

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

huph hinc : midaan cap
top : Tohp agenu he com

Deliver me ye wicked men crucify
him crucify you / and shall fall to
out of your fingers against you
for me

"All valleys shall be exalted
mountains and hills layed
so is created by the made of

ye seed of Abraham his servant
Jacob his chosen.
the Lord our God : his ju

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

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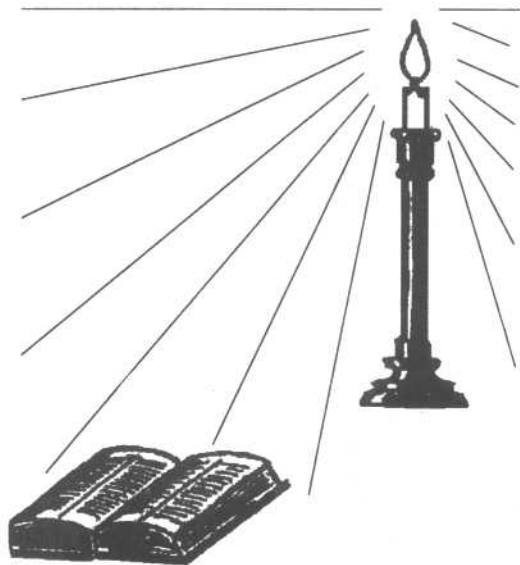
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NOTICES

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 the quickest and most reliable way of keeping records. It saves many hours of work each month. The information so stored is on the label of each magazine sent out, recording BFU reference number, reader's name and address, number of copies sent and date for which renewal has been received. This information 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 please notify us. Such a reader would still be able to receive the Bible Study Monthly regularly.

COSTS AND GIFTS: Costs connected with the Bible Study Monthly remain stable and to send 6 issues to a reader in UK costs about £6 and overseas the equivalent of £8. These figures are only given because some need guidance in giving but the magazine is sent free to all who request it. Some acknowledgements are sent with the magazine. Readers who pay UK tax who send gifts will help BFU funds if they use a form from us or write a letter which indicates that money sent to BFU is an unsolicited gift. These should be signed and dated and sent to us. This only needs to be done once and need not be done each year. Current circulation remains steady at about 1700. This is because new readers keep pace with cancellations and lapsed copies.

The **Talking Book** service continues to grow and we now have 13 readers receiving cassettes regularly. 3 of these are overseas. We are very grateful to the brother who records each issue. These cassettes are mainly for those who have partial or no sight. If you know of any who could benefit from this service please send us their name and address. This service is quite free.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE: is a Christian Retirement Centre on the border of Somerset and Dorset. This Victorian villa has a dining room, two lounges and a meeting room. There is also a remarkable collection of books in the library. Friends who are visiting may use the guest room or a vacant flat. Permanent residents have their own self-contained flats, single or double, arranged around a central garden area to the rear of the main house. A mid-day hot meal is cooked and served by our very dedicated and caring housekeeper, Mrs Corrinne Vaughan. Fees include council tax, water rate, light, fuel, contents insurance and TV licence. Residents enjoy formal and informal fellowship and worship. Gainsborough has a pleasant walled garden. This centre is in lovely countryside that contains many places of interest. The seaside is reached in an hour or so. Sherborne and Yeovil are very accessible.

The centre is run by a registered charity, Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust, which has slowly developed the facilities over twenty-one years. This will be specially marked by a celebration on Sunday 14th July 2002 when it is hoped to have guest speakers. Further announcements will be made and Gainsborough Journal will be restored. Visitors will be able to view the recently completed double unit named after Albert Hudson.

Bookings for temporary residence may be made through the housekeeper at Gainsborough House, 48 Gainsborough Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 5BB. Further enquiries may be made to the BFU central address.

Gone from us

Sister Kath Shaw (Blaby)

Brother James Webster (USA)

Sister Susan Essler (USA)

Sister Gladys Morte (Barnsley)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

“Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God ... the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37.14-16). Here is an attribute of God which is not always realised as it should be, even although the fact is self-evident when we come to think about it – that God is perfect in knowledge. He is the originator of all things and it is by His power that all things are. It follows that He has all knowledge and performs no act or carries out no work without having full knowledge of the effects and consequences. That, perhaps, is why He said through Isaiah that He *“declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done”* (Isa. 46.10). The secret of Divine knowledge, incomprehensible to mortal man, is bound up with this. And the physical characteristics of our earth, our galaxy and our universe, in which all things work together and inter-work to produce a continuing environment admirably suited to the continuing organic existence of its noblest product, man, is evidence of the perfect knowledge which has produced such wondrous works.

Man takes great pride in his own wondrous works, and wondrous they are indeed, but he does not stop to consider sufficiently that they are without exception all based on incomplete knowledge. We have burnt more fossil fuel – coal, oil, gas – in the last hundred years than in all the nineteen centuries before that back to the time of Christ. We complacently accept the standard of living, the facilities of travel, the marvels of modern manufacturing skill, which have resulted therefrom but we do not know what serious havoc we are creating in the earth. Is so much carbon dioxide being generated that the atmosphere will warm up and the polar ice melt and many will be

drowned? Is so much atmospheric oxygen being used up in the processes of combustion that by and by there will be no breathable air and we shall all be suffocated? We do not know to what extent the vast amount of spent aerosol gases that have moved into the upper skies are reacting with the earth's ozone layer so as to destroy its protective function and so vastly increase the incidence of malignant evils like cancer. We do not know what is going to be the long-term effect of modern pesticides, fertilisers and drugs and what evils they may inflict upon future generations. We do not know how long the containers of radio-active waste now being dumped in the oceans will hold back their lethal load from escape into the sea. With all the care taken by scientists and others responsible for these things, no man can be sure that disaster will not come, because no man has perfect knowledge and the unknown factor is just that which if known might have held men back from their actions.

But God does know. God, the great Master Controller of all things, “working all things after the counsel of His own will”; permits men this brief time of experimenting with the materials and forces He has given into their hands, but He will not suffer His creation to be irretrievably ruined. The Devil promised our first parents that he would give them knowledge but man has never attained the knowledge of God nor discerned the difference between good and evil. Only when, in the future Age and by Divine intervention, man learns to take his place in creation in willing co-operation with God will he achieve the knowledge necessary to the rightful administration of his heritage.

AOH

BOOK REVIEW

‘Israel – a history’ by Martin Gilbert was first published in 1998. The author is already known as a historian with remarkable talent in map production. His reputation was made long ago by his biography of Churchill and historical work on the tragedies of the twentieth century. This book, of some 750 pages, with its 143 pages of maps and monumental index, useful bibliography and glossary is something of a pilgrimage of the people of Israel returning and restoring their Promised

Land. The 16 pages of excellent photographs are enlightening and valuable in themselves.

The history begins in the first stirrings of Jews among the Diaspora, around 1882, longing to return to their homeland and realizing that such a return was the only way in which the national aspirations of the Jewish people could be achieved.

Gilbert has a remarkable way of weaving many important details into a very interesting story. Men such Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion almost

tell their own story of the slow, arduous building of Zionism. Not all Jews wanted to return to Palestine and not all favoured the Zionist movement. They were dispersed in many lands, particularly in Europe, and the political ideologies of countries such as Poland and Russia had deeply affected their way of thinking. After independence in 1948 the accounts become fuller and all kinds of official documents and various communications record the progress as Israel's political economy developed. Many will read the real account of the wars with Israel's neighbours for the first time. Yet in war and peace there is no attempt to cover up the facts or whitewash the story. The mistakes and wrong moves made by Israel are just as plainly recorded as for those who have opposed this young state. The cruel attitudes of western nations has been no less devastating than the 'human bombs' and power happy policemen. British governments and press cannot come out of this story as heroes yet some politicians have been surprisingly helpful in solving problems. This is the frank and factual account of the awful history of the middle-east during the twentieth century. One is left with the clear impression that nothing short of a miracle

will ever solve the problems of that cauldron of human evil. Many readers of this magazine will know that the Old Testament prophets shared that view, but trusted their God that some day He would work that miracle.

This is not a work for the faint hearted but it is enlightening for all who have no previous access to the official documents or been able to follow accurate reports from Bible lands. For those who want to know how the media have falsely reflected the truth of what has been happening, this book will go a long way to set the record straight. No history book, however well intentioned the writer may be and however well documented his work, will give the whole truth or be completely unbiased. We must ask the question, what does this account do for the Christian? The answer will always be the same for any investigation or study that is not totally based on the Word of God. Nevertheless this book does satisfy the curiosity of anyone who genuinely wants to know what is happening to God's ancient people and their land. This is a Black Swan book published by Transworld Publishers, London for £15.

DN

BALAAM, PROPHET OF ARAM

Part 1 – An invitation

One of the strangest characters in Bible history is Balaam the soothsayer-prophet, who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to invoke a curse on Israel as they gathered for their entrance into the Promised Land, but found himself able only to pronounce a blessing. Although from his own account he was a loyal prophet of God, he led Israel into the grossest sin and met his death at their hands in consequence; yet he foretold Israel's glorious future and their ultimate triumph over all their enemies. The main account occupies Numbers chapters 22 to 24 and the scene of the story is the land of Moab east of the Dead Sea. The time, the beginning of the fourteenth century BC when Israel, newly come out of Egypt under Moses, was stationed around the border of the country endeavouring to find a passage to the Jordan so that they could cross into their inheritance. Balak, king of Moab, was apprehensive that his own land might be invaded and with the superstition of his time wanted the curse of the gods imposed upon the intruders in the

belief that thus they would melt away and cease to constitute a threat.

Balaam, the son of Beor was a noted soothsayer and invoker of curses. He lived according to the narrative, at Pethor on the Euphrates in the land of Aram, nearly four hundred miles away. He must have been a soothsayer of no mean order for his fame to have penetrated so far. Aram was inhabited by Semites of the same racial stock as Abraham, and Balaam was probably of the same stock, which would explain how he came to be a worshipper of Abraham's God. Nevertheless there would have been a great deal of pagan superstition mixed with his worship and this goes far to explain his later actions.

So the messengers of Balak, elders of the Moabites and Midianites, took the long journey northward to entreat the prophet of Aram to return with them and use his magical arts against Israel. Belief in the efficacy of such formal 'curses' was widespread at the time. There exist Babylonian tablets containing such invocations to the gods to

visit some unlucky recipient with the direst misfortunes, couched in such malevolent language that the psychological effect alone might conceivably have produced the desired result. Without much doubt Balaam himself was well trained in such activities and the fact that he could reconcile all this with his worship of God only goes to show how much the patriarchal worship of the 'Most High God' had degenerated in the non-Israelite world by the time of Moses.

Balaam was not very accommodating. It must be admitted that at the outset his behaviour was perfectly correct. "*Spend this night here*" he replied *"and I shall give you whatever answer the Lord gives me."* (Num. 22.8). That night God came to him and he told God all about it. A people had come out of Egypt, covering the face of the earth, and Balak king of Moab wanted him to go and pronounce curses over them so that Balak could drive them away. "*You are not to go with them or curse the people, because they are to be blessed*" (v.12) and at that Balaam told the princely messengers of Balak quite curtly "*Go back to your own country; the Lord has refused to let me go with you*".

This was a rebuff for Balak, but the Moab king reacted as does a modern business man seeking a favour from a man in some position of power. The price offered was not enough, he would make a better offer. He sent new messengers of higher social standing empowered to offer not only the original monetary inducement but the conferment of other, unspecified, "*great honour*". He added hopefully "*Let nothing stand in the way of your coming to me*". The immediate response still could not be faulted, "*Even if Balak were to give me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not disobey the command of the Lord my God in anything, great and small*". This sounds like true and uncompromising loyalty and rigid allegiance to right principles and had Balaam left the matter there all might have been well. Unfortunately it is evident that the prospect of vast riches did pull a bit and led him to do something which none of us should ever do; offer God a chance to change His mind. "*But stay here the night, as the others did that I may learn what more the Lord may have to say to me*". God had already given him a definite ruling and moreover indicated the reason, that the people he was asked to curse were in fact ordained

to be blessed by God. Here, apparently, was the beginning of that most insidious of all temptations "I will do what God wants me to, but I do wish I did not have to". Balaam had no intention of disobeying God, but he began to harbour a hope that God might relent and allow him to go after all.

It has been said that "*God answers a man according to the idol in his own heart*". That was certainly true in the case of Balaam. No sooner had he given the desire entrance into his heart than God spoke to him again, "*If these men have come to summon you, then rise and go with them, but do only what I tell you.*" The next thing we know is that "*When morning came Balaam rose, saddled his donkey, and went with the Moabite chiefs. But God was angry because Balaam was going...*"

Inconsistent on God's part, say some. Why be angry with a man for doing what he had just been told to do? A careful reading of the text throws light on this point. God had come to Balaam by night, when he was on his bed. "*If these men have come to summon you,*" but they had not come. Balaam rose up in the morning, without having been called; nevertheless he saddled his ass and set out with the men. Anxiety to interpret the Lord's command in the loosest possible manner in order to persuade himself that he had Divine permission led him to ignore the letter of the instruction and yet claim to himself that he was being obedient. No wonder the Lord was angry.

But even when God is angry with man's selfwill and sin he still does all He can to show the sinner the error of his way and bring him back into the right path. He goes to the extreme to avoid condemning the man and will do all that can be done to save him. So here; Balaam was determined to go, and go he did, but the Lord sent an angel to awaken him to a realisation of his mistake if such were possible.

Now here we come to one of the occasions when the celestial world touches the terrestrial. A celestial being, charged with a mission from God, came to Balaam and stood in front of him as he rode upon his ass. Balaam, of course, could not see him, the angel was from another world, on another wave-length, so to speak and Balaam's physical senses were unable to discern him. The ass, however, did, which poses something of a puzzle, for the ass, also a terrestrial creature like Balaam, should have been equally unable to see the angel. Perhaps the

Lord gave the animal a kind of second sight, an impression in the brain produced by an influence other than the optic organs, what is called a 'subjective' appearance. It maybe that there was something similar to the quite reliably established fact of dogs sometimes evincing fear, with growling and hair standing on end, at some mysterious presence in some so-called "haunted" place which is imperceptible to humans standing by. Whatever it was, this was an intervention from the other world and the ass sensed it and tried to avoid it by turning off the road into the field, and Balaam smote the ass to turn her back again.

That did not avail him much. The angel took up a position where the path ran between two vineyards bounded by the low stone walls which even now are a feature of rural Eastern lands. The ass could only get past by pressing herself against one of the walls and in doing so crushed Balaam's foot against the wall, whereupon, probably in some irritation this time, he hit her again.

Now the angel "stood in a narrow place where there is no room to turn to either right or left", and the ass solved this problem by abruptly sitting down in the middle of the road, undoubtedly tipping Balaam off in the process. In considerable anger this time the irate prophet began to belabour the unfortunate animal with his staff and the ass spoke to him.

Considerable ingenuity has been expended by commentators in attempting to explain this unexpected departure from the usual role of dumb animals. Whether it has been worth while is a matter of opinion for from the nature of the case no one can be quite sure what actually happened. There are various suggestions. The ass may have been given, miraculously, human intelligence and the faculty of speech. The ass may have protested in normal ass language at her master's treatment and that was transmitted miraculously in Balaam's ears into spoken words. A voice could have come from heaven and to Balaam seemed to come from the ass. The whole thing could have been a subjective impression made upon his mind and there were no actual sound waves on the air at all. Whichever is correct, or something totally different really does not matter. Whatever it was, it was of God and outside normal natural law and therefore by definition, a miracle. Balaam does not seem to have been unduly surprised at hearing his

ass speak with man's tongue. At first he heatedly told the ass that if he only had a sword in his hand, he would kill her but upon the ass reminding him that she had never before been guilty of the behaviour he was complaining about, he assented quite mildly. Perhaps it was beginning to penetrate into his irritated mind that there was something strange in this proceeding, that asses, even prophets' asses, did not normally converse with their masters in human language. Perhaps the hand of God was in this matter somewhere; and with that thought his mind snapped into tune with the unseen world and he too saw the angel of the Lord standing visibly before him with his drawn sword in his hand.

That of course, brought Balaam up with a jerk, especially when he learned that he had been in imminent danger of death at the hand of the angel and only the cavorting of the ass had saved him. He realised now that God had no intention of allowing him to curse Israel and he might as well forget the prospect of riches and honour at the hands of Balak. "*I have done wrong, ' Balaam replied to the angel of the Lord, 'I did not know that you stood confronting me in the road. But now if my journey displeases you. I shall turn back!'"* (Num. 22.23).

This appears to be the language of true repentance. At this point, Balaam realised that he could only be truly loyal to God by being truly obedient. His unstable nature veered away again from the desire to please Balak and take his money to the resolve to be faithful to God. He was now ready to put himself in the hand of God's angel, and his fellow travellers, the emissaries of Balak, could go on without him. The sequel suggests that this was in fact the situation. The angel of the Lord told him, contrary to expectations, to continue in the way to Balak. He was now God's man again; as such he could be trusted to deliver the message God would give him. "Go with the men; but say only what I tell you." True to the injunction, when at last Balaam did meet Balak, all he would say to the Moabite king's enticement was "It is only whatever word God puts into my mouth that I can speak". (vv. 35,38 REB).

So the Aramaic prophet found himself conducted up to the 'high place' of Baal the god of the Moabites. There on the top of the hill he prepared seven altars upon which he offered seven

bullocks and seven rams wherewith to propitiate the heavenly powers upon whom he would shortly call for the message. He has been accused of downright idolatry and a swift repudiation of his recent repentance in this procedure, but unjustly. Balaam, like all others in his native land, knew the Lord as El Elyon, the Most High God. Here in Moab he looked upon Baal as the local national equivalent, and saw nothing unfitting in using the sanctuary of Baal to call upon God. It is almost certain, though, that Balaam included the mythological gods of his own land as worthy of worship even if to some extent subordinate to the Most High God and this is the explanation of the seven altars and seven sacrifices. These were obviously in honour of the seven deities of the heavens, the sun and moon and five planets (only five were known in that day) each of which manifested some aspect or attributes of the Most High God. Long before Balaam's day it had been laid down by the thinkers of his forefathers that because God is light, all the shining bodies in the heavens, the sun, moon and planets, were emanations of God and all working some part in God's plan. This led eventually to the deification of those bodies so that they all were worshipped as gods. From this it was easy to deduce that the planets had an influence and effect upon the events of human life upon earth and this in turn led to the 'science' of astrology which was invented by the ancient Sumerians and continues today, four thousand years later, particularly in the columns of popular journals. Balaam himself was an astrologer and understood all the techniques of divination and enchantments by means of which he found the basis of his predictions. So the smoke of his offerings went up, to Marduk the Sun-god and Sin the Moon-god, to Neb (Mercury) to the goddess Ishtar (Venus), the warrior god Nergal (Mars) to Niburu (Jupiter) and Adar (Saturn). Each of these represented the Most High God in one of his many aspects and in offering sacrifice to all Balaam was sure that he could find some avenue of access to the counsels of God Himself. It was this kind of worship which God so sternly forbade the children of Israel at this same time, that they should not lift up their eyes to the sun, and moon, and host of heaven, and worship them. (Deut. 4.19; 17.3). The theology of Balaam was a long way behind that of Israel, and although he

acknowledged and worshipped the Most High God, he did not know him as the God who is ONE: he acknowledged also a crowd of lesser gods.

Despite his ignorance and despite his idolatry, God used him. He was, for the time being at least, sincere in his profession and God can always use sincerity. Whilst Balak remained standing by the smoking altars Balaam went off to a solitary place to find and talk with God. Even though the ground was sacred to Baal the false god, even though the offerings were to deities that were not, even though the prophet awaited his Lord in a place given over to idolatry, God did not hesitate to meet him there and talk with him. It may be, perhaps, that the Lord does not regard so much the outward circumstances or the outward appearance as he does the heart. That at least, was what he told Samuel four centuries later (1 Sam. 16.7). It is worth noting, too, that according to ch. 24.1 it was by means of 'enchantments', the divination of signs and portents, the 'tricks of the trade' of his astrological profession, that Balaam discerned the voice of the Lord. It may seem passing strange that the Lord would communicate his will by such means, and yet, after all, is it not a case of God speaking to a man in the language he understands? When the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of the Exodus he talked with him "face to face as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex.33.11). But Balaam was not Moses, and his whole life and upbringing had been spent in an atmosphere of strange and tortuous ways of serving and knowing God so that it is perhaps a wonder that he had any valid conception of the one God at all. After all, the same God who "at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke to he fathers by the prophets" (Heb.1.), was perhaps speaking to this poor semi-heathen who for all his ignorance and failing was nevertheless used wonderfully as a prophet, in one of those "diverse manners".

So Balaam came back to the expectant king, charged with the word of the Lord that he must speak.

The next issue will describe how Balaam faithfully discharged his Divine mission, predicting a future for Israel which history has justified and at the end inexplicably failed. God and led Israel into gross sin, so coming to a miserable end.

CANA WEDDING

A story of Jesus

The first public appearance of Jesus after His baptism was at a wedding. He and a small party of disciples were invited guests. Perhaps this introduction to His ministry was intended to show that Jesus did not purpose to be an ascetic as was his predecessor John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness and waiting for the people to come there to hear him. Jesus intended to share the lives, sorrows and evidently the joys, of those whom He had come to save. So He started off by going to a wedding.

The story is related in John 2:1-11. No one knows whose wedding it was. One tradition says that the bridegroom was the Apostle John himself, *but that does not seem likely, for his father Zebedee and brother James, with himself, were fishermen on Lake Galilee, and Cana was well away from the lake.* The part played by the mother of Jesus might seem to indicate that she connected in some way with the family but in fact nothing is known except that the bridal pair were closely enough connected with the family of Jesus to ensure this invitation. An alternative possibility is that they were members of that little-known body looking for the imminent advent of Messiah who are described in Luke 2:38 as "them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" sometimes known as the 'Redemptionists'. Joseph and Mary may have been of these. *If such was the case, the presence of Jesus would be an obvious 'must'.*

Although Jesus had consented to grace the occasion with His presence and without doubt entered whole-heartedly into the festivities and merry making, He did not use it merely as an opportunity for idle diversion. He was no killjoy but He did infuse into the proceedings an object lesson bearing a direct relation to His forthcoming ministry. And the occasion was not long in presenting itself.

