest, the world was ready for the next great revelation of God's character and plan. The great power of God was now understood in the inflexibility of His purpose and the inviolability of His oath. A dim outline of things to come could begin to be discerned; a future day when the faithful would inherit the land and God's favour be with them for evermore. How it could come about did not as yet appear. The consciousness of sin and the necessity of a Redeemer from sin, had hardly as yet dawned. But there was at least a hope

in God of a resurrection from the dead and a means to regain, at the last, the happy state that had been lost so many long ages ago in Adam.

At the time of the Fall, knowledge of God was confined to one pair. At the Flood it was preserved in a family. Now at the time of Israel's bondage and coming deliverance, it was spread amongst a nation. At the next great stage it was destined to be proclaimed abroad among all nations. Now, God looked down from heaven, and He heard the groaning of His people in Egypt and knew that it was time to act. So God called Moses.

(To be continued.) AOH

BIBLE – THE BOOK FOR TODAY

The Bible is the most interesting and instructive collection of writings in existence. Its sixty six books are the handiwork of at least sixty different authors, the latest of whom lived only nineteen hundred years ago and the earliest nearly five thousand years ago. Of all the books that are now before the reading public, this one is the most up-to-date. It presents a full and adequate explanation of life, life's problems and perplexities, and life's possibilities and opportunities. Above all, it points unhesitatingly to One Who is the source of contentment, happiness and peace.

The Bible is the oldest book in existence. It has outlived the storms of forty-five centuries. Men have endeavoured by every means possible to banish it from the face of the earth: they have hidden it, burned it and made the possession of it a crime punishable with death. The most bitter and relentless persecutions have been waged against those who had faith in it; but still the book lives. Today, while many of its foes slumber in death and hundreds of volumes written to discredit and overthrow its influence are long since forgotten, the Bible has found its way into every nation and people on earth and has been published in nearly two thousand different dialects and languages.

The writings of the Bible include law, ethics, poetry, drama, history, travel, prophecy, romance, philosophy, political and social instruction; everything that has to do with the life of man. Its authors were as varied in character as its contents. Kings, emperors, and princes; poets, sages and philosophers; fishermen, statesmen and priests; poor men, rich men, preachers, exiles, captains, legislators, judges, men of every grade and class

have contributed to the writing of this book.

General Smuts once said: "Whenever I see anything great or anything really moving, my mind always passes into the language of the Old Testament. It is the language of the human heart, the language of the human mind and soul expressing pure human feelings and human emotions, with a universality which appeals to all races and all ages".

No other sacred writing possesses this appeal. The sacred books of world religions cannot be compared with the Bible. They give no detailed history of nations as does the Bible, neither do they pronounce with such authority and reason on the burning questions of man, of his origin and destiny; of evil, its origin, the reason for its permission and its end. The Bible merits the thoughtful consideration of every reflective person. Upon the earth there is distress of nations with perplexity; a voice that speaks with authority is sorely needed. The Bible is that voice. **The Bible is the book for today.**

As a record of history the Bible is unsurpassed. Over two-thirds of its contents are historical narratives. The narratives are authentic and reliable. Prof. Sayce, a great archaeologist has said "I do not for a moment hesitate to assert that the investigations in Assyria and Egypt thoroughly corroborate the statements of the Old Testament." Prof. Yahuda, another authority declares "Every archaeological discovery in Palestine and Mesopotamia contemporary with the Bible period bears out unfailingly its historical accuracy."

Harry Grattan Guinness, the famous nineteenth century minister, said "The Bible is the chart of

history. It affords a panoramic view of the whole course of events from Creation and the fall of man, to the final judgment and the inauguration of the new Heaven and the new Earth. Without the Bible, history would be a spectacle of unknown rivers flowing from unknown sources to unknown seas but under its guidance we can trace the complex currents to their springs and can see the end from the beginning."

There is evidence in the opening chapters of the Bible that they were written in Mesopotamia about twenty-five centuries before Christ. The history thus commenced was continued by successive writers for some two thousand years and was completed only four centuries before the birth of Christ. During the nineteenth century the historical accuracy of these writings began to be questioned by critics but today that scepticism has been proved unjustified largely in consequence of the decipherment of Egyptian and Asiatic written records and the further discoveries of archaeologists. A tremendous amount of excavation has been undertaken in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Israel and Egypt since the first world war and practically every part of Bible history has now been confirmed or illuminated by the results of this work. Numerous books have been published setting forth these facts. **The verdict of twentieth century research is that Bible history is true.**

There is poetry, drama and philosophy of a high order in the Bible. The Book of Ruth is an idyllic romance of three thousand years ago; the Book of Esther a rare study in human character. The passionate drama of the Book of Job stands in strong contrast to the measured soliloquies of Ecclesiastes, and the staccato epigrams of the Book of Proverbs to the delicate loveliness of the song of Solomon. The crisp sunlight and shadows of the Book of Acts make it one of the most vividly interesting books of travel ever written, and the Book of Psalms is full of the most inspiring poetry. Each of these books is to be read slowly and sympathetically as a work of art having its own characteristics and its own peculiar appeal.

The English language has been built up largely around the Authorised Version of 1611. The English love of liberty and justice is due in no small measure to general appreciation of its teachings. The finest British characteristics must be attributed in considerable degree to three hundred years

of consistent reading and preaching of the Book. Very truly then it was said by the famous biologist, Prof. T. H. Huxley, some hundred and twenty years ago "Consider the great historical fact that for three centuries this Book has been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history. It has become the national epic of Britain, written in the noblest and purest English, and abounds in exquisite beauties of a merely literary form. Finally it forbids any to be ignorant of the existence of other countries and other civilisations, and of a great past, stretching back to the farthest limits of the oldest nations of the world".

In the practical things as well as in the cultured tastes of daily life, therefore, the Bible is a sure guide. For good health of body and of mind the Bible contains ample instruction. For guidance in affairs of nations as well as in relationships between individuals, the Bible is the best authority. It has inspired the creative genius of writers, poets and painters through the centuries; it is no less effective in the lives of ordinary men and women who will read and ponder its pages. **The Bible is the book of daily life.**

Finally, and above all, the Bible is a Divine revelation. Man does not live by bread alone. He enjoys a full and rich life only by consciously seeking to fulfil the Divine will. For all such the Bible is the teacher.

The Bible declares that sin and death are intrusions among men and will one day be eliminated. The first human beings were created sinless, undying with ability to use the earth's resources for good. Tragically, men forsook the laws of righteousness and allowed selfishness, malice and injustice to influence their course of life. Inevitably, pain, disease and death followed and have continued until now. Bible history follows the course of that sad progress and tells of the coming to earth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God to redeem the world from its sin and the consequences of its sin. The immediate fruitage of His life and death on earth is the development of the Church, a world-wide assembly of Christians devoted to His service. A further fruitage will become evident when His Kingdom on earth has been established, under His beneficent control and administration of His Church. Humanity will be instructed and guided in the better way that will *"make wars to cease to the ends of the earth"*.

abolish disease, poverty, and all the ills from which mankind now suffers, and bring to an end sin and death. *"Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written 'Death is swallowed up in victory!'"* for "there shall be no more death".

The Bible, then, is the book of the future. Time spent in reading, studying and discussing it will not be time wasted. It cannot fail to broaden the mind and ennoble the character. It cannot fail to make the reader, more thoughtful for others, more ready to serve fellow men and women and more confident of the future. It cannot fail to establish intelligent faith in God and a conviction that men have a mighty destiny before them, reaching far beyond the limits of things that are now seen and known, and stretching into eternity.

Origin of the Bible

Popular tradition has it that the first books of the Bible were written by Moses about the year 1400 BC. Expert examination in the light of modern knowledge has shown that Moses made use, in part, of pre-existing documents and that the originals of these go back at least another thousand years.

The first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, the first part of the Bible, contain the accounts of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel and up to the lifetime of Abraham. These originally existed in the Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform script and the language of Abraham's ancestors, living in the Euphrates valley some five hundred years before Abraham left that land to dwell in Canaan. This is very close to the era when primitive picture writing was giving way to the more sophisticated cuneiform and it is quite possible that these early Bible stories were first written on clay tablets in a picture script.

In the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, cuneiform was the prevailing script and nothing is more likely than that Moses eventually inherited a collection of records thus written. They would

include not only the original stories but also the life history of the patriarchs preceding him, all of which he translated in Hebrew and edited. Thus he produced the Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis as we have it today.

To this Moses must have added the rest of the five books known as the "Books of Moses" – Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the latter as far as the 30th chapter – thus bringing the record to the end of his own life and the entry of Israel into Canaan. The Book of Job, from an independent source and probably at least four centuries old already must have come into Moses' possession at the same time and been added to what soon became the sacred collection of Israel.

During the next thousand years the remaining historical and all the prophetic and poetic books appeared from time to time as men of God wrote up truthful records of the times in which they lived. The final one, that of Nehemiah, brought the story down to the fourth century before Christ. The works of the Hebrew prophets belong to a period within about 800 to 400 BC and this was the time when the Messianic hope began to come to the front. By about this latter date and in the time of Nehemiah the Old Testament more or less as it is now, was accepted as the sacred book of the Jews.

The whole of the New Testament was completed over a short span of years, from about AD50 to 100. The writers were mostly the personal followers of Jesus the Lord Christ, with the exception of Paul and Luke, and the unknown 'writer to the Hebrews'. Acceptance of these books and these only, as constituting the New Testament, came about slowly by general recognition of the Christian Church, and it was nearly two centuries before the New Testament as it now stands was universally endorsed.

AOH

Talking Book: We are very grateful that each issue of the Bible Study Monthly is recorded on cassette, copies of which are available for those who cannot read due to partial or no sight. If you know of any who could benefit from this service please send their name and address to the Bible Fellowship Union central address. The service is

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Gone from us

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Sister Joyce Hiles | (Lytham St. Anne's) |
| Sister Dorothy Jackson | (California, U.S.A.) |
| Brother Jim Bell | (Manchester) |

THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

A meditation for a quiet hour based on Matthew 4. 1-11

"For because he himself has suffered and been tempted: he is able to help those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2.18)

Jesus' baptism was not like that of John who baptized as a sign of repentance and reformation. John objected to our Lord's being baptized because He was not a sinner. He was *"holy, blameless, unstained and separated from sinners."* The Lord's baptism was something new. He showed, in symbol form, that He surrendered His life, not as a sinner, but offering His life to remove sin. So He gave His life to God and the language of His heart is found in Hebrews 10.7, *"Here I am: as it is written of me in the scroll, I have come O God to do your will."* There began the "better sacrifices".

From a child Jesus delighted to be in His Father's house learning from the Scriptures about His work. At Jordan He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and driven into the wilderness to ponder and pray about the Law and the prophets. For forty days He fasted and may have been physically weak when He was assaulted by the Tempter with suggestions of ways and means of carrying out His work. These were not what He had found by prayer and in Scripture.

The three temptations experienced by the Lord were similar to those that His followers would receive in later years. *"He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin"*. He had none of the weaknesses of the flesh from which His followers suffer but the merit of His sacrifice makes forgiveness possible for all the sins of His followers. A study of His temptations reveals that His tests were like those that we have, as part of the New Creation, born again by the Holy Spirit.

Hungry after his long fast, Jesus' natural body cries out for nourishment. The tempter affects a kindly interest in His welfare and suggests that with His new powers of the Spirit he should transform stones into loaves of bread. Later in His ministry, Jesus was to use the power of God to feed the hungry crowds with bread and fish. To do this to satisfy his own natural craving would have been sinful. He might sustain his life by ordinary means but the power of the Spirit was given to Him for the demonstration of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus immediately recognized the principle

involved and refused the idea. *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* To create and eat bread for the nourishment of the 'natural man' would have been disobedience.

In applying this temptation to the ministry of Jesus and to the lives of His followers, it is a lesson in obedience to the Divine will, which must always be the highest priority and the holy privileges in spiritual matters must never be bartered for earthly advantage. Esau took the wrong course for a plate of stew (Hebrews 12.6). Every temptation to sacrifice spiritual privileges or violate spiritual responsibilities for the attainment of earthly advantage would be yielding to this form of temptation.

It is not necessary to suppose that our Lord went to Jerusalem and the pinnacle of the Temple in person to experience His second temptation. All the while he remained in the desert and went in His mind to the Holy City. He was guided to the Temple by Satan's suggestion that He should bring Himself and His glorious mission quickly to the attention of all the people by leaping from the parapet of the Temple into the valley below and then arising unhurt. He could then explain to the multitude His heavenly errand and awe them into faith. Seeing that our Lord had repulsed His first temptation by quoting Scripture, Satan now attempted to support the second temptation with a text of Scripture, which, on the face of it, might appear to be properly applied by him. The passage reads much as though it was specially intended as a suggestion to our Lord to perform this very feat, *"For he will give His angels charge to guard you in all your ways, on their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone."* (Psalm 91.11,12 REB).

Our Lord promptly discerned the fallacy of the argument and the misapplication of the Scriptures. It would have been sin for our Lord to follow the course indicated because He would have been tempting God to use Divine power, for His deliverance, which was unnecessary. He had not been called upon to hazard His life, but rather to sacrifice it, laying it down according to God's will in the service of humanity. Our Lord's answer was

directly to the point and was another quotation from Deuteronomy "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*". Each time, Satan seems to have realised that he was promptly and fully answered by the quotations and his temptation shown to be contrary to the Divine instruction.

Our Lord's followers are tempted along this line also; tempted to presume on the goodness of God and by words or acts to place themselves in such positions as would test or tempt God in respect to His providential care of them, along a line which he has never authorized in His Word. The wonder working spirit is contrary to the spirit of humility anyway and, if gratified, would lead to spiritual pride and egotism. God wishes His people now to "walk by faith and not by sight". Moreover the 'call' of this Gospel Age is along lines of faith in the promises rather than faith respecting the wonder-working achievements of others or of us. Meekness, humility, faith, are all arrayed on the side of our Lord's answer which is the way His followers should take.

In the third temptation it is unnecessary to assume that there is a very high mountain in the wilderness in which Jesus is being tempted for there is no such mountain there. Nor is there a mountain in all the earth on whose summit all the kingdoms of the world could be seen in a moment. In this also our Lord was mentally transported to a high mountain, to a great and lofty kingdom overlooking and overtopping all earthly empires, for in Bible symbolism, a mountain represents a kingdom. In a brief moment Satan pictured himself to our Lord as the ruler of all earth's kingdoms, as having the ruling empire of earth, controlling all empires. This is in accord with the Scriptures that declares that Satan is "*the prince of this world*" (John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11), and that he "*is now at work in the sons of disobedience*" (Eph. 2.2).

Satan's power over the world is the power of a usurping prince imposing upon the ignorance and superstition of mankind. He knew the object of Christ's coming and the promise that His kingdom will bless all the families of the earth. He knew that Christ would lift up the willing and obedient out of sin and death. He tried to appear to support the enterprise and deplore present conditions. He

would suggest that the work of reform amongst men should be done as his lieutenant and assistant. If Christ would recognize, honour and reverence him, he would co-operate in turning the world of mankind over to His care as their earthly king while he, Satan, would be the spiritual over-lord. He would suggest that any other course would bring disappointment, scorn, defeat and shame.

Our Lord's reply was "*Begone Satan! for it is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'*" The temptation passed successfully, Satan withdrew and holy angels ministered to our Lord. A similar temptation may come to every follower of the Lord, from the same Adversary, in one form or another. These are permitted by the Lord for the testing of our characters, even as in His own case. The temptation is, 'will we connive with and recognize unjust and sinful institutions, because they have power?' To oppose them would imply their opposition and mean the braving of shame, scorn and death. Such temptations may come through political or social or religious institutions, which say 'serve us and we will assist you'. But in every case behind the temptation is the Adversary. Those who have not learned to love righteousness and hate iniquity, and all who have not come to the point of full submission to the Divine will, are in danger of falling to such a temptation. But hearts loyal to the core, as was Jesus, will repulse the Adversary and disdain his offer of assistance on such terms.

Our Lord had no one to help, encourage or sympathize with Him in the hour of temptation; "scorned by men and despised by the people". With us, however, matters are different. Our Lord as our great High Priest, by the merit of His own sacrifice for man's sin, has ascended on high and has appeared as the Advocate of all those who are now being "called of God" to walk in His steps. They have faith in His blood, are baptized into His death and share with Him the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3.10). This great Advocate, having been tempted in all these things is able to give comfort and support to us. He waits for us to realise our needs, and as shown in our text, to call upon Him for support at the Throne of Grace.

The inclination we all have to settle down and make things comfortable for ourselves has directed very much of Christian effort into a wrong

channel. The importance of things seen and temporal has overshadowed the unseen and eternal.

THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH

*Lessons from the life
of a man of prayer*

3. Holiness unto the Lord

In fifty two days the walls of Jerusalem were built because *"the people had a mind to work"*. How much can be accomplished when those who labour do so willingly, joyfully and purposefully. It must have been a wonderful moment when the last brick or piece of stone was laid, the doors hung and the city could once more resume its function as the centre of national life. Good though it was for God's people to dwell in safety within the city wall, and delightful as that wall was to look upon, Nehemiah's great work did not stop at that point. It now remained to be seen whether the zeal and co-operation engendered by patriotism for their national heritage could be carried over into everyday life.

Jerusalem was the city of worship, and its restoration meant that the voice of prayer and praise could once again be heard in the holy place. The greater work of restoring the ancient faith of their fathers now began. Israel had to be reconciled to the Lord if they were to enjoy His blessing under their covenant with Him. They had to understand and keep His law if they wished to have His care and protection. So Nehemiah, having completed the first phase of his work, called upon his colleague, Ezra the scribe, to read and teach the Jews from their Holy Scriptures. The Levitical priesthood was reinstated amongst the people, their method of worship as instructed by Moses was again operative and the Hebrew way of life was re-established in the city of peace. Thus prosperity began to return to this God fearing remnant in Israel.

Ezra responded readily to the invitation to read the Law to the people of Israel. He appears to have had some kind of platform with a lectern or perhaps as some translators express it – a pulpit from which he could be seen and heard easily. In customary fashion Israel listened to a recital of God's great work among them and how he had protected and provided for them. The Scriptures were not only read but carefully explained so that when they dispersed the people would be able to apply the lessons to their lives. As we come to the end of chapter 9 the solemnity of the occasion increases for they are about to add their names to the re-making of their covenant with God. Just as

city walls do not make a city, so an unredeemed people do not make the people of God... Yet it was a joyful occasion when they celebrated the feast of booths or tents and they were exhorted to enjoy those days. Confession and penitence go hand in hand with celebration. It is right to be contrite before the Lord and acknowledge our unworthy condition before Him. Yet He expects us to make our worship happy and attractive and the people of Israel did this.

It is not easy to tease out the various strands that made up the book of Nehemiah. It is not certain just how much Nehemiah was in fact responsible for writing these records or how long he remained in Jerusalem. In the last chapter in the book following a period in which the people had opportunity to establish their faith and obedience, it is clear that they had fallen back to earlier years of failure. Nehemiah takes them to task on two major issues which he and others believed had been the cause of their exile. Firstly, they must observe the Sabbath properly and make it a day of rest. Secondly they must be thoroughly separate from surrounding alien peoples so that their faith and practices were not again contaminated by pagan religions. Undoubtedly their assent to the covenant had been outwardly a great show but inwardly they were still very human and prone to the way of the 'flesh'. The ways of the devout and prayerful Nehemiah were soon forgotten even by the leaders of the people. Not infrequently servants of God in our own day become so engrossed in the service of God that the vital need for prayer and the reading of His Word is forgotten. No great work can be accomplished for our Heavenly Father unless we are in close touch with Him. Whatever outward success there may be in our labours of love, the deeper issues of our faith must be kept well to the forefront. Serving the Lord and knowing about His purposes are valuable assets in the Christian life but they can never become substitutes for prayer and worship. We shall in fact be quite unprepared spiritually for our tasks for the Lord unless we spend much time with Him. Natural talent cannot make up for genuine spiritual power received at God's own hand. Nehemiah accomplished his great work because the driving force of his life was

derived from communion with God and not from self-gratification. It was quite natural for him to turn to religious reform after the outward material essentials had been restored.

During the intervening period from the time of the rebuilding of the walls, the old enemy had sneaked in and Tobiah had acquired accommodation in the very Temple itself. To upright Jews, this was desecration of the sanctuary. All else had failed, so this man who had so opposed the earlier efforts of Nehemiah, now sought to worm his way into the holiest place creating an act of sacrilege by the priest. Tobiah and his property were pitched out and it was made clear to the priests that such people had no place in the service of God.

In the time since the making of the covenant, trading with the people of Tyre had developed and no doubt had brought financial advantage to some citizens of Jerusalem. They might have got away with that but the Phoenicians, clever business people that they were, had no scruples about keeping one day in seven for rest and worship. Not until Nehemiah ordered the gates to be shut and he had severely rebuked his people, did they stop what in Israel was a terrible crime. The governor was prepared to take drastic action against the foreign traders. Keeping the Sabbath was of prime importance in the keeping of the Law.

Nehemiah's cleansing of the priesthood and people from the surrounding nations is not to be interpreted as an act of snobbery or unfair discrimination. The interlopers in the recently built city and reconstituted nation were not the friends of Israel or lovers of her God. They had for the most part been the very ones who had tried to hinder the rebuilding scheme and had sought to bring disgrace upon Nehemiah. Having failed in one direction they now planned to wreck God's people by mixing their heathen social and religious society with that of Israel. There was only one way into the Israel community, specifically laid down by the Law. Haphazard interbreeding with the Hebrews would have quickly reduced them to a nation as depraved as the surrounding peoples. Rigid separation from the language, customs and worship of their national neighbours was the only

solution to their strength and holiness before the Lord.

Once again the parallel between Israel and the Christian Church reflects how the same conditions have resulted in spiritual prosperity or bankruptcy. Thus we must turn the light of God's Word on our own consciences to see if in truth we too have 'separated ourselves from the people of the land' adequately. This in no way signifies a 'holier than thou' attitude into which Judaism finally developed, nor does it prevent us being sufficiently in the world to let our light shine. On the contrary, God's commission to Israel is to be found in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*It is too slight a task for you, as my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, to bring back the survivors of Israel; I shall appoint you as a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach earth's farthest bounds*" (Isaiah 49.6). Israel failed in her day of opportunity and the light was snuffed out by ritualism and base gain. Paul therefore declares to the people of Antioch in Pisidia that this privilege of bearing witness to the light of God's truth had fallen to the followers of Jesus (Acts 13.7). Darkness still abounds in the world. Without compromising with that darkness let us shine forth as the children of our Heavenly Father, in preparation for the day when the New Jerusalem shall descend from Heaven as a bride prepared for her husband.

God does not perform miracles when good sound hard work can accomplish His will. Nehemiah believed that God was with him and undertook His work with perseverance and enthusiasm. It stands in marked contrast to some attitudes in the Christian church during the century that has just ended. God awaits our co-operation and is ready to place into our hands the credentials for service that we can do only in His strength and by the direction of His Spirit. "Without God, we cannot: without us God will not." So ends a remarkable book by Mildred Cable who did so much for spiritual Zion in central Asia.

"Blessed be the LORD God the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous things; Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory fill the whole earth Amen and Amen." (Psalm 72.18,19)

The End DN

All things are possible to him who *believes*; they are less difficult to him who *hopes*, they are more easy to him who *loves*, and still more easy to

him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.

EVENTIDE

*A time of quiet
with the Lord*

"Come with me... and get some rest"; so spoke the Master to the tired but eager men who stood around Him that special day. What a time they experienced since He had sent them out two by two! How they had been paired off for this service we cannot know. Two by two they had journeyed forth and passed through many cities and villages of Israel calling on men and women everywhere to repent, to confess their sins and look up to God for help and understanding for their day. What a spate of stories they had to tell of men who had received them well, of others who had scorned their words and rejected their appeals. They told of suffering souls from whom they had cast demonic spirits, and ailing folk they had anointed with healing oil and made them well (Mark 6.7-13). But, oh dear! Why did the thronging passing crowd press them so? Why must they, intrude at this hour? Why could they not have the Master's ear for once undisturbed? Did some slight gesture of impatience or resentment show upon their faces, or in that effort to retain, or even to regain their bodily equilibrium? We cannot say. But Jesus had seen it all, and understood right well how eagerness and resentment might walk hand-in-hand.

Noting all these little movements He said to them "*Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile*" (Mark 6.31). Boarding a ship anchored near at hand, they found, upon the rippling waters of the lake, the quiet hour they desired to unload their well-stored minds and hearts. Surely Jesus listened patiently and interestedly to all they had to say, turning first to this, then to that member of the eager company.

How true is this little episode to the throb of life for you and me in our crowded day. Perhaps we too may have been seeking to find some hearing ears, or to pour the oil of gladness into some burdened heart. Perhaps our words have been received with gratitude, or perhaps, a more saddening experience, they have been laughed to scorn or rejected with a superior curl of the lip. In any case this thronging world with one or more of its many toys comes thrusting in; the daily press, the radio or TV, the workaday world or family ailment, so that we cannot get the opportunity to unburden our hearts as we would. We have wanted to tell Jesus all about the episode, how we had

been overjoyed or saddened by the experience, but ever as we wrought to frame our prayer some pressing thing would thrust itself upon our service and attention and prevent us from reaching the Master's ear.

Oh, then, for that power to hear in our inner ear, the Master's words "Come apart...!" How beautifully the poet has caught the spirit of our Master's watchful eye and loving care.

Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile
Weary, I know it, of the press and throng;
Wipe from your brow the sweat and dust of toil,
And in My quiet strength again be strong.

Come ye aside from all the world holds dear,
For converse which the world has never known;
Alone with Me, and with My Father here;
With me and My Father, not alone.

Come tell me all that you have said and done,
Your victories and failure, hopes and fears;
I know how hardly souls are wooed and won:
My choicest wreaths are always wet with tears.

We cannot go with Jesus to ride the ocean's wave for privacy, nor may we always have another quiet room where we can retire to be alone with Him. There is a secret of retiring into a place apart which we may learn if we apply ourselves thereto; each child of God is a living temple of God, he has within his heart, in the inner man, a sanctuary of the soul.

According to his consciousness of these deeper realities so will that sanctum of his soul take on the sense of an actuality and in proportion thereto becomes a retiring place, in which to meet the Lord. The old Quaker practice of retiring inwards to the Holy Light was along the right lines. No spoken words would necessarily escape the lips but communion both sweet and strengthening result therefrom. So with us, the more we turn momentarily to the Lord in unspoken prayer, the more our union with Him is complete.

TH

PROVIDENCE

Good when He gives, supremely good;
Nor less when He denies.
Afflictions, from His Sovereign hand,
Are blessings in disguise.

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

10. Crossing the Red Sea

The direct distance between the land of Goshen in Egypt and the southern part of Canaan is about two hundred miles by the ancient highway known as the Way of the Land of the Philistines or Way of the Sea. A similar distance was 'The way of Shur' via Beersheba. This was the road travelled by Jacob when he went into Egypt (Gen.46.5). Logically one of these ancient roads should have been the way by which the hosts of Israel under Moses would return. Instead he led them southward, into the tangled mountain masses of Central Sinai, through waterless wastes and arid deserts by a difficult and devious way which involved them in a journey of some eight or nine hundred miles. Forty years later they arrived at the border of the Promised Land. Why did Moses with his intimate knowledge of the area, take the people of Israel that way? Why did God permit it?

We have a clue in Exodus 13.17 *"God did not guide them by the road leading towards the Philistines, although that was the shortest way: for he said 'the people may change their minds when war confronts them, and they may turn back to Egypt.' So God made them go round by way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea"*. There was a similar thought among the people when Joshua, Caleb and their comrades explored the land and gave a mixed report. (Numbers 13) Later under Joshua they fought with great ferocity but that was a different generation of Israel from that which left Egypt forty years before. They were timid, questioning and easily discouraged. They were not ready to withstand the powerful tribes who held it. As a subject, slave nation for generations they were also not ready for the responsibilities and obligations of free national life. Moses had already waited forty years in Midian for this moment, yet now, as a man of 80 years old, he was going to wait still longer, yet there is no hint of impatience or resentment from him. He went, obedient to God's will, the long way round, and avoided the 'mail-clad' Philistines who would have so frightened the Israelis. The route also was heavily guarded by the Egyptians.

The people of Israel "went up harnessed" which probably means that they were organised and ready for war. They were not an undisciplined rabble. There is every evidence that Moses' task of taking two to three million men, women and children together with flocks and herds for a journey of 800 miles was a gigantic nomadic enterprise. The mummified body of Joseph went with them in accordance with the promise made by the whole family

of Israel when he died and was known as the man who saved the house of Israel. So far as is known his brothers' remains were left in Egypt. From Succoth to Etham is about 12 miles (Ex. 13.20) and was probably a fair day's journey. This is near the Egyptian frontier and beyond lay the wilderness and the Way of the Philistines, a track used by traders and armies moving through and beyond Canaan. They would encamp just outside the military garrison town which guarded the frontier.

Now the people could see that God was with them in the form of a pillar or column of cloud in the day and a similar column of fire at night. (Exodus 13.21.22). These two 'pillars' – or perhaps one cloud that looked differently at night from what it did in daylight guided their movements and their halts. It was a symbol of God's presence that guided and protected them. It gave assurance of His loving concern for their welfare, decision making and judgment. It is interesting to note that the various references to the Divine presence in this way can be referred to as thick darkness and blinding lightning. This glory of the Lord could be a devouring fire. It was a comfort to the obedient but a terror to the unbeliever. Suggestions have been made about the physical phenomenon of this 'pillar of cloud and fire' and God appears to His people thus on Sinai. Whatever it was from a physical point of view, it was very real and made a lasting impression on the national memory.

Perhaps it was something of a shock that they were not to continue eastwards but to turn to the right, southward along the shore of the Red Sea. It must have seemed suicidal to the more sceptical in Israel. The route along which they were directed meant that several million people with many millions of animals had to find their way across a strip of water at least six miles wide.

The locality of the 'Red Sea' has been debated for the last two thousand years. Every possible point along the ninety miles from Suez to the Mediterranean has been argued for the crossing and many books have been written about it. Ignorance of geographical conditions at the time of the Exodus has caused some of the confusion. The Scriptural account has been clarified by more recent investigation. The people of Israel were trapped and Pharaoh thought, *"The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert"* (14.3). So he decided to go after them and recapture them.

Between Ismailia and Suez today there are the Bitter Lakes but apart from these, there are two

stretches of land across which Israel could have escaped. In Moses' day both those pieces of land were below the sea. The Red Sea was continuous all the way to Etham. Since then the land southward has been slowly rising; from Etham northward to the Mediterranean it has slowly been sinking. A branch of the Nile which ran into the Red Sea at Etham in the days of Abraham has been steadily running dry through the ages because of this rising and Egyptian history is full of records of various pharaohs who had the river bed excavated to allow the water still to run. At the Israel camp at Pi-hahiroth, land which today is 10 metres above sea level was in the time of Moses eleven to thirteen metres lower, so that the people looked out across a sea six miles wide but only about two metres deep.

A trek of twenty-five miles brought them to the appointed place. Neither Pi-hahiroth nor Baal-zephon on the opposite coast have been identified; both names have been lost in the mists of antiquity but the narrative is so detailed that with a map of the district the position can be estimated with reasonable accuracy. The host found itself encamped on a wide plain shelving gently down to a sandy beach, surrounded by high mountains except for one narrow gap by which they had entered. There still exists one tower like peak standing as though it were a lookout position and this is probably the place called Migdol which means 'tower'. Across the sea, six miles away, they could just see the opposite sandy shore and the stony strip beyond. Behind these was the lofty rugged escarpment known as Shur – the wall – a mountain plateau with one upstanding peak. This was probably Baal-Zephon, Lord of the North, thought to be some 'high place' sacred to the Semitic god, Baal. Thus the precise crossing place is identified and there the people rested. It was here the forces of Pharaoh found them. The Egyptian king had changed his mind again and decided to bring the escaped slaves back. Whether it was the economic loss of slaves or the apparent loss of direction by Israel that outweighed his fear is not made clear. He organised his chariots and cavalry and set out in pursuit. It would take about three days for messages to reach Rameses and for the military force to sight Israel's host. *"As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord"* (14.10).

There is a significant contrast here between the people's panic and Moses' quiet trust. The people thought they would all be slain. Moses went to God and received his answer, *"Why do you cry to*

me. Tell the people to go forward" Does it not sound like Jesus telling the disciples to feed the multitude? Moses was told to stretch out his rod and it would divide the sea so that Israel could pass through the waters on dry ground. The message to move must have taken some time to reach everyone in that vast company and the Egyptians waited their time. They were in no hurry for they believed their escaped slaves were safely trapped. Darkness fell and as nothing could be done till light, the Egyptians pitched their tents and settled down for the night.

At this point the pillar of cloud and fire positioned itself between the Egyptians and Israel. It was darkness to the Egyptians but light to Israel as they crossed the sea. Over the mountains beyond the sea, God's people may have seen the lightning flicker and flash, indicating the time for their march. The Egyptians went to sleep. *"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right hand and on their left."* (14.21,22) Here is the miracle that lived in Israel's memory forever and perhaps is the most celebrated event in their history. What really happened?

The account is precise. They stood on a beach, seven miles long facing a stretch of water not more than two metres deep. They were just south of the present Bitter Lakes where the water was much deeper. They were in a valley running roughly north-south, between Egypt and the Sinai mountains. The tempestuous north-easterly gale sprang up and channelled between the mountains with increasing force driving the water towards the place of modern Suez. There would be a wall of water from which no enemy could attack and they felt safe. Israel, people, animals and all their gear, needed no further beckoning from Sinai. As the wind blew all night, they crossed the sandy bed of the Red Sea. If the people were extended along the entire beach and went forward as one body they could have crossed the six miles in under four hours. The sand would be firm as our sandy beaches demonstrate just after the tide recedes but movement would be slow. If they started at 10.00 o'clock the last stragglers might have been walking up the opposite beach at 3.00 in the following morning. With the gale blowing and accompanied by thunder and lightning, the going would not have been easy. Was it like a nightmare or a triumphant victory march? Either way, those who made it would never forget it – nor would their descendants.

By the time the Egyptian sentries had raised the alarm, sent a reconnoitring squad to investigate and found that the 'bird had flown', Israel was safe. The lowered water level may not have been totally new to the Egyptian officers. The Suez Canal company and the British army have records of a drop in surface level of more than two metres due to wind. This may explain why the cavalry did not hesitate to follow Israel. So in the morning watch, the chariots began to roll down the beach and before long the Lord *"made the chariot wheels come off"*. Too late they discovered that the God of Israel was fighting for His people. The sand water content had changed and become dangerous

quicksand. Moses held out his staff again and the wind must have dropped so that the water soon covered the Egyptian army. *"The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen -the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived."* (14.28). As the wind dropped, a fast tidal wave would roar toward the Egyptians leaving them no opportunity to withdraw across the three miles from their coast.

So in the morning sun, the Israelites stood on an unfamiliar shore and looked at the mountains of Egypt that they had left behind forever.

(To be continued.)

"THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH"

*Prophet of
three mountains*

2. Carmel

Elijah had thrown down the gauntlet. For too long he had observed Israel's unfaithfulness to the one true God, Yahweh, the God of Israel. For too long he had watched the increasing idolatry of the prophets of Canaanite gods, the Baal and the Asherah. They infiltrated from nearby Phoenicia into the Holy Land under the growing power of the queen, Jezebel. God's opposition to these pagan deities had been shown by the withholding of rain. Now the lush valley of Esdraelon was lying brown and fruitless. Drought was taking its toll of the populace in this dreadful famine. Elijah was ready for a more positive sign that God was still with Israel if they would but turn to Him. So he challenged Ahab to a contest on Mount Carmel where he and the prophets of Baal could offer sacrifice. The contest was to demonstrate who was really the true God of Israel by the spontaneous ignition of the animal offering and the animal being consumed in the fire. Ahab, who cared more for his temporal blessings than he did his religion, accepted the challenge and called the whole nation to witness the spectacle on Carmel. So this people, God's people, began to gather coming from northern Dan and the borders of Judah, throughout Ephraim and from beyond Jordan. They would cross the prairie like Esdraelon and others would come up the valley of Jezreel passing the city from which Ahab governed. The valley (of Megiddo) followed the River Kishon and had been the scene of many 'battles' before this, but none more important than this. As they went to Carmel they must have discussed the tragedy of famine and the implications of the meeting on a mountain where others had approached Yahweh before them. The sun beat down on a large cross section of Israel's population as it moved slowly to that beautiful west coast area where the range of mountains slopes down to the

sea. Those who have travelled and observed and written about the land of Israel in more recent times have described a very beautiful area. As you look south-eastward from the mountain the River Kishon is seen running through the valley with the larger area of the Plain of Esdraelon to the left eastward. Worship of other gods beside Yahweh had been enacted here, gods that had ears that heard nothing, that had eyes that saw nothing, the work of a man's hands, made in man's image. The slopes are covered with terraces where fruit is grown. To the west there lies the seemingly endless Great Sea (Mediterranean) with its little ships, white sails billowing in the wind. They moved in and out of the harbours of Tyre 50 kilometers up the coast from Carmel, the greatest port in the ancient world with incredible trading activity. But like its sister town, Sidon, 40 kilometers further north, they were but the works of men, labouring under delusion of false deities. But on this day, Elijah was not on the slopes of Carmel for sight seeing although the grandeur of the Creator's handiwork would not be lost on the prophet. He had more important work to do. In regal pomp and appropriately extravagantly dressed the prophets who worked by favour of the royal household came to demonstrate the power of their gods. Last of all, the king would put in his appearance carried perhaps in his chaise, expecting due homage. The proceedings however seem to have been in the hands of Elijah. He turns to his audience, God's people, and with a fiery address that seemed as though it would never go out, said to them, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions?" or as the NEB translates it "How long will you sit on the fence?" This people had vacillated between the Almighty God and their neighbours' Canaanite deity and this could be the turn-

ing point in their history. Not a word could they answer as the lonely prophet of the Lord put the proposition to them, that they should clearly follow the god who was prepared to answer by fire. So Elijah ordered that two bulls should be brought for sacrifice and he generously put the foreign prophets in to 'bat first'. He let them choose their animal and sort out their altar and the wood upon it. There they laid their dead animal and then began to call to the Baal to answer. All day, through the burning heat of noon into the afternoon they called to Baal. Surely there were enough of them, four hundred and fifty prophets, all making a dreadful noise, that must have echoed around the hills. Why did he not answer? Elijah began to chaff them into not calling loudly enough.

He suggested that perhaps their god was attending to some mundane matter and could not hear them. Amid the deafening row, the priests now beside themselves with terror, began to gash their bodies and make their blood flow. As the sun began to dip over the sea, Baal had still not answered. As David Kossoff so poetically puts it 'the meat began to go off'. Why did Baal not answer? He was god of fertility who made the crops in the fields to grow and controlled the weather – or so they thought. He was also the god of fire but still there was no answer. In their frenzy they would leap upon the altar. How different from the worship of the God that Elijah served!

When at last it was clear that the pagan prophets were not going to get an answer, Elijah began to prepare for the 'evening sacrifice'. This was the time when the priests of old had offered the second of the two daily sacrifices. Evidently the altar of uncut stones has gone into disrepair. Now Elijah repaired the altar of Israel's ancient worship. The twelve stones represented all Israel – were there any watching from Judah that day? Was Obadiah discreetly observing? Hundreds of prophets and priests there might have been, this great man of history. Elijah clad in his unusual garments now had the attention of that great convocation. He seems to have done all the hard work himself except filling the jars with water and splashing over the animals, wood and stone until it filled the surrounding trench. The false prophets had not been allowed any of their trickery that day so now Elijah was determined to demonstrate to God's people that there was no trickery in the worship of the true God. This was not magic. Quietly he drew the people to the altar, so that they could see that his offering was genuine and also that they might have a share in the worship of God. Israel now stood at the crossroads, a place where the Christian Church has stood more than once. Elijah challenged them to

observe what God could do. Then in front of them all he called upon the Lord to show that He is God by answering his prayer by fire. It is a poignant moment as that people hear the prophet call to the God of their fathers. The Almighty, the Eternal did not let His servant down, and fire swept down, cleaned up not only the sacrifice but stones and water in the trench surrounding the area where once the altar had been. The contest was over and Elijah's stand for God had been vindicated. He ordered the prophets and priests of idolatry to be killed so that the worship of Israel's God could be restored in His land. As the blood of those wicked men began to wash down towards the sea, Elijah suggested that the king, Ahab, should take a little refreshment while he, Elijah watched for the rain. He went up the mountain and sent his servant to the very summit to report on anything he saw. The prophet bowed himself with his head between his knees and prayed. Oh that we could hear the prayer of that quiet time with the Lord. Here was a man who knew what his petition should be. There was nothing vague about that prayer but it was intensely spiritual. Elijah was praying for rain because without such a prayer rain would not come. His servant returned and reported that nothing was visible yet. So the servant was sent up again to watch while Elijah returned to his prayer vigil. At last after several journeys to the top of Carmel, the servant returned with the news that he had seen a cloud as big as a man's hand. That was Elijah's cue and he told the king to 'get his skates on' as there was about to be a great deluge. Ahab took his chariot and went as hard as he could to his palace in Jezreel. Elijah won the second contest of the day and outran the chariot horses. Ahab went to see his wife, Jezebel and told her how the day had gone. Jezebel's one concern was for the safety of her prophets of Baal. When she heard the bad news she immediately threatened Elijah's life. Then the most astonishing thing of all happened, for the man who had prevailed with God when he asked for a drought, the man who had come back to withstand the host of foreign prophets and had watched God at work from real experience, now ran for his life. The excitement and effort of all that had gone on had overcome him, and he fled from the woman who so wanted to kill him. Elijah was someone just like us. He was on a joyful high when in triumph God was victor over the Devil and his evil representatives on Earth. Now he was feeling low for all seemed against him and he fled for his life. All the great moments of victory seem to have disappeared. Yet this was the moment that Israel needed Elijah. What did he miss that day when he fled from Jezebel? Another man when given such a

message from a wicked queen has said "Go tell her I fear nothing but sin!" All who love the Lord should be aware of Satan's secret weapon – it is 'discouragement'. It is vital that all that love the Lord should know what can happen in moments of fear and despair. They should certainly never be responsible for discouraging another believer, who-

ever they are. As for Elijah, running away from Jezebel, this was not the end of the story – but only the beginning. He may have deserted God at this critical point in the battle but God did not desert him. There were other tasks to be accomplished and God knew His man.

DN

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Notes to aid
personal Bible Study

2. Chapter 1 verses 39-80

Luke 1.39-45 Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Only Luke gives us the songs and the birth stories. He was a talented artist and researched meticulously. Mary's journey was about 90 miles (150km) taking about 5 days; much of it up hill, south of Jerusalem. What prompted Mary to go to Elizabeth, hurriedly? Would she find someone to share her experience? The older cousin was excited and thrilled, without envy of the younger one's privilege. Was her expression "my Lord" a reference to Messiah. Elizabeth's words are poetical – a song. All three main characters in this chapter are "*filled with the Holy Spirit*". Catch their excitement. The 'blessedness' of which Elizabeth speaks is a paradox; glory brings suffering; Mary would see her son, who brought so much bliss, hang on a cross. (1)

Luke 1.46-56 Mary's Hymn of Praise breathes a regal spirit, but there is no direct mention of Jesus. It dwells on God's power, holiness and mercy (3) and the Gospel stands on God's greatness. The song took its name 'Magnificat' from its first word in the Vulgate (Greek *megaluno*) meaning to make great (2). Mary would have known much of the Old Testament by heart since childhood and her song echoes it. How is it different from Hannah's, at Samuel's birth? (1 Sam. 1.1-10). Mary sings of "God my Saviour", which tells of her personal need, as with all sinful humanity. Like the prophets, she gave deeper meaning to earlier ideas. Human values are reversed and as the song reaches its climax, Mary sings of a 'revolutionary principle' in which all things are made new (4). God turns attitudes upside down (5). 'Heart' (v.51) indicates human thoughts, desires and emotions. Does v.55 refer to all of Abraham's natural descendants? (John 8.39,44,56; Romans 9.7,8; 11.26; Galatians 3.16, 29; 6.16) What does Mary's song reveal of God's character? What does it reveal of Mary? What challenge can we find in her example? What are the 'mighty deeds' which the proud ignore?

Luke 1.57-66 John is born. It seemed an utter impossibility a year before. The event aroused much interest. It was circumcision and naming on the 8th day. (Gen. 17.12; Lev. 12.3; Luke 2.23) The parents were emphatic; 'His name is John', which astonished friends and relatives, leaving them

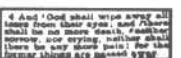
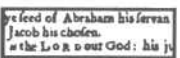
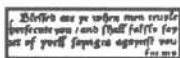
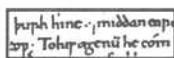
awe-struck. Names in Old and New Testament were important, especially if they revealed characteristics of God. "*Making signs to Zechariah*", was he deaf and dumb? (kophos can mean either (6)). Writing tablets were made of wood covered in wax using a 'stylus'. Names tell their own story: Zechariah – God remembers His covenant; Elizabeth – God is absolutely faithful; John – God's gift of mercy; Jesus – God saves. (7)

Luke 1.67-80 Zechariah's priestly hymn – The 'Benedictus' from the first word in the Latin version. What are the main themes of this song? Who are the central characters in it? It is the joyful response of one who had been silent for long months. There is a lot of Jewish history here but religious rather than political. God has come to His people after long centuries of waiting and is redeeming them. Like Mary's song, this is full of familiar Old Testament ideas. 'Horn' represents power. The house of David refers to Messiah, to Jesus not John who was from Levi. Zechariah looked forward, as did all true Israelites, to freedom from the tyranny of Gentiles, to worship their God. This was not just patriotic enthusiasm – but clasp the promises to Abraham "*in you and your descendants shall all be blessed*". Vv 76,77 turns to the new baby and sets the scene for John's place in the plan of redemption. Note the precision in the fulfilling of prophecy. Trace the unfolding purpose of salvation based on OT. Let us pray that God will work through us with assurance and purpose. How far was John's work predicted? (Luke 3.4-6; John 1.23). What, according to this song, is the purpose of salvation? Is this our experience? When John was born, the world was in total darkness. John was to announce the blazing glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We are not told when he left his parental home or how long this dear pair survived after the great event. They sleep with Daniel until He whom their son announced does the work He promised by raising all from their tombs. We leave the wonderful story in v.80 with a remarkable testimony about the growth to manhood of one of whom our Lord said "*among those born of women none is greater than John*" (Luke 7.28)

(1) Barclay (2) (6) Vine (3) (5) Morris (4) (7) Geldenhuys



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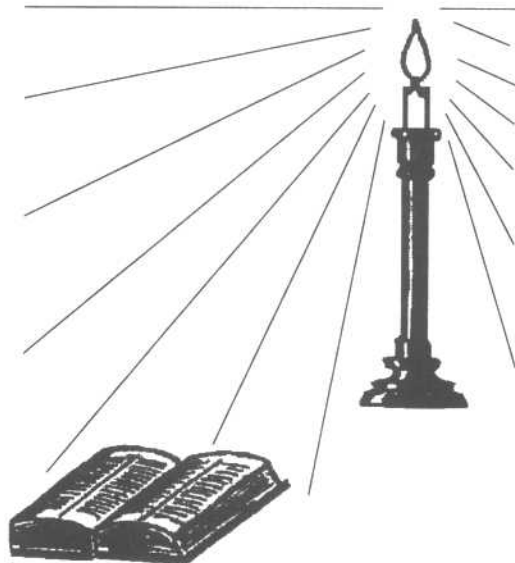
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JUST A WORD – vision – horama

Horama is a word that occurs almost entirely in the Acts describing the experiences of Peter at the time of Cornelius' conversion and later of Paul in various communications from the Lord. It will be noted that this Greek word appears in such current words as 'panorama'. In the Bible visions are some form of Divine revelation or message, conveyed in recognisable form, some of which have a sense of reality or physical presence.

Peter was on the flat roof of a house in Joppa and might have seen the white sails of ships at sea. He was there not to see the sights but to pray. He saw a 'vision' of all kinds of animal life in a sort of sail cloth hammock. The various animals included birds and reptiles and were by Jewish law and custom 'unclean' and unfit for food. A voice that he recognised as 'the Lord' told him to "kill and eat", to which he objected as a Jew. Later he recognised the meaning of the vision with reference to meeting Cornelius at Caesarea. The link with food, table fellowship and acceptance of Gentiles as brethren was a slow and hard lesson to learn. But for the immediate need Peter recognised his task for the Lord was to go to Caesarea, a semi-pagan Roman city and stay with a Gentile.

Did Peter see real animals? How much would someone beside him have shared the vision? *Horama* is the word translated vision in Acts 9 and 10. There is an interesting reference in Acts 12. 9 when Peter was leaving the prison from which he had been released by an angel. He wasn't sure whether the experience was real (*alethia* – truth; reality) or was a vision (*horama*). It is also the word to describe what Paul saw in Acts 16.9,10 and is how he refers to his conversion experience before Agrippa and Festus in 26.19, the vision to which he was not disobedient. Interestingly the word occurs but once in Revelation – 9.17. An associated word occurs in Acts 2.17 regarding the young men seeing visions. It is used but once in the Gospels when Jesus tells

the disciples not to speak of the Transfiguration 'vision' till after the resurrection.

Using the Septuagint (LXX) we can find the word used with reference to Abram's very important meeting with the Lord in Genesis 15.1 and later the Patriarch was to fall into a 'trance'. The word is used relative to Samuel's experience when as a boy he heard the voice of the Lord in His house. (1 Sam. 3.15).

The word for *trance* is different – *ekstasis* – (similar to the English word 'ecstasy') but is also used in Genesis 15.12 and Acts 10.10; 11.5 and 22.17. This last reference is by Paul to the Jerusalem crowd, describing an experience at prayer in the Temple when the Lord was giving him instruction.

So again we must ask the question, what did those who were involved in these experiences see and hear? How much were angels involved and in what way do they represent God? Abraham saw angels but addressed them as Yahweh (Heb. 13.2; Gen.18.22-33). Behind this stands the authoritative word "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1.17 RV) and Jesus' own words "No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God;" (John 6. 46).

These experiences are perhaps beyond description in the fullest sense. Words will not convey what really happened. Of one such experience Paul admits that what happened defies description (2 Cor. 12.4). God's servants seem to be taken beyond the confines of normal human existence so that He can convey His message to them. Each of these experiences was a very important occasion in their lives and in the revelation of God to man. Most of us do not experience such things but we do well not to be too dogmatic about them. Our Heavenly Father can come close to us and convey His thoughts to our minds. Only our human nature gets in His way.