The wine ran out. This does not mean that the feast had degenerated into a drunken brawl with the guests fast slipping under the table. The 'new wine' used for celebratory feasts in those days was not all that potent and it was normally mixed with water anyway, so there was not much likelihood of that. What is more likely is that the master of the feast had under-estimated the quantity required, or perhaps there were more guests present than had been expected. At any rate, as the celebration

proceeded it became evident that there was not going to be enough to go round, and this induced a state of consternation among the womenfolk who were responsible for keeping up the supply. No greater disgrace could fall upon the bridegroom than for it become known that he had failed to provide enough wine for his wedding. The urgent question now was what is to be done?

Mary went straight to Jesus. She could have had no idea what He could or would do to remedy the situation, neither could she at that time have had any knowledge of His supernatural power. It was just that she went to Him with the problem. If there was anything that could be done at this late stage, He was the one most likely to think of it.

Many an honest soul has been sorely puzzled at the apparent harshness of His reply. "*Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come*" (Jn. 2:4 NRSV). It was not harsh in reality. The word rendered 'woman' is one denoting considerably greater respect than is usually associated with the present use of 'woman' in English; more like the term 'lady' although not quite the same. "O woman" is what Jesus said, and in this context He was actually addressing her respectfully as His mother. He used the same expression at the cross (John 19:26). "*Woman (O woman) behold your son.*" Then follow the words which in colloquial English mean "*you and I need not concern ourselves at the moment; it is not yet necessary for me to interfere*". It is evident that His mother 'got the message', for she straightaway went to the servants and told them to obey implicitly whatever Jesus told them to do. The Lord probably then allowed the feast to continue and at the last minute gave instructions to the servants to act.

If that is a fair appraisal, there is a lesson here for all Christians. Many a time in life there arises a crisis that it would seem can only be dealt with by the overruling power of the Lord, when human help is insufficient. The tendency, a natural one then is to agonise and pray anxiously for an immediate intervention in the matter without stopping to reflect that if He is going to do anything at all about it, He will assuredly do so in adequate time to bring about the desired effect. Nothing will go wrong and the problem will be settled quite satisfactorily. If we take upon

ourselves to appeal to our Lord for help we only need put the matter before Him in faith and then like Israel of old in the days of Jehoshaphat, "*stand still and see the salvation of God.*"

At the right moment Jesus, from His place at the table, beckoned to one of the servants, which could be either man or woman. "*Fill those water pots to the brim*" He instructed, indicating six stone jars standing in the entry to the house. Those jars holding about 100 litres each were used for the very necessary washing of hands and feet as guests entered the house, and from time to time as the feast proceeded. The fact that there were six of them and they were now apparently empty, is a measure of the number of guests present; this was no ordinary wedding. So the servants filled the jars to the brim.

"*Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast*", commanded Jesus. Here was a test for the servants. To take jugs of plain water to the tables where the wine was expected might well have serious consequences for them. Of course, they, like Jesus' mother, had no knowledge of His powers or of what was to be the outcome. It says much for the reputation of Jesus that they apparently obeyed without demure. They drew the water in their jugs and carried it to the master of ceremonies at the principal table, and when they got there, behold it was wine!

Their amazement at this inexplicable transformation could only have been equalled by their relief at the unexpected deliverance from their dilemma. They said nothing to the master of the feast, it would have been imprudent to do otherwise. They watched impassively as, in his capacity of chief wine taster, he sampled what had been placed before him and pronounced it excellent. It was so good in fact that he observed to the bridegroom, by now a vastly relieved bridegroom, that he seemed to have reversed the usual procedure of serving the best wine first and keeping the inferior until men were no longer quite sure what they were drinking. "*You,*" he said, "*have kept the good wine until now*". The bridegroom, on his part, was probably wondering what good friend had come to his aid in this time of need, and from whence he had obtained so choice a vintage.

A word about the miracle. Agnostics and rationalists a few generations back used this story, as they did other similar ones, as useful subjects

for sarcasm and scorn. Whoever heard of one substance being transformed into another? Not so much of that nature is heard now, when scientific research has made it possible to do such things. Our chemical wizards now turn North Sea gas into cattle food, and good cattle food it is said to be. Water is a chemical combination of two basic elements, hydrogen and oxygen. The fermented juice of the grape adds to this a complex series of starches, sugars and alcohol that have their basis in several other elements such as carbon, nitrogen and sulphur all of which are present in the atmosphere. It required the exercise of Divine power to infuse those additional elements at the moment of drawing the water to convert it into wine. To One who once brought nearly a hundred different elements together from the dust of the earth to create the marvel of a human body that must have represented quite a minor act.

But why did Jesus do it? Why introduce his ministry, with an act that might well be interpreted as an exhibition of cheap magic. Was His work that was to involve so many momentous issues and was to have such tremendous consequences for the whole world, commence by a kind of conjuring trick only notable for the fact that no one knew how it was done? What was Jesus' purpose behind it? The narrative says "*Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him*". In what way did this incident manifest forth His glory? It should be noted that very few of those at the feast knew that a miracle had been performed. The master of ceremonies did not know; the bridegroom did not know, and fairly evidently the guests did not know either. In fact the only ones who did know anything about it would seem to have been the servants who drew the water, Mary, and probably the disciples, who would have been in close touch with her. Human nature being what it is the servants would without doubt have spread the story afterwards and perhaps by this means, public attention was focused upon Jesus, and men began to pay more attention to His message than they might have done otherwise. They were simple country folk but without doubt well versed in the Scriptures. They all knew the story of how Elijah the prophet had caused a miraculous supply of oil to appear in the Zarephath widow's cruse during two or so years of drought. Elijah had stopped the rain from heaven

and caused the drought and Elijah had brought rain back again. Might it not be that God was speaking to Israel again as He had done in the days of Elijah, and was this event at Cana a repetition of what had happened so long ago at Zarephath? So they might have reasoned, and watched with heightened interest to see what Jesus would do next. Moses had brought water out of the rock, and manna from heaven, at a time of Israel's sore need. Moses and Elijah, had been the two greatest of Israel's deliverers! Was this one to be a third, one who would deliver them and fulfil all the Divine promises? Perhaps, after all, this seemingly pointless miracle was the most effective manner of drawing attention to the One sent of God to redeem them from their enemies. Perhaps, in this way, more than in any other, He was able to show forth His glory, the glory of One coming from above, armed with celestial power to heal the woes of men. At any rate, it is said that, in consequence of this episode, "*his disciples believed in him*". He had only just chosen the first half dozen. They

hardly knew Him as yet. Perhaps this miracle was just what was wanted, and all that was wanted, to establish their faith in Him. He was not only a teacher and a prophet sent from God, which is how they probably received him in the first place, but as the Messiah, the one coming with all power in heaven and earth to fulfil all the glowing predictions of all the ancient prophets. "*We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did speak, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph*" said Philip just before this incident. (John 1.45) Andrew, going to Peter, was more emphatic; "*We have found Messiah*". After what they saw and heard at that wedding feast at Cana they were almost certainly more than ever convinced that He was indeed the One sent of God. Perhaps the miracle of the turning of water into wine was not for the benefit of the wedding guests at all but that those few first disciples, newly come to Jesus and necessarily not quite sure of themselves, might see, and understand, "*that this is very Christ*."

AOH

COSMOS OUT OF CHAOS

*Reflections on
society today*

Confusion, crisis, chaos; these sombre words appear more and more frequently in the news and comments on world affairs. How does this affect the hopes of those who pray daily "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth*" (Matt. 6.9 NRSV). According to OT writings, the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the earth. So the question arises, why does He allow the world to continue to slide down the slippery slope to destruction?

The prophet declares "*The Lord said to me, I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest*" (Isa.18.4 NRSV). A traveller in Palestine many years ago, alluding to this statement, said he had witnessed such a mist-cloud in harvest time. The sun rose early and the people of the village, having loaded their donkeys and carts with merchandise for the market, set out for the nearest town. Suddenly a mist descended on the scene and all was confusion and chaos as the drovers tried to find their way in the low visibility.

Can this picture explain the confusion and chaos that becomes more and more apparent in world affairs today? 'Chaos' is defined as the

shape of matter before it was reduced to order, whereas 'cosmos' is defined as a systematic whole, as opposed to chaos. This takes us back to the account of creation in Genesis 1 that states that the earth was without form and void, an empty waste, a formless void, a great deep of primordial matter. The Spirit of God was moving, hovering, brooding over the deep of primordial matter. As the Spirit brooded over the face of the earth, a great wind swept over the deep. Ancient mythology portrays this creative act as God overcoming the Chaos monster of the deep, a picture that is used in some aspects of God's dealing with men (Psa. 74.14; 89.9-12; 93.3,4; 105.5-9 and Isaiah 51.9-11). The account in Genesis concludes with a description of the creation of man and the instruction that he should fill the earth and subdue it. How well has man succeeded in carrying out these instructions? He has indeed filled the earth with millions of people, but one third of these are subsisting at starvation level and another third at not much higher level. This is because in his greed and avarice he has exploited the vast resources of this planet but has failed to share them equally. The supply of fossil fuels is fast running out because of

the profligate use of them; many species of animals and birds are now extinct: many more are in danger of following. The land, the sea and the atmosphere are becoming badly polluted and the 'Friends of the Earth' and other environmentalists appear to be fighting a losing battle.

Why paint such a sombre picture; is there no redeeming feature? All the Bible prophecies relating to the time of the end, or the Day of God's vindication (not vengeance), point to flaming fire, wild tempest and a swift descending sword. The result is that men become howling and frightened and despairing as the harvest of the earth is being reaped and the nations are sifted with the sieve of destruction. We pass over several references to God, coming down as a fire in the OT and turn our attention to our Lord's words in Matt. 24. These speak of the heavens and the earth passing away, the stars falling from the sky and the powers of the heavens being shaken, resulting in wars and rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes. All this is described as but the beginning, the early birth pains, of intolerable anguish (Matt. 24.8) So violent are these birth pangs that v.12 declares that the love of the great body of people will grow cold, because of multiplied lawlessness and iniquity. There will be tribulation, affliction, distress and oppression, such has not been from the beginning of the world until now, and never will be again, and if those days had not been shortened no human being would endure and survive. This is a true picture of this nuclear age. Some years ago it was reported that the stock of weapons held by the great powers is equal to one million times that of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. But for the sake of God's chosen (Israel) these days are to be shortened -literal translation reads "*God has shortened the days*" (Matt. 24.21.22).

What is that new birth of which all this is but the beginning of the pangs? God has declared "*I am about to create new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind*" (Isa. 65.17 NRSV). A footnote in the Amplified Bible suggests that a new universe is meant here. The Hebrew has no single word to express the thought of 'cosmos', so heaven and

earth are substituted. It would seem to be reasonable to draw a comparison between the first creation as outlined in Genesis, and this new creation which is to replace the old one that is to be forgotten for ever. References in the Bible to 'the cosmos' which is to be created out of the present chaos are too many to mention in detail, but some well-worn ones come to mind. "*He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide for stray nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more, but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid*" (Mic. 4.3,4).

Jeremiah is sometime described as the prophet of doom but in his prophecy there is a telling contrast between the old and the new. In 25.10,11, God declares that He will take away the voice of mirth, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstone and the light of the candle, an apt picture of the world today. But a profound change is foretold. There shall be heard again the voices of joy and gladness, the voices of the bridegroom and the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring the sacrifices of thanksgiving into the house of the Lord. "*Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever*" (Jer. 33.11 NRSV). This brings to mind the prophecy in the Song of Songs (2.11-13) "*For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig-tree puts forth and ripens her green figs and the vines are in blossom, they give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one and come away.*"

When, once again and for the last time, 'cosmos' has been created from 'chaos' the prophecy of Isa. 14.7 will be fulfilled "*The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; they break forth into singing.*"

AS

It is hoped that the new edition of the booklet '**Jacob's Trouble**' will be available early in the New Year. It will be sent to any who have recently requested it and been disappointed. Many regard

its exposition of Ezekiel 38-39 as very topical. As with all literature, BFU will gladly send copies free upon specific request.

STRAIGHT FOR THE GOAL

*Thoughts upon total
surrender to Christ*

"My brothers, I do not consider myself to have fully grasped it even now. But I concentrate on this: 'I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight for the goal – my reward the honour of my high calling by God in Christ Jesus'". (Phil. 3.13,14 Phillips) Paul in this part of his letter to the brethren at Philippi is using the Isthmian games as an illustration of the Christian life. Paul was wholehearted in everything he did. He put his whole mind and body into the persecution of the Church. When he became a follower of Jesus Christ he embraced the new faith with all his heart, just like an athlete in the games. For him, anything less than his best was useless. The Laodicean Church was condemned because its members were neither hot nor cold in their attitude in following Jesus. The task given to Paul could never have been done better than he did it. Jesus called him to a wonderful work that brought out the highest qualities. It also brought unparalleled suffering but he counted it a privilege and knew that his reward was secure in Heaven. His speeches recorded in the Acts of the Apostles together with his letters to the Churches show that he had remarkable intellectual ability. In spite of physical limitations he accomplished so much while under severe stress, for the sake of Christ. He took a major part in interpreting and explaining the life and work of Christ and their relation to the Old Testament. In God's providence he was foremost in planning the spread the Gospel and he personally pioneered much of it. He preached Christ, and based his message upon Moses and the prophets. His training and education prepared him for the immense task and he was utterly faithful in doing it.

Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, beneath the shadow of the Taurus mountains. From there he saw the Greek ships sail in and out of a busy harbour. He saw the grandeur of creation as storks flew across the Mediterranean. He could turn and look inland to see high hills and the floppy eared goats grazing on them. He saw the values of Roman rule and grasped the understanding of Greek philosophy. He saw the value in the twin cultures of the empire into which he had been born. This is shown in his words and actions yet he neither glorified nor was he ashamed of them. The boundaries of men's rule were like the boundaries

of land and ocean to Paul, established by Almighty God and he respected them whatever his feelings about them.

Paul was born a Jew, but also a Roman citizen. Of the tribe of Benjamin, he may have been called after Saul, Israel's first king, who also was of that tribe. There is evidence that he came from a fairly wealthy family who may have disinherited him when he became a disciple of Jesus. Yet he retained the connection with his sister in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that he had been married and was a member of the Sanhedrin but the Scriptures do not give us much help in that respect. He certainly had a good education beyond the average boy of his time. After early training in home and synagogue he was despatched to Jerusalem to discover the finer points of Mosaic Law. At the feet of the liberally minded Gamaliel this earnest, perhaps narrow-minded young man, was able to learn from the finest Jewish scholarship. This gave him the background that he was to need in later life and through the power of the Holy Spirit he pursued his work for Christ in fullest measure. He alone was able to see the moral consequences of such a teaching and he laid the foundations of new concepts of the Kingdom of God which none of the earlier leaders of the church had done. Yet Paul was no fanatical revolutionary in society and he saw the need for obedience to authority. Cultural change came slowly. All this the apostle did in his short thirty years of ministry and he could only have done it by complete dedication to Jesus' calling on the Damascus road. It was no idle boast that he was able to say, "I have fought a good fight;" it was the sober truth, he had fought ruthlessly. He had fought against evil and sin, against selfishness and conceit, against narrow-minded bigotry of the Jews and the total permissiveness of the Gentiles. The battle had been within his own life not against his fellow men, and certainly not against his brothers and sisters in Christ. It was by example that he showed others the way. He had run the race without deviation and according to the rules. He had stripped off everything and not allowed the closely fitting 'sin' to hinder his progress but had kept his eye upon Jesus and awaited with joy that moment when the veil would be drawn aside and he would see his Master face to face.

Paul shows none of the repugnance common among Jews towards the Grecian games. He had sufficient knowledge of them to use them in illustrating the Christian walk. He must have seen the runners moving as if their very lives depended on winning. But his was not a competition as if there were so many places to be filled and they must do all they could to beat the next person. The illustration was intended to teach the giving of all we've got to take the prize, which Paul describes in Phil. 3.8 as winning Christ – and that prize was beginning to be realised now – “*knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*”.

In writing to Timothy (2 Tim. 2.3-6) Paul teaches the same kind of lesson in three illustrations. The first is that of a soldier, who endures hardness and does not become involved in the normal interests of civilian life. This was highlighted following two world wars when soldiers were totally absorbed in winning a war and found it hard to return to normal life after several years in a foreign country. Resuming the responsibilities they left behind was very difficult for some. The lesson for the child of God is similar to that shown in Jesus' parable of the Sower and the soil which was full of weeds that deprived the plants of the real crop of water and air. So many things, taken for granted by ordinary people, that seem harmless in themselves, distract attention from life with Christ.

Paul then uses again the illustration of the athlete in a race. Here there is emphasis on keeping the rules and the lesson lies in discipline. A Christian must be self disciplined, able to do what is right even when by nature he would rather do something else, particularly with the pressures of contemporary society and ‘keeping up with the neighbours’. Discipline speaks of pattern and purpose in life and this is that which only Christ can give. In the Christian life there is no place for the chaos and the aimless ‘getting and doing’ that afflicts human life today.

Thirdly, Paul draws a rural scene in which a farmer only obtains the best rewards when he works really hard with no let up for frivolous things. A Christian must be diligent to the point of allowing nothing into his life that will not contribute to his life in Christ.

Paul refers to boxing at the games, not in the sense of attacking someone else but again in the

matter of self-discipline. Pummelling himself was not shadow boxing (1 Cor. 9.26). He writes as if he were two persons, as he does in Rom. 7.14-20. Paul the apostle is attacking Saul the Jewish teacher who couldn't keep the Law. The old nature has to be punched until it knows that it is completely beaten. Too often, through the history of the Church even until this present day, Christians have imagined that their opponents are fellow Christians who hold different interpretations of Scripture from their own. This is not so. A.B Simpson's words remain true -

There is a foe whose hidden power
The Christian well may fear;
More subtle far than inbred sin,
And to the heart more dear.
It is the power of selfishness,
The proud and wilful – I
And ere my Lord can live in me
My very self must die.

This was the fight that Paul took seriously and in which he ultimately triumphed. The whole of this passage speaks of Paul being totally absorbed in his life with Christ. Anyone who has truly been in love with a spouse will know what Paul felt. Yet this is not a withdrawal from the world that offers only a monastic way of life. Christ was actively interested in the world and in the people around Him but always, without exception, his interest was concerned with God's will and kingdom. Hence His words, “*Strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*” (Matt 6.32 NRSV). A job of work, a career or even one's own business can be a contributor in our lives to the Kingdom of God. But they can be a distraction which destroys spiritual life. The same applies to our relaxation and pastimes. It can also apply to Christian service and some forms of Bible study. They can all divert attention from Christ himself for none of these things can transform our lives. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can do that.

However great the self-denial and suffering endured by a Christian, it is but light affliction for the eternal weight of glory. That glory will be the shining with a character like that of Christ to a world that has known nothing of His beauty. Now is the time when that character is being formed in us. Is that the absorbing interest of our lives? Are we going **straight** for the goal?

ELI – THE PRIEST WHO FAILED

2. Defeat or Victory?

Hannah, the pious wife of a godly Levite, had accompanied her husband on his annual pilgrimage to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, probably on the occasion of the Feast of Pentecost. There is evidence that the Levitical ritual was still being observed but from 1 Sam. 2. 12-17 it is evident that there were grave abuses being committed by the renegade priests, the sons of Eli. Elkanah the Levite was probably only one of many who deplored these things but earnestly hoped that one day God would send a reformer to put matters right. He little thought that his own son was to be that reformer, to transform Israel into a free and worshipping people. At this moment Hannah was pouring out her heart to the Lord in prayer for just such a son, and Eli, perceiving her, concluded that she was intoxicated and reproved her. A High Priest devoted to his calling and thoroughly familiar with the sorrows and tribulations of his people would not have mistaken the outward signs of inward emotion and supplication for those of drunkenness. By this initial reaction this man showed himself insensitive to the essence of his commission. Said the writer to the Hebrews *"We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"* (Heb. 4.15) but Eli was not that kind of a High Priest. Upon being apprised of his mistake he merely replied more or less indifferently *"Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of him"* without even asking what it was.

Eventually Hannah appeared before the High Priest again, this time with her small son, the fruit of her prayer. Nothing had changed, she had to explain to Eli who she was and remind him of their former meeting. Now, in fulfilment of her vow, she had brought her son to be dedicated to the service of the Lord in the Sanctuary. As the son of a Levite and therefore a Levite himself he had the right to serve in the sacred things and henceforth he would be under the tutelage of Eli and grow up to engage in the service of the Tabernacle. Eli seemed to accept the arrangement without comment; he now had a young personal assistant who would become increasingly useful as he grew up and with that he was content. So Samuel remained with Eli.

One wonders what Hannah really felt about the moral atmosphere of the environment in which she had thus placed her innocent little son. The situation was notorious in Israel. Eli had long since ceased to exercise his priestly functions himself; he had delegated them to his two sons (1 Sam. 1.3). They themselves were notorious profligates. They diverted the people's sacrifices intended for the Lord to their own use; they made use of the girl servants of the Tabernacle, with or without their consent. These servants were dedicated to the service just as was Samuel and not free to leave so they had no escape. (Jephthah's daughter in the story of Judges 11 was one such devotee in her own day). The net result was that *"men abhorred the offering of the Lord"* (1 Sam. 2.17). The sacred festivals fell into disrepute and the people began to forsake them. The loyalty of Israel to the God whose centre was at Shiloh began to wane and be transferred to the idol gods of Canaan. But Hannah had no misgivings, if the sentiments of her song of triumph are noted (1 Sam. 2). She was quite sure that the hand of the Lord was in this thing and that He was about to do great things for His people. *"He will keep the feet of his holy ones and the wicked shall be silent in darkness"* she sang. Surely she was thinking of her little Samuel when she uttered these words. She left her son with Eli and returned home in full confidence that he was under Divine protection and would come to no harm.

So Eli remained sitting on his seat in the sun. *"by a post of the temple of the Lord"* (1 Sam 1.9) until, one day, a stranger approached him, a prophet of the Lord. That seat by a post of the temple, where first Hannah talked with him, yields a sidelight upon the corruption that had enveloped the Tabernacle. For that post was one of those which guarded the entrance to the Holy apartment of the Tabernacle so that the seat was inside the Court wherein according to the commandment only Levites and priests might enter. Apparently anyone of Israel could enter in the days of Eli. Now he found himself confronted by this prophet who solemnly recited to him how God at the first had promised Aaron his ancestor that his sons would be priests contingent upon their loyalty and

faithfulness. And now God demanded to know why Eli had forsworn that covenant and despised his sacred office, sharing in the illicit gains of his priestly sons and honouring them more than he honoured God. So the stranger pronounced the Divine sentence; his succession would be cut off and the priestly line of Ithamar descending through him would come to an end and be replaced by a faithful priest who would do according to the Divine will. The sentence was one of excommunication; had Eli taken serious heed and repented and amended his ways perhaps the outcome would have been different, for it is never too late for repentance. With our God the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour still leaves time for deliverance and the lifting of judgement if sincere repentance is there. But half a dozen years or so later, when the young boy Samuel hears the voice of the Lord in the Sanctuary, the position was unchanged. The sons of Eli were still pursuing their evil ways and he himself was still indifferent and so judgment became certain.

The occasion when the boy Samuel heard the Lord's voice and was used to convey the final decision to Eli is probably the best known incident in the lives of Eli and Samuel. The lad would be about twelve years of age and Eli about eighty-five. It was at night, when both were asleep, and "*ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord*" (1 Sam. 3.3). That casual mention indicates the laxity of the priests. The light from the seven-branched lamp stand in the Holy place was to be kept perpetually burning; it was never to be allowed to go out. It seems that the light now habitually went out at night and the oil was only renewed next morning, another example of the priests' disregard of the Divine order. Now in the darkness, the Lord spoke to the lad and imparted to him the shattering realisation that his teacher and guide had failed in his duty and was to be deposed and rejected. Samuel was still too young to understand much of the corruption and iniquity that was going on around him and probably looked upon the older man with respect and affection. Now he had to convey to him the news of his coming rejection and the extinction of his house.

Eli insisted on being told everything. Whether there was any last-minute realisation of his failure does not appear. He did not dispute the sentence; he did not attempt to defend himself. He merely

said "*It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.*" No endeavour to bestir himself, to try to make some amends even at this late hour. He just accepted the position passively.

From this time Samuel came increasingly into the public eye. By the time he was twenty "all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord; and the Lord appeared again in Shiloh (1 Sam. 3.19-20) For something like three centuries, from the time of Othniel and Phinehas, there had not been a ruler whole-heartedly solid to the end of life for God and His laws. Now all of Israel were being taught the right way as they had never been taught before and with every advance made by this new enthusiast for righteousness the old days of idolatry and godlessness began to slip away into the background.

But Israel was not yet converted. A few more years, and Israel found itself embroiled with the Philistines again. Battle was joined at Aphek, thirty miles from Shiloh. The first engagement was disastrous for Israel; they lost four thousand men. The situation was ominous; the elders of Israel took a dramatic decision. They resolved to send to Shiloh and take the Ark of the Covenant out of its place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle and bear it before them as they advanced to battle. They reasoned that God would not allow the sacred emblem to fall into the hands of their enemies, and so under its protection and by means of its magic power they would defeat the Philistines.

Such sacrilege had never before been known in Israel. The Ark of the Covenant, symbol of the abiding presence of God, was not even allowed to be seen, much less handled, by anyone except the High Priest. When on journeys from one place to another during the forty years' wanderings in the wilderness, it was carefully shrouded in blue coverings to conceal it from sight. Any High Priest who permitted such removal thereby manifested his total unfitness for office. Yet Eli concurred and his two renegade sons accompanied the Ark to the scene of the battle.

The effect was the opposite of that intended. "*Woe unto us*" cried the Philistines when they found out what was happening. "*These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? Be strong, and quit*

yourselves like men, O ye Philistines". The plagues of Egypt were four centuries in the past and it is remarkable that the terror of them was remembered still by the Philistines. They fought now with renewed desperation because of the very presence of the Ark, and the result was that thirty thousand Israelites were slain, including the two sons of Eli, and the Ark of God was captured.

Late that same day a runner appeared in Shiloh, clothes dishevelled, hot and dusty, bearing the news of the disaster. Eli was sitting upon his seat, anxiously awaiting assurance of the Ark's safe return. He knew he had done wrong and that he had perpetrated the greatest of all outrages against the Divine sanctuary. All he wanted now was to know that the Ark was safely back in its place and then he could sink again into his normal state of apathy. "How did it go, my son?" he asked. "Israel has fled before the Philistines!" came the reply "and there has also been a great slaughter among the people". Eli took that with equanimity. "Your two sons also, Hophni and Phineas are dead". That also passed without visible reaction. "And the ark of God has been captured." At those fateful words, as the chronicler has it, "when he mentioned the Ark of God", Eli collapsed, rolled off his seat on to the ground, broke his neck and died. The shock of the realisation at last, that he had betrayed God, killed him. (1 Sam. 4.16-18 RSV)

The Philistines would be hard on the heels of the runner. Shiloh had been a national centre of worship and place of meeting with God for four hundred years. It came to its end through the indolence and faithlessness of its last High Priest, and of a people who took the name of God upon their lips but were far from him in their hearts.

For the Christian, the lesson of Eli's life is the futility of backing away from evil, of ignoring it and pretending that it does not exist. Evil will not go away of itself; it is always there, seeking to make inroads and extend its power. Evil has to be actively resisted. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" says Paul. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth ... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6.11-17). It is a biting commentary on the indecision of Eli and the faithlessness of his people on that historic occasion is the very expression used by their Philistine enemies. When confronted by what they thought was a well-nigh irresistible opponent they said "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines" (1 Sam. 4.9). This became Paul's inspiration for his famous injunction to all Christians in 1 Cor. 16.13. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." The older man, with all his years of experience and authority, all his admitted power and influence as ruler of Israel in both the religious and the political spheres, had allowed himself to be overcome by the idolatry and irreligious attitude of his environment. The young lad, having nothing but faith and zeal challenged those same evil forces and put them to flight. Samuel found Israel an anarchistic and idolatrous rabble, a miserable caricature of the host that entered Canaan under Joshua. He left it an orderly and law abiding nation, conducting its national life in harmony with the Mosaic Covenant and in the true worship of God. In later times Israel classed Samuel with Moses: of Eli they had nothing to say.

AOH

A Reminiscence of Nahum

Nahum the Elkoshite (Naham 1.1). It is generally believed that Nahum was a prophet of the Northern Captivity and that his home town was Elkosh in the mountains of Assyria where the ten tribes were taken and settled by Shalmaneser. Elkosh today has a synagogue which possesses a notable shrine, claimed to be the tomb of Nahum.

"Nineveh of old shall be as a pool of water; yet shall they flee away" cries Nahum. (Nah 2.8). A rather obscure expression; just what does it mean? A passage in Wigram's 'Cradle of Mankind' supplies the answer. Standing on the heights just

outside Elkosh, he looked down across the plain to ruined Nineveh, 40 miles away. "It was a weird and striking effect that we witnessed from it next morning. The clouds lay low and horizontal above the plain beneath us; and many of them seemed to have sunk on to the ground, and looked exactly like lakes under the level rays of the rising sun. As his orb rose higher they lifted and dispersed into wreaths of vapour." So must Nahum have seen in that effect a picture of the doom of the great city of wickedness.

THE MIRACLE BOOK

The Holy Scriptures have been described as a miracle of diversity in unity. The Bible is its own great evidence for its Divine origin and authority and we cannot consider these two great facts without being tremendously impressed with its diversity and its unity.

First there is the diversity of language; the Old Testament was written in Hebrew; a portion of it in Chaldean, while the New Testament was written in Greek. There is a diversity of authorship. These Scriptures were not written by one person nor by a company of men collaborating with one another. Men with greatly diversified mental calibre, training and occupation were employed in writing them. Moses was a shepherd, Joshua a soldier, Samuel a seer, David a king, Solomon a philosopher, Amos a herdsman, Daniel a statesman, Ezra a scribe, Matthew a tax collector, Luke a doctor, John a fisherman, Paul a scholar. There is a further diversity of place in which these Scriptures were produced; they have come to us from the desert of Sinai, the wilderness of Judea, the banks of Chebar, the city of Zion, the public prison in Rome, and the Isle of Patmos. There is no literary phenomenon in the world to be compared with this book, the Bible. Not only so, but there is diversity of form. In Genesis there are stories, in Leviticus there is ritual, in Deuteronomy oratory, in Ruth romance, in Samuel and Kings national history, in Job drama. The Psalms are sacred hymns, in Proverbs we have ethics, in Ecclesiastes philosophy, in the Canticles (Song of Solomon) a love song, in Joel and Habakkuk rhapsody, in Isaiah and Jeremiah prophecy, in the Gospels biography, in Acts Church history, in the Epistles doctrines, in Revelation the Apocalypse. All these forms of literature make up this great spiritual classic. From the standpoint of diversity of subject matter also, is there any other book in the world to be compared with it? In the Bible we read of God, of men, of angels and demons, of Jews and Gentiles, of Christians and pagans, of saints and sinners, of the church and of the world. We read of peace and war, of friends and foes, of blessing and curses, of holiness and sin, of honour and shame, of faith and unbelief, of time and eternity, of life and death, of love and rage, of Heaven and Hades. These and countless other subjects are brought to our notice within the cover of this extraordinary volume.

We are not impressed, however, with any sense of incongruity; there is an eminent fitness in the relation of these tremendous themes to one another. Nor were these writings produced at any one time. They do not belong to any one age; they come to us as the growth of many centuries. Is there any other book in the world that can be compared with this as to its diversity? Were the number of subjects treated or their equivalent brought together in any other book? No publisher would take the risk of publishing it and no purchaser would ever buy it and yet the Bible is the most widely circulated book in the world. Other books have a season, they have a run and then we hear of them no more, but this book lives on through the ages. It out-lives all other literature and is the queen of all literature.

Notwithstanding all this diversity the Bible is nevertheless a sublime unity; every part is essential to the whole, and it all originates in the will and revelation of God. The two Testaments are essential to each other; they brood over the mercy seat as did the cherubim of gold of old, each answering to the other. "The New is in the Old contained, the Old is in the New explained." Genesis and Revelation are essential to each other; Genesis is the book of commencement, Revelation the book of consummation; Genesis anticipates Revelation and Revelation consummates Genesis. Each part is related to and corresponds with every other part. Genesis and Matthew are the two great beginnings. Exodus and Acts tell us of the making of the people of God in Israel and the Christian Church. Leviticus and Hebrews tell us of the priestly way to God. Joshua and Ephesians, tell us of the inheritance of God's people. Daniel and Revelation point beyond the rise and fall of the world's empires to the coming of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

As an illustration of this correspondence, take the first three chapters of Genesis and the last three of Revelation and it will be found that each of these take subjects but in the reverse order. In Genesis 1 we have the first Heaven and Earth, in Revelation 22 the last Heaven and Earth. In Genesis 2 we have husband and wife. In Revelation 21 the Lamb and the Bride. In Genesis 3 the sentence is pronounced upon Satan and in Revelation 20 the sentence is executed. It is little

wonder that the Devil attempts to have us believe that the one book is all myth and the other is all mystery.

The Word of God is not a dead letter. Hebrews speaks of the Word of God being alive, and Peter speaks of the Word of God which lives and abides forever. We can no more leave the Bible alone or leave it out of our reckoning than we can leave Christ alone. Christ does not derive His value from the Bible; the Bible derives its value from Christ. Only through the Bible can we get to Christ; our eternal knowledge of Christ comes through the Bible.

The Bible is built up in an extraordinary way, not to be accounted for by accident or chance, and the Testaments are in sequence. For instance, in the Old Testament from Genesis to Esther our interest is aroused and we are led on through all the books to the sublime end in the Apocalypse of John. We are impressed as we read the amazing diversity, yet it unfolds and presents itself as a sublime story. All these stories are one story, all these revelations are one revelation, and all these records are one record. Across the whole of the Old Testament you may write the word 'expectation', and across the whole of the New, 'realisation'. In Genesis there are origins, in Revelation there are issues, and all the way between, from Exodus to Jude, there are processes leading from those origins to those issues. The revelation of God to man has been made in history and everywhere in Holy Scripture there is historical continuity and sequence. There is historical unity in Scripture and there is prophetic unity. There could have been confusion and contradiction, as there is in modern human prophecies. But there was not, and could not have been any collusion among the writers of Holy Scripture; and there is no contradiction.

There are four great themes of prophecy – the Messiah, the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church. Some treat of one, some of another and not a few touch upon them all, but there is an amazing harmony everywhere. There is no contradiction among the voices. In the Old Testament there are predictions and in the New Testament there are fulfilments. In the Old we get types, in the New anti-types. The whole of the Old is leading up to the First Advent and the whole of the New is leading up to the Second Advent. There is

prophetic, structural and historical unity everywhere in Scriptures. We also have doctrinal unity. Were men left to themselves, harmony of doctrine would be impossible, but these many writers across the ages were not left to themselves.

Everywhere in Scripture we find God. Some would have us believe that He was the tribal deity of the Hebrews, but this is not so. He is the God of all men, and the New Testament shows that He so loved, not just the Hebrews, nor just the Church, but the whole **World** "*He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" Everywhere in Scripture man is a sinner. The Old Testament does not present man as half beast on his way up to morality and the New as a man made like God; both Testaments teach that Christ is the one and only Redeemer and His Cross our only hope. Redemption is in the Old Testament anticipated, in the New it is accomplished. From the Acts to the Apocalypse it is applied. It is the one great theme that runs throughout all the Scriptures. It is the note that dominates in this orchestra from start to finish. We also have spiritual unity. Think of its range, of its vision, of the sublimity of its themes. Think of the loftiness of its ideals, of the power of its appeals. The horizons of the Bible are infinitudes and immensities. The current coin of this is Faith, Love and Hope. Think what the Bible has done for individuals. Think of countless numbers who, were they with us still, would say "this one thing I know – that whereas I was blind now I see." No man ever came to say that by studying philosophy or science, but many have done so through an acquaintance with the Word of God. Think of what the Bible has done for the Church of God and for national life; for where the Word of God is accepted and believed there is emancipation and deliverance from degradation and from cruelty.

It has turned the demons out of cruel hearts and made men sober and kind. If the Bible is to be judged by what it has accomplished, then verily it is the Book of Books and the Word of God. It does not need our apology or our special pleading; give it a chance and it will demonstrate its own character and its own power.

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

13. The Book of the Covenant

Israel had encamped before Mount Sinai for some days and Moses had ascended the mountain several times. The people had already heard the terms of the covenant. Now it was time for them to have the laws of the covenant, contained in Ex. 20.23-23.33. *"Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was"* (NRSV). These laws comprise what might be termed the civil and ecclesiastical law of Israel, the observance of which would constitute them as the people of God. This long catalogue of regulations, specially fitting a nation living under the social and economic system that was Israel's destiny. This could be called the "Book of the Covenant".

These laws made provision for dealing with twelve classes of crime against God or against man, for the proper use of the land, and observance of the annual religious feasts. They are prefaced by a repetition of the second commandment prohibiting images of God for purpose of worship. They deal also with slavery, concubinage, murder, physical violence, idolatry and witchcraft, usury, sacrilege, perjury, bribery and corruption. These are followed by regulations about weekly sabbaths and sabbatical years when the land had rest, and the annual feasts. Some find them unacceptable in a modern context but these rules represent a distinct advance in ethical standards of their time. These laws form a special study in themselves but it is important to realise that the social and economic conditions then prevailing were vastly different from our own.

At the close of this catalogue of laws the Lord promised that His angel would go before them and bring them into the Promised Land moving out the earlier settlers in the land, little by little as Israel increased in numbers. This significant passage in Ex. 23.29, 30 has often been overlooked. This promise implied that Israel would not need to conquer the land by warfare, neither were they required to destroy the inhabitants in the ruthless manner of ancient (and sometime modern) nations. God Himself would see to it that the fear of Israel was upon those tribes so that they would offer no resistance. Their numbers would decrease as Israel increased generation by generation. During this

time they were strictly forbidden to have anything to do with the idol worship of those alien peoples and to permit any intermarriage with them. Amorites, Perizzites and Canaanites would have disappeared from the land without recourse to warfare and all that entails. The Promised Land was to have been a gift not won by the horrors of invasion. They never fully obtained their objective and many of the people of the land remained among them. These were a thorn in their side and a persistently bad influence during the whole of Israel's national existence.

So with these instructions Moses descended the mountain to lay before the people of Israel this 'Book of the Covenant'. With one voice and great enthusiasm they said *"All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do"* (24.3). This was the moment in which Israel accepted God's terms in their new relationship with Him and now it had to be formally ratified. They built an altar, a stone pile constructed of rocky boulders selected for suitability of shape. No tool might be used upon the stones of such an altar; just undressed stone unpolluted by human handiwork. Around this altar were placed 12 stones in a circle. The twelve 'mazzenbath' obelisks were set upright and inscribed with the names of the tribes. Similar ones have been found in the area, made from red sandstone, roughly squared off, approximately four metres high, half a metre wide and about eighteen centimetres thick. It is possible that those erected at Sinai under Moses direction were like those still around the copper mines today. The people gathered round the area for worship while selected young men approached the altar to offer the sacrifices of oxen. Up to this point the priesthood had not been organised. The ceremony that followed, already described in a previous article, probably went back further than paganism and polytheism. In the intervening years the ritual of sharing the blood and therefore of life had deteriorated into 'blood brotherhoods'. It may have gone back to those early post-Eden days when God revealed Himself, and mankind's primitive knowledge of their Creator had not faded. This had given place to stocks and stones and the powers of Nature. Men and women must have something to see. Now, the earlier ideas revived in

Abraham's day (Gen. 15) were given new meaning as the life of a whole people was symbolically given to God. This was the sign of the relationship between God and His people. Moses then turned and solemnly read the terms of the covenant in the hearing of the people. Did his voice reach the ears of the whole company of Israel or were they relayed by the head men of the tribes and families. At the conclusion of the recitation, all Israel with a great shout acknowledged that they would obey their God. As Moses repeated the words "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" the sprinkling of the blood must have been upon a somewhat representative group of these several million people. Now the glory of the Lord rested on the top of the mountain. Once more Moses set out to meet God, this time with the prospective priests, Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders of Israel. At a certain point below the summit they had a vision of God related in graphic terms in Ex. 24.10, 11 They appear to have had a ceremonial meal and as representatives of the people, they sat, as it were, at the table of the Lord and ate and drank with Him. Now Israel were truly of the family of God. It was apparently a quieter occasion than some other revelations of God.

The ceremony over, this momentous transaction forever committed Israel to be what Mohammed long years afterwards called 'the People of the Book'. They were now witnesses to God, preserving through all the darkness of ancient times that knowledge of the One God and His outworking purposes. That covenant testimony remained until the blaze of God's glory was seen in the sudden radiance of the First Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ who brought "*life and immortality to light through the Gospel*" (2 Tim. 1.10).

Moses and his assistant Joshua now went to the summit alone. Aaron and Hur seemed to be among the people, deputising for Moses. Hur apparently

enjoyed status in Israel's hierarchy alongside Aaron. He was of the tribe of Judah, grandfather to the craftsman Bezaleel who supervised the construction of the Tabernacle and great grandfather of Caleb. Amminadab should have been head of the tribe of Judah but may have been too old or even dead, whereas his son Nahshon was considered too young. So next in line of seniority was Hur, himself quite an elderly gentleman of about one hundred and twenty. This may indicate that rulership was already being shared between the tribes of Levi and Judah. These were the prototypes of the Priests and Kings who were to come. Moses went, confident that affairs of the nation were in safe hands. Soon he was lost in the swirling mist of the high reaches of the mountain. There he was to receive the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. There too, God would show him the instructions for making the Tabernacle. This was to take up most of the rest of the Book of Exodus. This large amount of material has been questioned, but the purpose of so much architectural detail was important. This Sanctuary contained the symbolism of God's redemptive plan and foreshadowed deeper spiritual truths than could be understood by the people of thirty five centuries ago. Fifteen hundred years must pass before it was fully realised what all this meant. All that went on during those forty days and nights remained hidden in the memory of this great man. Much of the detail must have been written down for it had to be right. We are simply told that "*When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone written with the finger of God.*" (Ex. 31.18 NRSV). Enshrined in those ancient words was the moral code which some day would be reinterpreted by the Son of God, yet for those who could understand, already the earliest ideas of God's love were chiselled in stone.

Worship "*I fell at his feet to worship him.*" This act of worship so often mentioned in the Scriptures was in fact a humble obeisance or act of reverence. Even today in the Holy Land the recipient of a favour will throw himself on his knees, bow his head to the ground, and kiss the lower part of his benefactor's clothing. Thus did Cornelius fall down and worship Peter (Acts 10.25) and the servant in the parable worship his Lord

(Matt. 18.26) and the three wise men worship the infant Jesus (Matt. 2.11). To the Philadelphia Church came the promise that their enemies would come and "worship before thy feet" (Rev. 3.9) and probably this is when Satan invited Christ to fall down and worship him (Matt. 4.9) to submit to him, to engage in his service and to acknowledge him as overlord. Such too had been Peter's position before Jesus on the shore of Galilee (Luke 5.8).