DN

THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE

A study in
Divine Purposes

4. Moses to Christ

"For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people'" (Acts 3.23 NIV – Deut. 18.15). This is one of the most significant utterances of the Scriptures. It tells more of God's purposes than did all that had been revealed to man in all ages before Moses. For the first time in history the Divine intentions and promises became centred in the person of an individual – "He that shall come" – and forever afterwards the constant theme of all who thought and spoke and wrote of the ways of God was the 'Coming One'. In Him would all the fair promises of God for human welfare be fulfilled.

Small wonder that Isaiah should speak so rapturously of the King who one day would rule in righteousness, of the Shepherd who would feed His flock, of the Conqueror who would destroy all evil in the winepress of God's wrath. Small wonder that Malachi should speak of the herald who would announce His advent, and the blessing that would attend the completion of His work. Small wonder indeed that the people, waiting and longing for the promise, should ask John the Baptist, hopefully, *"Are you the prophet?"* They had been waiting so long and by then they realised how much they needed His coming and His ministrations.

Back in the days of Moses the people had by no means come to this stage of development. They as yet hardly realised their undone state before God. True they knew that they were in misery and suffering. Their cry in Egypt had gone up to God in Heaven, and He had heard, and had reached down from Heaven to deliver them, *"with a high hand and an outstretched stretched arm"* (Deut. 26.8). But once the immediate stress was over and they were safely on the other side of the Red Sea they quickly forgot the Lord, their deliverer. It was not until their enthusiasm was engendered by the making of their covenant at Sinai in the mediation of Moses that their faith returned and they shouted, *"All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient"* (Exodus 24.7).

The making of the covenant was a great event in the history of the Times of Ignorance. Here was

God undertaking to teach this whole nation the things concerning Himself and His plan. For that covenant was much more than a mere understanding "If you do this you will live if you do that you will die" It was not framed merely to inaugurate and perpetuate a series of rites and ceremonies that might become the ritual form of the nation's worship. It was a covenant of knowledge, a means by which Israel, and others too, in after days, might be taught the elements of God's purpose by understanding what the Law Covenant contained, its precepts and principles, its warnings and promises, its types and shadows. The Covenant became to Israel a teacher that was intended to lead the sincerely reflective among them to a higher plane in the knowledge and understanding of God – and ultimately to the Saviour. *"The Law,"* says Paul, *"was our pedagogue (tutor) to lead us to Christ"* (Gal. 3.24).

The making of the Law Covenant with Israel, was by far the greatest advance in the dispelling of man's ignorance of God that had been made since Creation. The standards of God's holiness were now made known in the world, not as reasoned out by man on the basis of things that are seen, but revealed by God from things that are unseen. A new voice was in the world, speaking with authority, the voice of God Himself. When He said at Sinai *"Thou shalt not ... thou shalt ..."* there was none that could gainsay.

It has been asserted by scholars anxious to discredit the Divine authority of the Scriptures and the supernatural element in the Exodus story, that the Laws of Moses bear a striking similarity to the Code of Hammurabi. It was assumed that Moses must have taken his commandments from the great Sumerian monarch of six hundred years earlier. It is true that there is a great similarity and since the rules of right doing and justice are based on the same fundamental principles in all ages it is not surprising that such a similarity does exist. Hammurabi did the best he could with the same motives at heart as had Moses; but when God spoke to Moses He revealed depths of understanding in the regulation of the conduct of fallen man that the Sumerian ruler never plumbed. The law of Moses has survived almost intact to our

own day because it was directly the work of God. The Code of Hammurabi has survived only imperfectly through generations of fallible and imperfect men.

So Israel pursued her noble career through the centuries, despite many failures and shortcomings continually advancing in knowledge of God and presenting to the world a constantly deepening and widening view of the principles of His government and plan. Men, as a whole, were no more disposed to believe than they had been in the earliest stages of world history. However, the opportunities for acquiring knowledge of the way of salvation, and the bases of faith, were much more extensive. That is an important consideration when the question of responsibility is discussed. Our Lord indicated that when He spoke of the men of Sodom and Nineveh rising in the judgment with men of His own generation (Matt. 12.41). Greater knowledge, greater light, brings responsibility and therefore liability to a greater judgment. The Israelites had light a thousand-fold, more than those who had lived before the Flood.

Perhaps in no way is this increase of light on God's character more strikingly shown than in the Lord's own words to Moses. He said *"I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac and unto Jacob by the name El Shaddai – God Almighty but by my name Yahweh – the all-embracing One – was I not known to them"* (Exodus 6.3). What profound truth is hidden in those few words! The patriarchs, knowing God as the Almighty, All-powerful One, had advanced tremendously from the position of their ancestors, who knew Him only as the Most High, so Moses and his generation take another great stride forward into the light and come to know God, not merely as the Almighty One who had all power, but as the Eternal, omniscient both in power and being, the source of all things and the sustainer of all things. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" said Paul to the men of Athens. That is what the name Yahweh implies. He embraces all things, and in Him all things consist. There was only one greater height of understanding to be attained, and to reach that highest level of all, men must wait for the Coming of One who had dwelt in the bosom of the Father. In due time He would interpret Him to man, not as the Most High, not as the Almighty, not even as the All Embracing One, but as the Father! Men were by no means

ready for that in the time of Moses.

The history of Israel was not one of uninterrupted advance in the knowledge of God. There were periods of retrogression. Such an one was the latter part of the period of the Judges, a time when idolatry was rampant and the people were falling away fast from their covenant. The work of Samuel did much to bring them back to God and the terms of their national standing before Him. Then in the days of the later kings the ugly head of apostasy reared itself again, and this time the people went away into captivity. It was a captivity in which they learned another and an entirely distinct set of lessons which brought them back in the days of Cyrus, a very different nation from that which had gone away under Shalmaneser and Nebuchadnezzar. In the interim the prophets of Israel had arisen with their several messages. Thus when there were barely four centuries left to go for the Times of Ignorance to have run their full course there were many in Israel able to look forward with considerable clarity of vision to the God-promised prospect of a world in which sin and death were banished and all men would live in the light of God's countenance and find at His right hand pleasures forevermore.

It was during this period that the benevolent aspects of the Divine dealings with man became clearly understood, as they had never been understood before. The old mechanical, ritualistic idea of God, eternally demanding appeasement by blood sacrifices, requiring unyielding obedience to a meaningless jumble of precepts, began to give place to an appreciation of the principles which lay behind those outward forms and ceremonies. *"Hath the Lord as great delight"* cried Samuel to Saul *"in sacrificing and offering as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"* (1 Sam. 15.22). It was Jonah, one of the earliest prophets, who was taught, and taught in his turn, the great lesson of the mercy of God. *"Should not I spare six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right and their left hand?"* (Jonah 4.11). Times of Ignorance indeed! The entire population of what was at that time the world's capital city was incapable of the most elementary discernment, and God would save them, that an opportunity be granted them to repent, and so come to a knowledge of Him that

their ignorance might be swept away. The Gentiles, sunk much more in unbelief than did Israel, were nevertheless just as much objects of Divine care. Although they had been left to make their own way through the fogs of ignorance there were among them from time to time men who showed that the spirit of enquiry and of investigation was not dead. Oft-times there were those, who, like the discreet lawyer of the Gospel story, were "not far from the Kingdom of God."

Such an one was Akhnaton, the Egyptian Pharaoh who not long after the time of Moses sought to wean Egypt away from her many gods and return to the purity of her ancient worship, that of One God. Akhnaton has been called 'the world's greatest dreamer', the world's first pacifist, and kindred names. He drew all Egypt away from the worship of many gods and set up the worship of one god, restoring Egypt's original monotheism. He could compel respect to his wishes, for he was Pharaoh. He closed the old idolatrous temples and built himself a new capital city, sacred to the cause to which he had devoted his life. That he was a great man and profound thinker there is admittedly no doubt but he was no sooner dead than all his reforms were abandoned, his memory vilified and Egypt went back to her old ways. The monotheism of Moses has borne lasting fruit in the world and given us first Judaism and then Christianity. The monotheism of Akhnaton failed to survive his own generation. Moses was led by the Holy Spirit; the Egyptian Pharaoh was not; that is the difference.

So it was with the great philosophers who came in the later centuries, a few hundred years before Jesus was born at Bethlehem. The world was growing rapidly in knowledge and experience; explorers were pushing to the ends of the earth and astronomers were scanning the heavens. At the time that Sennacherib took the Ten Tribes captive to Assyria, Zarathustra, the Persian philosopher was laying the foundations of a great religion upon his thesis of an eternal conflict between the powers of light and darkness, of good and evil. He had not attained to the truth as it was shortly to be revealed but he had taken a great step forward. While Nebuchadnezzar was ruling in Babylon and Daniel was his Prime Minister, Confucius the Chinese philosopher was teaching men on the other side of the world that human nature is essentially and inherently good, it only requires development to

attain to righteousness and perfection. He was right, and yet he came far short of the truth, that only by means of the Redeemer shall man reach forward to righteousness and perfection. While Malachi, the Hebrew prophet declared that a day must come when God will burn as in an oven all that is evil and corrupt, so that the true and good might emerge, purified as gold and silver, the Greek philosopher, Socrates, was extolling the inherent goodness and rightness of knowledge. That for him was all that is necessary to open to man a pathway to the stars; but man had sought for knowledge at the very beginning, had attained knowledge, and it had brought only suffering and death. All that Socrates had to say concerning the virtue and the necessity of knowledge was true but knowledge of itself cannot save and that is where Greek philosophy fell short and failed. These philosophers, and many like them, were searching for the truth and each of them uncovered some fundamental principle that has its place in the great plan whereby men will enjoy harmony with God and remain in harmony with Him. Yet they all, without exception, failed to give real illumination to men because they did not know Christ. They had not heard and failed to realise that in addition to all that man can find out for himself and all that he can do for himself he needs the saving power of God, in Christ, as expressed in the knowledge of the Gospel. Without that and without faith in the only name given under heaven whereby men can be saved, there is no salvation.

So at last, and in the fullness of time, Paul the Apostle stood upon Mars hill at Athens. He announced in a tone of authority never before voiced either by prophet or philosopher and with a knowledge transcending the loftiest heights to which either had in time past attained, that the world's ignorance was now to be dispelled by a plain authoritative statement of the Divine purpose. The beclouded minds of men were to be illumined by a proclamation and a calling as clear and definite as it was commanding and obligatory. The Times of Ignorance, God had 'seen beyond'; now that which He had foreseen had come to pass and in the light of the triumphant life and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, He called upon men to forsake their former ignorance, to heed His words, and repent.

AOH (To be concluded)

JOHN MARK

A character study

There is so very little said about him and yet an important part of the New Testament came from his hand. The details of his life and ministry are so obscure yet he exercised a momentous influence on the early days of the primitive Church. He was younger than any of the twelve apostles, yet he is of such mature character and devotion to the Lord Jesus. John Mark, author of the Second Gospel, is one of the outstanding figures of the Apostolic Church.

He does not appear in the history of those early days until about ten years after the Crucifixion. He then is presented under the Latin name of Mark or Marcus, which has led some to suspect that he was either a Jew of the Dispersion or a Gentile who had become converted to Christianity. This idea is linked to his fellowship with the Jerusalem Church at the time of Barnabas and Paul who were there in connection with the money gifts contributed by the Gentile churches to the suffering of the Church in Judea as recorded in Acts 11 and 12. However, Mark was the son of Mary, one of the devout women disciples who provided for Jesus out of their means (Luke 8.1-4). Mary had a house in Jerusalem, frequently used by the believers and this may have meant she was well off. Her brother Barnabas was also comfortably off and sold land in order to give the proceeds to the Apostles for the relief of the poor. Barnabas was of the tribe of Levi, and it would appear that Mark was a Jew of Jerusalem.

Another consideration is the vivid and life-like style of his Gospel. It used to be argued that Mark wrote his Gospel at the dictation of Peter. The motive behind this suggestion may have been the wish to have one Gospel representing Peter's recollections of the Lord's life to stand alongside that of John. It is only a hypothesis; there is no evidence. The style of Mark's Gospel is so vivid and life-like that it is clearly the work of an eyewitness. There is a crispness and an enthusiasm about the composition which speaks of an alert, intelligent and youthful observer. Acts 13.5 speaks of John as general assistant to Paul and Barnabas and that implies that in AD46 he would be in his mid-twenties. It follows that during the lifetime of Jesus he would have been about fourteen years of age. That conclusion is supported by another significant feature of his Gospel. Unlike all the

others, there is a noticeable absence of references to the Old Testament prophecies. As a lad, he might have been less familiar with them than the older men. There is a much fuller and detailed account of the things that Jesus said and did. In this latter field he repeats many Aramaic words as uttered by Jesus which again testifies to the fact that he was there and heard him speak. Although all the Gospels were written in Greek, Jesus probably spoke Aramaic, the language of the people.

It is true that there are many words of Latin origin in his Gospel. The tradition that he wrote it at Rome could be true. If so, he would have been at least forty years of age with a varied and travelled life behind him. Thus, with his agile and perceptive mind, he must have acquired a reasonably good education.

If Mark was a youth at the time of Jesus and devoted to the Master there is a logical explanation of one of the New Testament enigmas. It concerns the identity of the young man clad only in a linen cloth who was seized by the guards at the time of Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. The incident is related only by Mark (14.51-52) but it happened after all the disciples had fled and they knew nothing about it. Only Jesus was there, being led away. The 'young man' (neanias - any age between 14 and 25) had followed the captured Jesus "*wearing nothing but a linen garment*". When seized by the soldiery, he wriggled out of their grasp and fled, leaving the robe in their hands. One might ask, what was this young man doing out there in Gethsemane, in the freezing April night-time, always bitterly cold in Judea at night even though the day is hot, clad only thus? Others had fled, but he followed, discreetly at a distance, probably, to see what was going to happen to the Master. If the lad was Mark, only he knew of the incident. It is believed that the Last Supper had been held in the Upper Room at his mother's house. Mark knew perhaps from the demeanour of the twelve, as they set out for Gethsemane with Jesus, that there was going to be a crisis that night. He must have known of the enmity of the priests and he knew their methods. He intended to be there to see what happened but he did not intend to be caught. So he smothered his naked body with oil, enshrouded himself in a single sheet of cloth that would readily

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slip off, and set off for Gethsemane. When caught by the captors of Jesus he wriggled out of the sheet and they were unable to hold him. He slithered out of their grasp and was gone. Thus was the news brought to the women whilst the disciples were in hiding.

So Mark would have grown up in the faith during those early years following the resurrection and was received into full fellowship in the community. When ten years or so later Paul came to Jerusalem, he found him ready for Christian service and took him back with him to Antioch. There he laboured for two or three years and then set out with Paul and Barnabas on what is known as Paul's first missionary journey. He did not get far. After a short progress through Cyprus, evangelising and perhaps establishing one or two little communities, they crossed the sea to the Asiatic mainland and here Mark left the other two and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13.13). The cause of his defection is not known. The most likely surmise is that the increasing troubles in Judea and rising persecution of the Christians there led him to return to protect his mother. He must have gone back to Antioch within a year or so for when Paul and Barnabas planned their second missionary journey in AD 50 a dispute arose as to whether Mark should accompany them. The upshot of that was that the two evangelists separated and Mark went to Cyprus again with his uncle, Barnabas.

Of this evangelistic effort nothing is known. After their arrival in Cyprus in or about the year 50, when Mark was about thirty years of age, the curtain drops and does not rise for another ten years. According to Col. 4.10, he was with Paul at Rome during the Apostle's two years' detention awaiting his first trial. That would be between the years 60 and 62. Of Barnabas nothing more is known and tradition has it that he was martyred in Cyprus soon after his arrival. If this were so, Mark would obviously have returned to his headquarters at Antioch. The early historians are emphatic and unanimous in saying that Mark was the founder and first elder or bishop, of the Christian church at Alexandria in Egypt, and Eusebius (4th century) says that the second bishop, Annianus, succeeded Mark in AD 61. It might therefore be concluded that from Antioch, Mark went to Egypt and stayed there perhaps eight or nine years by which time the church he founded had become numerous and

influential? In later years Alexandria ranked with Antioch and Rome as one of the three most powerful churches of the Christian society and was a serious contender with Rome for the primacy of Christendom. If Annianus did succeed him in AD 61, Mark, learning that Paul had been taken to Rome to await trial, wanted to be with him in his hour of adversity. At forty-two years of age he was too young to think of retiring from any kind of service. So he went to Rome, which is where we find him in Col. 4.10 and again in Philemon 24. The epistles to Colossians and Philemon were both written during AD60-62 and Mark was with Paul when they were despatched.

Two or three years later he is in Rome again, this time with Peter. Paul had gone on those travels which occupied the time between his first and second trials and which are not recorded in the Book of Acts. After Paul left he probably went back to Antioch. After Paul and Aristarchus sailed for Spain there were none of the Asiatic evangelists left in Rome; the Church in Rome had its own leaders in Clement and Linus (both mentioned in the NT), and Anencletus so Mark was not really needed. The obvious conclusion is that he returned to Antioch where his friend Peter was now the leading elder, and wait for his next commission of service.

That commission came in about AD 65 when Peter decided to go to Rome. The Great Fire of Rome and the consequent persecution of the Christians there, blamed for the catastrophe by the mad Emperor Nero, was over and the decimated church there stood in dire need of help. Peter, Silas and Mark set sail for Rome and laboured with the church there for some two or three years before Peter's martyrdom. It was quite likely that while there Mark wrote his Gospel, unless, he did so during the five years or so immediately preceding, whilst at Antioch. The accounts of several 2nd and 3rd century Church historians regarding Mark were formerly held to infer that he wrote his Gospel at the dictation of Peter so that it was properly the Gospel of Peter. More sober examination of these old histories tends rather to indicate that Mark acted as a kind of secretary to Peter, writing down his oral teachings for the benefit of the believers, not that his own Gospel was dictated by Peter. In practice there is little doubt that Mark drew some of his material from

Peter but the style and contents of his Gospel both point to a writer who himself witnessed most of the events which he records. He remembered the actual words spoken by Jesus and possessed a freshness of enthusiasm and outlook that point to a much younger man than Peter. The life of Jesus as related in the Gospel of Mark is seen through the eyes of a teenage lad rather than a grown man. Perhaps the 1st letter of Peter offers the most convincing argument in this connection. Peter wrote that epistle from Rome at about the same time as Mark wrote the Gospel. The total difference in style and in the usage of words between the two compositions renders it inconceivable that both stemmed from the same mind.

Within about another two years, Peter had gone to his reward, martyred for his faith. Silas must have left Rome only a few months before, carrying Peter's 1st Epistle to the brethren of Roman Asia. Mark would have left Rome directly after Peter's death, having no further object in remaining. He could not have known that Paul had just been arrested at Troas and was now en route for Rome again, to his second trial and to execution. The two ships carrying them probably passed each other somewhere in the Mediterranean, for Mark is next found at Ephesus. It is likely that he took with him Peter's 2nd Epistle. So he came to Ephesus, where Timothy had been serving for the past six years, since he left Rome after Paul's first trial. Mark probably worked with Timothy and the Apostle John whom he knew so well in his boyhood days.

Six months later, Paul, back in Rome, in prison,

facing trial for being the ringleader of what was now an illegal and proscribed religion, wrote to his beloved co-labourer Timothy asking him to come to Rome, and to bring Mark with him. (2 Tim. 4.11). Only Luke had remained with him, he said, and he wanted to see the others again for what would perhaps be the last time. "Do try to get here before winter" (v.21). It was not to be. He wrote to Timothy early in AD 68. His final trial and execution could not have been later than April or May, for he was condemned during the reign of Nero, and Nero himself died during June of that year. Before Timothy even received the letter the great Apostle to the Gentiles had finished his course and passed into his Master's safe keeping.

So, in the year 68, thirty-five years after he had crouched behind that tree in Gethsemane watching his Master being taken, the curtain falls on John Mark, still serving that Master, in the Asiatic city of Ephesus. He was barely fifty years of age, probably the youngest survivor of those who had seen and heard Jesus in the flesh. He was still capable of work for the Master. Whether he stayed at Ephesus, or went back to Antioch or even Jerusalem, or to some other quite new field of endeavour, no one knows. He is not likely to have returned to the Church he founded at Alexandria. After his successor Annianus came Arilius, and after him Cerdo, and then Primus. It is apparent that Mark did not take up the oversight of the churches in Egypt again. Like so many of God's heroes in the Bible, there was no departing in a blaze of glory. He just slips out quietly and is seen no more. AOH

PROSPECT

"Will nothing end this state of things? Is creation to go on groaning and travailing forever after this fashion? Thanks be to God, the Second Advent of Christ supplies an answer to these questions. The Lord Jesus Christ has not yet finished his work on behalf of man. He will set up a glorious kingdom, in which the consequences of sin shall have no place at all. It is a kingdom in which there shall be no pain and no disease, in which 'the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick', (Isa. 33.24). It is a kingdom in which there

shall be no more partings, no moves, no changes, no goodbyes. It is a kingdom in which there shall be no more deaths, no funerals, no tears and no mourning worn. It is a kingdom in which there shall be no quarrels, no losses, no disappointments, no wicked children, no bad servants, no faithless friends. Where is the Christian heart that does not long for this state of things to begin?"

Bishop Ryle 1880

It is a good deal better to live holy than to talk about it. We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody that it does.

The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses don't ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining – they just shine. (Moody)

"THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH"

*Prophet of
three mountains*

3. Horeb

The victory of Carmel lay behind Elijah as he entered the gates of Jezreel. But now he was close to the woman who was his real enemy. Jezebel was the power behind the throne and had been the power behind the prophets and priests of Baal. When she heard of Baal's defeat on Carmel from the lips of her husband, King Ahab of Israel, she immediately sent a message to Elijah that was a threat to his life. At that point the man who had been God's instrument of victory and blessing but a few hours before, now turned on his heel in fear and ran for his life away from that terrible woman. Suddenly the moment of victory seemed to have turned into defeat; all that had been so wonderfully gained appeared to be lost. Elijah had already proved his athletic ability as he ran from Carmel to Jezreel. Now he was travelling but much further, more than half the length of Israel and on through Judah until he reached Beersheba opposite the southern end of the Salt (Dead) Sea. He had gone some 150 kms (about 100 miles) without turning aside into Judah. Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah was queen consort to the king of Judah. He left his servant at Beersheba and travelled on into the desert alone, still southward. At the end of the day, worn out from his travels, he sat down in the shade of a white broom tree that can grow to 4 metres high (12 feet). There he longed to die which was an interesting wish since he appeared to be running away from death at the hands of the foreign queen. It had been a long day so he lay down to sleep. While he slept he had a visitor. An angel touched him and provided him with bread and water. Elijah returned to his rest until the angel again woke him and provided more refreshment. This was for the journey ahead, for Elijah was on his way to the 'second' mountain, the sacred mountain of Horeb where Moses had received the commandments and had made the Law Covenant. This doesn't appear to have been Elijah's planned destination but evidently God intended that it should be. Many godly men have spoken and written about Elijah's story, and in particular about this phase of his life when he appeared defeated and running away from the Lord's enemies. It is regarded as a dreadful failure at a time when he should be celebrating a great victory. Was he

wrong to have fled from the wrath of Jezebel? Was it really a terrible mistake? If it was, then God turned it into a wonderful experience that Elijah would never regret. There were many places nearer home to which Elijah might have gone. God had hidden him before from Ahab and he could have done it again. Elijah needed to be away from the battle with the world and God's apostate people, to regroup his forces and discover the way ahead. So to Sinai he walked, about 150 kms (100 miles) and found a cave in which to shelter, probably from the burning of the noontide heat. There the Lord found him and asked that interesting question. "What are you doing here Elijah?" The prophet does seem to have been in agony of mind. He felt so lonely not merely physically but spiritually. He desperately needed human fellowship. That need was part of the Creator's design for humanity. But God didn't want Elijah in a cave at ground level but on the top of the holy mountain, that wonderful spot on the face of the Earth where God had met Elijah's spiritual forbear, Moses. Amid the natural grandeur and beauty of that place He had something to reveal to Elijah that would bring spiritual growth. As with Moses, the presence of the Lord passed by. There was a furious wind, and a mighty earthquake and a searing fire, but God's revelation at this time was not in the dramatic and physically powerful things. God could be known in the demonstration of power and wonder. These Elijah could see elsewhere but now he had to listen to his Maker in the quiet whisper. Again the question came, "What are you doing here Elijah?" Was the prophet in a cave at the top of the mountain? Was he in the cleft of the rock in which Moses had stood as the Lord passed by? More importantly did Elijah, in that wonderful moment, discover the true beauty of the nature of our God as Moses had done (Exodus 34.6,7). Elijah still seems to have been in an agony concerning his isolation yet received no rebuke. We are not told that Elijah had done or thought anything wrong. Nor is the Lord unsympathetic about his obvious depression. But Elijah's work was not complete for he had to return to Israel so that he could anoint two kings, and also the prophet Elisha who would

continue the work that Elijah had started. There were political and ethical issues to straighten out and only Elijah could accomplish that for the Lord. Finally there would be the dramatic departure in the presence of Elisha.