SIMON PETER - FISHER OF MEN

1. The Call

He straightened up from his task as his brother approached. Andrew was looking more than usually thoughtful, he was always the more serious of the two and given to times of quiet reflection, whilst Simon got on with the net-mending and other tasks demanded by the necessities of their fishing business. When there was vigorous action or hard work to be done it was to Simon that their father Jonah turned. When it was a matter of quiet calm judgment as to where the fish shoals were likely to be found he always consulted his quieter son; Andrew was the more reliable in such things. Jonah was farther along the beach at the moment, cleaning the boat from the remains of the last catch, and Simon with his usual energy was repairing and adjusting the tackle. He had good-humouredly accepted the fact of his brother's absence and consequent failure to take his own share of the morning's work, knowing that he had gone to see their spiritual leader, John the Baptist. His instruction in the things of God they had both accepted and his company they sought during all the moments they could snatch from the arduous business of earning a living.

Simon noticed nothing unusual in his brother's demeanour at first. He was not observant of such things. He motioned Andrew to a pile of nets still requiring attention and bent anew to his own work. Conscious suddenly of the other's continued silence, he looked up again, and their eyes met. Andrew's glance was serious; there was also in it a look of wonder, of awe, and strangely, of exultation. Simon's eyebrows lifted in interrogation; he knew his brother and he realised that something out of the ordinary had occurred. "We have found the Messiah" said Andrew simply. The half-mended net slipped through Simon's fingers and fell to the ground. He straightened up slowly as his mind took in the significance of his brother's words. He was not naturally quick at grasping ideas. His dexterity of mind lay more in the realm of physical things. He reacted quickly when the wind blew the boat off course or sensed the subtle changes in the weather that betokened the imminent onset of the sudden gales that so often swept across the Sea of Galilee from the opposite mountains. So he stood still for a minute, slowly considering what he had just heard.

"The Messiah?" he queried, half sceptically and half wonderingly. Andrew was looking across the calm sea. "We were with the Master" he said slowly, "and there came by one of those whom he had baptised, a man from Nazareth, Jesus the son of Joseph. And as he passed us by, the Master lifted up his voice and cried "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world". And we looked into the eyes of Jesus and from that moment we knew that we were his men forever. And we went home with him and we spent the night with him and he told us things about the Kingdom of God that even the Master had never told us and we knew that he is indeed 'He that should come'.

Simon stood, taking it in. "And what says the Master, that you are going to desert him?" he asked at last.

"He said that his work is now finished, that he was sent to herald this Coming One and that we must now follow the true Light which is to enlighten every man that comes into the world. 'He must increase, and I must decrease' he said. Simon came to a rapid decision. "Take me to him" he demanded, and began immediately to walk away from the beach, leaving Andrew to hurry after him and resign himself to the seven miles walk back to Capernaum. So Simon met Jesus.

The serene eyes rested upon him and Simon stood motionless. Then the quiet voice, speaking words that were never in all his life erased from his memory, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You will win the name of Kephas – the rock." That was all, but it was enough. Simon knew then that he had found his life's destiny – to follow and serve this Man to the end.

How much more was said at the first meeting is not known. The call to be of the Twelve and to give up his secular occupation to follow Jesus was not yet; that was six or eight months future. For the present he was to spend part of his time with Jesus as formerly he had spent it with John but he still continued to earn his living as a fisherman. The two men went back to Bethsaida and their father, full of the new thing that had come into their lives and doubtless extolling the praises of the Man of Nazareth in the ears of all their relatives, friends

and neighbours. From time to time they were with Jesus, as at the wedding in Cana of Galilee where they witnessed the first miracle, the turning of water into wine. They saw the healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum. They may possibly have accompanied Jesus on his first visit to Jerusalem where he drove the money-changers out of the Temple and had his historic conversation with Nicodemus. If so they must certainly have been with him as He passed through Samaria on His way back to Galilee and had the memorable talk with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. But all this time they were like so many other disciples of Jesus who accompanied Him when He was in their district and went back to the daily work when He was not.

A change was to come. King Herod had thrown John the Baptist into prison and John's work was finished. There was only Jesus to follow now. He was returning from His first Passover at Jerusalem to preach in the synagogue of His native Nazareth, and had been unceremoniously rejected by the townsfolk and without much doubt excommunicated. He left Nazareth, possibly with some of His family and came to live in Capernaum by the lake side. This was to be His home and headquarters for the next eighteen months whilst he travelled throughout all Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. Quite naturally one of the first things He did was to seek out Andrew and Simon.

This time it was Jesus who walked the seven miles between Capernaum and Bethsaida and there, as He had expected, He found the men He sought (Luke 5). Standing on the seashore with the customary crowd around Him, He talked to them about the things of God and the coming of the Kingdom. Finding the crowd pressing upon Him, he looked round for Simon, who was most certainly not very far away. He climbed into his fishing boat, asking him to put off from the land a little way. From that vantage point He finished His discourse.

It was many years before the fishermen of Bethsaida ceased to talk about the marvellous thing that happened next. Jesus had told Simon to put out into the lake and let down his nets. Simon had demurred; they had already toiled all night and caught nothing. It was evident that the fish shoals were nowhere at the end of the lake and their knowledge of the habits of the fish told them that

at the moment they would be wasting their time. But Jesus insisted and so Simon and Andrew complied, just to demonstrate to Jesus that no matter what He knew about the things of the Kingdom of God, He understood nothing about the technique of fishing. To their intense astonishment the net filled almost immediately with such superabundance of fishes that it threatened to give way and they had to make frantic gestures to their business partners, James and John the sons of Zebedee, to bring their own boat to the rescue. So four very impressed and subdued men came safely to land with the heaviest catch they had ever landed.

This was the great turning point in Simon's life. He had come up against a power greater than he had ever imagined and of a nature he could not understand. In face of what the Lord had done, all his old self esteem vanished. "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*" was his spontaneous exclamation. From self-assertiveness to humility, from arrogance to contrition, he became as in a moment, a new man, Christ's man, and Jesus, looking at him, knew that the time had come to make him and his companions the spearhead of His mission. "*Follow me*" He said to them, "*and I will make you become fishers of men.*" And immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1.17 RSV). This marked the end of the old life. During that first six months or so they had combined their discipleship with their fishing business, now the fishing business was finished and they were to be with Jesus all the time. Simon, and his brother Andrew, with John and James the sons of Zebedee, as men with a single mind, turned their backs upon the old life and entered together upon the new. Although it was probably several weeks before he formally ordained the Twelve to be His apostles (Matt. 10; Mark 3; Luke 6), there is not much doubt that this was the point of time at which there began that close identification of this band of men with Jesus which set the seal upon their apostleship. Philip and Bartholomew were certainly already in the company, and there were probably others.

It almost seems as if these still very immature believers were to be given incontrovertible proof of our Lord's Divine authority in order soundly to establish their faith in Him at the outset. Side by side with the daily preaching, in the open and in the synagogue, of which they were, at present, only

silent witnesses, there followed miracle after miracle of healing. Almost immediately they were spectators of the wonder that was wrought in the synagogue at Capernaum, where He cleansed the man afflicted with an unclean spirit, to the amazement of the beholders. From then on the little party entered the home of Simon and Andrew, probably the family home of their father Jonah, to find that Simon's wife's mother had been stricken with a fever. Jesus restored her health and she arose and ministered to their needs. Then at sunset, the news got round, the door to the house was besieged by hopeful villagers bringing their sick and maimed for healing at the hands of this wonderful Man. Simon and his fellows must have had plenty to think about that night.

The little story about Simon's wife's mother will bear a second thought. It is upon this incident recorded by three of the Gospel writers, that the knowledge that Simon was a married man is founded. Church tradition goes on to say that his wife accompanied him on his evangelistic journeys in later life and ultimately suffered martyrdom before him. He is supposed to have had a daughter, Petronilla and a son. Of all this there is no evidence, only various allusions in the works of early Christian writers. Perhaps the most that can be surmised with probability of truth is that Simon's wife shared his faith. She may have been one of the band of women who are occasionally mentioned in the Gospels as endorsing and supporting the mission of Jesus and "*ministering to him of their abundance*" (Luke 8.2-3). There is however just the possibility that she had died young, before the time of this incident. One might ask how it was, if the daughter was in the house all the time, that the mother, newly risen from a sick bed, should be the one to minister to the men. On another point, the story militates against the idea so

often met with, and inherited from medieval times, that Simon Peter was an old man at the time of his call. If his wife's mother was still alive, and few lived beyond the age of sixty or seventy at that time, he himself was not likely to be much out of his twenties, if at all. The fact that he survived the death of Jesus by at least thirty years and even then did not die a natural death is a pointer in the same direction.

In this manner, then, the Call came to Simon Peter. Like his illustrious predecessor Isaiah, he felt himself to be a "*man of unclean lips*" (Isa 6) in face of the glory of his Lord but he was accepted and commissioned to bear the message to all Israel and eventually to all men everywhere. Like Isaiah, too, he had no conception at the start, of what was going to be involved in the life he had chosen. There were to be times of light and dark, times of achievement and of failure, times of exaltation to the heights and of despairing descent into the depths. But at the end he emerged "*more than conqueror*". This is the value of the story of Simon the Galilean fisherman, of Peter the Apostle and evangelist of Jesus Christ, to us as we in our time follow in the same way. So very human, so very prone to hasty and ill-considered judgments, so quick at coming to the wrong conclusion and so liable to panic at a time of crisis! Yet, on the other hand, so warmly devoted and passionately loyal, so certain that all his Lord had promised would assuredly come to pass. Then at the end, so quietly convinced that the star he had followed all his life was no chimera but a reality that would lead him without fail into the heavenly Kingdom. "*We did not follow cleverly devised myths ... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty*".

(To be continued)

AOH

NOTE ON PSA. 19.4

The Septuagint, Vulgate, Ethiopic and Arabic Bibles give a different twist to Psalms 19.4, speaking of God's glory in the heavens; "*in them hath he set a tabernacle (dwelling) for the sun*". These versions have it "*in the sun he has set his tabernacle; and he comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber*." The implication is that the dwelling-place of God is in the sun; as a statement of theology this could not be admitted for a

moment but as a poetic simile it is very forceful. God oversees all that takes place on earth and travels round it every day that He might witness all the deeds of men. "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Prov. 15.3). A similar poetic sentiment is encountered in Psalm 104, in which God clothes Himself with light, rides on the clouds and walks on the winds of the wind.

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

5. Chapter 4.1-30

Luke 4.1-13. Temptations in the Wilderness – parallel Gospel refs. Matt. 4.1-11; Mk. 1.12,13. Note differences in Matt. and Mk. There are differences of interpretation – some cannot think of Satan as a personal devil. Many regard Jesus' experience as more visionary than actual. Devil (Gr. Diabolos, Heb. Satan) means accuser or slanderer, of God and man. (Gen. 3.1-5). A much more important challenge is the way we respond to temptation. Heb. 2.18 and 4.15 are interesting refs; using the Greek verb as in Matt. 4.1 and Lk. 4.2. Gr peirazo, "means to test far more than it means to tempt". (Barclay) It contains the idea of 'assay' or 'prove'. This is God's viewpoint. The Devil's view is 'enticement'. This word is used in Acts 15.10; 1 Cor. 10.13; Jas. 1.13,14. Jesus had other temptations, which like these, were implied doubts about Him being Son of God, (Matt. 27.40). Like Him we must face temptation in the power of the Spirit (Mk. 1.12) and with answers from the Word of God. Temptation can be subtle – arousing 'legitimate desire' – satisfying hunger, being a king and accepting Divine protection. "The Devil can do no more than suggest".. (Augustine) We also need to watch the Devil's incitement to "impatience and self will" (Geldenhuys). Jesus valued the Book of Deuteronomy (8.3; 6.15, 13.). But the Devil can quote Scripture for his purpose (Ps. 91.11, 12)

Round stones in the desert were not unlike the flat loaves His mother made when He was a boy. Difficulties of interpretation lie in the type of mountain described and the uncertainty of identifying the 'pinnacle' of the Temple.

Jesus' first answer shows that spiritual needs come before bodily wants. His second answer warns against short cuts to success. His third answer speaks of abuse of privilege. All three replies urge right use of God's gifts. Jesus' victory can be ours also.

Luke 4. 14-30 Jesus in Nazareth's synagogue.

vv14,15 reveal that Jesus was "praised by everyone" as he went about Galilee and preached in the synagogues.

v16 Jesus had arrived at his home town of Nazareth; it was His habit from childhood to go to this synagogue. Parallel records suggest that this incident was rather later than Luke gives it (Matt. 4.12-17; Mk. 1.14,15; Jn. 4.43-45). There is a distinct difference between synagogues for teaching and the Temple for worship. This is "the earliest description of a synagogue service we

have" (Morris).

vv17-20 Evidently Jesus was asked to read the lesson for that day from Isaiah but He didn't finish the prophecy from Is. 61. And why read Is. 58.6? If He read the Hebrew text then He would give an Aramaic translation. He sat down to teach as was the rabbi's custom.

vv21-22 He said that God's acceptable year had come and He was anointed to fulfil it. Did they understand that He was applying a messianic scripture to himself? Was He saying that all the good things were coming to Israel? People of Nazareth expected much from one of their sons and got more than they expected, which uncovered their scepticism. They wanted proof of His mission by a miracle but not to be told what to do.

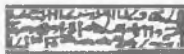
Jesus draws on the historical stories of Elijah and Elisha who had shown kindness to Gentiles. He was leading God's people to realise that "God so loved the world". They believed that only judgment awaited the vast majority of the nations and their fanatical hatred suddenly boiled over. Ref: 1 Kgs. 17 and 2 Kgs. 5. Compare with Paul speaking to the Jewish fanatics in Jerusalem – Acts 22.21,22. There is an obtuse streak in human nature that really can't bear the thought that anyone outside their group may be of worth in God's sight. Jesus was conscious of His mission and the deep spiritual need of those around Him. Note comment in Mk. 6.5. It was Jesus not Paul that shone the Gospel in the direction of the Gentiles. Geldenhuys – Commentary on the Gospel of Luke. Morris – Luke An introduction and commentary.

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;" (Isa. 61.1-2)

"I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth". (Isa.49.6). Quoted by Simeon (Lk. 2.32); and Paul (Acts 13.47; 26.23)

"..but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (Isa. 60.3)

The three quotations above are taken from the New Revised Standard Version. Like its predecessor the RSV, it couples accuracy with beauty of language.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

huph hinc: midan capu
top: Tohipageni he cōm

1. Blessed are ye when men revile
persecute you / and shall rejoice for
set of your names against you
for me

"All valleys shall be exalted
mountains and hills shall be
broken down that man may
go up and down"

ye seed of Abraham his servant
Jacob his chosen.
the Lo R our God: his ju

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

Vol. 79, No.2

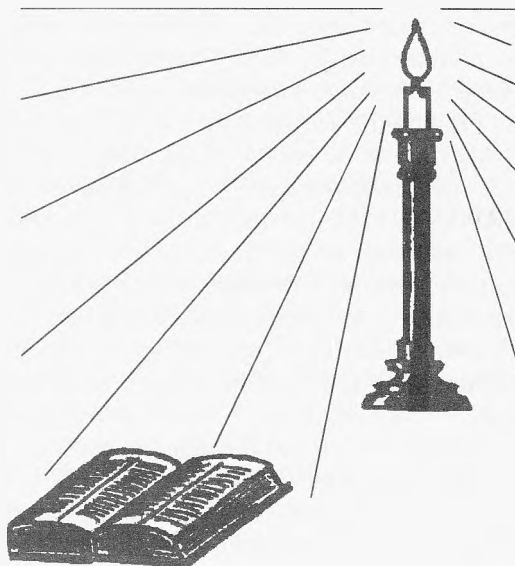
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job. 42.5).

The climax to that drama which is the Book of Job comes at this verse. All the arguments and debates, all the wisdom and knowledge, displayed by Job's three philosopher friends, had contributed nothing to his understanding of God. It was experience, the effect of all that life brought him of good and evil, prosperity and suffering, happiness and heartbreak, which enabled him at last to see God. His bitter comment upon the philosophy of suffering as expounded by the three *"I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are ye all"* is matched only by the scornful, peremptory demand of the Almighty *"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"* Job started out in life believing in God and the overruling benevolence of God. What he got in return was an overwhelming succession of disasters which led him at last passionately to exclaim *"O that you would hide me in the grave"*. But at the end, he was able to say what perhaps very few men in any age have been able to say; *"Now my eye sees"*. The whole tenor of the Book of Job reveals the outstanding thesis that held his belief firm that God is working to a purpose which involves progress and development through discipline and endurance. It is a purpose that transcends the events and time-span of this earthly life. Whatever may be the apparent evidence to the contrary it is true of God with respect to every man that *"He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold"* (Job. 23.10).

There are so many to-day who look at their Christian background in the light of what they know of modern science and the wisdom of this world. They find the two apparently irreconcilable, and jettison their faith in consequence. God cannot

be defined in terms of the measurements used to define things of daily experience and they decide God does not exist. They have never heard in modern times of One coming from another world to live among men for a spell and return whence He came, so they declare such a happening is impossible. The existence of such other world, asserted in the Christian Scriptures, cannot be demonstrated with a radio telescope or mathematical calculation so they refuse to believe in the possibility. This is happening in an age when every incredible wonder becomes commonplace within a few years of its invention or discovery. This present time with all its discoveries should surely be the one in which men could be expected the most readily to admit not only the possibility but even the probability of a sphere of life and power still unperceived by man.

The position is more tragic when a person who loses faith is one who has stood before his fellows as a minister of the Gospel. There have been a number in recent times. The fact that the stand is usually honest and sincere does not minimize its tragedy. *"We do not know what God is; Jesus was a good man but only a man; resurrection? Impossible!"* Contrast the calm confidence of the Apostle Paul at the end of a long life of arduous service. *"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded"*; with that of the ancient patriarch *"Now mine eye seeth thee"*. Is there not a real likelihood that such assurance is positive knowledge due to being actually attuned with that other world, that such men may have bridged the gap that no man-made detecting instrument and no philosophical investigation can ever bridge?

AOH

Gone from us

Brother Wilf Seymour (Sheringham)
Sister Vera Robins (Yeovil)

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

2. Walking on Galilee

Simon pulled on his oar silently. His fellow-disciples were too busily engaged themselves on the same task to take much notice of his unusual quietness. It was only when the southerly squall struck them and rendered progress a matter of difficulty that they looked to him, as usual, for guidance. But this time he showed no sign of counselling an alteration of course so that they might use the wind to help them steer a course for the nearest shore. He went on pulling vigorously, without speaking. He evidently meant to obey the Lord's instruction to make for the shelving beach of Gennesaret on the western shore of the lake in reliance upon Jesus' word that, after His object of remaining behind on the eastern shore near Bethsaida was accomplished, He would join them. Neither wind nor storm was going to deflect Simon from that purpose; he laboured doggedly at his oar, leaving his comrades to do the same without question.

He had good reason for silence. He was thinking deeply and seriously. Thinking did not come easily to Simon. He was a man of action; hasty, impulsive action for the most part, ill-considered action that often landed him in trouble. He was not given to quiet reflection. But this time he had much to think about. He had just witnessed a miracle surpassing anything he had yet seen save the raising from the dead of the widow's son at Nain. Together with his fellows, Andrew, John and James, and the others, he had for something like twelve months been following Jesus through the villages and towns of Galilee, spending much time around the Lake on which they were at this moment embarked and he had seen the sick healed, the lepers cleansed, the demon-possessed made free, the blind given sight, in all these things the effect of healing power flowing out from Jesus to restore some one or other afflicted sufferer to health. He had seen the widow's son rise from his bier and live again; he had seen the daughter of Jairus heed Jesus' call to return from the land of the shades. But now he had witnessed something belonging to a very different sphere; he had watched Jesus create food apparently out of nothing. Five thousand people were there on the grassy plain between Bethsaida and the sea, the

day was far spent, they had listened to Jesus for hours, hunger was asserting itself, and there was nothing to give them, nothing but five small loaves and two fishes. But with those in His hands Jesus had stood there handing loaf after loaf and fish after fish to each of His disciples until all that five thousand had received a sufficiency. What wonderful power from Heaven is this, Simon asked himself as he ploughed his oar through the water. And if Jesus was indeed the king of Israel, the One that should come, and Simon had no doubts at all on that score, what marvellous events must await them in that future day when Jesus should assert His authority and commence His reign? With powers like that there was no limit to what could be achieved. And what of His followers? They were surely invincible; with His power exerted on their behalf there was no enemy, or man or of Nature, that could stand against them ... his reverie was abruptly broken as a gust of wind stronger than ever momentarily halted the boat's labouring progress.

Simon cast a professional glance at the heaving sea. The storm was getting fiercer, and they were not making much headway. They had left the eastern shore at 'even' – 6.00 pm. – and now it was nearly the fourth watch – 3.00 am. Eight or nine hours 'in toiling and rowing' and they had only made a little over three miles (twenty-five or thirty stadia; John 6.19). Another four miles to go; as he looked at the tumultuous billows and felt the raging wind Simon began to wonder whether they were going to make it. He had flattered himself that he knew all the tricks and foibles of this unpredictable lake, on the waters of which he had gained his living for so many years, but never had he experienced a tempest like this. For the first time that night his heart began to fail him. Had Jesus been there with them things would have been all right; somehow or other Simon knew, He would have dealt with the situation. But Jesus was not with them; the result of His miraculous feeding of the five thousand had been that the people wanted to take Him, against His will, to make Him a king (John 6.15) and that He would not have. So He had gone into solitude on the mountain, to pray and reflect, telling His disciples He would see

them again on the other side of the lake. Now they were in this predicament, in terror for their lives, and Jesus knew nothing of it and was too far away to help anyway.

A terrified cry from one of the others and Peter spun round. Following the other's pointing hand, he looked across the foam-crested waves and his heart gave a sudden lurch. Out there, a few yards from the boat, was a shadowy figure, the form of a man, walking on the water. "It is a spirit" someone cried out; "we are all lost men". The rowing stopped. They gazed with apprehension at the apparition, moving so easily and effortlessly upon the troubled waters. As they gazed, there came a voice, a familiar voice, low and clear, yet plainly to be heard above the howling of the gale, "*Take heart it is I, have no fear.*"

Reaction was swift. "It is the Lord" cried Simon. Everything was going to be all right; Jesus was with them again. But almost immediately a tiny seed of doubt implanted itself in his head. Could Jesus really walk on the water? Could this be a demon impersonating the Master and luring them on to destruction. Impulsive as ever, he put the matter to the test. "*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*". Came the invitation, "*Come*", Without more ado Simon leaped over the side of the boat into the sea; in the exaltation of that moment his faith was complete. To his joy he found that he too could walk on the water and boldly he set out to cross the few yards that separated him from his Lord. But ere he reached him a great wave, higher than the rest, rose before him and blotted out the waiting Figure from his sight. Now he was aware only of lofty waves and racing water, the dark sky above and unutterable depths below and the horror of his situation dawned upon him. At that his faith failed and he found himself submerged, swimming desperately to keep himself afloat. In sharp anguish he cried out "*Lord save me*".

A well-known hand reached out and caught him, raising him out of the water; a well-known voice in his ears "*O man of little faith, why did you doubt?*" So Simon came hand-in-hand with Jesus

to the safety of the boat. And the storm ceased, and there was a great calm.

It is a wonderful story and full of significance to the Christian. There are times in every life when the storm-waves mount high to the heavens with their overpowering threats and the gale winds seem as though they would sweep away all in which we trust. Something like Luke's and Paul's experience on the voyage to Rome when the ship ran into a great storm becomes our position also; "*When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.*" (Acts 27.20) But Paul and Luke were saved, and Simon Peter was saved and so are we, if we hold on tightly to the hand of Jesus. "*They that trust shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be moved; but abideth for ever.*" Sometimes it is not so much that our faith fails as that the pressure of well-nigh intolerable circumstances almost overcomes our powers of endurance and we tend to cry out as did the Psalmist "*Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Is his mercy clean gone for ever?*" It is then that we need to remember that Christ is near us, just on the other side of the big wave and His hand can reach right through that wave to hold out and guide us through the storm into the calm that will follow.

This incident was an essential element in the training of Simon. It was not enough that he should realise Jesus' mastery over the elements of Nature; he had already seen something of that on the earlier occasion when, crossing the lake, they had been hit by a wind-squall whilst Jesus was asleep in the boat; on that occasion He had rebuked the wind and the sea and a great calm resulted. (Matt. 8.24-27; Mark 4.37-41; Luke 8.23-25). The disciples had been greatly impressed, but this time there was something more, the lesson of the Lord's care for his own and the certainty that He is always at hand to save. He "*will not suffer you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear but with every test will direct the issue, that you might be able to endure*". That was a greater and a more important thing than the stilling of a stormy wind and a tempestuous sea.

No prophet? "*Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee*". Cried the scornful Pharisees to Nicodemus (John 7.53). But had they been genuine students of God's Word they would have seen that prophets had come from

northern Israel. Elijah was from Tishbe in Naphtali and Jonah from Gath-Hepher near Nazareth in Zebulun not far from Nazareth. Hosea too was a northerner. A warning to the scornful who don't check their facts.

ARE YOU ABLE?

A momentous question

Some little while prior to the hour of His death, Jesus left the scenes of His usual activities in Galilee, and took His disciples along into the region of Caesarea Philippi, a town in the Northern district of Palestine, near the foot of Mount Hermon. In the quietness of this countryside retreat, for the first time. He began to tell His followers of His approaching death (Matt. 16.21; Mark 9.31). During this period of retirement Jesus passed through His wonderful transfiguration experience in the Holy Mount, during which the chosen three disciples saw His glory and heard the other two participants in that glory scene, talk with Jesus of the *"departure which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem"* (Luke 9.31). Descending from the mountain to the other waiting disciples, Jesus charged the favoured witnesses to tell no man about what they had seen *"until the Son of Man is raised from the dead"* (Matt. 17.9). From that time on while in Galilee and after He left, for the last time, those cities where He had done His mightiest works, to go up to Jerusalem, reference to His approaching death and resurrection fell more frequently from His lips (Mark 9.30-32). In spite, however, of these repeated assertions, though at times they questioned among themselves what they might mean, the disciples failed entirely to comprehend what He meant. These frequent references by Jesus, however, show us that the purpose for which He had come into the world was beginning to lie heavily upon His own heart and mind. The hour of His life's mission was fast approaching, but, for all the sorrow it might entail, it wasn't in fearful mood He set out to meet it (Luke 9.51). A very graphic pen-picture is given by Mark (10.32) of the bearing and reaction, both of Jesus and His followers, as they set out on the last stage of that fateful journey, to the mighty events that were to befall during the next few eventful days. *"And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them ... and those who followed were afraid"*. Fear made them hesitant, so that they lagged behind their Master. But He, for whom these moments were so fraught with destiny, *"set his face to go up"* without hesitation to that ungrateful City which realised not that its own fateful hour was also fast approaching.

From the moment of glory on Hermon's slopes

till He hung between heaven and earth outside the city gate, the shadow of the cross lay upon the life of the Man of Sorrows and gave solemn depth to all His words and eager expectation to His consecrated thoughts. Evidently the disciples could feel the force of this deeper solemnity and eager expectation, for Mark says *"they were amazed"* as Jesus led them in the way. While in this exalted mood, a rich young ruler came to ask Jesus by what means he could attain to eternal life. "Cross-bearing" and self-renunciation had been Jesus' constant theme during all this southward journey from Hermon to Judea. Hence, when this young man, so apparently in earnest, asked so direct a question, Jesus replied *"Sell all"*. "Surrender all" says Jesus as one who now stood on the threshold of giving "all" in death that others might live. The young man turned sorrowfully away, unable to value *"treasure in heaven"* as riches preferable to his great wealth. Inwardly sighing as the young man went his way, Jesus said *"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God"* – in other words, how difficult it is for anyone to make the best of both worlds! Hearing this remark, Peter says, in effect, "Lord, how does this statement affect our position? We have not hesitated to leave all, and follow you. What shall we have when the Kingdom, that we preach, is established?" To Peter and his brethren, Jesus replied *"At the renewal of all things, when the son of Man sits on his glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name's sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."* (Matt. 19.28-30) "They, who like the young ruler, have been 'first' in this present order, if, entering at all, shall be 'last' in the honours of my kingdom, and you that have been least shall then be first".

This word of assurance must have been encouraging and comforting to his followers. Here was something they could readily grasp and understand. It was not puzzling and baffling, like the references to His death and resurrection had been. Presumably they talked this matter over among themselves and also more privately. It is likely that this was the topic of an earnest conversation be-

neath Zebedee's roof. As James and John told the story of Jesus and the ruler, a fond and doting mother resolved to ask for a place and position for her sons they would scarcely have dared to ask for themselves. Threading her way, one day, through the little group of disciples, accompanied by her two sons, and with some show of respect and deference, she desired the privilege of speaking with Jesus perhaps more privately. "What is it you want?" asks Jesus. "*Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.*" (Matt. 20.21). Taking the question as the agreed utterance of sons as well as mother, Jesus looks them straight in the face and through that to the heart, and says, "*You don't know what you are asking.*" ... "You do not know or realise what is implied or involved in this request! You may have followed me about in Galilee, and in Judea; and you may have left your boats and employment for my sake, but following me means more than all this! As I have recently told you of my death and that I have come not merely to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, but to die, to suffer at the hands of cruel men; I ask you now, are you prepared to follow me in all this? Are you able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink of? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I have already been baptised with? Will you follow me through death and humiliation and rejection, and be cut off from your people and kindred?"

"We will follow you even there; we are able!" they replied, expressing a deep fidelity to Him and to His mission in life. Jesus replied "You will indeed drink of my Cup, you will be baptized with my baptism, but even then, I cannot grant your request to sit one on either side of me; that is not my gift. It is my Father's prerogative to give those positions to those for whom they have been prepared by Him. Will you follow me, not knowing what place or position you will get? Will you drink of my Cup, and leave all else to the Father? Can you step out, not minding what your reward will be, only that as you share my Cup of suffering you will also share my Cup of Joy?"

No more penetrating or illuminating words, prior to the moment of this conversation, had anywhere fallen from the lips of Jesus. Up to the time of Caesarea Philippi, a short time before, after Peter had made his memorable, God-given confession "*You are the Christ*" Jesus had gone on to say "*if any man will be my disciple, let him take up his*

cross and follow me" implying that every faithful follower should be accorded the privilege of 'cross-bearing', but never before had He linked His followers with himself in quite the same close, intimate way. "Are **you** able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink of? Can **you** drink, as I am about to drink, of a Cup which my Father shall pour?"

There is no mistaking the implication here. Jesus was reaching the crucial hour, and the accomplishment of the specific purpose for which He had come into this world. At a later time as the weight of tragedy and sorrow pressed more heavily on His sensitive heart, we hear Him say, in the very shadows of Gethsemane; "... *the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?*" There is no mistaking what He meant in these decisive words (John 18.11). Not Peter's sword, nor resistance, nor flight was the way out for Him in this hour of darkness. He had come into the world for this hour. He had lived a spotless life. He had faithfully taught the Truth of God and raised the hostility of demons and men – and this was their hour and the power of darkness. But not from them did Jesus accept the issues of that dark hour.

"*The Cup which my Father has given me*" – that was Jesus' view. There were no secondary causes in His life, either in His coming into or going out from this world. Yet again, when the fuller extent of the shame and humiliation that awaited Him was opening up before Him in the hour when "*his sweat became like great drops of blood*", we hear the same truth, and the same whole-hearted submission to the over-ruling hand of a Fatherly providence. "*O Father, if it be possible, let this Cup ... pass from me, nevertheless ... not as I will*". Here the bitter cup was at His lips and He was drinking it to its dregs. This was "*the cup that I shall drink*". Jesus had lived in the shadow of this hour more particularly from His transfiguration onward, and under its solemnizing power he had come by stages to Jerusalem and Gethsemane.

Knowing then, in His own mind, the ordeal that awaited Him, when His hour should be fully come, we must not fail to note what His question to James and John implies. He had a Cup to drink, that which was to be given Him by His Father; and with the deepening sense of all this experience weighing heavier upon Him, He asks, "*Are you able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink?*" TH

BALAAAM, PROPHET OF ARAM

Part 2 – Opportunity Lost

Balak waited expectantly as Balaam returned to the still smoking sacrifices on the altars, and stood beside the king surveying the hosts of Israel encamped on the plain below. In the distance, just visible on the horizon, lay the river Jordan, the river which Israel must shortly cross into their Promised Land – unless Balaam's curse should bring down the wrath of all the gods and scatter them to the winds of Heaven. That was Balak's hope, and hope that was rudely dashed when, at length, the prophet spoke. *"Balak has brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: Come, curse Jacob for me; come denounce Israel! How can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? For from the top of the crags I see him, from the hills I behold him. Here is a people living alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations! Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the dust-cloud of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!"* (Num. 23.7-10)

The Aramaic prophet has passed the first test. Despite the inducements offered by Balak and the temptation of the rich reward, he had fulfilled his declared intention of saying only what the Lord had commanded him to speak, and in so doing had not cursed but had blessed Israel. And Balak was furious. *"What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but now you have done nothing but bless them"* and the prophet calmly replied *"must I not take care what the Lord puts into my Mouth?"* With that his commission from the Lord was discharged and he would have done well immediately to leave Balak and go home. Once again his fatal predilection for giving God another chance to change His mind came to the top and he acceded to the Moabite king's request to take another look at Israel from a different vantage point to see if that would make any difference. So the old procedure was repeated, the seven altars and the seven sacrifices to the seven luminaries of heaven, all representing aspects of the Most High God, and then Balaam went aside again into a solitary place to hear what the Lord had to say.

One cannot but wonder at the patience and forbearance of our God. This was the fifth time the

matter had come before Him and each time the answer to Balaam had been positive. Nevertheless the prophet kept on coming back to ask, in effect, if the Lord really meant what He said. Was there any chance at all that He would reverse His attitude to Israel and allow them to be formally cursed. Still in the back of Balaam's mind was the fact that there was a lot of money involved in this matter. If by any means the Lord could devise a formula which would both preserve Balaam's loyalty to Him and at the same time give Balak the satisfaction necessary before he would pay over the money the outcome of the affair could be eminently satisfactory. But the Lord was not so accommodating. *"Return to Balak, and this is what you shall say."* When he went back and did so, the situation was worse than before. His first words do seem to indicate that he realised at last that God was not going to change His mind and that the promised wealth and honours were definitely lost. It is to Balaam's credit that he did not allow this reflection to temper or water down the message he had been commanded to give. *"Rise Balak, and hear; listen to me O son of Zippor; God is not a human being that he should lie; or a mortal, that he should change his mind. He has promised and will he not do it? Has he not spoken and will he not fulfil it? See, I have received a command to bless, and he has blessed and I cannot revoke it."*

That is a wonderful affirmation of faith and loyalty. The man was at the parting of the ways: he had only to repudiate his loyalty to God, utter a curse in the terms expected of him and the wealth and honours of this world would be his without question. Of course, God need not, and would not, take any notice of the curse, so that Israel would be quite safe after all. But he would go back to his home on the Euphrates a saddened and unhappy man because he had denied his God. On the other hand he could maintain his loyalty and integrity, deliver the message with which he had been entrusted, and go home a poor man in respect of this world's goods, but rich in faith toward God and most certainly richer for the experience. He chose to be loyal.

Now Balaam declared the full message he had been given. God had brought Israel out of Egypt by

His might, by His mighty power, for a great purpose. It would be said of them in time to come "See what God has done!" The people would rise up as a lion and not lie down until they were surfeited with victory. The Lord God was with them and the shout of a king among them; and at that Balak could stand no more and he cried out in desperation "*Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all*". He wanted nothing now but to stop the mouth of this man who was destroying all his hopes. But again he got the reply "*I told you that all that the Lord speaks, that I must do!*"

Accepting, at last, the prophet's determination, Balak decided to go beyond Balaam to Balaam's superior and try to succeed there where Balaam had failed. "*Come now, I will take you to another place; perhaps it may please God that you may curse them for me from there.*" It is not very clear why God could be expected to be more amenable if appealed to from another spot. The new place was fifteen miles from the camp of Israel down on the plain whereas the old one was only five but there does not seem to be any point in that, Balaam, too, was not very sanguine as to the outcome. It is true he told Balak to build seven altars and offer seven sacrifices again as on the previous two occasions but this time he himself did not go off to meet God. He had accepted the fact that God would not change and he was still in the mood to be God's mouthpiece. "*Now Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, so he did not go as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. The spirit of God came upon him*". (24.1-2)

This is an expression that has to be taken very seriously. When the spirit of God is said to come upon a man it means that God is about to use him powerfully and that the man is in the right condition of heart so to be used. Here in the final scene of this drama being played out on the hill-tops of Moab, Balaam was more than ever God's man. He was about to give the first of the prophecies concerning the End-Time. These are the events characterising the end of this world (age) which is to be succeeded by the Messianic Kingdom of God, six centuries before the next such prophecy, that of Joel, and on account of that prophetic status alone he deserves due credit.

This time, then, he did not need to go and seek

the Lord. The Lord came to him, and by virtue of His Spirit gave him words to speak. Once again, to Balak's exceeding chagrin, Israel was blessed "*How fair are your tents O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! ... Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.*" And Balak could take no more. Brusquely he dismissed Balaam and told him to return home. "*Now be off with you! Go home! I said I will reward you richly, but the Lord has denied you any reward;*" to which Balaam only responded by repeating what he had said before, that notwithstanding whatever reward Balak might offer, he could still do no more than speak what the Lord had told him to speak.

But before going, he turned to the king and invited him to listen whilst he would "*advise you what this people will do to your people in days to come*". The ensuing passage (24.15-24) bears all the signs of a Spirit-guided fore-view of the far distant future and the 'long-term' operation of the Plan of God insofar as Israel is concerned. The key is the expression "the latter days". In the Old Testament this phrase invariably refers to that time in history when the kingdoms of this world have run their course and are about to be superseded by the Millennial reign of Christ. At that time, the time of the Second Advent, all relevant Scriptures concur in viewing the ideal Israel restored to the Holy Land in a condition of faith in God and readiness for her future destiny as light-bearers to the world. In the meantime any nation or people that opposes Israel's onward progress to her destiny is thwarted in its aims and rendered impotent. The fore-view commences with the nations which were hostile to Israel at the time then present, Moab, Edom, Amalek, Midian, but it sweeps on through all history until it reaches its grand climax at the close of this world (age). The descendants of Asshur and Eber, contemporary with Israel in Balaam's time, are found still maintaining the enmity and are likewise rendered powerless. The details of that momentous prediction are the subject of another chapter. Suffice here to say that Balaam saw, in the mists of futurity, the rising of Israel to its zenith of power in the days of the Davidic monarchy and again at the end, the 'latter days'. Then the final triumph of Israel merges into the Second Advent of our Lord Christ and the establishment of His Millennial Kingdom. All that

he told to Balak, and having done so "*he rose up and went his way*", leaving the Moabite king to his own thoughts.

Had this been the end of the story, one could have concluded that Balaam maintained his integrity to the last and went home with honour unblemished. Unfortunately that is not the end of the story. Within a few weeks a great calamity fell upon Israel; they were seduced into wholesale participation with the women of the Midianites and Moabites in the licentious rites of Baal worship and in consequence the wrath of God fell heavily upon them. The instigator of this seduction was named by Moses shortly afterwards – Balaam. These (the Midianite women) he said, "*caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor*" (Num. 31.16) There is no other OT reference to this sudden about face on the part of the Aramaic prophet, but John in the Book of Revelation (2.14) records the words of the glorified Christ concerning "*the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to teach things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.*" That is all that Scripture has to say on the matter, but what actually happened can be inferred. It is plain that Balaam did not go home after his sessions with Balak for he fell into the hands of the Israelites when they fought Midian a few weeks later. The two passages just quoted show that he must have given Balak advice which, acted upon, led to the terrible apostasy of Israel. It could only have been that Balaam, conscious of having discharged his obligation to God, not to curse Israel publicly but instead to invoke a public blessing upon them, felt

that he might now gain some moiety of the promised reward by suggesting to Balak another way of attaining the desired end. If Israel could be persuaded to turn to idolatry, Balaam reasoned, God would cast them off and Balak's end be achieved. The plan worked, and it cost Israel dear, the loss of twenty-four thousand men and a blot on their character that was never effaced and never forgotten. But God did not cast them off. In the fury of reaction Israel utterly destroyed the Midianites who had ensnared them, and with them Balaam himself. "*Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword*" (Num. 31.8; Josh. 13.22).

So the man's covetousness caught up with him at the last. His reverence for God was only a superstitious reverence and once he had obeyed the letter of the Lord's command he felt at liberty to follow the dictates of his own distorted reasoning without regard to the morality of the matter. Although at times Balaam did have the Spirit of God on him and in him, at the end he lost the Spirit because, to quote the words of Peter, (2 Pet. 2.15) he "*loved the wages of unrighteousness*". Had he rooted out of his heart that which was alien to the spirit and purpose of God, and served Him in absolute sincerity and dedication, he would have gone down in history as an honoured prophet. But this he would not do. Balaam is the classical example of the man who tries to make the best of both worlds. He tried to serve and obey God on the one hand and make the best bargain he could with Mammon on the other. He failed to realise he could not serve God and Mammon. So the canker remained in his heart, and at the end it destroyed him.

AOH

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 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 account 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.

IDENTIFICATION

Reflections on the Resurrection

It was around the time that Jesus and His disciples were at Caesarea Phillipi, when Peter made his great declaration of faith, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" that the Master began to warn them that He must die and be resurrected. It was an idea that was totally strange to them and which they could not take in. It didn't follow the pattern that they had been taught from childhood of how Messiah would establish God's Kingdom. They expected that He would now restore the commonwealth of Israel and they, His closest disciples, would be with Him in that Kingdom. That Jesus would die could not be considered. They had a genuine blockage in their minds. He gave further warnings as they approached Jerusalem. These were reinforced by Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' request for a sign. He told them that the only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah, which meant three days in the grave until He was raised. These warnings were sufficiently strong for the priests and pharisees to warn Pilate "*that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'after three days I will rise again'*" and insisted that the tomb be secured (Matt 27.62-66).

It was the women who first saw the empty tomb and Jesus himself. They went to tell the disciples who received the news in disbelief. It seems that the women accepted the facts and understood what had happened more readily than the men that Jesus was going to rise from the dead. The first record of someone meeting Jesus that day was Mary of Magdala. He just had to say her name in the old familiar way and there never could be another doubt in her mind. Like the other disciples, a bond of love had been forged in those years of Jesus' earthly ministry, and His friends recognised certain expressions of love which were so important to them. "*My sheep know my voice*" He had said to them; and they did on Resurrection Day. The two walking to Emmaus, along the route to Joppa, expressed amazement and gave little evidence of having believed the women. As Jesus talked to them about the Hebrew scriptures, something held their senses back from recognising Him. Was it their unutterable grief at his death or was it His control of their senses or was it just that He appeared to be different from the familiar figure of the Master. When finally they were round the supper table the characteristic manner of breaking

the bread suddenly opened their eyes as to who He was. Finally, He confronted Thomas, who until then had resisted all persuasion that Jesus was alive. John's record of that meeting almost gives the impression that Thomas only had to see Jesus to be convinced. He did not really need to observe the holes that had given so much pain to that beloved Lord. He was overwhelmed.

We each move in a way peculiar to ourselves that distinguishes us from everyone else. Our way of walking or the way we hold a pen or pencil are special to us. Posture, tilt of the head, swing of the arms, all betray who we are and animals notice these things more quickly than we do, and they have the advantage of a more acute sense of smell and sharper hearing. Such characteristics are valuable because they help us to know a person. Jesus deliberately said and did things after His resurrection that would leave His followers in no doubt as to what had happened on that day. The experience to the disciples was the more telling and impressive to them because they had not believed that it was going to happen. It was an experience that would change their lives and the whole world. Not only their faith but the genuineness of their proclamation of the Gospel depended on their correct identification of Jesus.