The instructions contain an interesting lesson for us. We too have cried out that we are alone. Too often we have dismissed the faith of others as of no account in God's sight. There on 'our Horeb' may we discover as did Elijah, there are many in Israel who we have never known but whom the Lord has kept safe, who have not bowed the knee to Baal and are zealous for the Lord of Hosts; their Heavenly Father and ours.

The third mountain was the place of the Transfiguration. There we have just a glimpse of Elijah in the vision with Moses and Jesus seen by the Apostles. It is a vision that set Jesus apart from all other men, and it was done in the presence of two of the greatest men that have ever lived, Moses and Elijah. These two were very great men, not only because they wrought mighty works in Israel. They were truly mighty instruments in the hand of the Lord. Like Moses, Elijah was given a very

special audience with Israel's wonderful God not in the dramatic or the loud acclamation but in the quietness of Horeb. A still small voice, a gentle whisper, a brief sound of silence. Our Lord knew *that quietness in the presence of a holy God*. Like Moses and Elijah, He learned not only what He had to do but how He had to do it. That quiet place is still available today to all who follow Jesus. We need not seek it on some distant mountain top nor beneath a lofty dome or spire. We must seek a trysting place where we listen to the Lord alone and where our voice and the voices of others are still. If we would do anything to further God's kingdom and lift up His name among believers or unbelievers, we must first spend time with the Lord in the secret place of the Most High and live beneath the shadow of the Almighty. There we find what we and others call 'mistakes' are really wonderful revelations of God's character. There we find our commission for fresh fields of service, for our work for Him is not done till He is ready to say 'Well done, good servant'. And prayer in the secret place can be as important as any other work. Elijah was a man just like us.

EVENTIDE

"So he brought them to their desired haven"

When in God's providence the right man arrives at the right time in the right place great things may be expected and accomplished. It was so when Barnabas took Saul from Tarsus to Antioch (Acts 11.25,26). Following the spell of sharp persecution after Stephen's ministry and death, certain brethren travelled into distant parts finding for themselves opportunities denied in Jerusalem. Among them were brethren of Greek background, who as they travelled homewards, came at last to Antioch, and there spoke openly and freely to 'Greeks' about the grace and goodness of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A very considerable number of hearers believed wholeheartedly and turned to the Lord. Here was an unorthodox situation, for these were Gentiles, yet the hand of the Lord was with them.

When the tidings of these unexpected happenings reached Jerusalem, the mother Church sent Barnabas, a brother well trusted and greatly esteemed, to investigate and presumably to report back. Barnabas was both amazed and delighted by

what he saw and heard, and good man that he was, exhorted the new converts to stand fast in the Lord. But he quickly realised that this work was too big and too exacting for the local overseers to control effectively and help must be found somehow, somewhere. Barnabas knew the man for the task; recalling events of several years before he was sure that but one man in all his generation among those with whom he was acquainted was capable of taking this task in hand. Hence that speedily determined journey to Tarsus to seek Saul.

But what of Saul? How had he fared since the day when his Master without warning told him to "depart" from Jerusalem? We don't have much evidence concerning these intervening years and such as we have is autobiographical. In an outline of experiences in which comparison with other believers had been necessary, Paul lifts the curtain upon some of those earlier years spent in and around his native town prior to the call of Barnabas. This little chapter of autobiography is recorded in 2 Cor. 11.21-27 and records the story

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of countless beatings, some nearly to death, five distinct scourgings by the Jews, to the utmost limit permitted by the law, three beatings by the Romans (by rods). Three times shipwrecked, with a whole day and night adrift on one of these occasions; in dangers of many kinds and in many places, in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure, so runs the grim and frank recital. Foxes had holes, birds had nests, but Paul (like his Lord) often had no where to lay his head!

Now all this had befallen him prior to the story of his travels recorded in Acts 19.21-23. Where is the record of these things in Acts of the Apostles? There is no record of all this buffeting anywhere. We have the main records of his first and second missionary journeys and while some of these experiences occurred during one or other, there are some that cannot be accounted for during these journeys or in later years. At least two of the Roman beatings and probably three of the Jewish floggings belong to those early years before Barnabas sought him out. Which means, of course, that the servant of the Lord, dismissed from Jerusalem, had laboured, perhaps in the main unsuccessfully, in the hinterland above Tarsus. These are unrecorded years and he paid very heavily in suffering for his fidelity to the Lord. How do the words of the Lord to Ananias seem to have been fulfilled "*I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.*" (Acts 9.16)

Well, such was the man and such was the preparation for the work he had been called to do! In that quieter retreat, away from the stress and turmoil of faithless Jerusalem, the Lord had been hardening him to pain and persecution, to hatred and disesteem in readiness for the arduous hours that lay ahead!

Thus when the Gentiles' hour came, there came the right man prepared by God to match the hour and the work to be accomplished.

His purposes had ripened fast
Unfolding every hour;
The bud had a bitter taste
But sweet would be the flower!

A whole year was spent in establishing and consolidating the Church at Antioch; the preparation for the wider work he and Barnabas were called to do.

The lesson here for us is that there are tides, ebbing and flowing, in the history of the Lord's people; set times and set hours for this work or that, and it is the Lord who arranges them. Nothing is more obvious in the stories of Acts than the hand of God, the Spirit of God, supervising and directing everything. Such expressions as "the Holy Spirit said"; "the Spirit suffered them not"; "Come over to Macedonia"; are among the tokens of the Spirit-led life! Are not these things the essentials today? Perhaps not in great world-shaking movements as yet, but in the quieter ways of preparation. It is a lack of insight and love to think that God's over-ruling Providence falls only inside one little fellowship or church, and that His hand controls none outside. In these days of intensive strain, we may be the person to help some poor sufferer in their 'hour' of need. If that is so, are we going to say that we've tried and tried in vain and are quite sure there's no one else we can help? Has all been done that can be done? If that is how we feel someone's 'hour' will come without the right and intended person being in the right place. There are still lonely hearts to cherish as the days go by that a spirit of defeatism will allow to pass without help and without blessing.

Only a word for the Master,
Lovingly, quietly said,
Only a word, yet the Master heard
And some fainting heart was fed.

Only a look of remonstrance,
Sorrowful, gentle and deep,
Only a look! Yet some strong man shook,
And went alone to weep.

Only some act of devotion,
Willingly, joyfully done,
Surely 'twas nought! (So the proud world
thought)

But yet souls for Christ were won.

Only! But Jesus is looking.
Constantly, tenderly down
To earth and sees, those seeking to please
And these things he stands ready to crown.

A loving God will continue to call for the right person in the right place at the right time until the purposed hours are fulfilled! Let us be sure of that!

TH

MORDECAI AND ESTHER

The Inside Story

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible with no reference to God or prayer. Fasting and self mortification are its only possible allusions to praying. The Septuagint (LXX) version of the Old Testament however refers to God some fifty times in Esther, in line with the books around it. Further, it records two prayers, those of the leading characters, in great detail, and closes with a detailed testimony to what God had done: His hearing of prayer and delivering His chosen people. The book is 30% longer than the traditional one and refers to records of the key events being kept by both Mordecai, Esther and the Persian king. It is evident to the present writer and others that the LXX version is Mordecai's account and that the traditional book is the Persian court record.

The LXX account was probably that available at the time of Christ's first advent, as New Testament writers generally used the LXX version of whatever Bible book they were quoting. The reason Esther in the LXX is so long is that it begins and ends with the prologue and an epilogue, presumably by Mordecai. These describe a dream of his, some twelve years before the racial hatred that is remembered to this day in the annual feast of Purim; and finally describe the complete fulfilment of that dream. In addition he records his prayer to God – when the hatred of Haman surfaced – and the even longer prayer of Esther, at that greatest crisis in their life. They occur between chapters 3 and 4 of the traditional version. They are summarised here, since readers may not have access to the LXX version of the Old Testament. The two court letters, Haman's and Mordecai's, are also recorded in full: amazing legal documents, which must have been copied endlessly, for the local rulers in the 127 provinces of the Persian empire.

But to begin at the beginning: the scene is set in the Persian capital, Shushan, with Jewish captives originally taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, transferred like Daniel to Persia by Darius or Cyrus. Esther was Mordecai's young cousin, to whom he became the foster-father on the death of her parents. The age difference may account for the common misconception that he was her uncle. The LXX adds the hope of Mordecai that she would become his wife. And the story ends with Mordecai becoming viceroy, perhaps succeeding

as emperor. Esther and he appear to take over the rule of the Persian empire. One cannot help wondering whether, after the emperor died, Mordecai had his wish and married Esther, as he had hoped when she was a teenager, long years before.

Mordecai (Mardochaeus in the Greek) was a witnessing Jew, not ashamed to be known as one determined to obey the laws of Moses. As we learn from the Septuagint translation of the Jewish scriptures, he was a Benjamite and a man of prayer. He brought up his foster child in a godly way. The record tells how he dreamed of a storm in which two serpents prepared to fight, resulting in all nations preparing to oppose the righteous nation. This nation (Israel) in their fear of the tumult, cried out to God for their life. "And from their cry there came as it were a great river from a little fountain, much water. And light and the sun arose and the lowly were exalted and devoured the influential." Also contained in the prologue to the book is an account of Mordecai getting his name in the royal records for informing the king of an assassination plot – also recorded in chapter 2 of both Hebrew and Greek versions. In the prologue account, Mordecai also kept a record of the incident. (In the prologue account Mordecai reported the plot via Esther). Chapter 9 verse 29, reports that both Esther and Mordecai wrote down all that they had done.

The holding of a beauty contest is not the first in scripture. In King David's old age a beautiful damsel was chosen to nurse the king because of his low body temperature. In Esther the choice was for a new queen, a totally different ministry. Esther was chosen for both her physical beauty and her inner charm – which led, years down the line, to her taking political responsibilities in a vast empire. In the Greek version, ch. 2.20, it is recorded that Mordecai commanded Esther to fear God and keep His commandments as when she was with him. Here then we see a faithful daughter of Abraham and of Benjamin obeying her national religious code within a godless palace. She was also very careful to follow the royal etiquette, in obedience to the guardian of the women.

Mordecai got into bad odour with Haman (the first chamberlain, according to the Greek text) for his failure to accord him the customary obeisance.

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Thus he drew down Haman's wrath, not only on himself but on all the race to which he was proud to claim to belong. So five years after Esther's wedding feast the holocaust was planned, according to Haman's casting of lots. Mordecai's message to Esther was to entreat the king for his people, "remembering the days of your low estate, how you were nursed by my hand. ... Call upon the LORD and speak to the king concerning us to deliver us from death."

Mordecai and Esther had almost a year to seek divine help and their prayers are recorded in great detail. It is here that the names and titles of God appear frequently. A condensed form of these prayers follows. Capitals are used to emphasise these titles.

He sought the LORD, making mention of all the works of the LORD. And he said, "O LORD GOD (equivalent to LORD JEHOVAH) king ruling over all, for all things are in your power, and there is none that will oppose you in your purpose to save Israel. For you made heaven and earth, and every wonderful thing in the world under heaven. And you are LORD OF ALL, and there is no one that shall resist you LORD. You know all things: you know, LORD, that I have done this, to refuse obeisance to haughty Haman.

For I would gladly have kissed the soles of his feet for the safety of Israel. But I have done this, that I might not set the glory of man above the glory of GOD: and I will not worship anyone except you, MY LORD, and I will not do these things in haughtiness. And now, O LORD GOD, THE KING, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, spare your people, for our enemies are looking upon us to our destruction, and they have desired to destroy your ancient inheritance. Do not overlook your 'peculiar people' (portion), whom you have redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt. Listen to my prayer and be propitious to your inheritance and turn our mourning into gladness, that we may love and sing praise to your name, O LORD: and do not utterly destroy the mouth of them that praise you, O LORD."

Following this prayer we read what may be a unique statement "**and all Israel cried with all their might, for death was before their eyes**". Immediately we read: "Queen Esther took herself for refuge to the LORD, being taken as it were in the agony of death." Her self mortification is

described vividly, followed by her long prayer – which is abridged here.

And she sought the LORD GOD OF ISRAEL and said "O MY LORD, you alone are our KING: help me who am destitute and have no helper but you. For my danger is near at hand. I have heard ... that you LORD took Israel out of all the nations ... for a perpetual inheritance and hast done for them all that you have said. And now we have sinned ... and you have delivered us into the hands of our enemies, because we honoured their gods: you are righteous O LORD. O LORD, do not resign the sceptre to them that are not ... turn their counsel against themselves and make an example of him who has begun to injure us. Remember us O LORD and ... encourage me O KING OF GODS and RULER OF ALL DOMINION. Put harmonious speech into my mouth before the Lion and turn his heart to hate him that fights against us ... But deliver us by your hand and help me who am destitute and have none but you, O LORD. You know all things and know that I hate the glory of transgressors, and that I abhor the couch of the uncircumcised, and of every stranger. ... And your handmaid has not eaten at the table of Haman, and I have not honoured the banquet of the king, neither have I drunk wine of libations. Neither has your handmaid rejoiced since the day of my promotion until now, except in you, O LORD GOD OF ABRAHAM. O GOD, WHO HAS POWER OVER ALL, hearken to the desperate and deliver us from the hand of them that devise mischief; and deliver me from my fear."

In the second sentence of chapter 5, we find an 'arrow' prayer of Esther's: "having called upon God, the overseer and preserver of all things" she went with her maids to see the king. "And she was blooming in the perfection of her beauty, and her face was cheerful, as it was benevolent, but her heart was paralysed with fear". ... As she came before the King "he looked with intense anger: and the queen fell and changed colour as she fainted... But GOD changed the spirit of the King to gentleness." "What is the matter, Esther? I am your brother; be of good cheer, you shall not die, come near." She flattered him with "I saw you, my lord, as an angel of GOD, and my heart was troubled for fear of your glory; for you my lord art to be wondered at, and your face is full of grace." She fainted again. Wonderfully God was answering

her prayer. And so diplomatically she got the king's ear, and that of Haman. Was it chance that the King should that night have read to him the account of Mordecai's reporting of the assassination plot? Was it chance that Haman came in next day and found himself having to honour Mordecai in a way he would have liked to be honoured himself? Chapter 6:13 includes the words of Haman's friends and his wife: "You will not be able to resist him, for the living GOD is with him." Chapter 7:4 includes Esther's words, "for the slanderer is not worthy of the king's palace." Chapter 8:11 includes the words "wherein he charged them to use their own laws in every city and to act as they pleased" – a much milder summary of the state edict. The version of the second edict, from 8:13, constitutes virtually an extra chapter, which includes such expressions as: "the sin-hating vengeance of THE EVER SEEING GOD, the sons of THE LIVING GOD, THE MOST HIGH AND MIGHTY, WHO MAINTAINS THE KINGDOM, ... in the most excellent order. ALMIGHTY GOD has granted them this time of gladness." It concludes with an insertion in the last verse: "many of the Gentiles were circumcised and became Jews, for fear of the Jews."

The traditional ending of the book of Esther with the honouring of Mordecai is said to have been recorded in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (10.2) whereas Mordecai's epilogue to the Greek version of the book is a remarkable testimony. "These things

have been done of GOD. For I remember the dream which I had concerning these matters: for not one particular of them has failed... The river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen. And the two serpents are I and Haman. And the nations are those that combined to destroy the name of the Jews. But as for my nation, this is Israel, that cried to GOD and were delivered: for THE LORD delivered his people, and THE LORD rescued us out of all these calamities; and GOD worked such signs and great wonders as have not been done among the nations."

"Therefore did he ordain two lots, one for the people of GOD, and one for all the other nations. And these two lots came for an appointed season, and for a day of judgment before GOD, and for all the nations. And GOD remembered his people, and vindicated his inheritance. And they shall observe these days in the month Adar, on the 14th and 15th of the month, with an assembly and joy and gladness before GOD, throughout their generations for ever among his people."

Truly the Greek Old Testament preserves a record of God's dealing with two praying cousins and their nation in a way which fully honours His Name. Blessed be that Name.

JT

Author's note Capital letters have been used for the names of God to give emphasis. These and the bold type do not appear in the Septuagint translation. Readers are invited to send in their observations on whether such a 3-day prayer with fasting and self-abasement has ever been tried in situations of national danger – such as Israel faces today.

Superscription on the Cross

Some have wondered why the writers of the Gospels differ in their record of Pilate's inscription placed above the Cross. Matthew records it as "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27.37) Luke "This is the King of the Jews" (Luke 23.38) John, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19.19) and Mark, "the King of the Jews" (Mark 15.26). It would seem at first sight that the Evangelists had been guilty of carelessness in compiling their records, but such is not the case. It will be remembered that the inscription was written in the three languages current in Palestine at the time – Hellenistic Greek, Aramaic Hebrew and Latin. Luke being himself a Greek, would probably record the Greek inscription. Matthew, a

'civil servant' of the Roman Government, accustomed to rendering his accounts and reports in Latin would take note of the Latin form, whilst John, a Galilean fisherman, would of course read the Hebrew. Mark, a lad at the time, has apparently preserved only part of the inscription. On this supposition, the Latin inscription would consist of twenty-two characters and the Greek and Hebrew of twenty each. Thus the inscriptions in each language would occupy an equal amount of space.

A fish in the Thames – afraid of perishing? A mouse in a granary – afraid of starving? All things are ours, and above all "My grace is sufficient for thee."

(P E Thomson)

A MAN SET UNDER AUTHORITY

"The centurion answered him, 'Lord I am not worthy to have you come under my roof but only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority'" (Luke 7.8-9). Jesus' encounter with a centurion occurred during the first year of His ministry; a year when He was popular. Some rabbis and synagogue authorities were still kindly disposed toward Him and He moved freely among the people of Galilee. Capernaum was a city at the northern end of Lake Galilee. It was a centre for the fishing and farming communities of the area. It was also strategically placed for the collection of taxes on the trade route from the Great Sea (Mediterranean) to Damascus, capital of Syria. It may therefore have been a garrison town with Roman soldiers stationed there and the man in our text was in charge. This was a town where Jesus, by his own comment, had done many mighty works. This centurion and the people of Capernaum had a mutual respect for each other. As the story unfolds it is clear that this Roman had faith in the God of the Jews and had put a substantial sum of money towards the building of their synagogue. While the Romans went out of their way to help local people over whom they ruled, Jews did not readily co-operate with their foreign masters.

A centurion was the highest non-commissioned officer in the Roman army and these men, with a hundred soldiers in their care, were the backbone of the Imperial forces. They led their men into battle and took the strain when they were attacked or in retreat. They were men of trust, diplomacy but conveyed the iron will of the Emperor. They had to show the subdued populace that the Empire would tolerate no corruption or rebellion. Evidently they could show the kindness, which helped to bring Roman stability. The man who approached Jesus was one among several centurions mentioned in the New Testament all of whom had commendable qualities of character. There was the man stationed at the cross who looked with wonder on the dying Saviour. The first Jewish convert to receive the Holy Spirit was Cornelius, the centurion at Caesarea. Paul was cared for on his eventful voyage by Julian. This man at Capernaum who had used his wealth to build the Jews a meeting place for worship appears

to have enjoyed the friendship of the respected elder men of the town.

In spite of what could be said in their favour, centurions for the most part would be regarded by the Jews as heathen, uncircumcised Gentiles, who knew little of the law and promises given to Israel. Their authority came from Rome and followed the dictates of the Emperor. This farsighted officer had to obey whatever was decreed by the imperial power and then ensure that those under him obeyed the orders. This centurion in Capernaum was able to translate that idea into the Power that ruled the universe. He thought deeply about the real issues in life and impressed Jesus.

Authority involves obedience and that has always been a problem of the human race. It was that which brought the first disaster on mankind with the entry of sin. We more readily show other qualities than the humility needed to do as we are told. King Saul discovered that to listen and obey is more important than some forms of worship.

The word 'authority' is not a popular word and some regard it as an out of date, outmoded manner of life. It speaks of the time when a privileged few dominated the large majority, often using cruelty and oppression. Strangely, those who once fought tenaciously for liberty from such authority are the quickest to impose it on others.

The Bible clearly upholds the idea of 'authority'. Scripture doesn't support violent revolution or acts of terrorism, from whatever quarter they may come. They are the tools of the Devil and there is no religious, political or social ethic to support them. Israel believed that as children of Abraham and custodians of the Law of Moses they should be free from a foreign tyrant. It was a shock when Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylonia telling them that they must not rebel but rather co-operate with their masters and pray for the peace of that pagan land. The concept was not really so strange. From the time of Joseph, the pattern of behaviour of godly men was to accept civil authority. Providing the rulers of this world are not demanding that His people should flagrantly disregard God's moral laws, men and women of God are clearly told to accept their authority because it comes in some degree from Him. Jesus upheld this principle when he told the religious leaders of His day,

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" and the early Church leaders enjoined Christian communities to pray for civil authorities. How often are we obedient to that command?

This does not mean that followers of the Lord Jesus should imitate the arrogant example of human rulers. Jesus clarified this point when rebuking the disciples for wanting to be regarded as the most important of the 'twelve'. The humility called for in obeying authority is also the characteristic needed in wielding authority. Those who have the compassion and patience of Jesus are the right candidates for holding authority. We do not get the best out of people by 'lording' formal authority but using it for the blessing of others. There is such a difference between mechanical obedience and joyful responsiveness. That principle holds good in every sphere of life, in office and factory, in school and home. This is not the spirit of an authoritarian but one that invites co-operation and mutual understanding. Ultimately God's authority alone must stand, and to Him must be the glory. For the rest, we are but instruments of blessing in His hand; servants to do His bidding because His way is best.

The centurion who requested Jesus' help had a servant (Luke uses the word *doulos* – slave) who was so ill he was likely to die at any moment. The officer for some reason greatly valued his servant and desperately tried to save him. His whole attitude was very unusual. He did not feel worthy that Jesus should enter his house. This officer who had the backing of the whole Roman empire felt that his home was not good enough for Jesus, an itinerant preacher of a subjugated nation. This man had heard, perhaps even seen one or more of Jesus' mighty healing works. Perhaps he had already discovered something of the Hebrew God and was a 'god-fearer' – a Gentile who had not become a proselyte but whose faith had drawn him into a teaching circle of the Jews. He recognised that Jesus was a true representative of that God. He realised that Jesus was under orders from Heaven just as he, a centurion was under authority and could exercise that authority. Further, he realised that Jesus had the power of that authority to do a mighty healing work at a distance, as it were, by remote control, without actually being present with the sick slave. The jump of faith was truly remarkable and Jesus expressed great surprise,

with implied admiration. How different from the leaders of God's covenanted people who could not accept the authority of the prophet, John the Baptist. They similarly refused to acknowledge the authority of Jesus when he cleansed the Temple. The Pharisees demanded a visible sign by which they could prove that Jesus' work was authentic. This centurion's 'leap of faith' (to use C. T. Studd's expression) was so much more wonderful because he believed in Jesus' power without an outward, visible sign.

In the Matthew 8 record of this event we learn that Jesus sets the scene for the acceptance of Gentiles to His kingdom. "*Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*". What better evidence did the early church need that it was right and proper to go to the house of a Gentile and have table fellowship with him? How many barriers of class and race are broken down in this one story? This is the Good Samaritan in actual life. It is the story of someone who cared for the best possible reasons. It is the story of a spiritual life that puts to shame many who have claimed to follow the Master. Jesus saw in this man an example of what he had taught recently in the Sermon on the Mount, that the Creator makes His sun to shine on everybody, whoever they are. The Gospel teaches us that those who truly believe in Jesus, cannot remain aloof from those who need our help.

The boy or slave was healed and God was glorified because this man, under authority, had faith. Jesus too was a man under authority. He carried the credentials of God and He knew when and how to use the powers which God had given Him. May He help us to go and do likewise.

DN

The Riper Years

A little more tired at the close of the day
 A little less anxious to have our own way.
 A little less care for gain or gold;
 A little more zest for the days of old.
 A broader view and a saner mind;
 A little more love for all mankind.
 A little more love for the friends of youth
 A little more zeal for established truth.
 A little more charity in our views
 A little less thirst for the latest news
 A little more leisure to sit and dream
 A little more real, – the 'things unseen'.

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THE EXODUS

11. Into the Desert

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

Song of Victory Exodus 15

The dawn of Israel's first day of freedom came up beyond the high Sinai mountains in glory and splendour which fitted Israel's mood. The Lord had delivered as promised and they were witnesses of the truth of Moses' words "*The Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will see no more for ever*". Only six miles lay between Israel and the land of their slavery. An Egyptian cavalry force could easily have caught them by travelling round the northern end of the bitter lakes, a route familiar to those going to the Egyptian copper mines. But Pharaoh really accepted defeat this time. Amen-hotep II lived for another 19 years and was buried in the Valley of the Kings. There is little in the Old Testament to suggest that Pharaoh died in the Red Sea with his army. Psalms 136.15 speaks of Pharaoh and his host being 'overthrown' in the waters but it would be better translated 'shook off'.

Moses organised a thanksgiving session on the shore of the Red Sea and a song was composed for the occasion which was probably sung to musical instruments. The first part dwells on the victory over the Egyptians, the second part anticipates further victories in winning the Promised Land. Miriam, Moses' sister led the women in a suitable triumphal dance with timbrels to the refrain "*Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously*." This is the first record of song and dance in the Bible but it has remained part of religious worship ever since. Considering that Miriam was probably over ninety on this occasion it was quite an achievement but illustrates the fact that human vitality was at a much higher level than now.