Out at Galilee, in familiar surroundings of the lake-shore they went fishing and not for the first time, caught nothing. As the shadowy figure in the half-light of dawn became clearer to them, they heard His voice. It was then that their minds went back to that day several years before when he had commanded them to put down their net on the other side of the boat. Now they realised who He was. "*It is the Lord*". Peter would not forget the first occasion of the big catch. It was deeply impressed upon his mind for he had been commissioned as an evangelist to go out and 'catch men'. Now the Lord was strengthening the call to become a pastor of the flock. Their task as apostles was to tell others what had transformed their lives and enabled them to do the wonderful things that occurred in Jerusalem and all the lands where the Gospel was preached.

Seeing Jesus after the resurrection was more than mechanical recognition. It was more than being given a new job to do. "*The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*" They were full of

joy and ready for anything. It was that deep impression of the living Lord in their midst that spurred them on to witness and suffer for Him. Has He had that effect on us? Have we not seen Him at work through the power of the Holy Spirit? He is a living power in the lives of our brethren. Have

we not recognised Him at work in ourselves, transforming and renewing us? He is the one who cares for us and spurs us on. Let us greet the Resurrection morning this year with a convincing 'the Lord is risen indeed'.

DN

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

14. The Golden Calf

Moses had been forty days in the mountain receiving the Law, but in the meantime strange things were happening in the camp. "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said 'Come make gods for us, who shall go before; as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'." (Exodus 32.1 NRSV).

So soon after the making of the Covenant, when they had enthusiastically shouted "*Everything that the Lord has spoken will we do, and be obedient*" they had forsaken their high resolve and turned to the ever-present temptation of idolatry. It is usually suggested that this relapse was complete and that the golden calf was an image either of Athor the cow-goddess of Egypt, or one of the many bull deities of Canaan. There are a number of factors in the case which render both suppositions unlikely. The cry of the people, upon the installation of the idol, was "*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*" (ch. 32.4). It is most unlikely that they would attribute their deliverance to an Egyptian or a Canaanite deity. The God by whose power they knew themselves to have been delivered from the one land, and promised victory in their onslaught upon the other, was obviously no friend either of Egypt or Canaan. Also they had only just witnessed a display of the power and glory of their God which had so impressed and overawed them that they begged He should speak to them direct no more. They asked that Moses be their intermediary. It is not possible that the effect of that revelation from the mountain top should have been lost in the short span of three or four weeks. There is also the claim of exclusiveness "*These are your gods, O Israel*"; gods not shared by other nations. When all was ready Aaron called the nation with the words "*Tomorrow shall be a*

festival unto the LORD" (LORD in capital letters indicates that originally the name here was Yahweh). A careful consideration of the facts, leads to one conclusion, Israel were not repudiating their God for another; they were creating a substitute for Moses!

Moses had been their visible leader and the representative of God in their midst. Moses had disappeared, and after forty days' absence the people were convinced that Moses was not coming back. Maybe he was dead; perhaps he had in some way offended God up there on the mountain and God had destroyed him. At any rate they seem to have abandoned hope of seeing him again. The journey to Canaan must be resumed without him, but where now was the visible presence of God in their midst? To what focal point must they direct their professions of loyalty to God and how now could they assure God of their continued service? The obvious answer was an image, like to those they had seen in Egypt but symbolic in this case of their own God. Quite forgetting the prohibition of the Second Commandment, which they had so recently taken upon themselves, they called upon Aaron, as the next in authority to Moses, to have such an image constructed. The term "calf" was a more or less technical term for any kind of idolatrous symbol in ancient Israel. The word occurs many times in later years in connection with Hebrew paganism and it might well be that the image actually made there at Sinai looked like a literal calf or ox only in part. The form of the cherubim – part ox, part man, part lion, part eagle – was well known to Israel and the object of worship they constructed might easily have been a representation of the cherubim. This is made more likely by the fact that although there was only one "calf" produced, the acclamation was in the plural "*these be thy gods*" (*elohim*) and the cherubim are always referred to in the plural.

Whatever the nature of the image, Israel

immediately invested it with all that is involved with the ritual of idol worship. The expression in 32.6 *"the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel"*, indicates that kind of intemperate feasting and intoxication followed by depraved and licentious rites which was common to all forms of idolatrous religion but hitherto not known in Israel. The burning words of Paul in his letter to the Romans are appropriate, *"they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being, or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts ..."* (Rom. 1.23,24).

Aaron called the people to render worship to the God of Israel and came with the intention of so doing. But in that worship *"they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass"* and the inevitable happened, *"They forgot God their saviour, who had done great things in Egypt."* (Psa. 106.20,21). They clothed their worship with all the sensuous trappings of idolatry. In so doing they repudiated one of the basic principles of the Covenant into which they had so recently entered. Instead of relying upon the spiritual power of the unseen God for safety and guidance they were putting their trust in the magic potency of a visible fetish. The image itself, going before them, was to serve them in time of need. *"Make us gods, to go before us."*

Moses, leaving the Divine presence after forty days' communicating with God, was stricken with horror as the Lord told him of the people's defection. *"Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely"*. In no greater way could the Lord have indicated His separation from the people who had broken the Covenant. They were no longer His people; they were merely Moses' people. And the proposal He made to Moses was a test of the prophet's integrity and loyalty both to the people and to God. *"Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation"*. The importance of the proposal cannot be overstressed. The words imply that God put before Moses the prospect of starting again in his own person where Jacob had started. The nation sprung from Jacob's twelve sons would be blotted out for its iniquity. From the two sons of Moses, God would develop a new people, still of the seed of Abraham, that

would fulfil the promise, that would become the Covenant nation and eventually be God's witness to the ends of the earth. A lesser man might have closed with the offer, but not so Moses. He knew how the slow working of Divine purpose had been preparing for this time through all those generations in Egypt. He knew, better than anyone, that the hardships of the wilderness would imbue this people with qualities that would yet rise to the top when their present faithlessness and disloyalty were things of the past. He knew that no generation or family of men is or can ever be altogether exempt from the pernicious effects of false teaching and the subtle allurements of pride and self-sufficiency. So he pleaded with God. He reminded God of the mighty wonders and demonstrations of power by which He had brought them out of Egypt, and how the Egyptians would mock at His apparent inability to complete His purpose so that in desperation He was driven to destroy them in the wilderness. He called to mind God's promises to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob and begged that God should not turn from His declared intention at this late hour. He was a true servant of his people. He pleaded that they be given a second chance *"and the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people"* (32.14). Perhaps all this was a rhetorical proposal; the Lord knew His man and knew that he would not assent to the blotting out of all Israel. The expression *"the Lord repented"* (AV translation) which occurs in a number of places in the Old Testament, sometimes provokes questions, for it is written in Num. 23.19 that God is not a man, that He should repent. The word itself would be more accurately translated by our modern English word 'relent'. In fact it enshrines the basic meaning of being put at ease or comforted, and here in this verse it quite evidently indicates that Moses' impassioned plea had mitigated the Divine indignation and to an extent restored the broken link between God and His people.

So *"Moses turned, and went down from the mount"* picking up Joshua where he had left him, and continuing the precipitous descent until the noise of the idolatrous festivities, still proceeding, came to their ears. It was then, as the pair came into the camp, that Moses performed the act for which he has become celebrated. The two tablets of the

Law, written by the finger of God, were in his hands. He dashed them to the ground and they shattered into pieces. That action has been put down as an exhibition of temper; in fact it was nothing of the kind. In thus dashing to pieces the Tables of the Law Moses expressed in symbol the breaking of the Covenant of which Israel had been guilty. At the sight of the idol "*Moses anger burned hot*" and in this manner he displayed to Israel the enormity of the crime of which they had been guilty. But this was not the end; that Covenant provided penalties for violation just as it provided rewards for observance, and now the penalty must be paid. First, the golden calf itself was destroyed and reduced to powder that was thrown into the river traversing the valley. All Israel, with no alternative water, were made to drink of the river and must in symbol, swallow the idol they had made and take its guilt upon themselves. The sons of Levi, men of the tribe which afterwards became priests to Israel, were called upon to go through the camp with their swords, executing the death sentence provided in the Covenant for the sin of idolatry. "*About three thousand of the people fell on that day.*" It seems

a barbarous deed but it was part of that age. It's logical to suppose that those who fell were ringleaders of the apostasy that now had been suppressed. Before condemning Moses, let it be remembered that the crime of treason carries the death penalty in most countries today. These men had been guilty of treason. From Sinai to the Babylonian captivity, God was Israel's king and the occupant of the throne in Jerusalem was His representative. Idolatry was treason and in effect they only suffered the fate of anyone committing treason in modern countries. To many, this was worse than treason and its effects were much worse. The incident was not finished yet. Sin lay on the people who too readily had yielded to apostasy. Until the covenant relationship was restored Israel could not expect the Divine blessing. "*On the next day Moses said to the people 'You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin'*" (32.30). Did Moses know how he could atone for Israel's sin? He was ready to enter the presence of God unbidden in order to do just that.

HOLINESS AND SERVICE

"If a man cleanse himself he shall be a vessel unto honour sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work". You cannot have the law of service more clearly or beautifully laid down. A vessel of honour, one which the King will delight to honour by use, must be a vessel cleansed from all defilement of the flesh and the spirit. Only then can it be a sanctified vessel, possessed and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. So it becomes meet for the Master's use. Holiness is essential to service. The will of God must first live in us, if it is to be done by us. In Scripture whatever bore the name of holy had a use and a purpose. The holy angels, the holy prophets and apostles, the holy Scriptures, all bore the title as having been sanctified for the service of God ... we can only serve as we are holy. Holiness is essential to effective service. The more of holiness, the greater the fitness for service; the more there is of true holiness, the more there is of God, and the more true and deep is the entrance He has had into the soul so the more complete is the hold He has on the

soul to use it in his service.

Note the connection between "sanctified" and "meet for the Master's use". True holiness is being possessed by God, true service being used by God. True service is being yielded up for the Master to use. Then the Holy Spirit is the agent and we are the instruments of his will. Such service is holiness.

How many weary workers have spent their strength more in the outer court of work and service, than in the inner life of fellowship and faith. They have never understood that only as the Master gets possession of them, as the Holy Spirit has them at his disposal, can He use them, can they have true power. The way to have God's power in us is for ourselves to be in his power. God may appear to keep the door closed against your working for him in the way you would wish. Still, let it be a matter settled between God and the soul that your longing for holiness is that you may be filled for him to use.

(Andrew Murray 19th Cent.)

'IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME'

*Thoughts on the
Last Supper*

How truly wonderful it is to be able to hold things in remembrance and to live again today with the events of yesterday, experiencing once more the thrills and pathos of that hour which gave those memories birth. All memories do not afford pleasure for there are some things in every life that we would rather forget. That fall under temptation; that unkind or bitter word; that cold and icy look! How we would prefer to forget it and tear it from memory's page! In spite of that side of memory's store, it is a most wonderful gift to be able to call forth from the depths of memory those episodes of life which re-clothe themselves in joy and delight when time and circumstances carry us back to the sights and scenes of yesterday.

Do we ever pause to think what life would be without remembrances? How different it would be if each day's experiences were faded or wiped out with every setting sun and there were no impressions to carry forward to another day? Imagine how barren the daily round would be if there was nothing gained, nothing learned, nothing achieved, nothing experienced save the drab monotony of existence at the low level of a limpet or oyster! No love of parents or offspring; no appreciation of home or country; no delight of colour or harmony – none of these things to call to mind, to think upon, or to link us with the past.

The storehouses of remembrance are the real riches of life, the treasury of sweet thoughts, ennobling influences and inspiring motives. They are precious far beyond gold and rubies or wide verdant acres, for thereby we are linked with our God, with Jesus, home, and loved ones, and everything that is worthwhile. It is greatly desirable to remember intensively, in spite of the fact that we do not create such ability. Some people are blessed with good memories, or, shall we say, the capacity for remembering. They do not have to develop remembrance by repetition of things or facts, nor by any patent methods. Quality and intensity depends primarily upon the natural endowment bestowed by heredity or parentage; that is, upon the density and receptivity of the impression-cells of the brain with which we are born into this world of sensation and experience. Something, too, depends upon the general state of health. A tired, rundown brain is unable to receive or register adequately the percep-

tion from external sources. The first of these situations cannot be remedied, if deficient or lacking. Something may be done to correct the second and thus make the best use of Nature's equipment.

There is one factor that compensates whether we are well equipped by nature or not. That factor is 'interest'. Remembrance depends more upon interest than any other single factor of life. When the whole being – heart, mind and soul – is caught up by the written or printed word, the spoken or visual picture, so that every pulse and desire is set throbbing and vibrating with warm sympathy and response, the impressions then received register themselves more sharply and deeply on the brain and will affect the ability to remember and recall at will. Have you not seen and felt the magnetic effect of a gifted tongue as the spoken word draws the listener from a relaxed position until eyes and ears are alert to catch every word and note every expression in the speaker's theme? These are the occasions that trace themselves deep on the memory.

What supremely serious things affected the disciples on that tragic night in the upper room to enable them to remember their Lord and Master! Was there ever such an occasion as this? Was there ever such a speaker as this? Did not ever so much depend upon the faithfulness of one Sufferer! What serious things were done! What impressive eyes looked out upon the little band! Think what that gathering meant. The established religious procedures of fifteen centuries were coming to an end, and were to be memorialised for the very last time. They were to be replaced and superseded by the first observance of a new and better remembrance arising from the 'better' features of God's great Plan. For those few pious souls that God had given into Jesus' keeping the old order was beginning to pass away, and new order to come in.

This night, as throughout the span of one whole Divinely appointed Age of time, the call to remembrance had carried back the minds of godly men to the events in Egypt's oppressive land when death swept through palace and hut leaving its sorrows behind. Thirty or forty generations had lived and died with that dread memory behind them, but none had dared to interfere with the order that Moses had established there. So far as all outside

that little room were aware, thirty or forty, or even hundreds more might be expected to pass away and all may come and go while still calling to remembrance that same dark tragic night in Pharaoh's land. The constitution founded by God through Moses, in Jewish belief was to be eternal. Established upon the Law of God, they could not rise to the thought that its authority could ever pass away; and they were sure that even the coming of their Messiah would only settle it upon an even surer foundation. The little band of disciples who had come aside with Jesus into this little room had been cradled and reared to manhood in that belief, and even their learning at Jesus' feet had not eradicated it from their memories.

Now they had come to this quiet room with strange thoughts and memories rushing through their minds. On the way up to Jerusalem they had heard Jesus dwell repeatedly upon His coming death, and though they had not fully understood what He meant, still they had heard His words. He also had invited them to share with Him in His cross, His cup and His baptism. They had been with their Master when the hot words of reproof had been spoken to the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees; words such as Jesus had never used before. They had seen him drive money changers and merchants from the Temple Courts as He charged them with sacrilege in the House of God. They had heard Him say that the Holy House was to be henceforth left to them desolate!

Not comprehending the deadly seriousness of what He said, they called His attention to the stately magnificence of its stones, only to be told that a day was coming when one stone would not be left upon another stone, so utterly complete would be its desolation. Stunned and amazed by their unusually compassionate Master's words, some of them broke into His sad reverie as He sat looking from Olivet over the doomed city, to enquire more particularly what His solemn words meant. Responding to their questions, He gathered together the testimony of the holy books, and showed them what God had spoken about the overthrow of Jerusalem. They heard him speak of wars and rumours of war, of famine, pestilence and persecution. He told of an abomination that would stand in the Holy Place, and of a period of tribulation such as had not been since man lived on the earth. He likened the overthrow to the catastrophe

of Noah's day and to Sodom's fate, and dated it by telling them that that generation would not pass away till all was fulfilled.

What a strange miscellany of sights and sounds the recent days had brought into their lives, and into this night and into this room. Away from the madding crowd into the quiet seclusion of this upper room Jesus brought His little flock to keep first the memory of Egypt's tragic night and then to institute an ordinance to be remembered in coming days. A solemn seriousness rested on the Master throughout the night, as He spoke quietly and slowly of what was on His heart. Reverently He led their memories in the accustomed way, and then, taking a portion of the remaining bread, He invoked Heaven's blessing upon it, and passed the bread to them, saying "This is my body, take it and eat it". Then He took a cup and blessing it said "This is my blood of the covenant, take it and drink it". Then they heard Him pray as had never been heard by mortal ears! How reverently and sacredly impressive this quiet ceremony would be! Those gravely searching eyes; that quietly arresting voice; and the strange newness of what He did! Could they ever forget that little room? Then those words: "This do ... in remembrance of Me". Throughout the days and years that followed they did remember Him. He was to them the Lamb of God; the Prince of Life; the Lord and Master of their lives. They counted not their lives dear to them so they might lay them down in His service! And what of these days, and of ourselves in this remembrance? Only in spirit can we share that experience in the upper room, but it is still true that according to the "interest" that grips our hearts, so will the measure of our "remembrance" be.

These many years we have come apart into our own upper rooms, and at the appointed time have taken the emblems of His broken body and spilt blood, and "remembered" him! We have shown to each other our 'interest' in "the Lord's death". We have accepted the benefit to ourselves of His life and death, and have covenanted also to become "dead with Him". As the appointed hour draws near, what will it mean to us? Again, a world order is shaking. Can we go forward into the unknown future with nothing more than Him? Is He of such 'interest' to our hearts that we would willingly surrender all for Him? Does anything else share our heart's interest with Him? Does the torch of

remembrance burn fiercely in us for Him alone? If so, then the measure of our interest will reveal how much we shall desire to remember Him! For what have we to remember Him? Is it not for everything that is worthwhile in life? Is it not our redemption and reconciliation, for our safekeeping day by day; for our comfort and consolation in trouble? Is it not for the hope of attaining to a share in an inheritance

as joint heirs with Him; and for the possibility that we may be found acceptable to enjoy His eternal friendship and companionship? Is there not here sufficient cause to awake the interest of the deepest springs of our life, and lead us to remember Him for the things of yesterday, today, tomorrow and forevermore?

TH

'CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER'

"But I say, Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:44-48 NLT) These words from the 'Sermon on the Mount' mark a watershed in the understanding of the great Almighty God and Creator of the Universe. The first part of Matt. 5 is much more than an updating of the Law which God gave to Moses. This is a fresh revelation of God and His requirements. The Beatitudes and moral contrasts in 5:13-43 are something new and are a necessary introduction for what is to follow. A distinct change occurs towards the end of chapter 5 for Jesus begins to speak of "your heavenly Father", a reference to God which is to recur many times in the remainder of the 'Sermon'.

Reverently, we may echo the question of many honest believers, what is God like? Listening carefully we may get many different impressions of what God is like. Even more disturbing are the great differences in behaviour of those who claim to be the children of God. Some onlookers may ignore this problem, but many who search for truth find the situation confusing and hypocritical. We who say we love the Lord in all good faith, often send mixed messages to those who make no such claims.

So what is God really like? In his little book 'Your God is too small' J.B. Phillips shows how we may give distorted impressions of what He is like. Some, like the Sadducees and Pharisees, re-

gard God as a 'policeman' who spends His time keeping people within the law. Similarly, Jewish religious leaders thought of the Creator as their personal or national God; He belonged to them, to their group or sect or nation and no one else could possibly know Him. Phillips says they behaved as if they had God in their box. Christian sects have taken a similar attitude and we must ask ourselves questions. Am I distorting the vision of God so that others are unable to know Him or feel they don't want to discover Him? How are others reading the Gospel according to me? We see through a glass darkly. Yet we have the written records of Messiah's acts and words. He brought to us the "reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb. 1:3 NRSV). He showed us all that we need to know about God so that we might know Him and become like Him. If we take to heart Jesus' words in the 'sermon' we can begin to know our Heavenly Father. Jesus unfolds the mysteries of the Father at the point in which we are most vulnerable. The history of mankind has been written in the blood of those who have suffered from retaliation. In earlier days the rule was 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. Family honour had to be upheld at any price. Justice had to be done, particularly if someone in the family had been killed. It has been suggested that Jesus was giving rules for personal relationships in daily experience while the laws in the Old Testament were instructions to judges in their administration of justice. They were also restraints against retaliation which so often becomes brutal bullying and goes far beyond justice. The desire for revenge rests upon the conceited notion that 'I am the best'. It is sometimes called 'self esteem' in the modern world, but it has nothing to do with the lowly man of Nazareth, or the Father in Heaven who sent Him to demonstrate real love.

Getting one's own back doesn't only refer to bows and arrows, swords and spears. In a modern world a great deal that passes for 'fair competition' really stems from the same motivation as retaliation. Sometimes this feeling is demonstrated in the use of nuclear or other high explosive weapons, but more often it is expressed among ordinary folk in verbal terms. We must have the last word. We must let others know that we are just not going to be sat on, or be someone's private doormat. We may not even give any kind of outward expression to these feelings, but inwardly we are boiling, hoping against hope that we can show the other fellow what we are made of. And what are we made of? Children can be taught that violence need not be met with violence and that teaching is best done in the absence of violence. Saddest of all, this spirit of vengeance is most bitterly found in conflicts about religion. Those who have named the name of Christ and claimed to be His brethren, have been some of the worst to display this attitude. And the result has simply been the worst possible witness to faith in the Son of God. Sects and Churches have been violent by word of mouth in the name of 'sound doctrine' and in the service of the Kingdom of God. But their only achievement has been to further the Devil's interests. The pages of sectarian dogma are littered with arrogant aggression, often resulting in innocent blood being spilt. Crusades in the Middle East, the battlefields of Flanders, or angry words of Christian leaders telling others that they don't know the truth, all amount to the same spirit of antichrist. It is a spirit that has failed to recognise just what kind of person Jesus was, or to take heed to His careful, measured and plain teaching – love and pray for your enemies but do them no harm.