The song first exalts God who gave this great victory. "*The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation. ... The Lord is a man of war ... Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea...*" It was the Lord's right hand which brought glory and power. This same thought had been evident throughout the plague disasters brought upon Egypt. Israel's God could execute powerful judgment. From this early conception of power in the right hand, Israel's prophets began to bring in the idea of God's projected personality, not separate from Him but representing Him among men, exercising His power in the earth

without Him leaving His Heavenly Throne. The compiler of Proverbs similarly uses 'wisdom', the mind of God, personified and depicted as a skilled workman. From this came the concept of the Word or Logos of God.

"*With the blast of thy nostrils*" sang Moses, "*the depths were congealed (hardened) in the heart of the sea*." These are the words of an eye-witness, but with a remarkable turn of phrase, in wonderful poetic form. "*Who is like you, O God, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*" Moses continued by looking to the future. It wasn't quite so easy as anticipated because Israel were not obedient nor did they trust that God could take them into the Promised Land without warfare (Exodus 23.30). Their joyful simplicity vanished three days later when they were in a state of rebellion against their leader.

Paul took the crossing of the Red Sea to illustrate in 1 Cor. 10 the Christian doctrine of baptism which he explained in Rom. 6. as the raising to new life of the Christian and again emphasised this in 1 Cor. 5.17 with "*Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new*". That in turn signals a much greater deliverance of all mankind which inaugurates the Messianic Age. The glory of that moment in the desert was undimmed through the centuries of Hebrew poetry in the Psalms and Prophets (Isa. 11.11). The coming of Israel out of Egypt was like the exit from the Kingdom of darkness into the glorious Kingdom of Light.

Bread from Heaven Exodus 16

It is probable that when Israel camped in the Desert of Sin, six weeks into freedom, that the provisions brought with them had begun to run low. They had flocks and herds but these could not be killed indiscriminately as they would be part of their future life in Canaan. It was now vital that the problem of food supplies was solved. Perhaps it's the most well known story of the Exodus in that the people of Israel, some two to three million men, women and children, plus flocks and herds, were adequately fed and watered for forty years. They stopped at Marah and Elim where the water supply was well arranged, but as they went further they

were becoming hungry and wished themselves back in Egypt. So God promised bread from Heaven and it came in shape of little fat birds of the partridge family, quail, that frequently migrate in large flocks across this area sometimes as low as a metre above ground. Dried and salted they needed little further preparation. The other item on the menu is not so easily explained although numerous attempts have been made to show that this too was a natural happening. The supply, once commenced, continued throughout the forty years of wanderings, six days a week. There is a substance frequently gathered by travellers, called 'man-ha' by the Egyptians, even used as an item of trade. It was investigated about 70 years ago by Prof. Bodenheimer of the University of Jerusalem who established that manna is a honey like substance produced from the sap of the tamarisk tree by insects in much the same way that bees produce honey from nectar. Its scarcity today is due to the gradual depopulation of trees in Sinai area. The description in Exodus 16.14 is very accurate. Another suggestion has been that edible lichens from the arctic, borne in on the wind and capable of being ground and baked to form a kind of bread. Either or both of these suggestions could produce enough food for this great company of people. But the six-day week supply, with none on the Sabbath is a little harder to explain by natural

causes. If food came to some extent through natural processes then it was very much under the control of the powers of Heaven. They would have other food stuffs, meat and milk from their animals, fruit from trees definitely known to be in the area especially dates. Only when their journey was across the strictly desert places did the food supply really run short. Like us, they had lived in the sophisticated urban areas of Egypt that gave them an inflated idea of what was good to eat. Now back to meagre diet of nomads they would be fitter for the journey and much nearer to the natural world and that was good for the mind as well as the body. The real shortage was grain for bread and the manna would be its substitute.

The lesson was there to learn – that the Earth can yield its increase and the Divine Creator can and will arrange for those who trust Him. When their own unaided understanding of the situation is insufficient to cope with a crisis, God can control Nature to bring what is needed. It is the Divine intervention that makes it a miracle. It is that which modern conceited human beings do not like to admit. Israel, like all peoples, quickly forgot the lesson and soon they lost faith at the next crisis. For the moment they were satisfied and accepted the order to 'March'. As they pressed on over the flinty ground, the forms before them of lofty mountains would continue to grow.

CART – Christian African Relief Trust

In the Spring Newsletter of this registered charity it is heartening to read how it continues to send huge container loads of much needed clothing, food, books, fabrics, bedding, tools, medical and toilet supplies and machines. So far this year containers have gone to Cameroon, India, Uganda, Senegal and Ghana. It is the first time that Senegal has received relief and now there are new projects for Kenya and Botswana. One of the two sent to India was for earthquake disaster relief.

The Newsletter contained details and photographs of supplies reaching Zambia and Senegal last year. It also contained much information as to how funds are being raised by all kinds of people. It tells of those involved in giving time to serve in the shop at Huddersfield and others who help in repairing and packing goods. Many boxes of spare BFU magazines and books have been sent too.

If you have clothing which could be sent – for

all ages – you can make contact through the addresses and phone numbers given below. If you wish to send food, then it should be dried or **canned but not in glass jars please**. Typewriters, sewing and knitting machines are still needed; so are gardening tools. It costs a great deal of money to send a 20 or 40 foot containers to Africa. Help is always deeply appreciated and it is clear that the love which has sent so much to that great continent, is deeply appreciated by those who live there.

Contacts:

G. G. Tomkins,
"White Gates" Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield.
HD8 0LR Tel: 01484 602756
and in the Midlands:-
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COURAGE OF CONVICTION

Faith in action

"Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, 'I believed and so I spoke', we too believe and so we speak" (2 Cor. 4.13 RSV). Faith is a mighty, moving force, making worlds and changing circumstances. In action it has worked wonders. The golden threads of its deeds are woven into the many coloured tapestry of man's history. But faith is not a dumb force. It speaks in words of conviction and assurance. Sometimes in halting phrases and with stammering tongue, sometimes eloquently in words of flame or in tones of thunder. Often it chooses the still small voice of some gentle saint to suddenly stab awake the dormant conscience of a self-willed ego. Whatever its tones or wherever it speaks, its words spring like water from the rock foundation of its belief.

"I believed so I have spoken." The original words were said by David, King of Israel. He had cried to God when in deep trouble and he had been helped. His distressed mind found rest. In his relief and sense of revival, he publicly expressed his gratitude to the Lord who had answered him with swift and generous assistance. Faith proclaimed its secret trust in the almighty invisible arm of power and its open reward. It declared its plain testimony before others, that they might see and know and understand the benefits of believing.

The life that is lived by faith, the steps that are walked in faith, have different experiences leading to different destinations from those resulting from purely human choice or the uncertain chances of life. Actions speak louder than words and the old heroes of faith were doers. Following in their energetic wake have come the preachers and the teachers, proclaiming in tones of living fire the great gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The glorious theme of salvation needed tongues of Pentecostal fire that its speech might be heard through all the earth. Its greatest Apostle, carrying its torch of liberty and truth into the misty philosophy of the western world, had exclaimed, "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Again, "If our Gospel is hid it is hid from them that are lost."

It is a blind, confused, wandering world of men and women that runs hither and thither in all directions, tossed about by every wind of doctrine,

alternatively angry or distressed, like lost children, needing a clear reasoning voice to give them direction, to turn their feet in the right path. Unless someone who knows the way is willing to speak to them how can they get out of the dismal wilderness? Faith stepped into the office of preacher. Men and women believed in God and in Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth and the life", so they went out into all nations, into the highways and byways of the earth, and they preached. Faith spoke out of the fullness of their belief. "The Lord gave the word: great was the army that published it."

The harsh clamour of the modern world almost drowns the still small voice of faith. Vanity Fair competes brashly with the voice of the preacher. A jaunty indifference plugs its ears to the words of life, but so long as faith remains in a human heart its voice will still be heard proclaiming the glad tidings of good things. No word of God fails of its errand. Into some mind a spark enters, a taper of hope, a flicker of interest, a stirring of longing, to blaze at last into that abundant life which is the gift of God.

Because we believe we speak. We can do no other

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise;
The glories of my God and King
The triumphs of his grace.

To the last conscious day of his life the Christian must have the courage of his convictions. Believing, he must speak of the hope that lights his life, of the Kingdom of God to which he steers his frail craft, piloted through the shoals and storms of this world by the Hand of universal power. The praises of God will always be on his tongue and the love of God never far from his thoughts, the whole tenor and essence of his life expressing the depths and the strength of his convictions.

Who knows what dying embers may be fanned to brighter flames or what questing heart may seize on such blessed assurance and follow on to join the triumphs of the true and faithful. The words are God's words but it is the privilege of instructed men and women to speak them, that other men and women may listen and live.

BJD

WEeping AND GNASHING OF TEETH

The double metaphor of being cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, is often thought to denote the irrevocable doom of the eternally lost. There is really no justification for this quite general impression, except perhaps in one specific instance as can be seen by a closer study of the occasions in which the expression is used.

The phrase occurs seven times in the New Testament, six of these being in Matthew's Gospel. The remaining one is in Luke, paralleling one of those in Matthew. Apart from this particular case, the other five in Matthew are all embodied in one or another of our Lord's parables. In each particular parable they indicate how some have come short of God's calling or intentions, or have been judged unfit, or in some other way have been rejected from the particular purpose or calling of which the parable is the subject. The expression indicates loss rather than condemnation and its precise implication has to be determined by the teaching and purpose of each parable in which it occurs. In basic principle, the weeping and wailing indicates sorrow, disappointment and regret. Gnashing of teeth denotes frustration and enmity. An example of this latter is Acts 7.54, where Stephen's accusers at his trial, stung to the quick by his denunciation of their hypocrisy, "were cut to the heart and gnashed upon him with their teeth". In the Old Testament, David illustrates the usage: "the wicked plot against the righteous and gnashed upon him with their teeth" (Psa. 37.12). Other examples are Job 16.9, Psa. 35.16; 112.10 and Lam. 2.16: in all cases enmity against the righteous is expressed. It is in this light that the expression should be viewed when the parables in which it occurs are considered.

The first instance comes very early in Jesus' ministry. Confronted with the faith of the Roman centurion whose servant was sick (Matt. 8.5-13), Jesus imparted what was probably the first intimation of Israel's coming rejection and their replacement by the Christian Church. "*Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*". Luke 13.28 relates this incident. It is a matter of principle that the unbe-

lieving Jews of our Lord's day, who are here called the 'children of the kingdom' are not eternally lost on account of their unbelief. They will be subjects of Christ's Millennial kingdom together with all the rest of mankind and only then will they come into their final time of decision. The same situation is the subject of our Lord's words to the chief priests and elders in Matt. 21.43 "*The kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation which will bring forth its proper fruits*". The 'outer darkness' is the condition of exclusion from this particular Divine calling and the gnashing of teeth the impotent resentment and frustration at finding themselves supplanted by others.

The Parable of the Wedding Garment has a somewhat similar theme. Each guest at the wedding-feast was given a white garment to wear – it is said that this was a custom intended to avoid feelings of embarrassment on the part of the poorly attired guests, and one man refused to wear the garment. He was forthwith rejected from the feast and the door shut on him. The outer darkness and the gnashing have precisely the same significance as in the earlier story. It is often suggested that this is a parable of the divine calling of the Church just as the earlier parable had to do with the calling of Israel to be God's representatives and witnesses in the world. Thus the wedding garment pictures what could be termed the 'robe of Christ's righteousness' given to each believer to cover his frailties and weaknesses. The man who refuses the garment is then repudiating Christ and logically is therefore separated and expelled from the Christ company, hence the metaphor of being cast into outer darkness.

Of a similar nature is the Parable of the Talents. (The 'talent' here is a coin having a purchasing power in that day for which about a thousand pounds or more would be necessary today.) The king's servants were given varying numbers of talents wherewith to trade while he was away; on his return he required of them an account of their stewardship. One man had done nothing with his; he had not even invested it to gain interest, but buried it for safety in the ground and now handed it back to the king untouched. This is obviously a picture of the Christian life. The man who does nothing with all that the Lord has given him and at the coming of the Lord for His Church at the end of

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the Age has to admit as much is excluded from the company of the faithful "whose names are written in heaven". As Matt. 25.30 states, he is cast into outer darkness and suffers the pain and frustration of loss. Whatever his ultimate destiny, he has failed to obtain the "prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3.14), and takes his place with the remainder of mankind in the coming Messianic Age when all will have their full and final opportunity of accepting Christ and obtaining eternal life through him.

The parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants (Matt. 24.45-51) introduces a slight variant in that the outer darkness is not mentioned. In Matthew's account the evil servant is to be "cut asunder", an Aramaic expression which means to be cast off, cast out or separated. He was dismissed from the position held in the household and relegated to the company of hypocrites or unbelievers, this last being the word used in the parallel account in Luke 12.36. Matthew, but not Luke, then adds, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Once again, this expression is to describe the chagrin felt by the unfaithful servant at his dismissal.

There are two other instances, the Parables of the Wheat and Tares, and of the Dragnet. These are unique in that in both cases a furnace of fire is substituted for the outer darkness. There would seem to be a reason for this. In the other four cases individuals are concerned and their fate is exclusion from the calling or privilege they had enjoyed. There is a differentiation between the worthy and the unworthy in the mass, a process that endures throughout the Age and is terminated by the "Harvest of the Age". In both parables the contrast is between the fruitage of the Age, the "wheat" and the "good fish", and the wastage, that which is alien to, and unfit for, the intended purpose, and is therefore cast away. This could be true of God's dealings with the entire race of mankind. The fact that in both cases the climax is said to come "at the end of the Age" denotes the time of the Second Advent and establishment of the Millennial Kingdom and would seem to emphasise an application to the present time. The good seed of the Gospel, sown through this present Age, yields its first result in the development and completion of the Church which is to be associated with Christ in the evangelical work of the Millennial Age. It may well be that our Lord giving these parables to his disciples in private (v.36) was

leading their minds to realise that at His coming again there must inevitably be a division between those who have proved their worthiness and those who have not. By reason of unbelief or lack of faith or sincerity they have failed to do so and the fate of such is rejection from the High Calling.

In the parables this rejection is said to be accomplished by casting the rejected "into the furnace of fire" which might be identified with those metaphorical allusions to the "lake of fire" or "everlasting fire". They are references to the final passing out from life of the incorrigibly unregenerate at the full end of the Day of Judgment. This is incorrect and the reference here is to something quite different.

The word translated "furnace" is *kaminos*, occurring only four times in the New Testament, and meaning an oven or kiln for baking pottery or bread. Such ovens in New Testament times were fuelled by any suitable waste product and particularly dried herbage or brushwood (hence our Lord's allusion to the grass of the field) "*which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven*" (Matt. 6.30). Thus what Jesus said in these parables is that the tares and the bad fish respectively were "cast into the oven" as worthless for their intended purpose, wastage as far as that purpose was concerned. It is to be noted that after being thus cast into the oven, the "tares" and the "bad fish" give vent, as in the former instances, to "wailing and gnashing of teeth". There is still consciousness and reason enough to express feelings of resentment and the sense of loss. Their enmity and frustration is symbolised, as in the former cases, by the wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Thus seen, this expression, applied to six instances in the New Testament, of which five form the conclusion to parables, pictures the potent resentment and feeling of frustration of those who have been excluded from the Divine purpose in which they might have had a part. This is so by reason of apostasy, unbelief or rebellion contrasted with those who have attained such honours. Such are not necessarily excluded for ever from the wider purposes of God; only from the particular aspect with which the parable deals. Only at the end, when God has exhausted all the weapons of His armoury and still been met by a defiant 'No!' does He turn sorrowfully away and leave the erring one to his own deliberate choice. Only then is there an outer darkness that is final and irrevocable.

A Thought for the Month

"You did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19.44). Those who despised and rejected Jesus at the First Advent and were in consequence themselves rejected, were not so judged because of lack of knowledge or unsoundness of theological outlook. On matters of Law and of doctrine and of righteousness before God, the scribes and Pharisees had much in common with Jesus. He certainly condemned them for their narrowness and rigidity in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law but he did not dispute the soundness of the theological ground upon which they stood. It was not their orthodoxy or their beliefs that cost them the Kingdom. It was their failure to appreciate and manifest and practise the mind of God, which in our day we would call the spirit of Christ, that led to their rejection and thrusting out from the Kingdom. *"Go and learn what that means, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'"*. That was the stumbling-stone. They despised and rejected Jesus because He manifested a spirit of love and tolerance and mercy and with all their doctrinal orthodoxy they could find no room for those virtues. So they rejected Him, arrogantly,

scornfully and at the end maliciously; and so He in turn rejected them, sadly, regretfully but firmly.

So it will be with us. Like Paul, the most intellectually minded of all the apostles, we may understand all mysteries and all knowledge but without love it profits us nothing. If we refuse to have our lives guided by compassion, tolerance and mercy and insist instead upon the empty shibboleths of intellectual understanding and a mechanical memorising of Scriptural doctrines, we shall without any doubt at all, end up where the Pharisees did, outside the Kingdom. Our Lord will be just as sad and regretful as He was in the case of the Pharisees, but He will be just as firm. The Millennial work of the future needs many qualifications, some of them of a nature that cannot be learned out of a book. Unless we have well learned, and practised in our own lives, that spirit that pervaded the life of Christ we shall not be fitted for the Church's future work and it will become true of us as it was of them *"the Kingdom of God is taken from you."* We also shall become of those who "despised and rejected" Him.

AOH

MAN'S INADEQUACY

"Vain is the help of man" (Psa. 108.12). There are times in the life of everyone when human help is inadequate. How often someone is forced to stand helpless while another is left to fight single handed with some difficult situations. Sometimes sorrows and grief, disappointment and disillusionment come when no human word or action is of the slightest use to the stricken.

It is then that faith and habitual leaning upon the almighty arm of God prove themselves, the rock in the storm, the shelter from the blast, the strength by which we endure and conquer the onslaughts of misfortune, change, loss or betrayal.

All people are individuals, with their own personal viewpoints, feelings, failures, needs, longings and experiences. Therefore no other human heart can fully enter into or understand how deeply the waters of grief overflow or how fierce the tempest howls, or how sharp the stab from a trusted hand which goes through the quivering heart. Eloquent testimony has been given in every age to the saving grace of God. The brave have

often said of their exploits, "God was with us". Many a one looking over life's chequered pathway can point to places where but for God's help they had been destroyed by despair or overcome by perils too great for any human aid, but not beyond the deliverance of God. Life is short, uncertain and full of problems for the most fortunate. Even the best informed have moments of doubt and perplexity when all seems dark. Man is a mere speck beside earth's mountains, his days a shadow, a hand's-breadth compared to their everlasting substance, yet the privileges of humanity are many. They can scale the steepest slopes, stretching out arms to the heavens, breathing a rare air, looking up into the face of mysterious space. They can lean back on the solid crags, find shelter in the cleft rocks, make their dwellings in the green foothills. Immovable and sure, the unchanging God is the shelter of mankind, too wise to make mistakes, kind enough to remedy the mistakes of human nature, to wipe tears, to heal hurts, to lead the weary into everlasting rest.

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ANTIOCH ON THE ORONTES *Background to the Bible*

Antioch in Syria was built by Seleucus I at the end of the third century BC. It stands in a beautiful setting on the Orontes, a river which rises in the northern mountains of Lebanon. It is a city in the top right hand (north-eastern) corner of the Mediterranean to which the finger of Cyprus points and has a back drop of Mount Sylphus (Silpius). Boats came right to the city on the Orontes and there is a fine port at Selucia Peiria 19 km (12 miles) away. Like any other ancient city it suffered from the tramp of successive conquering armies as they swept across the middle east and in Roman times Antioch was the third city of the Empire and a stronghold against the Persians in the eastern Mediterranean zone.

It was an imposing city, beautiful in its simplicity and enjoying the normal characteristics of Greek and Roman towns with amphitheatre, forum, baths and many temples. The citizens were renowned for their enterprise and energy and it was a cosmopolitan city where many cultures and races were represented. In the fourth century AD the population was estimated to be 200,000 but earthquakes and the movement of Turkish and Arabic peoples caused a decline through the centuries and today there are only about 46,000 inhabitants. In early days Jews made up a good proportion of the populace receiving full citizens' rights. It was an easy journey of 600 km (360 miles) northward from Jerusalem by land or sea. The surrounding agricultural areas were rich and fertile, growing plenty of cereals and fruits. It was a remarkable centre for trade, and strategically placed as an administrative centre. Like many

flourishing and wealthy towns it was also a city of vice and corruption. As with many places in the first century ordinary folk were weary of the worn out pagan philosophies with their continual emphasis upon debased moral values.

It was therefore an ideal seed bed for the early Christian church and it was not long after the first movements of disciples to Samaria and Caesarea that believers in Jesus were finding their way to Antioch. Migrating Jews quickly discovered that non-Jews could accept the faith in Christ. It created problems for the strongly Jewish church in Jerusalem which wanted to know what was going on in the 'provinces'. Hence Barnabas was sent to investigate and he wisely seconded Saul of Tarsus to help with leadership in the Church. It was here too that the Christian community, through the prediction of the prophet Agabus, discovered the need of the churches in Judea due to famine, and Barnabas and Saul were sent with help for their needy brethren. So the young church composed of Jews and Gentiles, grew healthily in its spiritual concern for the welfare of the brethren. But they did not rest on their pastoral laurels just to rejoice in a mutual admiration society. They saw the potential for evangelism throughout the Roman world and appointed Barnabas and Saul to carry the Gospel through Cyprus, Asia Minor and Greece.

Antioch was the first place in which the disciples of Jesus were called Christians – Christ's ones – those who spoke often about Christ – those who imitated His work in spreading the Gospel and 'going about doing good.' This was a spiritual church. DN

"Can mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (Job 4.17) First propounded by an Arab philosopher, Eliphaz the Temanite, descendant of Esau, three and a half millennia ago that question is one that is relevant to Christian thought today. The situation that called it forth then, is still with us. Job, the old patriarch, embittered at the affliction that had come upon him, saw nothing more to hope for in life, and was perilously near to reproaching God for allowing such an ending to a blameless and upright life. Had he been in the place of God, he would not have acted thus. His friend Eliphaz took the long-term view. Whatever the apparent injustice of the present life, it will be found at the

end to be part of the Divine purpose for human development, that all is well and all has been for a wise purpose. "Do not reject the discipline of the Almighty, for though he wounds, he will bind up; the hands that smite will heal" he says (Job 5.17,18). There is more of experience and development and moral change to come after the end of this life before the Most High passes judgment and whatever of injustice there has been now will be made right then. The Lord created man for a purpose and it is going to take more than this lifetime to fit men for that purpose. The intent of the literary drama which is the book of Job is to caution we who read it, against judging God before the time. AOH

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

3. Chapter 2

Luke 2.1-7 Jesus' birth. The most well known story in the world, yet is it understood? The historical setting – Augustus is well known and he kept careful records of taxation. There are records of censuses in the area and of Quirinius as governor, but dates are hard to match up. This may be because Herod had a hand in arranging the census in a manner that would not arouse Jewish rebellion. Whatever the exact circumstance of this unusual movement of people, in God's providence it served to take Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem (on a donkey?) at the precise moment in history, according to Scripture, (Micah 5.2). Mary must have had a difficult journey but there were benefits in being in this unfamiliar, small crowded town. Much has been made of the full inn and Jesus being laid in a manger. There is no mention of stable and animals but a cave is mentioned by the early church fathers. Many peasant houses had mangers, for animals were kept indoors during winter. Was this autumn or winter? 'Mary's firstborn' suggests that there were others to come. The swaddling bands would be a papoose like binding of long fabric strips to give the baby support and security. The simple story "points to obscurity, poverty even rejection" (1). What can we learn for our own lives from this story? What does it reveal of God's control of historical destinies through the free actions of men?

vv 8-20 Angels and Shepherds. Contrast human society with the despised shepherds' reception of the Saviour. Their sheep may have been for Temple sacrifices. The angel reassures with "fear not" followed by "good news". Luke records the Gospel not a biography. Why were angels sent? What was the joy about? Who was going to be affected by this news? What is the value of the words "peace" and "goodwill"? The shepherds acted on the angel's suggestion and found the baby. The text doesn't say they gave a lamb. Would they be more effective in spreading the news than 'religious people'? Contrast Mary's meditation.

vv 21-39 In the Temple. Eight days later Jesus was circumcised and named. They kept the Law carefully. Later they went for the mother and child purification and Jesus was presented as a firstborn (Ex. 13 Num. 18). Simeon was careful and correct in his attitude to God and people. What is the significance of his reference to Isaiah 49 and his words to Mary. What does 'falling and rising of many in Israel' mean? (Isa. 8.14; Matt. 21.42; Rom. 9.33; 1 Pet. 2.7,8). We cannot remain neutral to Jesus. Simeon's words are a prayer, a song, a poem known as the Nunc Dimittis (from the opening words in the Latin version). Finally a faithful old lady of a 'lost' tribe, rises from obscurity and Anna adds her testimony to the arrival of Messiah.

vv 40-52 Jesus visits Jerusalem at 12. Vv 40 and 52 fill in many years till He reached Jordan. They are a description which reveal His parents' complete trust in Him and He in His Heavenly Father. This one delightful story shows that while He became a 'son of the Law' (Bar Mitzvah) He really was the son of His Father in Heaven. Why were Mary and Joseph so surprised? How had they failed to notice His absence with the returning party? May be children travelled with mother and those who were of age with father? Mary and Joseph may have thought he was with the other. Perhaps they thought he was with young friends from Nazareth. Jesus calls the temple, built by Herod, His Father's house. Asking questions like a pupil; in humility not 'know-all' arrogance, he was found by his 'parents' winning the admiration of the religious teachers. "By means of the various words used by Luke to describe the Saviour, v.16 brephos (new born babe); v.40 paidion (a young child); v 43 pais (a boy); v 52 Jesus Iesous (Jesus the Saviour)" he indicates our Lord's development to maturity.(2)

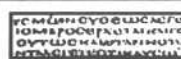
(1) Morris -Tyndale NTCommentary - Luke

(2) Geldenhuys - Commentary on the Gospel of Luke

REVERENCE

"I always put on my court robes when I enter my observatory, because when I study the stars I

stand in the Court of the King of Kings".
(Tycho-Brahe)



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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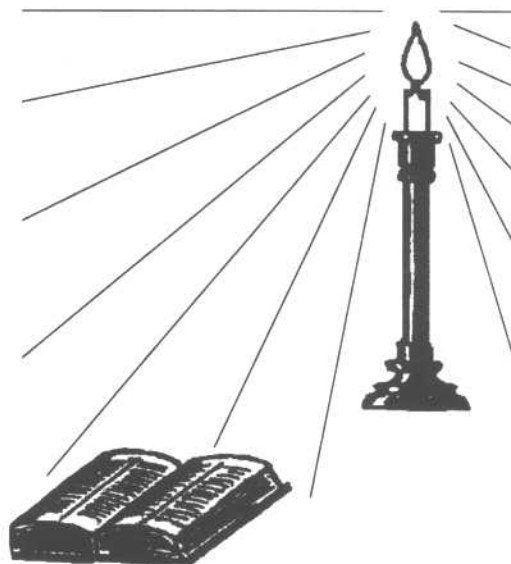
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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern understanding. It

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NOTICES

INTERNET: Bible Fellowship Union now has an E-mail address which is: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk Arrangements are also in hand for a web site on which material can be presented from this magazine and associated literature. This step has been taken after prayer and discussion and we are indebted to those who have made this project possible. This system will only be used while it enhances BFU service. Adequate time is always a problem solved only by God's grace.

'JACOB'S TROUBLE' booklet is out of stock and being reprinted (DV). We hope to have the new copies available early in the New Year. It has been used extensively for 60 years and still being used. It is an exposition of Ezekiel 38-39 in which the historical background is very well surveyed including the geographical extent of the land of Israel. There is a careful consideration of the fulfilment of the prophecy and discussion of future developments is cautious. Application of Bible principles is straightforward and the whole treatise is easy reading.

RENEWAL TIME: You will find a 'Renewal Form' in this issue of the Bible Study Monthly. Please fill it in, writing clearly, and return it to Bible Fellowship Union to whom cheques (checks) should be made payable. We are very grateful for every gift received but no one should hesitate to request the magazine because they can't send a gift. All BFU literature is free. If any have difficulty in returning the renewal form or forget it, none should worry. We do not cancel your copy of the magazine until we are certain that it is no longer wanted. Please tell us if you change your address.

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BFU. If you have already sent us the appropriate form then you need do no more but if you have not, please write a brief note, signed and dated, saying that you want all money sent to Bible Fellowship Union to be regarded as a gift with tax refundable. This applies only to UK tax payers.

INTRODUCE A FRIEND: your continued interest and support as a reader is greatly valued. Why not introduce the Bible Study Monthly to a friend? We shall be pleased to send the BSM to any name and address that readers submit to us. Booklets listed on the back cover of the March/April issue are sent free and can make a pleasant addition to your greetings to friends. Please address all enquiries to Barnstone.

MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT: In the Lord's providence we would like to make the Bible Study Monthly as useful and helpful as possible to all its readers. They live in many lands with different Christian and cultural backgrounds. We are always please to receive observations about BFU literature. Such comments may not make us change anything immediately but we will listen attentively. With the Lord's help we will maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication.

In order to reach all ages we use modern translations. We try to keep articles to a moderate length and seek to use varied presentations. When reprinted material is updated we try to retain original viewpoints. What is published is believed to have a wide interest but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

COVER STORY UPDATE: the design introduced in January 2001 appears to suit most readers – none have complained so far.

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THE TIMES OF THIS IGNORANCE

A study in
Divine Purposes

5. God Now Commands

The hour had struck! During the slow progression of many centuries of human history, God had waited, inscrutable in His wisdom, long-suffering in His patience, for this hour. Men had gone headlong down the steep slope of ignorance and degradation into hopelessness; the judgements of God had come upon them, time after time, to cause their heedless minds to reflect. At definite points in the chain of years He had intervened in some marked manner – at the Flood, the call of Abraham, the Exodus, the Babylonian captivity – that men might have opportunity to realise both His almighty power and His overruling providence. Great lights had flared up in the darkness of those slow years, lights that showed how the spirit of man, as yet without God and without hope in the world, was endeavouring to free itself from the encircling shackles of sin and death. Men such as Buddha and Confucius, great philosophers, made a great contribution, each to his age, but despite their greatness, ignorance remained. They lived before Christ came and they knew not God. Abraham, Moses and Daniel and a long line of worthy men in Israel had greater influence in the preparation of men's minds for the revelation that was to come because they were men of God and their lives were knowingly devoted wholly to His service. The nation of Israel, a royal priesthood, a separated people, became examples to the world of what God's Kingdom would be when in the fullness of days the Times of Ignorance were past. In spite of stubbornness and unbelief and hardness of heart, Israel was a flaming beacon in the darkness that preceded the dawn. They were a witness to men that God was not unmindful of their plight and that He was actively planning for their future good and would, in due time, reveal himself to them.

So, at last, when all men, not only in Israel but in all the Roman world, were in expectation, realising, by what means they knew not, that a great awakening was soon to come, there came the herald, the long-awaited messenger, stirring the hearts and minds of men with his thrilling cry, "Repent; believe the Gospel; the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

The advent of John the Baptist was the signal

that the Times of Ignorance had ended, the Light was about to break in upon the world of men. John was not that Light, but he was sent to bear witness to that Light, the true light that lights every man that comes into the world. What glorious hope for all mankind is enshrined in that burning cry! Every man that comes into the world! Not just those who happen to be born after the advent of Christ. Not only those who may happen to hear the message of Christ in this Age, those who are reached by the missionary zeal of Christ's disciples, a tiny fraction of all earth's millions despite the intensity of that zeal. **Every man that comes into the world!** From the first unnamed and unknown children of Adam, back there many thousands of years ago, to the last heathen vagabond who is born in some impenetrable city and lives his life and dies there without anyone coming to him with the story of the saving power of Jesus. Every man is to be brought to the light, in the day that God has ordained shall follow the Times of Ignorance, the day in which God shall judge the world in righteousness by that one whom He has ordained, Jesus Christ the Saviour of men.

So it was "*in the fullness of time*" (Gal. 4.4), when at last men, or at least a 'remnant' of men, were ready for the message, Christ came. He came to bring "*life and immortality to light through the Gospel*" (2 Tim. 1.10). He came that the people who walked in darkness might see a great light and that upon those who dwelt in the darkness of the shadow of death the light might shine (Isa. 9.2). He came to reveal God's plan in all its fullness, to clear away the mystery and doubt and perplexity that had so long assailed the minds of men, and to point them to the way that leads to life.

Jesus came to reconcile men to God. There was no possibility of reconciliation before He came, for there was no basis upon which true reconciliation could be made. Man, imperfect, fallen, sinful, could not so much as stand in the presence of One who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, so the "*way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing*" (Heb. 9.8). Jesus came to open that way. It involved His own death, a willing sacrifice, the "*just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*"

(1 Pet. 3.18). That death opened the way for all of earth's millions "*whosoever will*", to enter, in due time, into the eternal inheritance God has prepared for them (Matt. 25.34). The coming, the death, and the resurrection of Christ were for all men. Upon the day that He ascended triumphantly on high, having led captivity captive (Eph. 4.8). He began then to set in motion the mighty forces that were destined to spread their energy over the long span of three thousand years until they have completed the Divine purpose. This is the reconciliation to God of all who will, and the subjection of all things to Christ, "*that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*" (Phil. 2.10).

It was Peter who saw so clearly that the keynote of the new dispensation was repentance. Gone forever were the old archaic ideas that God could be propitiated by sacrifice, or bribed by means of ritualistic observance. God was not a Deity delighting in the suffering and misery of His creatures, neither was He a tyrant demanding abject and grovelling obeisance. He desires not sacrifice and burnt offering but rather the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving "*O God, you will not reject a humble and repentant heart*" (Psa. 51.17). Therefore Peter placed, as the first requisite for those who would come to God, repentance. Time after time he hammered out this theme. "*Men and brethren, what shall we do. Repent and be baptised*" (Acts 2.37, 38). "*Repent therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out*" (Acts 3.19). Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16.15). Peter interpreted that injunction in terms of repentance. The Light had come, the Times of Ignorance were past; all men could now rejoice in the knowledge of the glory of God, if they would. But entrance into that privilege could be gained only in one way – the way of repentance. And so Paul, years later, speaking to the men of Athens, telling them of the passing of those Times of Ignorance, could do nought else but confirm Peter's gospel. "*God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent.*"

This did not mean that God was calling all men at that time into the fellowship of the Church. True, the invitation was extended to all, and all who would exercise faith and devotion necessary to present themselves in wholehearted consecra-

tion to God would have been accepted, as indeed some three thousand were accepted in the very first day (Acts 2.41). But God knew and had provided that for the first two thousand years only a few, relatively speaking, would in fact come to Him and become His; for the many the more intense work of the third thousand years, the Millennium, would be necessary. That does not affect the fact that on the Day of Pentecost the active work of reconciliation of man to God was begun. It has progressed without interruption ever since, and will progress without break until all mankind, except the incorrigible, have accepted the Divine standards and come into harmony with God. The transition from this era when the Gospel has been preached into the Messianic age will not alter that work. The onset of the great time of trouble, the ending of the call of the Church and the going forth of the Law of the Lord from Jerusalem to all people in the world will make no difference to the need for repentance.

The responsibility and obligation laid on all men, therefore, in these days of the Gospel, is to heed the words of His witnesses and to repent. That is the message that has been going out since Peter stood up with the eleven; it has never changed, it has never been abrogated. It will not change and will not cease until the end of the Messianic age. In our day we are privileged to announce, with that message, the glorious news of the imminence of the Messianic kingdom. We are also obligated to make known the fact of Divine judgement coming upon the world for its evil, the "*day of vengeance of our God*" (Isa. 61.2), the bitter harvest of his own doing which man must reap. But nothing in this changes the original message. In answer to the oft-repeated question "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" we can only say as did Peter, "Repent!"

In this there is guidance for us in our Christian activity. The suggestion that a time comes in the end of the Age when it becomes contrary to the Master's will to proclaim His message far and wide, wherever opportunity offers, is not only quite unscriptural but the very negation of the Christian position. The very purpose of our existence is to preach the Gospel. The very object of our earthly lives is to be instructed and trained for a future work of service in which the preaching of the Gospel will play a very important part. God has

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been working through the ages to develop in man a closer and increasingly accurate knowledge of Himself and His plans. How short-sighted therefore to hold that in this time, when the climax of all human history is about to be reached and God is preparing to take over the sovereignty of the world, the work of witness should be stopped. Shall no voice speak of the wonders that now are imminent, no warning be given of the stupendous changes so soon to take place, no injunction to repentance be uttered in face of the momentous nature of the times and the swift entrance of the world into judgment? Has God ever left the world without an opportunity for repentance in the face of disaster before? Never! Has He ever been without His messengers and ambassadors in this world in bygone times? Never! Then why should we think He will change His methods now, when all the world is crying out its need of the message that those who know His plan alone are able to give?

Our mission, then, like that of Paul and Peter, is to preach Christ and Him crucified. God will give the increase; it is ours to plant and water. We are, as were the Apostles and as have been all Christians since, ministers of reconciliation, (2 Cor. 5.18) beseeching men in Christ's stead "be ye reconciled to God". Neither is this ministry for our own instruction solely. Too often it is suggested that the preaching of the Gospel is not for the sakes of those who may hear, but for the sake of those who preach that they may be more qualified for the future work of world conversion. The work of

witness is going on today and has been going on throughout the Age. God's voice is sounding through the world commanding all to repent. It must also be a time of sowing for the Age to come. It is impossible for Jesus' close followers to give expression to their faith without affecting those who are not converted now, but will be in that Day. That is not at all the same thing as trying to convert everybody now. That is a mistake made by so many Christians. Those who love and serve the Lord now will take up their activities of reconciliation where they are left here, but without weakness and in great power.

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. The whole of our message hinges around that one inescapable fact. The long story of sin and death, the misery of man in his darkness and ignorance, the revelation of Divine oversight, first at Sinai, then at Calvary, finally at Armageddon, all testify that God is working towards that great Day. The time of its full demonstration cannot be long delayed. The goal toward which we have been pressing is before us. Let us then with more zeal and more certainty than ever proclaim with all our heart, soul and strength, the message that has been the Divine call to mankind for nearly twenty centuries and remains the Divine call still.

"The time is fulfilled – repent, and believe the gospel".

The End

AOH

'TO US A CHILD IS BORN'

The words of the prophet Isaiah (9.6) were echoed by the angel throng as they praised God above the hills of Bethlehem on that momentous night when the Saviour of the world was born. From the days of Moses, when his mother placed him in a little boat and floated it on the Nile, the people of Israel were very determined in the matter of having children. The impetus behind that resolve to rear their children grew through the years following Moses own declaration of Divine intent recorded in Deut. 18.15. He told the people of Israel in one of his final addresses to them, that *"the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren"*. Every mother in Israel looked for a baby that would fulfil that prophecy. Perhaps even earlier,

following the long and sometimes bitter wait of Sarah for her child, the patriarchal families looked longingly at each child to see if the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled in that one. Perhaps we may go a stage or two further back to Eve when God promised that one of her descendants would bruise Satan's head.

A loving Grandmother once wrote to her daughter at the time she was expecting her first child and expressed her joy that this was like the women in Israel who looked so earnestly for their firstborn. Each mother who bears a child in the Lord follows that wonderful tradition (1 Cor. 7.14; 1 Timothy 2.15). We do not know if Eve lived long enough to enjoy the thrill of seeing for the first time baby Enosh (Genesis 5.6) but we do know

that Sarah never saw the twins that gave their mother quite a time of it (Genesis 25.22-26). During the period of the Judges two babies are outstanding because they were so much wanted. First came Obed, a child and grandchild that was desperately wanted by Ruth and Naomi. In a sense he was very much a promised child, that fulfilled the need to give Elimelech descendants, but more than that he was David's grandfather and in the ancestry of Messiah. Integrated into that story comes the birth of Samuel. How deeply was Hannah's longing for him yet she parted with him in God's service at a tender age.

That longing to bear a family must have run deeply through the people of Israel for centuries. Yet when those children came, was every one wanted and loved, and did they fulfil the expectations that came to the minds of parents before the children were born? No less were the hopes and fears of young people who married in the Lord. Through the Christian era, perhaps because of our Lord's own words about children, the same feelings toward little ones have intensified. The coming of a child into the world has brought much blessing and strengthened many a feeble arm in its last years of service for Him. And what of those who denied themselves the privilege of parenthood because of the Gospel (Matt. 19.12) and those who were denied it because of wrong teaching (1 Tim. 4.3)?

What then were the feelings of joy and apprehension that filled the mind of Mary as she waited for her child? It is generally agreed that she was very young and the circumstances of her conception had no precedent. She spent much time with Elizabeth her cousin, and was 'out of town' for the birth. Were there no close relatives to strengthen her in that exquisite moment of discovering her first born son? What were her feelings as she travelled with her husband to Bethlehem? Mary was a deeply meditative person and we are able to share a little of her feelings through Luke's skilful writing. She did not have all the medical attention or the spotless hygienic conditions into which our babies come. There were almost certainly animals present although there is no mention of a stable. What other curious eyes beheld the magic moment when the Son of God first looked out on this sinful world, and whose ears heard His first cry? It is true that the Scriptures give no reason for celebrating Christmas, but they give every reason for celebrating the coming of children into the world. That same baby, years later, said 'of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. Some may chose their company carefully, to avoid young folk. Jesus chose His company carefully so that He could enjoy children and bring blessing to their lives. We wish you a blessed celebration and every blessing in the year ahead.

DN

ETERNAL GIFT

O precious gift of God
By His own Spirit conceived.
Eternal life from Mary's womb.
O wondrous mystery.

Unseen by human eyes -
Deep in God's heart concealed,
Love sparked a glorious flame
Now in His Son revealed.

How blessed that humble maid
As now with gentle hand
Holds close her own sweet babe,
Wrapped round in swaddling bands.

Long journey, pain of birth,
By joy is now replaced.
As her dear son she lays
To sleep in that poor place.

O precious gift of grace.
Salvation sent from Heaven,
Open wide your eyes
To see this priceless treasure.

In purity He came,
In innocence He died,
From cradle to the Cross
By men God's gift reviled.

Do we receive Him now
With fervent hearts or cold?
What gifts can we now bring
He asks not myrrh or gold.

O teach us Lord to love,
As at your feet we lie -
Our poor imperfect lives
Your love can purify

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Judges 2

ELI – THE PRIEST WHO FAILED

1. Why was Eli High-Priest?

Weak, indolent, half-blind, almost senile, and altogether unfit to administer the important duties of a High Priest of Israel; such was Eli. He was the occupant of the sacred office during the latter part of Israel's stormiest time, the period of the Judges. Old Testament students know him chiefly as a rather shadowy figure in the background to the stirring epic of the life of Samuel. He was the celebrated leader who rescued the nation from almost two continuous centuries of apostasy and godlessness. He restored it to the worship of the true God and guided it into the more orderly and settled era of the monarchy, although this too was just as disastrous.

Eli was about seventy-eight when the child Samuel was placed under his tutelage. He was ninety-eight when his slothfulness and heedlessness brought about the greatest calamity of Israel's history, the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines. Taken into battle as a kind of magic talisman to ensure victory, the warriors were stunned when God allowed the sacred emblem to pass into uncircumcised hands. That was the virtual end of the Tabernacle and its ritual. For many years afterwards, almost until the days of Solomon, there could be no annual Day of Atonement observance and the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant fell into abeyance.

When the priesthood was established in the days of Moses, Aaron, brother of Moses of the Tribe of Levi, became the first High Priest. The line of succession was ordained to pass through his oldest surviving son, Eleazar, who thus became the first High Priest to officiate in the Promised Land. He was succeeded by his son Phinehas. But Eli was not of the line of Eleazar; he traced his descent from Ithamar, youngest son of Aaron. Why and when the High Priesthood passed from the senior to the junior line, sometime during the two centuries intervening between Phinehas and Eli, is not known, as the Scriptures are silent. It is not that the senior line died out, for the descendants of Phinehas are known, although none of them are recorded as having exercised the High Priestly function until Zadok, in the time of David and Solomon. In him the duty passed again to the line of Eleazar. The last mention of Phinehas is in Judges 20.28 at a time that could hardly have been

more than fifty years after the entry to the land. When next we hear of a High Priest it is Eli of the line of Ithamar some two centuries later. In the meantime it is not known who was High Priest in Israel, and therefore performed the duties, the principal of which was the annual ritual of the Day of Atonement sacrifices. None of Eli's forbears are named, only that he was descended from Ithamar. He had been in office for at least twenty years before Samuel came to him but of the details of his administration nothing is known either. Faced with this conspiracy of silence, it is usually stated that nothing can be suggested on the subject.

Looking at the conditions and political situation in Israel at and immediately before the time of Eli, there is a possible explanation. The connection of Eli with Samuel, and of Samuel with Saul and David, requires that he died only about forty years before David became king. It is said that "*he judged Israel forty years*" (1 Sam. 4.18). This implies that for the last forty years of his life he was the political ruler of Israel in addition to being the High Priest. The Judges' of this period were leaders arising from among the people to bring some semblance of order into what was a very disorganised and lawless state of society, to restore the worship of God and in that strength to deliver Israel from her enemies. Not all the judges ruled the whole of the country; some of them ruled only in specific parts of Israel. Eli, ruling from Shiloh in the centre of the land, would probably have been universally accepted.

The chronology of the period of the Judges is very difficult to rationalise, but the consensus of research does seem to favour the conclusion that Eli could have attained his High Priesthood at the normal age of thirty. This is not too far removed from the time of Gideon, the hero who decimated thousands of Midianites with only three hundred men. One of the enigmas of Old Testament history is the story of Gideon, the God-fearing man of faith in the midst of an idolatrous people, who went out in the strength of God to overcome the enemies of Israel. He vindicated the name of God in the land, and after his famous victory took of the spoils of war to set up a shrine to the Lord in his native town of Ophrah to rival the official Tabernacle at Shiloh at which the lawful High Priest officiated. The

riddle is even more inexplicable when it is remembered that in the same breath Gideon had refused the people's request that he and his sons after him should reign as their king, saying, "*I will not rule over you ... the Lord shall rule over you*" (Judges 8.23). It seems illogical to think that after such a victory, which he acknowledged to be of the Lord, and while uttering such sentiments of loyalty to the Lord, Gideon should at the same time be turning to idolatry.

Could Gideon's action at Ophrah have some connection with the unknown disruption that unseated the lawful line of High Priests and replaced them by the unlawful line at Shiloh, not very far away, at much the same time? Shiloh was situated in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, the most turbulent and powerful of the tribes of Israel. Gideon was of Manasseh, and there was always rivalry between these tribes, stemming from the fact that Jacob had conferred the Divine birthright on Ephraim the younger son of Joseph to the exclusion of Manasseh the firstborn. Ephraim in the time of the Judges was a violent and idolatrous tribe; the narrative of that book shows how they were at war with their own brother-tribes as often as they were with outsiders. Was there, perhaps, at this time a 'power struggle' within the family of Aaron in which the Ephraimites ousted the legal line of Eleazar from officiating at Shiloh and substituted the junior line by force and illegally, in the person of Eli? The reputation of Ephraim generally and the characters of the inhabitants of its chief towns, Shechem, Bethel, Shiloh and so on, was such that almost any kind of roguery could take place. Although Shiloh was the place where the Tabernacle stood for nearly four hundred years, the Lord bitterly reproached the people there for their iniquity and predicted that His judgment would come upon it - as it did in the days of Samuel. "*But go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh*" he said to Jeremiah "*and see what I did to the wickedness of my people*" (Jer. 7.12). It was in fact the iniquity of the people and priesthood there in Ephraim that caused the Lord to take away the birthright which in Jacob's day had been given to Joseph and his son Ephraim, and to award it to Judah, so that Judah became the royal tribe. "*He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men ... he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and rejected the tribe of Ephraim, and*

chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved he chose David also his servant" (Psalm 78.59-71). What great crime was this which took place in the very heart of God's sanctuary; what depth of iniquity was there in the lives of those people and priests in Ephraim which drew forth such condemnation from the Most High? Several incidents are enough to show just how far gone in the ways of evil were these professed men of God. The behaviour of Eli's sons during the boyhood of Samuel (1 Samuel 2.22) of Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Judges 9) of Micah and his graven images in the very vicinity of Shiloh (Judges 17) are just three that will suffice.

It might have been therefore that Shiloh had fallen into the hands of a faction that made Eli, or perhaps his father, High Priest in defiance of the legal rights of the Eleazar line. The true High Priest - whether Bukki, Uzzi or Zerahiah, all recorded in 1 Chronicles 6 as the legal line from Eleazar although not said to have been High Priests (Josephus says Bukki and Uzzi were so in fact; Ant. 5.11.5) was compelled to flee into exile. In such case he would most likely cross the border into Manasseh; the enmity between that tribe and Ephraim would assure him of protection and the Manassites would certainly recognise him as the legal High Priest. Did Gideon then, in the flush of victory, and in his enthusiasm for the abolition of Baal worship, dream of a restored High Priest of the line of Eleazar. This would function not at Shiloh in Ephraim but at Ophrah in Manasseh, and is this why he made his ephod and built his shrine?

At all events "*all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it there and it became a snare to Gideon and his family*" (Judges 8.27) That expression means that unlawful worship and ceremonial was carried on at Ophrah and the fact that the Deity worshipped was the Ever-Living and not Baal did nothing to mitigate the fact. The Scripture makes no mention whatever of the ceremonies conducted there and no names of its priests; the endeavour was in no manner recognised by God. The rightful line of Eleazar was eventually restored but it was in the person of Zadok in the days of King Solomon, when the Temple was built.

The most that can be deduced about the life of Eli before he comes on to the Scripture stage is that he had probably been High Priest for thirty or forty

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years before the birth of Samuel and Judge of the nation for twenty years. His earlier years might well have coincided with the judgeship of Samson. Neither man brought any peace to Israel and the shadow of the Philistine menace hung over the land throughout both their careers. The fact that Eli was accorded the position of Judge, perhaps at Samson's death, suggests a stronger and more forceful personality than is suggested by the records of Scripture but by the time he figures in Scripture he was an old man and verging into senility. In his younger days he may well have been the kind of leader Israel looked for, as a Judge he must at least have led Israel's forces against the enemy at times. If there was the kind of power struggle going on as has been suggested above, Eli

at the centre of it must have been a strong and vigorous character. We have then to think of a man mingling military prowess with religious zeal, ruthlessly trampling down his opponents, whether civil or ecclesiastical, and emerging as a leader whom both God-fearing and idolatrous Israelites were equally prepared to follow. But when we see him in the Book of Samuel, we see a weak, tired old man, bereft of his life and passion, unable to control even his own sons sitting on a seat outside the curtains of the Tabernacle entrance, left alone to his thoughts. Israel, leaderless, didn't know whether she worshipped Yahweh or Baal. It is at this point the story of Eli so far as the Bible is concerned, really begins.