Many will question whether Jesus' commands are practical. Jewish rabbis and religious philosophers across the world and throughout history have happily exhorted us to do to others what we would like them to do to us. Even that is hard to do honestly. John Stott has suggested that the Jews twisted Old Testament texts in such a way that they could hate and take revenge upon any who were not of their own nation of Israel. Matt. 5.38-48 has long been used by pacifists who cannot see how it is possible to be obedient to Jesus' commands and still be involved in any kind of violence. Martyn Lloyd Jones disagrees and says

that these verses refer to the responsibility of individuals to other people. He insists that the State is like a policeman who must defend justice and he infers that they have different rules from the individual citizen. John Stott tends to agree with this, saying "Jesus was not prohibiting the administration of justice but rather forbidding us to take the law into our own hands". Nevertheless he points out that "the very nature of war is brutalizing and horrible". Neither of these theologians mention the practical and successful experiment of William Penn with the American Indians. It has to be admitted that it is easy to profess to be a pacifist but in private life show the most horrible bitterness.

Few people have demonstrated more clearly our Master's words than Martin Luther King who suffered unimaginable horrors for his Christian beliefs and continued until martyrdom to withstand evil with good. He preached a very moving sermon about 'Loving your enemies' and this has been published with other sermons under the title 'Strength to Love'.

No one has set us a better example regarding these principles than Jesus from the time He was arrested in Gethsemane till He died on the cross. He sought only the good of all those around Him and in return He suffered more than anyone. He gave four illustrations in Matthew 5.39-42 of how we are to refuse to resist evil in other people. We need to distinguish between this and resisting the Devil. Jesus said that we must be prepared to be more than just passive in resistance, we must be ready to do positive good. We must offer our coat when someone demands a shirt; prepared when hit on one cheek to be slapped on the other; carry someone's burden the extra mile and not expect to be repaid when we loan money. This was the spirit which carried Jesus through those terrible experiences prior to crucifixion and enabled Him to fulfil the words of Isaiah 53 and to obey his own principle of praying for those who persecuted Him. Hebrew philosophy is practical.

Thus Jesus showed how He really was the Son of God. He carried His Father's likeness. So must we. When Jesus told His disciples that they must be perfect just as their Father in Heaven was perfect, He was not asking us to do something that is impossible. The word for perfect here does not mean sinless. It means that we are being made ready for doing just the job for which God has

designed us. We are, so to speak, being made into the round peg that exactly fits the round hole. It would be impossible for us to do this alone. Jesus told us to ask for the Holy Spirit. Only by that means can we possibly be the kind of people that God plans. His power is able to do miracles. When we meet tomorrow's evil, in whatever shape or form it takes, love is to be the dominating feature of our thoughts, words and actions. When someone hurts us, there must not be a shadow of resentment or bitterness. When someone gets the better of us we are to accept it with good grace. There is no room for arrogant retaliation in God's kingdom.

That belongs to sinful flesh and blood. Revenge and retaliation are products of sin and are therefore illogical. They achieve nothing but harm and are counter-productive when displayed by Christians. There is more of the forgiving spirit in the Old Testament than most people realise. Nor has God reserved fire and suffering for those upon whom He showers His continual blessings in nature. Some day, if God lives in us now, we shall have the joy of demonstrating to those who arrogantly reject His goodness now, that the love of Jesus really does win.

DN

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

6. Chapter 4.31-44

This section might be described as a typical working day in Jesus' ministry and is also referred to in Matt. 8.14-17 and Mark 6.1-6.

Luke 4.31-37 Jesus expels an unclean spirit. Capernaum, a busy town near the northern shore of the lake is sometimes identified as Tel Hum. There was a tax office for industry and merchants travelling through it. Luke may have had a special interest in Sabbaths. v.31. Jesus seems to have amazed people by His authoritative teaching in the synagogue. The Sermon on the Mount gives good examples of the authority that was behind Jesus' teaching. 'Demons' are not an easy concept for the modern mind and many rationalise these 'exorcisms'. Such dismiss first century folk as simple and ignorant but perhaps it's not they who are ignorant. This is the first of such events. They raise questions to those who have never experienced such things but mental disorders do not explain everything in these records of demons. Why did Jesus silence the demons? How did the demons know who Jesus was? Had they a reason for using His name? Plummer says that their recognition of Jesus was horror not flattery. Why did they think Jesus might destroy them? More demons were about in Jesus' day than now or in the OT; why? What are unclean demons or spirits? Would 'unholy spirits' mean the same? Jesus had

power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*); the latter is sometimes translated power; what is the difference? Jesus was demonstrating the power of the Kingdom. It was a signal (sign) that the Kingdom of God was among people. This power will release humanity from the power of Satan and give them freedom. The man in the synagogue at Capernaum discovered freedom that day.

Luke 4. 38-44 The healing work of Jesus. This passage illustrates the urgency of Jesus' ministry particularly v.43. Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever. Only Luke, the physician, uses medical terms in his description of this event. Peter's wife is mentioned in 1 Cor. 9.5. When the sun set, the Sabbath had ended so those in need of healing would feel free to go to Jesus. It had been a long day but Jesus, although weary, continued to free people from their illnesses. What can we learn of Jesus example in v.42? (see Mark 1.35 and Luke 5.16; 6.12; 9.18,28).

This is the first mention of the Kingdom of God by Luke. What did it mean to the Jews who heard Him and what does it mean to us? In this passage Luke draws the contrasts between the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness. It is possible that Jesus travelled much further than the 'boundaries' of Judea.

Kneeling in Prayer "*I fall on my knees before the Father ... and I pray*" this was the attitude of Paul when he prayed for the brethren at Ephesus. Such also was the position of Peter when he prayed before the raising of Tabitha from the dead (Acts

9.40). Daniel too knelt in prayer before his window three times a day while Ezra (9.5) did this publicly. Many Christians still believe that this is the best position for prayer.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

1. The Anointing

He first appears in view a fresh, likeable young country lad. Born into a farming family, in the midst of a community of farmers, the youngest of a family of eight sons, it was inevitable that at perhaps sixteen years of age he spent his days shepherding sheep. He probably did not expect to do anything else for the rest of his life. His father's inheritance would have to be divided at death between eight sons so that there was not likely to be much for each. In all probability the prospect was that the farm would continue to be worked in partnership by the eight with himself, the youngest, very much the junior partner. The chances are that he did not worry himself much about that. He found shepherding a congenial occupation giving him abundant time for his three favourite diversions, the playing of music on his little set of pipes, reading the sacred Scriptures of his people consisting of their stirring history from the beginning and meditating on the wonders of nature and the majesty of the Almighty.

He came of a godly family. There can be no doubt about that. He manifests even in his early youth, a reverence and a confidence in God that can only have been instilled by his upbringing. His father Jesse must have been one of the faithful in Israel who endeavoured to keep the obligations of the Covenant and due respect for the Lord in the forefront of family life. Nothing more is known about Jesse. He farmed his land as his fathers had done before him. When he died at a noteworthy old age, which in those days may have been up to a hundred and twenty, he left behind him as his only epitaph the fact that he had been responsible for the youthful training and character development of Israel's greatest king. David the shepherd boy of Bethlehem was destined to rule Israel and extend its boundaries from the modest little land, conquered by Joshua and his forces four hundred years previously, to the Euphrates on the one hand and the borders of Egypt on the other. Never again was the nation to possess such an acquisition of territory. He was a man of destiny. His name in after days was the symbol of Israel's royalty. He became the visible representative of Israel's God. Of him it was said that he sat on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem. Israel, the theocratic state, whose true king

was the Lord himself, looked upon David in all his royal glory and saw in him the embodiment of their heavenly king.

He was not the first to rule Israel. Saul had preceded him. Saul, the arrogant leader of men who himself had started life in the fields as did David and was selected by the Lord to fulfil the people's demand for a king. Saul had been the handsome, muscular stripling, whose physical appearance captivated the nation so much that they clamoured for him. Saul, modest and retiring, hid himself among the baggage. But Saul had proved a failure. His early promise had changed to self-will and self-conceit and he no longer revered the Lord who had called him and raised him to high honour. So at last the Lord deposed him and sent the prophet Samuel to anoint this other lad to take his place. How was it that the Lord called Saul when so soon he proved himself unworthy? Is the Lord so bad a judge of human character? The answer lies in the realm of human free-will and this is a fundamental principle in the Divine scheme of things. Saul had the same opportunity as David. Saul could have been the first of a line of kings ruling eventually in Jerusalem but he chose otherwise. He rebelled against God who had given him the kingship just as in a much higher sphere Lucifer the apostate archangel rebelled against God who had created him "*full of wisdom and perfect in beauty*" as Ezekiel has it. So the Lord disowned him and appointed another. In just the same manner Lucifer, the god of this world, must give place to our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who yielded himself willingly to the Divine will and in consequence is exalted above the heavens and will ultimately receive the loyalty and allegiance of all creation. It is not by accident that David becomes the type and prefigures Christ in his triumphant royalty. Saul and David both had freewill. The one used it to rebel against God, the other to conform himself willingly to the Divine purpose.

Here then, in David, was a man for God's purpose at a time in history when such a man was needed. There had not been many such in Israel's past history who had remained supremely loyal to the end. Joshua said, just before he died "*not one thing has failed of all the good things which the*

Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass to you, and not one thing has failed." (Josh. 23.14). There was Caleb, his brother soldier, at the same time and Othniel the first to govern and protect Israel after Joshua was dead, but after that, no one during four long centuries who was faithful to the end of life until Samuel. He it was who was sent to anoint David the future king. As the young lad stood still the anointing oil flowed over his head and he was enshrining within himself the Divine promise. He was being consecrated as a servant of God, to become king for the present and a type for the future, a type of Christ who should come to reign over Israel and the world for ever. The promise made to David a little later on in his life was that his throne should endure for ever. That promise will become a reality when at the last the powers of this world have given place to *"the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Rev. 11.15). David had a lot to say about that Messianic kingdom in later times, for he was a prophet as well as a king. He was able to depict its glories in wonderfully eloquent language, for he was a poet, a psalmist, as well as a prophet. "The sweet singer of Israel" is a very apt title that has been conferred upon him by later generations; his songs of praise and devotion have enriched, first, the worship of Israel, and second, Christian worship, for thirty centuries, and they will never die.

But there were flaws in the diamond. There were defects in David's character that came out more strongly in later life, when he was established in the glory and power of his kingdom and could command his subjects' compliance with his every whim. It is said that "all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts utterly". That was not fully true in the case of David. He attained what amounted to absolute power in Israel but he was not corrupted utterly. He ended his life in faith and loyalty and continued acceptance with God but in the meantime he had been guilty of serious breaches of the confidence God had placed in him. He ascended into the heights but he also descended to the depths. He won Divine approval in many things, but on occasion he merited and received severe Divine condemnation. He established justice and judgment in the land but he was at times guilty of great injustice. He was wholly devoted to God but he also indulged in the sins of the flesh. He was in fact, typical of every man and he became an illustration

of what God can do with weak and fallible man. It is also an example of his great mercy and compassion for men. The story of David is in a very real sense, the story of every man.

The smoke of the sacrifice curled lazily upward: the air was very still. The circle of venerable men, elders of the village of Bethlehem, stood silently watching the prophet erect before the rough stone altar, raised his hands to Heaven in silent entreaty. A few moments thus, and he turned, and made his way to the centre of the circle where Jesse the aged and respected farmer of Bethlehem was standing. "I would see your eldest son" he said. A sign from the other and a tall, vigorous-looking middle aged man stepped forward and stood before Samuel. He waited quietly.

"This is Eliab, my eldest son," said Jesse. Samuel's eyes met those of the man before him. He noted the fearless gaze, the strong mouth and muscular arms. He knew this family to be one that revered God and the Covenant. The Lord had sent him here to find Israel's future king. This man looked like one capable of becoming a leader of men. "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me" he thought to himself. He waited quietly for the inward voice.

It came, "Look not on his countenance or the height of his stature; because I have refused him. The Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Samuel sighed and looked across at Jesse, shaking his head. Jesse motioned to his son to step aside, and beckoned. Abinadab stepped forward, and took his place. Eyes met, and there was silence a little space. Then Samuel spoke. "Neither hath the Lord chosen this" he said.

Shammah came into the circle and stood expectantly. Again that silence. Samuel had closed his eyes, as if in communion with his God. He opened them and spoke slowly, "Neither has the Lord chosen this".

Some of the elders looked at each other dubiously. There was a certain amount of head shaking. Jesse's three eldest sons, the mainstay of his establishment, all rejected. They looked back hopefully as the fourth son came forward. Faces fell as he too was rejected in his turn.

So with the fifth, and the sixth, and finally the seventh. As that seventh son strode across the grass

to join his brothers, Samuel waited expectantly. There were no more.

"Are these all your children?" he asked Jesse. The other was perplexed.

"These are all, at least, there is one more, but he is only a young lad, and he is out tending the sheep. I did not think the Lord would have use for him". "Send and fetch him" commanded Samuel. "We will not sit down to feast until he has come hither". A brief instruction to a servant, and the man was running across the fields and speedily out of sight. The slow minutes ticked by, every man wrapped in his own thoughts. No one spoke.

A little figure in the distance, running with easy trot of an agile youth. He came nearer, dropping into a rapid walk as he neared the waiting group. The circle of elders parted to give him admittance, and he stood before his father in respectful silence.

"This is David, my youngest son" said Jesse. Samuel regarded the lad intently. He saw a fresh, guileless boy whom he judged could not be much more than sixteen years of age, glowing with health and vitality, and something more; enthusiasm for whatever he might undertake. He had attractively handsome features, with promise of development into a virile and strong-minded man, perhaps a leader of men. Samuel mused, as the lad's frank eyes met and fearlessly held his own. But Saul had been such an one, he thought, and now Saul had proved a failure. He had rather expected that after that failure the Lord would have chosen an older and more mature man for the responsible position of king over Israel. This lad was scarcely out of his boyhood. What possible knowledge could he have of life and how could he be expected to lead the armies of Israel against her enemies. And yet there was something appealing in that candid glance, something that had an element of the other world, as though this boy, despite his youth, knew what it was to sense the workings of that same Divine Spirit which had been so potent a factor in Samuel's own life. He suddenly thought of his own boyhood, so long ago now, in the Tabernacle at Shiloh with Eli the old High Priest, and he began to feel a kinship with this young lad, so like he had been in those far-off days. His thoughts came back to the present and then he heard, once again, the Voice, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he!"

Samuel looked across at Jesse and gave him an almost imperceptible nod. Turning back to the

altar, he picked up the horn of anointing oil that he had placed there in readiness. Returning, he stationed himself before David, standing there motionless. The eyes of all in the assembly were fixed upon him.

"The Lord has commanded me to anoint you to the service to which He will call you in his own due time" he declared. The lad stood rigid, a look of wonder in his eyes. Samuel raised the horn of oil and allowed its contents to trickle over his head and be absorbed in his flowing locks.

There was a long silence. Every man present knew the implication of the act. That ritual anointing could only be for a priest or a king. David was not of the tribe of Levi; he could never be a priest. Slowly a new light began to dawn in the eyes of the watching elders. They were and had been for a long time under the iron oppression of the Philistines. Several attempts to break the yoke had been unsuccessful. Saul had consistently failed to achieve for them the freedom they had expected when they made him king. Did this mean that the Lord at last was going to provide them the deliverer for which they longed. They thought of Gideon, Jephthah and Othniel, who in past days had wrought deliverance for their fathers. Did this visit from Samuel mean that God was now about to visit them with salvation, to give them a king after his own heart, one who would both lead them to victory and to God. It came to each one of them that nothing must be said about this, for Saul was still king, and this anointing was tantamount to treason. What had been done this day and what they had seen must be locked up in their own hearts until the Lord should see fit to bring it into the open. For the present they must go back to their own occupations, taking with them a hope for the future which they had never expected to cherish.

So the elders dispersed to their homes, and David went back to his shepherding, and Samuel the Lord's instrument returned to his residence in Ramah.

(To be continued)

AOH

Face the work of every day with the influence of a few thoughtful, quiet moments. Do not meet other people, even those of your own home, until you have first met the great Guest and honoured Companion of your life, Jesus Christ.

QUESTION TIME

This series will only occur when there is one or more questions that have been genuinely asked and not manufactured to make an article. They concern Christian knowledge (academic or theological) or behaviour. The Bible Study Monthly is a not a forum and it has a fairly strict code of practice which seeks to avoid controversy and material likely to divide or cause offence. So, let us have the first question:

Was Paul married? Paul had quite a lot to say about marriage, so was he able to speak out of experience on the subject? Firstly, Jesus too had something to say about it and He wasn't married (Matt. 6). In fact Jesus upset current established opinions on this subject and to some extent Paul enlarged on what the Lord had said. Teaching about God and His purposes doesn't necessarily demand experience but rather revelation from Him. Some of the things Paul wrote about marriage he acknowledged as his opinion rather than dogmatic teaching. Much of what he had to say was in answer to questions with a desire to resolve problems. His words should be understood in the light of the fact that he was an Apostle sent of God.

This is an emotionally charged subject and sometimes views that are expressed avoid scripture and logic. The answer to this question cannot be absolutely conclusive and like so many more is not vital to our faith or understanding. It might be helpful to know a little more about the Scripture involved in the question.

Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7.7,8 appear to be conclusive that Paul was not married; "I desire all men to be as I am myself, but each man has his own gift from God, one in one direction, another in another". This is the translation of Prof. C. K. Barrett who points out that some translations are incorrect when they read "I should like you all to be as I am myself" – NEB. Prof. Barrett argues that Paul is not saying in v.7. that we should all be like him – that is unmarried – but insists that the Apostle is really saying that he wishes that all had his capacity to resist natural desires. Again in v.8 Paul is really saying that he wants his readers to be like him, that is unchanging in their estate – married or unmarried.

Interestingly, scholars who say that Paul must have been married don't seem to use the verses in 1 Cor. 7. They prefer to follow the inference that

Paul must have been married in his early manhood because he was a Jew, a rabbi and possibly a member of the Sanhedrin. For this latter point Acts 8.1 and 26.10 are cited. 8.1 reads "and Saul was consenting to his death", referring to the murder of Stephen. Prof. F. F. Bruce has a note in his commentary on Acts in which he writes "The expression 'was consenting' need not be taken to mean that Saul was actually a member of the Sanhedrin" and it is clear that the same writer has the same opinion about 26.10.

W. J. Conybeare in his work with Dr. Howson 'The Life and Epistles of St. Paul', commenting upon these same texts writes "There are strong grounds for believing that, if he was not a member of the Sanhedrin at the time of St. Stephen's death; he was elected into that powerful senate soon after, possibly as a reward for the zeal he had shown against the heretic. He himself says that in Jerusalem he not only exercised the power of imprisonment by commission from the High Priests, but also when the Christians were put to death, **gave his vote** against them. From this expression it is natural to infer that he was a member of that supreme court of judicature."

Prof. William Barclay joins the argument even more strongly. Commenting upon 1 Cor. 7 he writes "Paul was a Rabbi and it was his own claim that he had failed in none of the duties which Jewish law and tradition laid down. Now orthodox Jewish belief laid down the obligation of marriage. If a man did not marry and have children, he was said to have 'slain his posterity' 'to have lessened the image of God in the world.' Seven (types of people) were said to be excommunicated from heaven, and the list began, 'a Jew who had no wife; or who has a wife but not children.' God had said 'Be fruitful and multiply' and therefore, not to marry and not have children was to be guilty of breaking a positive commandment of God. The age for marriage was considered to be eighteen; and therefore it is in the highest degree unlikely that so devout and orthodox a Jew as Paul once was would have remained unmarried. On particular grounds there is also evidence that Paul was married. He must have been a member of the Sanhedrin for he says that he gave his vote against the Christians. (Acts 26.10). It was the regulation that members of the Sanhedrin must be married men, because it was

held that married men were more merciful. It may be that Paul's wife died; it is even more likely that she left him and broke up his home when he became a Christian, so that he did indeed literally

give up all things for the sake of Christ."

The evidence seems to favour the view that Paul had at some time been married but there is nothing conclusive.
DN

TRANSLATIONS OF TOPICAL TEXTS

ISAIAH 53.4-11 in the New Revised Standard Version

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one: my servant shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

1 CORINTHIANS 15.3-8; 20-23 from the Revised English Bible.

First and foremost. I handed on to you the tradition I had received: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas, and afterwards to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to

James, and afterwards to all the apostles.

Last of all he appeared to me too; it was like a sudden, abnormal birth But the truth is, Christ was raised to life – the firstfruits of the harvest of the dead. For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be brought to life; but each in proper order: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 3.7-11 from the New Living Translation

I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!

The New Revised Standard Version(1989) is a revision of the Revised Standard Version (1952). The Revised English Bible (1989) is a revision of the New English Bible (1970). The New Living Translation (1996) is an update of the Living Bible (1971) The New International Version (1978), (not used above) is probably the most popular translation in current use in UK. What are we looking for, a translation for study, a Bible for public reading or a version to support our own personal viewpoint? There are plenty to choose from.

Simon the coward became Simon the courageous. Simon who denied his Master three times before soldiers and servants, spoke to

thousands of men without flinching and declared that it was the Spirit of the living God that had been received.

BIBLE FELLOWSHIP UNION**WITNESS****THE GOLDEN FUTURE**

A preview of God's promised time of peace and happiness.

GOD'S FULFILLING PURPOSE

An outline of God's work with, and goal for all mankind.

THREE STORIES OF SALVATION

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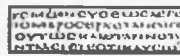
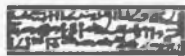
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sorrow, nor crying, neither shall
there be any more pain: for the
former things are passed away.