AOH

"THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH"

*Prophet of
three mountains*

4. The Man of God crosses Jordan

Elijah began his long journey back to Israel (1 Kings 19.19-21). He had far to go and presumably he travelled slower now than when he fled from Jezebel. Yet there was a sense of urgency in his step for he sought the young man who was to succeed him in God's ministry. Back he went, through Judah bearing eastwards toward the Jordan. He did not cross the river however for he was making for Abel-Meholah a town about 60 kilometres north of Jerusalem and about 40 kilometres south of Lake Chinnereth later to become known as Lake Galilee. He was looking for Elisha son of Shaphat. Little is known of this young man's background but ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen seems to indicate that he came from a wealthy family. It must have been a fascinating meeting whether or not they had met before. The stormy but lonely Elijah was to adopt a more passive son whose strength lay in his quieter approach to the ministry than that of Elijah.

From this period on in Israel's history the 'mantle' of a prophet appears to have become something of a means of identification and remained so until the time of John the Baptist. The mantle would have much the same kind of meaning as a gown worn by a teacher in a place of learning. Elijah just went up to Elisha and threw his 'mantle' upon him. It was almost as if God told him to induct the young man into office without further invitation. When Elisha wanted to say good-bye to the family, Elijah had no objection

and from then on the lonely prophet enjoyed the companionship of a disciple.

The next move was more dangerous. Elijah had to visit his old adversary, Ahab. The king had coveted the land next to his royal Palace in Jezreel. When his neighbour refused to part with his ancestral vineyard, Ahab had a sulk and was sufficiently depressed for Jezebel to notice. The princess from Tyre had not been in the habit of accepting 'no' for an answer. As the king's daughter, her word was obeyed. If she wanted something, it was as good as hers. Jezebel was probably a priestess of Baal and the rules by which she had been brought up were very different from the God-given laws of Israel which were based on high ethical standards. She cared nothing for the rights and privileges of the ordinary citizen, even though God had given the land that Ahab wanted, to Naboth's ancestors as a possession for ever. She cared nothing for the fact that the land of Israel belonged in the first place to their God.

Jezebel devised a plan to steal Naboth's vineyard. She invited the leading men of the city to a religious celebration which may have appeared to be according to Israel's law. Naboth was also invited and may have taken a place of honour. The '*lifting up of the head*' can mean honour or it may mean the preparation for the indictment and sentence that was to follow. The whole scheme was a 'put up job', fixed by the Queen, so that Naboth was shown to be a law breaker, cursing

God and the King. Perjury, murder and theft were all part of the stock in trade of the pagan worship. So the rightful owner and his sons (2 Kings 9.26) met a violent end at the hands of would-be judges. It would not be the last time that innocent blood was shed at the hands of those who pretended to keep the law of Israel. It is, however a classic example of the contrast between the law of God and the law of man. A man tends to become like the god that he serves. It still happens. But the 'conscience' of Israel was not to be silent. Before Ahab had begun to re-organise the vineyard into a herb garden, his newly acquired gift from the gods, the evil deed was being exposed by Elijah. Fearless as ever the prophet went straight to the vineyard and gave the king the message from God. Ahab bore the responsibility of shedding innocent blood because his seal had been used on the invitations sent to the men of the city. His taking possession of the vineyard was an admission of his guilt. The sentence was that Ahab and Jezebel and their royal line would be destroyed. The wicked queen and her daughter in Jerusalem came to a terrible end.

Did Elijah take any pleasure from Ahab's repentance or that the God of Israel somewhat relented and the king did not die immediately. Yet, after a battle, Ahab was mortally wounded and carried in his chariot to Naboth's vineyard and there the dogs licked up his blood, as the prophet foretold (2 Kings 9).

While it may seem strange that Elijah should become so involved in the political dramas of his day, Israel were God's covenanted people and their leaders were very much a matter of His concern. God's authority lay behind what Elijah said and he conveyed God's messages to His people. Some of Israel's leaders accepted the place of the prophets in Israel's society even though this recognition was little more than superstition. God revealed Himself to His people, step by step. It was vitally important that Israel should understand the ethical nature of God's kingdom. Holiness was the keynote of piety in Israel. They were learning that laws were obeyed as spiritual principles and moral obligations not just mechanical rules. Elijah had taken them along

that road but the time had come for someone else to 'take the baton' and run the next lap of the race. There was still much to learn and many problems to solve. Samuel wielded the sword, Elijah called down fire from Heaven while Elisha was to feed his enemies ... all helped the people of Israel discover the truth for their time. The guiding principles of righteousness and goodness never alter even till today.

Elijah, the Tishbite, was a puzzle at times and remained an enigma to the end of his life. Not for him to have a state funeral or climb a mountain to lay down for the last long sleep until awakened in glory. Elijah passed from this life in a whirlwind accompanied by horses and chariots of fire. There was only one witness to that momentous event, whatever it was and whatever it meant. They had travelled far together and now they had a last long interesting walk. In a fascinating way Elijah led Elisha on. At each stage of the route the older man appeared to be testing his young disciple in loyalty and perseverance. Elijah told Elisha to wait at a certain point and Elisha refuses to do so. The trial of the younger man increases as the prophets remind him that he will soon have the old friend no more. Unhesitatingly Elisha goes with Elijah southward to Bethel then over Jordan. Elisha receives one final test. What gift would he like? The young prophet had been well trained and he rises to the occasion. "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit" he said for he had learned to think 'big' in spiritual terms. He must have watched in awe as Elijah left this world clothed with the wind and accompanied by angels. He disappeared from view and so Elisha lost sight of the one he had learned to love.

Did he receive a 'double portion' of the spirit of Elijah? Was his victorious ministry the result of that request and the fact that he now had Elijah's mantle. These are the outward 'trimmings' of the great inner lives of the prophets. They shared the mainspring of all who belong to God - His Spirit in their hearts directing them in His service. "*Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves and he prayed fervently...*" (James 5.17) DN

"Prayer brings and keeps God and man together: it raises man up to God and brings God down to man. If you would keep your walk with God, pray without ceasing."

(George Whitefield)

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THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

12. Making the Covenant

Mount Sinai is the most celebrated mountain in the Old Testament, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel came to this spot a relatively unorganised and undisciplined confederation of tribes, owning kinship to each other through the common ancestor, Jacob. Here they heard God speaking to them and here they entered into a covenant with Him. This turned them into His holy nation destined for a special purpose. They were to declare His salvation to the ends of the Earth. They left the mountain pledged to obey the revealed will of God. Thus inspired, the younger generation among them entered the Promised Land forty years later. They were then an established political entity, for thirteen hundred years. That was followed by a gap of two millennia after which they were re-established in our time. The story of Israel as a nation is a chequered career; yet its influence upon the development of 'religion' and its preparation for the coming of Christianity began at Sinai. What sort of place is it?

Imagine a land of mountain peaks and rocky crags intersected by tortuous ravines stretching in every direction as far as the eye can see. Although apparently a wild land it gives the impression of superlative grandeur. The sun beats down on red and yellow, brown and black rocks during the day, and sparkles with frost in the moonlight. It is about five kilometres long by a kilometre and a half wide and its lofty summits are about two thousand metres high. From the north there is a long curving ravine where men camp and find pasture for their animals. This is where Moses talked with God and Israel entered into a solemn agreement with Him, making them His people.

Experts differ as to which is the exact spot for this great occasion but the highest peak is at the southern end known as *Jebel Musa* or 'Mountain of Moses'. At the foot of this mountain lies a valley three kilometres long and four hundred metres wide. Some scholars think that this is where Israel camped. Yet the details in Exodus fit better with the northern end of the mountain, three miles away. The peaks are not so high but the crescent shaped plain beneath is larger. Many streams flow down from the mountain providing water for Israel's animals during the lengthy stay. The mountain reaches the plain by a sheer precipice which

recalls the Exodus description "*mountain which might be touched*". More important are the chapters 19-40 which record the Ten Commandments and the making of the Tabernacle. When these objects are accomplished the Book of Exodus ends and Israel is still in the Sinai area.

The voice of God was heard in the Ten Commandments, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Moses spent forty days alone with God and returned carrying the Law written on two tablets of stone. Finding the people worshipping a golden calf, Moses dashed the stones to the ground.

He ascended the mountain seven times in the course of about three months. Israel was in that valley for ten months in all, when they struck camp and dismantled the Tabernacle. Forty years later they crossed Jordan and entered Canaan.

Only Moses had set eyes on Sinai before this, yet the whole people knew this to be the place where God's presence dwelt. It was a holy mountain to the nomadic tribes that lived in the area before the people of Israel arrived. The mountain was enveloped in clouds, storms, thunder, lightening and fire for virtually the whole time Moses was ascending and descending the mountain on their behalf. It must have been an intensely awesome spectacle that remained in the national memory for centuries, inspiring poetry and prophetic vision. It is possible that the guiding fiery cloud remained over the summit of the mountain.

As soon as camp was established Moses went up the mountain. The people would watch him disappear into the ravine that provides access to the mountain. If in fact the law was given at the northern end where the almost vertical precipice plunges thousands of feet to the plain below, Moses could have reached the summit in a few hours. Chapter 19 preserves the simple record of Moses first meeting with God who called to him out of the mountain. Instruction was given in the words of Exodus 19.4-6 "*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*".

In whatever way the mighty Creator, He who began everything and sustains all things, spoke to Moses, it was clear, intelligible and impressive to one of the world's greatest men, totally committed to God and an incredible thinker. Three million people witnessed from afar but were convinced. The events influenced the national consciousness forever and it was deeply embedded in their literature and culture for all generations. God's communications to His people reveal something new but not what they expect or want from a human point of view. Christians and many others have accepted the record of the resurrection of Jesus Christ through five hundred witnesses. Six thousand times as many heard the voice of God and pleaded that He speak to them no more except through Moses. Both events changed the world more than any other in the history of mankind. Only God knows how Moses and the people of Israel received the sensory impressions that gave them the sensation of sound within their brains.

The first message was an offer of a covenant. They could accept or reject it. They would all know that their ancestor Abraham had received a covenant by the promise that his descendants would be blessed and bring blessing to all families of the Earth. Somewhere in the scope of that promise lay the assurance of restoration from the damage done in Eden. They were now being invited to take a step toward fulfilment of that promise. The whole assembly cried out the remarkable response "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do." Moses returned up the mountain to give the people's reply and await God's next instruction. It came in the form of the basic Laws of the Covenant known as the Ten Commandments. Israel were also given instruction as to how they should prepare for their next encounter with God, in purity and awe.

With a normal slope up a hillside the boundary of the mountain is hard to define. That this is a vertical precipice from the valley floor makes the definition clear so that humans and animals can touch the face of the mountain but should not transgress it. On the third day amid the atmospheric display and trumpeting from the leaders, the Lord came down in a fire like a furnace. It must have been one of the most awe-inspiring events in the history of the world. The vast concourse of people stood there in the

plain, drawn up in array facing the huge precipice with eyes fixed on lofty peaks. With beating hearts they saw and heard the fire and smoke, the thunder and lightning, rumblings deep within the ground all for which some have concluded that it was a volcanic eruption. But Sinai is not volcanic and no mountain in the district ever has been.

Moses was called again to the summit and the prohibition of the ordinary people was again in operation. Israel had to learn the lesson that sinful man cannot endure the searching presence of the Eternal God and live. Their plea that God should not speak with them again has a similar ring to their reaction to Moses' shining face when he returned from speaking with God. Sadly human beings are unaware of how far they are from the standard of holiness which God expects and must have from his intelligent creation.

The covenant into which Israel were entering was the first step towards the place in the purpose of God which is His objective for all mankind. Although this is called the Law Covenant, it was not just a legal transaction. A covenant is the legal instrument for a relationship between two parties. A covenant is God's way of entering into a relationship with members of the sinful human race in order that they can come to know Him. While this objective was not reached by most in Israel, it is clear that there were many dear souls who knew the friendship of their Maker as Abraham and Moses had done. Although covenants are not unknown today, and indeed at least one marriage service speaks of the partnership as a covenant, the concept was more widely recognised in the ancient civilisations. The Hittite pattern of a covenant is believed to fit particularly well that which is used in the Scriptures. Hence the covenant with Abraham is clearly described in Genesis 15 where the patriarch cut the animals in two and the fire of the Lord moved between the pieces.

In Exodus 24.3-8 there is recorded a similar ceremony in the making of the covenant between Yahweh and His people. There half the blood of the animal's sacrifice was thrown against the altar while the other half was thrown over the people. In this way, through the life of the animal, Yahweh and Israel were joined in covenant, the altar representing God and those who received the blood sprinkling represented the whole congregation of Israel. The importance of this service lies in the

fact that God was joined to His people forever. It is a covenant held together permanently by the un-failing love of God (*chesed*), that faithful love which made Israel, God's bride. The only thing that could in any way change that covenant of sac-

rifice is the coming of the Messianic covenant through the blood of Israel's Messiah. This was the interim covenant needed to help a nation love – love in this case written on tablets of stone.

"NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME"

*Reflections on
Acts 20.22-24*

"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." These words fell from the lips of the unconquerable Apostle as he bade his Ephesian brethren the last goodbye! All the way along on his journey to Jerusalem, brethren testified that bonds and imprisonment awaited him when he arrived in that heart-hardened city. Brethren who loved him with all the warmth of their passionate hearts pleaded and begged of him not to proceed further on his journey, knowing full well that he did so at peril of his life. Possibly they pressed him to realise how necessary it was for the "works' sake" and the "brethren's sake" that he should not unduly jeopardise his life too much, for should he fall, there was none to replace him in the whole world. Or they may have tried to assure him that it was not cowardice to keep away from that city of peril, but the very essence of wisdom. Neither entreaty nor persuasion could produce effect on his indomitable soul. What if bonds did await him or scourging or persecution? He faced all this before. Long before this hour, he had been scourged, beaten by Roman rods, stoned and left for dead; yet in it all the Lord had never forsaken nor forgotten him! How he had lived to experience the truth of those vivid words spoken concerning him by Jesus to Ananias while he lay in a darkened room in Damascus, *"I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"* (Acts 9.16). He had suffered without murmuring or complaining; without losing one jot of his resolute tenacity, or unwavering determination. Search the records of the New Testament or of the early Church or of the church from beginning to end and no more thrilling or inspiring catalogue of willingly-borne suffering is found than in the record of 2 Corinthians 11 and in the latter chapters of Acts for some ten years more.

The Lord Jesus knew His man when He told Ananias *"he is a chosen instrument of mine"*. He was a man of granite, unyielding as a granite

bastion against which the waves of persecution could make no impression. In like manner as it was said of Moses "he endured as seeing him who is invisible" so Paul always has a clear perception of his Master's unseen presence, and in this he rested, and was strong.

Hence, when the testimony was several times repeated that bonds and imprisonment awaited him, and when to the repeated prediction there was added ardent tearful entreaties of his dearest friends, it was no easy matter to keep his face 'set like a flint' to go forward to Jerusalem. Almost to the gates of Jerusalem this foretelling of bonds and imprisonment awaited him; for arriving at last at Caesarea again a certain prophet, Agabus, gave a dramatic emphasis to it by binding himself with Paul's belt. "So shall they do to its owner at Jerusalem." Then the whole assembly with tears and fervent solicitation besought him not to proceed further on the fateful journey.

"What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart" asks Paul. Man of granite though he was, there was a heart beneath that inflexible exterior as tender as any child's! Their tears touched him to his depths, and for their tears, he too could return tears of affection.

He had undertaken this mission, bound in the spirit, feeling it to be the will of God; and that being so, neither the ferocious hatred of his enemies nor the ardent love of his friends could make him swerve from his predetermined course. To the brethren at Caesarea he said *"For I am ready, not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21.13). Earlier he had said to the elders of Ephesus, *"I am going to Jerusalem bound in the Spirit not knowing what shall befall me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me but I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself if only I may accomplish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus ..."* (Acts 20.22-24).

Strange enigma! Wonderful paradox! Bonds, afflictions, tribulations, imprisonment, – sufferings of all kinds – even unto death – yet he looked forward to it all with ‘joy’. What an inexplicable intoxication it is to have the love of Christ in the heart at a white-hot glow! How irrational it all seems when judged by ordinary standards. Seeking, suffering and courting persecution and finding ‘Joy’ in it!

That is just what comes of having in the heart that living vitalised faith in the power and presence of Christ! It was *no mere theoretical* acknowledgment of Christ Jesus that led to that pain-hunger! It was not just the admission of the historic fact that Jesus of Nazareth had lived and died in Jerusalem that steeled his heart to that fearful outlook and yet gilded the dark clouds ahead with fringes of joy and exultation. No mere academic recollection that Jesus had been raised from the dead to procure our justification would have kindled a consuming fire within the soul, which no torrents of persecution or pain could extinguish! It was only possible by the inner assurance of the ever present companion on every step of the journey, from Philippi to Caesarea, and from Caesarea into that howling den of fanaticism which was Jerusalem. Unseen, yet He was closer than a brother, warmer than a lover, more tender than a mother, stronger than an army; *entering into every experience of every moment of every step of the way*. There was never a thought, but it was permeated with Christ; never a word, but it was saturated with the power of his Lord, – never a longing, but that it reached up to Jesus who had redeemed and rescued him.

Conviction, assurance, persecution; that was the material out of which the chain was made that linked him to a living, loving Christ. And with Christ in his life, no enemy or persecutor mattered! All the long years of his apostleship had led up to this. The fruits of those years had been gathered and he had grown strong thereon. A hundred times he had faced death; but with Christ at hand he had smiled at the dread monster. His faith and assurance and conviction fed itself on the threats of enemies and intimidation of his foes!

Happy indeed the man who has reached this stage of growth in the stature of Christ! “*My peace I give unto you*” said Jesus. Paul had it and his own lips later came to say “*the peace of God ... shall keep your hearts.*” And it kept Paul. Rest, peace,

joy, exultation, within; bonds, tribulations, prison-cells, death, without.

It is not given to all to climb the heights, nor to plumb the depths of rest and peace and joy which the Apostle knew. We are not all made by nature as he was. We could not fight single-handed so often as he did; yet thanks be to God, we have the same Lord and Master embracing us, as near and as tenderly interested as Paul had. He is the same loving Jesus to us today as to his “chosen vessel” long ago. We have the same truths, and the same High Calling to thrill our hearts that carried the unfaltering witness over all his stormy way. We have the same “grace to help” in every time of need. God has not changed, and He is not one whit less heedful of us than of Paul. Christ has not altered, and He is never farther from us than from His great Apostle. Remember these things today when this thing or that, comes to assail our faith. When subtle suggestions or clever deductions come along, and call in question the facts and experiences upon which our convictions have been built, let us say “*None of these things shall move me*”. When attempts are made to prove our foundations wrong, and to unsettle our assurance in the things we have learned, let us “*stand fast in the faith*” unmoved and unmoveable, knowing of whom we have learned. It is not physical sufferings – the bonds and imprisonment that menace our well being and salvation today. Our danger arises in being moved away from the assurances to which our faith has been moored these many years. Growth and development from the old truths are to be expected, but when it comes to casting this and that of our earlier assurances overboard, there is risk and danger to us. Unloading the cargo that has given ballast to our boats is a perilous thing. Thousands there are in the world today who threw their rubbish overboard as they thought, and have found to their sorrow that they had nothing left. Let us hold fast that which we have, and determine that none of these things shall move us from our conviction and rest of peace in the heart. Let us be determined that nothing will intervene to deprive us of the comfort and companionship of Paul’s Lord and Master, who is our Lord and Master too. It is still conviction, assurance and persuasion that is the material out of which salvation is made, and he or she who retains these will never falter or fall by the way.

TH

CORRECTION WITH JUDGMENT

"I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O Lord, but in just measure; not in ... anger, lest you bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10.23,24). Wonderful words, to come from the lips of a man who lived six centuries before the Lord Jesus Christ came to open the "new and living way". We tend sometimes to regard the whole thought of men in Old Testament times as hopelessly enmeshed in the mechanical framework of the Mosaic Law. *"All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient"* the people had cried exultantly when Moses gave them the Divine Covenant, and although none of them ever succeeded in fully meeting the requirements of that covenant by works, very few of them ever realised why. They thought they could do it; the Ten Commandments must have seemed a very simple set of regulations by which to govern their lives. It must have come as a shock to many of them to find that, after all, they had not gained the everlasting life of promise. The rich young ruler who came to Jesus was one such. *"All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?"* (Luke 18.21). There must have been a constant voicing of that question all the way from Moses to John the Baptist. Not many discovered the reason why. Jeremiah was one of the few who did. The way of man is not in himself. He has not the power rightly to direct his steps. So Jeremiah prayed to God that because of man's inability, God would not be harsh with man. Send correction, yes, by all means, for man sorely needs correction. Jeremiah knew that. But let it be with discretion, with judgment: not with severity or harshness, or man would speedily be reduced to nothing. And Jeremiah knew that God did not desire that. He knew that God had made man for a purpose and he prayed that the purpose might be achieved.

Man needs a shepherd, here and now in this life. We get so accustomed to thinking of the future Day of Judgment, when God will set himself to teach all men the principles of His laws, that we do perhaps forget the fact that today also is a time of man's experience. True, the coming Age is set aside for man's instruction in the effects of righteousness under a righteous government, but the present has been set aside just as certainly for man's instruction in the results of evil when sin is

permitted to flourish unchecked. It is in this time of man's liberty to sin that Divine shepherd-care is needed. We should not think of the Father-Creator bringing the earth to the perfection of Eden and then washing His hands of the human race completely at the very time they need Him most. He has permitted man to go his own way and has allowed men to ignore the fact of His existence. Nevertheless, He has always held the controls in His own strong hands and intervened whenever it has been necessary to save men from themselves. The Flood was a supreme example of this. Other lesser examples are known to us from the sacred records and there must be many more unwritten and unknown except to those directly affected. Even although Satan has arrogated to himself the title 'god of this world', he has not been allowed to have everything his own way. The same Power that brought into being all the mighty works of creation and developed life on this planet in all its myriad forms has never ceased to watch over the interests of the helpless creature, man, who has it not in him to direct his own steps. As natural men and women, even when born into one of the so-called enlightened and civilised nations, we know very little of our surroundings, of our past or of our future. Confined as we are to this one little planet, we know next to nothing of the remainder of creation. Man had not explored even the whole of this earth until about three hundred years ago. Only in the last few generations have the jungles of Africa, the deserts of Australia and the wastes of Antarctica given up their last secrets. Our geologists look back over the vast space of time, calculated at three thousand million years, which separate us from the coming into being of the Earth, and can tell us absolutely nothing of what went on during over two thirds of that period. Definite knowledge covers only the most minute fraction of that enormous time span; we are so recently arrived on this our home. If the period that has elapsed since God said *"Let there be light"* is likened to the length of one week then the animal creation has been on Earth for about twelve hours and man only three seconds! These are the last three seconds at the end of a week. That is man's experience of his earthly home. He has hardly had time to learn much about it. If man then is so recent a creation of God, we would hardly expect God to get impatient yet. Long

though the dark reign of sin and death appears to us, to God it has lasted only three seconds out of His creative week. Jeremiah's confidence was surely rightly placed when he besought God to administer His correction, not with anger, but with judgment; not to destroy, but to save.

That is the principle behind the Divine scheme of redemption. It is not for nothing that we have discarded the Hell-torment ideas of the Dark Ages as a figment of theological imagination. It is not for nothing that we insist on the Scriptural truth that not until a man has had every possible opportunity to learn of God, and in full knowledge and recognition of all that is involved, deliberately rejects God, can he be eternally lost. Some there are who slightly speak of such conviction as the 'Gospel of the second chance'. They speak truly; it is the Gospel of One who spoke the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the prodigal son most assuredly did have a second chance. When Jesus told Peter to forgive his erring but repentant brother seventy times seven times we hardly believe that He would refuse any man one more chance to make amends, if hope there be that this time the man would see the light. Many Christians have never put to themselves the question of God's response to one who has passed through the gates of death and then, standing before the Throne, at last sees the light and repents. Would the Most High condemn such an one out of hand because it took the supreme experience of death and resurrection to effect the conversion? It is because our God knows that it is not in man to direct his steps unaided that He waits and watches in full confidence that the vast majority of people will one day learn the lesson and His ultimate purposes will be achieved.

So the Divine purpose is not one of harsh anger, of a jealous, wrathful God bent on displaying His omnipotence by the condemnation of those who are slow to understand and do His will, or because they are rash, short-sighted and ignorant enough to set themselves against Him. But neither is God's attitude towards, and treatment of, men correctly described as 'Justice tempered by mercy'. Divine justice is not modified or qualified in any way. *"Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?"* The weakness of man calls for strength, and strength will be given. The knowledge will be imparted. The sin of man calls for retribution, and retribution will be inflicted. But all these things

come for the furtherance of the Divine ideal in man and not for his destruction. That is why Jeremiah prayed for the correction which he knew had to come, but prayed that it might be in judgment and not in anger.

Today we know that his prayer is being fulfilled. Peter at Jerusalem and Paul at Athens ushered in the new order of things in which God both commands all men everywhere to repent and invites those who will, to give themselves in sincere consecration of heart and life to be dead with Christ. For these two thousand years of this Gospel Age that latter work has predominated and the Church of Christ has been gathered out of the nations, 'a people for God's name'. The other work has not been neglected. The Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world. The command voiced on Mars Hill has brought many to repentance and made them right before God through Jesus Christ. Some of those have not necessarily gone on to total commitment of life in God's high calling. The Lord knows how to make use of such in His Kingdom when God's final time of 'correction with judgment' runs its course for all mankind.

The 'shekinah glory', God's supernatural light in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, was a source of confidence and life to all Israel. It held no terrors but only joy and peace for the High Priest when he entered with the offering that spelt Israel's deliverance from condemnation for another year. It was a pillar of fire by night to lead them in their desert wanderings and it went before the host to guide them safely into their Promised Land. But it was also a flaming fire to defend them from their enemies and it was a blazing radiance that swept out from the Tabernacle to execute the Divine decree when some of Israel sinned. So it is with Divine judgment. It is remedial and instructive to the one who is capable of reformation, leading such an one back into full reconciliation with God; it is consuming and a destroyer, to the one who is determined to resist every inducement and persuasion which works for His reclamation. The Lord is a shepherd to all who can be persuaded to accept willingly and sincerely of the green pastures and still waters of His providing. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God when there is nothing in the heart but black sin to

confront His white-hot purity. It is and must always be true that the incorrigible sinner will be consumed by the Divine wrath when all possibility of conversion is gone. There is a profound truth, descriptive of the Divine dealings both with those

who attain everlasting life and those who shall not see life, in Jeremiah's heartfelt entreaty: "*correct me but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.*"

BJD

THE QUIET TIME

*Thoughts upon the
Morning Watch*

"Great crowds kept gathering to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. And from time to time he would withdraw to remote places for prayer." (Luke 5.15,16) Jesus lived a very busy life, often surrounded by great crowds, yet it was necessary for Him to be alone with His Father sometimes, away from those that would throng His path. This was not an isolated experience nor was it a quick snatch of time out of routine. Jesus spent all night in prayer before selecting the men who were to become the twelve apostles. These were to be far reaching decisions concerning the future of the Church. (Luke 6.12) Jesus needed to talk to His Father when He heard the news about John the Baptist's death, for like others in a crisis of bereavement He suffered grief concerning a loved one. "*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart*" (Matt.14.13) Following the momentous miracle of feeding five thousand, the crowds wanted to make Him a popular leader against the Romans. This is a temptation not unlike one He had mastered when in the wilderness. "*Jesus realising that they meant to come and seize him to proclaim him king, withdrew again to the hills by himself*" (John 6.15). After a busy time in Galilee the "*very next morning he got up and went out. He went to a remote spot and remained there in prayer*".

Many of Jesus' followers have discovered the value of His example. A quiet time away from routine and friends is necessary in order to cope with the work of the day. How important is God to us? How much of our time does He really get? Not everyone's routine allows them the opportunity at the beginning of the day but many can testify that this is the time, following rest of mind and body, to have a Quiet Time. It provides spiritual vitality for what is to happen in the day ahead. If the mind has been focussed in worship of God at the beginning of the day, when intervals occur, however short, between tasks, then we can swing our attention back to Him whom we claim to love best and to whom we have given everything. It is worth

discovering that the way to cope with the difficulties of life, its problems and stresses, to relieve the stress and solve the problems is to have time out with God at intervals through the day.

To illustrate the point, if a metal needle is magnetised and suspended horizontally from a thread it will react like a compass and turn one end to the north magnetic pole. If the metal is dropped it will tend to lose its magnetism and will require further magnetising by a strong magnet or an electric coil. We too need to be magnetised in our quiet time so that our prayer life is strengthened. Then, between the 'bumps' and 'knocks' of life we shall be able to turn 'naturally' to our 'North Pole' and find our focus in Him again.

This is important to every Christian now. Worship in the Quiet Time, means that our daily chores and ordinary tasks in the world, become an act of worship in themselves, for 'unless we perform divine service in every willing act of life, we never perform it at all' (Ruskin). The goal of our lives is to know the Lord and be like Him. We cannot reach that goal without deliberately spending time with Him. No amount of Bible study or active service for Him can take its place. Time spent with the Lord, getting to know Him will make our Bible study more realistic and our service, whether in caring for His people or spreading His Gospel, much more effective and purposeful.

So what are the 'mechanics' of having a regular Quiet Time? Individual daily and weekly schedules of various Christians will be different. A person who works shifts and does night work may find the best period for a 'Quiet Time' is not at the same time as one who always works during the day. The important thing is to set aside a specific time and place suitable to our circumstances and keep our tryst with the Lord even if we are compelled to vary from week to week. For many, that time will be in the morning before the cares and busy duties take hold of our lives. It will be in a place where none and nothing can disturb our

prayer and meditation. How we spend that time must be a matter of how the Lord leads us to use it in the best possible way. Many young Christians will, like the famous 'Cambridge Seven', find they can just manage seven minutes. Through the years there may be adjustments to our understanding of what He wants. It should be a relaxed and pleasurable time that we are glad to lengthen as the years go by. What follows is a shared experience. It should be a time that will make the Master's presence through the day more apparent our lives for the benefit of others as well as ourselves.

The Quiet Time has two main features. It is a time of prayer and a time for reading and meditating upon God's word. But the whole time is a very special act of worship and we need to focus on God before we do anything else. He must be central in our thoughts. Prayer will have several characteristics but there are priorities, and we can do nothing of value for God until we are 'right with Him'. So we must bring to the Father, at the foot of the cross, that which has disturbed our peace. There will be things we have done wrong and matters in which our relationships with others have been clouded. All the cares and troubles and problems must be taken to Him so that the way ahead is clear and we know what the will of God is for us in every circumstance of life. Before we bring the gift of our lives each day to God's altar, we must first have peace with our brother or sister for only so shall we have peace with God (Matt. 5.23,24)

Praying for His guidance needs to be specific, and that includes how we spend the Quiet Time. If we have a rich indwelling of the Holy Spirit we shall be ready to receive God's message from our reading of the Word. We shall be ready also to make intercession for others and a personal prayer list is valuable in this respect. Others need us and although we may not know precisely what those needs are, the Lord, through the Spirit can work for their blessing. Through all the Scriptures, great men and women of God were great intercessors and for that we need deep humility. Arrogant self-esteem and 'knowing all the answers' disappears at the foot of the cross. That is where we learn the most important lessons. There, alone with the Lord, we can learn patience, gentleness and quietness and so learn skill comforting and lifting the burdens of others.

Many have found through experience that too

much study can hinder the work of the Spirit in the Quiet Time. This does not reduce enthusiasm for Bible study at other times and in fact it becomes all the more inspiring and exciting. It is a time to share the feelings of the characters in the wonderful Bible stories that thrill young and old. Meditation can make the words of exhortation and guidance come alive. Essentially this is a time when God speaks to us through His Word and it will be all the more effective if we go to it unhindered by preconceived notions and personal interpretations. The Word of God must challenge us if it is to do God's work in our lives. Cleansing and growth occur most rapidly when not hindered by our own gloss on the Word that can deceive and cover over truth. So, at first at least, let us allow the Scriptures, as we read them, to tell us their message for today.

Taking notes in the Quiet Time is valuable. Ideas, questions and things we want to look at again, at another time, can be recorded for further consideration. Choosing a translation for the Quiet Time is important but a version should not be selected because it gives us the answers we want to read. We need to be challenged concerning our previously held interpretation of a text. More importantly it will challenge our words and actions – for none is without sin. Our fellowship with brothers and sister in Christ is more valuable when we pass on, not our own ideas, but simply the word of God and what it is doing for us. We have this 'treasure in earthen vessels', how is this treasure being seen in us? Preachers and writers are not the only ones to whom the Lord gives a message. We must look and listen carefully and act upon what we hear and read. God comes into our lives when he is wanted. Dramatic confrontations by the Lord, as with Paul on the Damascus road, are rare. Nevertheless He waits to bless. Hearts that refuse to yield to Him shut out the blessing. Prayer at the end of the Quiet Time can be even more meaningful as God opens our eyes by His Word about the things we should be praying for. Ananias who went to Paul in Damascus seems to have had quite an argument with the Lord. Disciple and Master knew each other well. They were old friends and had talked much together. "Lord have I got to go to this man?" Does it ring a bell? Have we never been in the situation that we don't want to help a brother or sister in the Lord, or do we only

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recognise as brethren those that suit our particular outlook. Ananias would have missed such a blessing if he had not gone to Brother Saul that day. That kind of disobedience leads to further shutting out, not only our brethren, but the Lord Himself. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ, not just the ones we like but the ones we ought to love. If only we could catch the spirit of the father who held out his arms to his prodigal son. Our Father is the High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, and He lives with those who are contrite and broken in spirit.

There are still many lessons to learn about the Quiet Time, but mostly they are learned from experience. There is the problem of a wandering mind when in prayer. If the matter to which our mind wanders is prayed about, it will soon be put to rest. There is the problem about getting up in the morning. As one beloved preacher said. If we find it hard to get up in the morning for a Quiet Time buy an alarm clock and go to bed earlier. Every prayer we utter is like a cheque from Heaven and it needs a signature. Every petition must bear the signature of the Lord Jesus Christ – then the sky is the limit – nothing is withheld.

"Lord out of the depths I have called to you; hear my cry, Lord; let your ears be attentive to my

supplication. If you, Lord should keep account of my sins, who could hold his ground? But with you is forgiveness so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord with longing; I put my hope in his word. My soul waits for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen for the morning. Like those who watch for the morning, let all look for the Lord. For in the Lord is love unfailing, and great is his power to deliver. He alone will set Israel free from all their sins." (Psalm 130 REB)

Begin the day with God, He is thy Sun and Day
His radiance of thy dawn, to Him address thy lay
Sing a new song at morn, join the glad woods
and hills,

Join the fresh winds and sing in the plains,
Join the bright flowers and rills.

Sing thy first song to God, not to thy fellow men,
Not to the creature of His hand, but to the
glorious One.

Take thy first walk with God, let Him go forth
with thee.

On sea and on the mountain path, seek still His
company.

Thy first transaction be, with God Himself
above

So shall thy business prosper well, and all thy
day be love.

HIS WAY IS BEST

Whatever may be our reward, those of us who have consecrated our lives to do the Will of God realise, in the closing hours of this Age, that His over-ruling is most necessary for the development of our Christian characters. Being *"not of this world"* (John 17.18) although we still remain here and in a state of imperfection, we know that transformation has to take place, that adjustments have to be made. Just as a growing child we have to reach maturity, continually progressing until we become acceptable to God.

We then look to Him as our teacher, for many lessons have we to learn. The rough edges have to be removed, until we attain the brightness of diamonds, as He will accept nothing under perfection. Looking into our hearts He can detect any weakness that we may have, also the strong points, and He knows just how to apply tests which will bring about changes in us and strengthen our former weaknesses.

Watching over us with His infinite mind and His vast and immeasurable foreknowledge, He can manoeuvre us into such positions that the results

are sure to prove effective and pleasing and satisfy His purpose.

In our prayers we remember all those of kindred mind and meditate upon their upbuilding. God understands and can see their needs, that some of us need to acquire more patience and to become more tolerant, others to possess more love and care for those of like mind, or perhaps it may be grace, or to inherit meekness, (*"Blessed are the meek."* Matt. 5.5) while others need to endure all kinds of temporary disappointments, others to learn to forgive those who trespass against us and still others to place more faith and trust in Him.

Being blessed with this guidance, which is incomparable, we become conscious of the fact that He can foresee all things, and is therefore many moves ahead of us.

So if we acknowledge our Heavenly Father in all His ways, we shall find we are being shaped day by day more in the likeness and in the spirit of Him we serve, and that always, His way is best.

Leslie Pegg
(*Young Bible Students Messenger*)

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

*A new look at
an old subject*

Mysterious visitors from the East! Better known in mediaeval legend and by modern Christmas cards than in the original story in Matthew's Gospel. They appear from the unknown and they vanish without trace; their nationality, religion or status are never revealed. We don't even know how many there were. The popular idea of 'three wise men' is church tradition and not Biblical history. The details in Matthew are so scanty we might be led to believe that nothing more could be known, but a closer examination yields enough to justify its place in the stories of Jesus. "*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem*" (Matt. 2.1). This is one of the two historical references by which the date of Jesus' birth can be fixed. The other in Luke 2.1 is to the effect that He was born at the time that a decree went out from Augustus Caesar requiring "*all the world to be taxed*" – or enrolled. From these two events it may be deduced that Jesus was born in September BC 2. The tradition of 25th December appeared at the time of Chrysostom in the 4th century.

It is within the framework of this period of some two years, between the birth of Jesus and the death of Herod that the story of the wise men is to be placed. They are called by the Greek name Magi, Persian astrologers who succeeded to the wisdom and status of the 'wise men of Babylon'. They figure in the Book of Daniel and at one time he was 'Rag-mag' or chief magician (Dan. 2.48). During the intervening five centuries, some Jewish thought and religion became incorporated into their philosophy but it was a decaying system. After the destruction of Babylon their numbers decreased and slowly their influence ceased to exist. Evidently this party represented a few who accepted much of the Old Testament teaching. The extent of their belief in God does not appear, but they were "warned of God in a dream" and obeyed that warning but that doesn't imply that they fully accepted the Jewish faith. Their religion was probably a mixture of Judaism, paganism and Eastern mysticism. If they had been Jews they would not have asked the question "*Where is he that is born King of the Jews*". Nor would any true Jew admit to guidance by means of a star. They were probably Gentiles, of Persian or Babylonian

origin, aware of the Messianic hopes of Israel and from their own science believed that what they had seen was the announcement of the birth of Messiah.

The church festival of Epiphany, which means 'manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles' and commemorates the Magi visit, testifies to ancient church belief that the Magi were Gentiles although the choice of date twelve days after the Nativity does not rest on any historical evidence. Neither does the Scriptural record give the popular impression that there were **three** magi. Mediaeval drama, art and church tradition from the Middle Ages, embellished Matthew's story without regard to historical facts and so we have Caspar, King of India, Melchior, King of Persia and Balthasar, King of Arabia, presenting their gifts. Cologne Cathedral has a shrine to the three kings and claims that their bodies are buried beneath. We can be certain of one thing, that a party of philosophers, wise men of this world, believers in the promise of Israel's Messiah, by unknown means, discerned while in their distant home by the Euphrates or Tigris that the Messiah had been born in Judea. They therefore decided to see him and pay homage. One of the great points of this story is that the wise of this world, learned, powerful and wealthy, were represented as worshipping the Lord of glory, just as the poor, mean and simple of this world had already made the same homage through Judean shepherds. It might be significant that it was the poor and simple who got there first!

While these Gentiles were not part of the covenant of Israel nor could claim to be God's people, they were sincere worshippers even though their worship may not have been of the same purity as in Israel. There is a hint that their knowledge went deeper than that of many in Israel. "*Where is he that is born king of the Jews*" (v.2) they asked. The majority in Israel did not know that. They expected Messiah to appear suddenly in the full military glory of conquering power, fully armed and ready for the overthrow of all enemies and the exaltation of Israel to the leadership of the nations. These wise men must have interpreted correctly the famous prophecy, "*For to us a child is born; to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder... of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of*

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David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for ever more" (Isa. 9.6,7). Israel, to whom the prophecy was given, never really understood it. To these Gentile magi was given the privilege of calling attention to the One who fulfilled it. *"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him."* (v.11). This is the act of truly pious men who really believed that, like the aged Simeon, in the Temple not so long before, their eyes had looked upon the Lord's Christ.

This raises the question to what extent their revelation and their journey were inspired by God. It has been argued that God could not use men of pagan cults and astrology and that they had less worthy motives. Is there a reluctance to admit that God would recognise the faith and watchfulness of men who were not inside the chosen circle of the faithful and whose faith was mingled with pagan elements which admittedly were not of God? In after years Jesus met with the same attitude in His ministry and He told those who thus argued that many would come from the east and the west, from outside the commonwealth of Israel and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 8.11-12). The narrative makes it plain that God was in this thing for after finding the child and rendering their worship and presenting their gifts, they were *"warned of God in a dream"* not to return to King Herod in Jerusalem as he had requested. They returned to their own country by another route in order to avoid him. There are three stories of the reception of the infant Jesus into this world. There is the angelic revelation to the shepherds and their visit to the baby in the manger; this visit of the Magi, and the blessing of the child in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. These stories indicate His reception and acceptance by representatives of the people of Israel, the Gentile peoples and that special class known in all ages as 'the watchers'. Simeon and Anna were members of that closely-knit community that 'looked for redemption of Israel'. They, more than any others, possessed a clear knowledge of the nature and time of Messiah's advent and were ready to receive Him in the way that He came. There are among Christian believers those who have the same clear perception of the Second Advent that Simeon,

Anna, Zacharias and Elizabeth had of the First.

So the Wise Men came to Jerusalem, guided by a star. That star has fascinated astronomers, both professional and amateur. A tremendous amount of time must have been spent during the last two thousand years calculating just what was the nature of the appearance. Kepler, a great Christian and astronomer, in the 17th century decided that it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which would make a brilliant display in the heavens; it is now known that no such conjunction took place anywhere near that time. It is calculated that there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in the year 6 BC but that was too early. A modern suggestion is that it was a 'nova', an explosion in distant space that causes a normally faint star to shine out with hundred-fold brilliance for a few days or weeks and then to disappear. There are some who picture it as a heavenly light which travelled across the sky guiding the Magi over the desert and through Judea until it stood just over the very house, thus indicating that they had reached the goal of their quest. The text is fairly clear that they did not follow the star from home to Jerusalem where they had to ask their way. As they left that city and headed toward Bethlehem they saw the star again and rejoiced. The star could have been a natural phenomenon used by God or it could have been a special display of Divine power for the occasion. Whatever the star was, it appeared at precisely the correct moment to achieve the desired result and therefore was under the direct control of God's Spirit to perform His work in the Earth.

Perhaps they did not exactly get the reception they expected *"When Herod the King heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him"* (v.3). Herod the Great had reigned some forty years at this time. He obtained and retained his throne by treachery and cruelty and lived more or less in a constant state of apprehension. Fear and jealousy caused him to murder his wife and two sons. He was told by Augustus that he ruled by permission of Rome. Now strangers came from the east declaring that a new king had been born, and they sought to do him honour. No wonder Herod and his supporters were troubled. What followed accords with the known character of the king.

He was not a Jew but an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. The chief priests and scribes showed the king the passage in Micah that said, out of

Bethlehem Israel's ruler would come (Micah 5.2). Herod devised a cunning plan that demanded the Wise Men to call in on the way home and tell him where they had found the baby so that he could go to worship also. It has been noted that the men from the east found the child in a house whereas Luke describes the baby's resting place as a 'manger': and also that the family returned direct to Nazareth. It is also clear from Luke that they stayed in the Bethlehem-Jerusalem area for some time (Luke 2.22). They would return home by the end of that year but in accordance with custom went back to Jerusalem for the Passover (2.41). There is quite a possibility that they had relatives in Bethlehem and the surrounding Judean countryside where they could stay. It might have been that while staying with them, in a house, that the wise men found Joseph, Mary and Jesus and not in an inn, stable or cave. It was in a house, to a young child, no longer a tiny baby, that they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. It has been suggested that these were symbolic of his royalty, his dedication and his suffering. There they worshipped and no doubt talked with His parents before taking their leave. The young couple must have felt awe at the presence of men who moved in different circles from them. They were less likely to meet with the wise and noble, the wealthy and powerful. Nevertheless this visit must have strengthened their faith in the reality of the things that the angel had said to Mary at the beginning. That night Joseph dreamed, and in his unquestioning faith, obeyed what an angel told him. The little family slipped quietly away to Egypt. They knew little at that time of the terrible suffering that would befall parents in Judea. The wise men also were warned to go another route home and would be well on their way before Herod was aware of what had happened. They were probably not young men. They might not have been alive thirty years later to hear of the fame of the prophet of Nazareth. Maybe they closed their eyes like the aged Simeon with thoughts of having seen the Lord of glory. Would they know of the resurrection and standing among the willing and obedient of mankind, in 'that day'?

Herod also did not know that he was destined to live only a short time. Within six months he too closed his eyes in sleep, but not before he had planned to rid the earth not only of children but highly placed nobility of Jerusalem. Those orders were never given. Following the death of Herod, his son, Archelaus, was away in Rome for over a year to have his position as king confirmed by Augustus. During that absence there was political unrest and military suppression which crushed Jewish opposition with many hundreds being crucified. Romans ravaged, crushed and slew the people from Galilee to Jerusalem. Archelaus returned to a kingdom desolated by the horrors of war. From this the little family in Egypt was spared. Joseph would have found work to do at his own trade to support his wife and child. At least eighteen months would have passed before he was again told by an angel to return to Israel. The new king who was as bad as his father did not rule in Galilee and Joseph was wisely guided back to the town from which they had originally set out.

Great must have been the grief and pain of many in the hill country at that time. Well did Matthew quote Jeremiah 31. *"Thus says the Lord, 'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children because they are not.' Thus says the Lord, 'Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for your work shall be rewarded; says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy'".* With what joy in the 'morning' will those children come and meet the one who cut their lives short. With what joy will those men of the east rejoice that the child they worshipped is the One who brings those children back from the land of the enemy. So the child whom the Wise Men worshipped, grew quietly to manhood until the day that He stood before John at Jordan. Then he was ready to commence the mission for which he had come into the world, and for which He had been protected from the enemies who in those early days *"sought the young child's life"*.

Abridged AOH

Share it with someone else and you will make the blessing doubly yours. Jesus once borrowed Peter's ship and returned it full of fish.

God is not sparing in his riches. He gives not a trickle but a torrent. As His power is great, so is His grace. (2 Cor. 9-8)

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A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

4. Chapter 3

*Notes to aid
personal
Bible Study*

Vv 1-22. John the Baptist's ministry

Vv 1-3 historical background: Tiberius AD14-37; Pilate, procurator or prefect in place of the deposed King Archelaus AD26-36; Annas high priest AD6-15 had influence while son-in-law Caiaphas was high priest AD18-36 and while his sons were in that office. John appeared about AD27-28; it was a dark period marked by cruelty and immorality. Lysanias is unknown although Josephus mentions the name and so do various inscriptions. John enjoyed the freedom and seclusion of the desert. There are personal details of John in Matthew and Mark. John is God's mouthpiece after 400 years of prophetic silence. John's word from God was 'repent from sin and turn to God' – prepare for Messiah. Repentance (Gr *metanoia*) means 'to turn' and comes from Hebrew/Aramaic.

Vv 4-6 Luke catches the spirit of John's message in the quotation from Isa. 40.3-5. He gives a picture of a coming King. How were paths made straight and level? Spiritual lack must be supplied and obstacles broken down. Spiritual need was very great. When does 'deliverance' come? Campbell Morgan suggests a movement of the comma from "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'*" to "*The voice of one crying: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord'*"? Baptism indicated that a Gentile had become a proselyte to Judaism. Jews thought it unnecessary for them to be baptised. The questions show that groups of ordinary people knew their need. Matthew and Mark concentrate on the response of religious leaders. 'Salvation' in the quotation from Isaiah is from the LXX translation used instead of 'glory'.

Vv 7-14 Ethics of the Kingdom. John did not 'pull his punches' and began to do the 'straightening' and 'levelling'. Luke indicates how John's message changed people. All were able to obey. How far does John fulfil the prophecies made about him? (1.76-79) What are the effects of baptism? Wrath has been defined as "God's continuing hostility to evil" (1). John was challenging. He exposed need of repentance in everyday affairs in fearless honesty from 'lowest to

highest' He removed the security of being a descendant of Abraham. There is a play on words for in Aramaic 'stones' and 'children' are similar. Tunic (*chitones*) is an under garment for the outer coat (*himation*). Tax collectors got their job by making the highest bid to Rome which made taxes high; but then collected even more. Not surprisingly they needed guards possibly these soldiers were their guards or they may have been the Temple police. They were told not to bully or blackmail (REB). Roman soldiers were unlikely to have joined the questioning, and Jews did not enter the Roman army. These people were not told to change their jobs but to be honest in what they were doing.

Vv 15-20 John was a herald who went before a King clearing (sweeping) the way. The comment about fastening sandals meant 'I'm not worthy to be Messiah's slave'. Note use of 'fire' and 'judgment' (Mal. 3.1) Winnowing was separating grain from husk; compare John's message in John 1.29. What right had John to speak against Herod? Note parallels with Elijah. The study of John the Baptist is valuable. Jesus' comments about him are very interesting especially Matt. 11.11; Luke 7. 24-34.

Vv 21-38 Jesus' baptism – the only record of the cousins being together. Why was Jesus baptised? Was He identifying with sinners? Rom. 8.3; or preparing the way Rom. 6.3,4. Jesus was a much loved son Psalms 2.7; Isa. 42.1; Luke 9.35. What did the voice mean to Jesus, to John and to the crowd. Why was God's Holy Spirit symbolised in a dove?

Jesus' genealogy: Why is it different from Matt. 1? Is it the difference between Joseph's and Mary's family trees. Morris commentary gives useful arguments. The list is not just names, they were real people like ourselves. Each had a place to fill like all characters in the OT but they were not puppets on strings. Ruth, Rahab and Tamar were ancestors of Jesus! Why did Luke include Adam to Abraham while Matthew doesn't?

(1) Morris – Apostolic preaching of the Cross;

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