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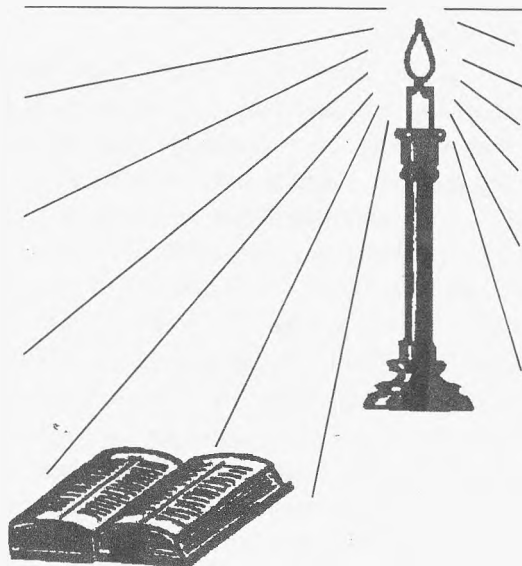
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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern understanding. It

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NOTICES

Internet: Bible Fellowship Union now has its own web site which may be reached at www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk. This site is still being developed and information on it is limited at this stage. It is hoped to build up the material that will attract interest and lead to enquiries about the Bible Study Monthly. Please do not expect to be able to read a full issue of the BSM or a booklet on the web site. Articles and chapters will be used as 'tasters' which lead to enquiries for the full magazine or booklet.

The booklet '**Jacob's Trouble**' has been reprinted and is now available for despatch. It is hoped that all who have requested this booklet during the last few months have now received a copy. If you were among these and have not yet received a copy please jog our memories.

Introduce a Friend: your interest and support as a reader is greatly valued. We would be pleased to send the Bible Study Monthly for a six months trial period to any addresses which readers submit to us. Similarly we will gladly send booklets to your friends also. Whether booklets are for yourself or friends please be specific about titles and quantities when you request literature and write names and addresses as clearly as possible. All enquiries to the address on the front cover of this magazine.

Gifts are gratefully received but please make cheques (checks) and postal orders payable to **Bible Fellowship Union** NOT to Bible Study Monthly or to an individual. If you use a postal order please do not write on it the place of payment. Thank you.

CART: The Christian African Relief Trust continues to do a wonderful work and it was good

to hear recently from a reader who had greatly benefited from a consignment sent to his African country by this Charity. Since CART was last mentioned in these columns, large forty foot containers have been sent to The Gambia, Tanzania, Kenya and to India. The Trust now operates from a large warehouse in Huddersfield where clothes, books, food and many useful items are stored until a container is ready to convey them to Africa. Also on these premises is a Charity Shop, which is helping to raise the transport charges for the containers. Anyone wishing to know more about this work should write to Mr.G.G. Tompkins, 'Whitegates' Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks. HD8 OLR.

A notice concerning overseas readers: Bible Fellowship Union receives many requests for money, Bibles and other desirable items. We would like enquirers to note that BFU is a charity regulated by a constitution that does not allow us to send money out of the country. Normally, we only handle BFU literature. Occasionally, second-hand Bibles and study books come to hand and we gladly send these on to readers who we know genuinely need them.

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'Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away'

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

3. Discovering Christ

It could only have been a few weeks after the incident of Simon walking on the water that he made the historic declaration that changed his name and sealed his position as leader of the little band of disciples. They were at Caesarea Philippi, in the extreme north of the land and about as far away from Jerusalem as it was possible to get, but Jesus knew that within a few weeks He must go to Jerusalem and speak His message there. It was necessary that His disciples should be made aware, more than they were at present aware, of the serious implications of their calling, of the opposition, persecution and suffering that was going to be entailed. It had been comparatively easy going so far; plenty of miracles with all the public acclaim that they evoked, and a generally favourable reception of those words of life that always accompanied the miracles. But things were about to change and a deeper, more serious faith would be needed to withstand the trials that lay ahead. So up there, in the quiet privacy of the mountains, Jesus put two momentous questions, "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" He asked, and waited quietly for His disciples' reaction.

They returned a variety of answers; John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one or other of the ancient prophets, risen from the dead to teach this generation. That question was only intended to lead their minds to the second and more important one. "*But who do you say that I am?*" After two years' association with Him, had they grasped the truth of His person, that He was indeed the one sent by God, the one for whom Israel had waited for many centuries past? Had they realised that the day of Israel's prophets was past and that God was now moving into action to accomplish the redemption of mankind from sin and death? Had they realised that the One whom they loved and served was more, far more, than a holy man, come to life from the past? Were they aware that He was in fact the Son of God come to lead the world back to God? If these men were to constitute the spearhead of Jesus' work in the world after He had returned to His Father, it was high time that they began to understand these things.

Simon, at least, did understand. His impetuous, questing mind, through the sudden illumination of

the Holy Spirit, saw all this in a flash. All the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. His Leader's identity, His origin, His mission to Israel, His relation to the golden prophecies of olden time, came together in his mind and pointed to the answer, "*The Messiah of God*". For the rest of his days that one irrefutable fact remained unshaken in Simon's mind. Through all the many changes of a long life spent in the Master's service, adorned by triumphs and blemished by failures, he never lost sight of the revelation that came to him that day. And Jesus looking upon him, knew that His man was ready.

It was at this point that Simon received of the Lord his new name, Peter. There was a significance in the name. Simon's name, given at his birth, meant 'the hearing one'; one who listens and accepts what is told him. That was true enough of Simon's early discipleship; this forthright declaration at this crucial moment demonstrates how well he had heard. During all that time his character had been crystallising in the direction of the service which now was to be his life's work and Jesus knew that character to be rock hard and firmly set. So He named him Peter, the rock, *petros* means a piece of rock or boulder. "*You are a rock*" He said "*and on this rock I will found my ecclesia*". Whether Jesus used that word *ecclesia* to denote the believers who were to look to Peter for leadership during the next decade or so or the larger Church of this present Age which owes so much to Peter's yeoman service during another thirty years of life, is not very important. Both are true. He probably meant the former; at any rate from this time forward Peter was the acknowledged leader of the disciples and the one who assumed the initiative after the Resurrection. By common consent he was looked up to for guidance and counsel in those difficult yet halcyon days of the first generation Apostolic Church.

According to John's Gospel, Jesus did use this expression prophetically, when He met Peter for the first time, two years earlier. In that account He is recorded as using the Aramaic term for a piece of rock, *kephas* instead of the Greek *petros*. Paul used the Aramaic word when referring to his brother Apostle in Corinthians and Galatians. Be this as it may, it seems definite that it was on the later

occasion that the name was formally and definitely given and put into use. Mark, who is the most careful of the evangelists in matters such as this, refers to the Apostle always as Simon prior to this incident and Peter afterwards, with but one exception. At any rate, from this time onwards, both to the Apostolic Church, the Early Church and the Church of all ages to the present, the impetuous Apostle is universally known and remembered by the name of Peter.

Six days later Peter, with James and John, received new and startling confirmation of their Lord's Messiahship. Jesus had taken them "up into an high mountain"; most probably it was Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in Israel and not far from Caesarea Philippi. There, in quietude and privacy, away from the ever insistent crowds, they witnessed an amazing scene. Jesus was *"transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him"* (Matt. 17.2-3). Stricken with awe, and somewhat terrified by the radiance of the vision, Peter nevertheless realised instantly that this was the fulfilment of Jesus' words to his disciples a few days previously. He had said then that some of their number would not see death before they had seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. There is not much doubt that he jumped to the conclusion that Jesus was here and now about to assert his Divine authority, take his rightful power, assume the position of king over Israel and inaugurate the long promised Messianic reign. The presence of Moses, Israel's Lawgiver and greatest man, and Elijah of whom it had been predicted that he would return at the Day of the Lord, was further evidence. A Messianic kingdom without the presence of Moses and Elijah to lead the people to God as they had done in their respective lifetimes was inconceivable. So Peter gave voice to the obvious suggestion which must have been in the hearts of all three disciples as they watched *"Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah"*. Almost without doubt he was already seeing himself as hastening down the mountainside to call the people to come into the presence of their King and hearing the shouts of acclamation as the reign of Messiah began. As in the days of Moses there had to be a "tent of meeting", a tabernacle where Moses met with God

to receive commands and talk with God on matters to do with the welfare of Israel (Exodus 33.7-10; 34.29-35), so it must be now. Peter remembered that Moses too had appeared radiant after being in the presence of God so that he had to assume a veil to cover that glory except when he went in to talk with God. Now there must be three similar tabernacles for these three supernaturally radiant ones, before the people could be admitted to hear their voices and acclaim their king. Something like this, in a confused sort of way, must have possessed Peter's mind. The Divine glory of Jesus and the resurrection glory of Moses and Elijah must be veiled from mere human sight. The disciples themselves must be the ones to go between these three and the people, even as in those far-off days of the Exodus Moses had been the go-between for God and Israel. So Peter's thoughts ran riot in his exaltation at the great thing which was happening.

The radiant glory encompassed the disciples and they fell on their faces in reverence. The voice of God sounded in their ears; *"This is my Son; whom I have chosen, listen to him"*. There was a silence. They looked up. The glorious vision was gone. There was no Moses, no Elijah, only Jesus as they had always known him. No kingdom, no reigning in power, no public acclaim, just three puzzled men following their Master down the mountainside and hearing his injunction to tell the vision to no man *"until the Son of Man is risen from the dead"*. And with that all their hopes of imminent kingly glory withered and died.

Yet, of course, Peter and his companions had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. They had witnessed a manifestation of that other worldly power which is always there, behind the scenes, and will be outwardly revealed to all men in the day of the world's deliverance from sin and evil. Moses and Elijah, with other ancient stalwarts of faith, will be there to administer earthly affairs in that blessed day. They really had experienced a preview of what Mark, in his version of the incident, describes as the Kingdom of God come with power. Peter never forgot that experience. It finally established his faith and coloured his thoughts and words for all time to come. Thirty-five years later, nearing the end of a stressful life in the service of Christ, he recalled the wonder of that day. *"We have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God*

the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. And this voice which came from heaven we heard: when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1.16-18). There were yet to be times in his life when he

faltered and vacillated. The weakness of the flesh temporarily overcame the assurance of the Spirit, but basically his devotion to Christ was sound, and his faith proved true at the last.

(To be continued)

AOH

BALAAM. PROPHET OF ARAM

Part 3 – Balaam's Vision

There is a modern ring about the story of Balak, king of Moab in the days of the Exodus. He was alarmed at the prospect of the Israelites conquering Canaan and perhaps absorbing his own land and people in the process. There is a similar fear today and in a sense history is repeating itself on the very same territory. Balak tried to avert the threat by hiring Balaam the prophet of Baalpeor on the Euphrates to invoke Divine curses upon the invaders. Instead of concurring, Balaam, somewhat against his own will apparently, found himself obliged to declare the Divine blessing upon this people which had come out of Egyptian slavery. After the manner of the prophets he uttered this mystic saying which has had such an evident fulfilment through the ages. After declaring, from the hilltop and in public, God's intention to bless and prosper Israel and confound her enemies, the prophet of Aram described his vision of Israel's victories and ultimate triumph (Num. 24.15-24). It is noteworthy that all the peoples mentioned in this prophecy are of Semitic race, of the sons of Shem, racially akin to Israel. In contrast, in Ezekiel 38-39 where the final gathering of nations against Israel that provokes Divine intervention takes place, not one Semitic people is included in the list. The triumph of Israel in Balaam's look into the future is therefore not quite the same thing as in that of Ezekiel, although coming to its climax at much the same time.

The prophet describes himself as hearing the words of God, having knowledge of the Most High and seeing the vision of the Almighty. The impression evidently intended to be conveyed is that he was in a rapt or ecstatic condition in which he saw a kind of panorama of the lands and peoples he mentioned and a symbolic representation of the emerging power of Israel progressively swallowing them up. There is a central Figure, one who stands as Conqueror and King, who will exalt Israel to its destined position of predominance. But that is to be

a long time hence. "*I see him, but not now*" he says "*I behold him, but not now;*" (the future tense, in the A.V. is incorrect. It should be present tense, see RSV, NEB and virtually all modern translators. Moffatt has it "I see them in the future far; I mark them in the days to come". Balaam declares that what he sees is not for fulfilment in his time but in the distant future). "*There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Jacob, and destroy all the children of Sheth*" (more properly, Sons of tumult – a poetic name for the Moabites). The sceptre here is the tribal staff, symbol of leadership and kingship. Balaam saw a great king arise in Israel. The rest of the verse shows that it was King David to whom reference was made, for it was David who subdued the Moabites, although afterwards they recovered their independence for a while. The Moabite Stone, (now in the British Museum) states that they were again subdued by Omri of Israel, (c.800 BC), oppressed forty years, and revolted successfully once more under Mesha of Moab. This is confirmed by 2 Kings 1.1 and 3.4-5. They were eventually conquered by John Hyrcanus in 129 BC and merged into the Jewish State.

Besides the Sceptre, he saw a Star come out of Jacob. This is something more than a king. Amongst the Semitic and Sumerian peoples of Balaam's native land a star was the symbol of a god and in fact in the written language the word 'god' was a representation of a star. In perhaps no better manner could the vision depict Israel's Messiah, descending from heaven to be born as man, of the line of Jacob and David, ascending again into the heavens as Lord of all. So v.19 "*out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remains of the city*" or more accurately, "the survivors of the fortress", picturing the complete dispossession of the kingdoms of this world, despite their resistance, and their supersession by the kingdom of God. As the

Psalms says in the same connection *"he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth"* (Psa. 72.3.) world-wide.

"Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly" (vs. 18). The Edomites in their Mount Seir were subdued by David, revolted under Solomon (1. Kings 11.14), again under Jehoram and made themselves a king (2 Kings 8.20), defeated Amaziah (2 Kings 14.7) and Uzziah (2. Kings 14.22). After this they remained independent until subdued by Hyrcanus in 125 B.C. and merged with the Jewish State. True to the prophecy, they were not destroyed but became a "possession". After Israel's dispersion in A.D. 73 they merged into the general Arabic peoples and their distinctive language perished. *"Amirick was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever"* (v. 20). The Amalekites occupied the "Negev", south of the Dead Sea, at the time of the Exodus. Beside the heavy losses inflicted on them at that time, Saul, five hundred years later, is said to have *"utterly destroyed"* them (1 Sam. 15.2). This was confirmed by Josephus (Ant. 6.7); but David twenty years later (1 Sam. 27) fought what was evidently a survival from that destruction, and the Simeonites in the days of Hezekiah, about 700 B.C., "smote" the remainder (1 Chron. 4.43). After this they drop out of history, thus literally "perishing for ever".

"The Kenite" (Kainite) *"shall be wasted until Asshur shall carry you away captive"* (vs.22). The Kainites occupied territory to the south of the Promised Land and into Sinai. An offshoot of the nation was headed by Jethro the father-in-law of Moses and part of his tribe, referred to in the O. T. as "Kenites". They remained with the Israelites, sharing their fortunes, until the time of the Captivities. The word translated 'wasted' (Heb. 'haar') means to dwindle or be consumed. They gradually lessened in number, living with the Israelites, until they shared the latter's fate at the fall of Samaria and were carried away captive into Assyria (Asshur being the native name, Assyria the later Greek form). Racially they were Midianites who shared Israel's fortunes from the Exodus onward, (Judges 4. 11; 1 Chron. 2.55; Jer. 35.2) and after the Captivity never reappeared as a distinct people. (The Kenites of Gen. 15.19 were an earlier and distinct tribe which had no connection.)

The Moabites descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew. Amalek and Edom both came from Esau the son of Jacob and the Kainites from Abraham by his wife Keturah, through Midian. They all therefore were of near kin to the people of Israel.

Up to this point Josephus notes the fulfilment of Balaam's words. He says (Ant. 6:5) that Balaam *"foretold what calamities would befall the several kings of the nations, and the most eminent cities, some of which were of old not so much as inhabited; which events have come to pass among the several people concerned, both in the foregoing ages, and in this till my own memory, both by sea and by land. From which completion of all these predictions that he made, one may easily guess that the rest will have their completion in time."*

Josephus' comment is fair; every item of Balaam's foreview, spoken at the time of the Exodus, fifteen hundred years before Josephus wrote his history, had come to pass, with the exception of the final prediction expressed in verse 24. The records of history confirm this fact.

Verse 23 marks a change. Again comes the formula as at the beginning in verse 15; *"he took up his parable"*, his discourse, as the RSV has it *"and said; Alas, who shall live when God does this?"*. Here is the dividing line between the events to be fulfilled during Israel's national existence from the Exodus to First Advent, and those which have their place at the end of this world and at the time of the Second Advent. These visions are so remote in time that he wonders *"who shall be living when these things happen"*. *"And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and they"* (not "he" as in A.V.) *"also shall perish for ever."* (v. 24). There is a wealth of significance in this verse. Chittim was the island of Cyprus, lying in the west in the Great Sea, the Mediterranean. The expression "ships of Chittim" meant in general ships of any remote seafaring nation. (Rotherham translates ("the coast of the isles"). Ships were to come from the far west, only dimly known beyond Cyprus at that time. "Afflict" is *amah*, to be abased or brought low and the phrase "perish for ever" means to *be lost*, or to *pass away, at the appointed time*. This brings us back to the "latter days", the expression with which Balaam prefaced his foreview, so that the "abasement" of Asshur and Eber is a factor which has its place at the end of this Age, the time of Israel's final

restoration and ultimate triumph.

Who or what, then, is meant by Asshur and Eber? Both names are identifiable in Scripture. Asshur was one son, and Eber a great-grandson through another son, of Shem, original progenitor of Israelites and Arabs (hence "Semitic" race). Their descendants formed the two principal divisions of the Semitic race. From Asshur came the Assyrians and other peoples who colonised the northern and eastern parts of the Mesopotamian plain, developing the Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian group of languages; these are known as the East Semites. From Eber came the Hebrews, Phoenicians, Syrians and the desert Arabs, colonizing the lands bordering the Mediterranean and southward into Arabia; these developed the Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic and Phoenician languages and are known as the West Semites. From Eber, according to Genesis, came Peleg and Joktan. Peleg is ancestor of Israel and those Arab peoples sprung from the families of Haran, Abraham and Nahor-Moab, Edom and Amalek among them, with the Syrians and the Arabs of northern Arabia, whilst Joktan's descendants colonized southern Arabia. In these few words, therefore, Balaam included virtually all the non-Israel Semitic peoples of this entire area; they are to experience the passing away of their power or kingships in consequence of the coming of ships from the west. The word here is *tsi*, war galleys as distinct from *oniyah*, denoting merchant vessels. The inference is that a hostile force from the western world will come to limit or nullify the power of the nations represented by Asshur and Eber at the time of the end, thus leaving Israel unscathed in the midst of her Semitic neighbours. The enmity begun by Balak, by the peoples of Moab, Midian and Edom at the time of the Exodus

and manifest from time to time in history to the present day is brought to an end by the intervention of the West. Before the coming of the final cataclysm that converts the kingdoms of this world to the kingdom of our Lord there may well be a reversal of the economic and therefore political fortunes of the modern successors of Asshur and Eber. That may tend to align them more definitely with their blood-brother Israel in the face of more serious threats from outside. That may explain why, among all the peoples depicted in Ezekiel 38/39 as joining in the final attack upon Israel that precipitates the Divine kingdom upon earth, not one Semitic nation is included.

Of this aspect of the matter and the part played by these Semitic nations, the Arabs, in the final end-of-the-age conflict, Balaam says nothing. He is concerned only with the fact of the final triumph of Israel, as an instrument in the Lord's hand for evangelizing the world during the Messianic Age. Perhaps, Israel's first converts may be from among their fellow-brethren of the sons of Shem. Of one thing, and that thing alone, he is certain, the inviolability of the promise and purpose of God that was made known to him in those early days of the Exodus. It was repeated through the lips of Isaiah nearly a thousand years later; "*I the Lord have called thee in righteousness and will hold thine hand and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prisonhouse, ... No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn, This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.*"

AOH

Earthen Vessels

"*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*" (2 Cor. 4.7). It was a common practice in ancient times to hide valuable possessions, money, jewellery, etc in earthenware jars buried in the earth. These jars are constantly being discovered by excavators or when the ground is disturbed for the erection of a building. Jeremiah, buying a piece of land in token of his faith that houses and lands would again be possessed in safety in Israel, placed the 'deeds' in an earthen vessel, "*that they may*

continue many days." The priceless documents discovered in a cave on the shores of the Dead Sea were in such vessels. So Paul declares the ministry we have had committed to us; it is in "earth vessels", our own frail imperfect human natures. From a different point of view the unfaithful servant in the Parable of the Talents went and "*digged in the ground, and hid his lord's money*" (Matt. 30.18).

PATIENTLY WAITING

Reflections on Psalm 130

The life of every human being has its lights and shadows, its seasons of joy and its depths of sorrow. These make up the 'warp' and 'woof' of experience, and the web of character that flows from the active loom of life. This will be fine and beautiful, or coarse and homely, according to the skill and carefulness with which the individual appropriates and weaves into it the thread of experience. In every life, under the present reign of sin and evil, the sombre shades predominate; and to such an extent that the Scriptures aptly describe humanity in its present condition as a "*groaning creation*". Nor is the Christian exempt from these conditions that are upon the whole world; for "*we also groan within ourselves, waiting for deliverance.*" (Rom. 8.22,23.)

But while we wait for the deliverance, the daily experiences of life have a most important mission to us, and the manner in which we receive and use them should be a matter of deepest concern to us. According to the use we make of them, each day's prosperity or adversity bears to us a blessing or a curse. Those experiences that we are accustomed to regard as prosperous often have in them subtle dangers. If wealth increases or friends multiply, how almost imperceptibly the heart finds satisfaction in earthly things. On the other hand when the keen edge of sorrow and disappointment are felt, when riches fail and friends forsake, and enemies take up a reproach against us, the natural temptation is to despondency and despair.

Just here is an important part of the great battle of the Christian's life. He must fight the natural tendencies of the old nature and confidently claim and anticipate the victory in the strength of the great Captain of his salvation. He must not succumb to the flattering and deceptive influences of prosperity, nor faint under the burden of adversity. He must not allow the trials of life to sour and harden his disposition, to make him morose, or surly or bitter, or unkind. Nor may he allow pride or ostentation or self-righteousness to grow and feed upon the temporal good things that the Lord's providence has granted him to test his faithfulness as a steward.

Sorrows indeed may, and often will, come in like a flood, but the Lord is our helper in all these things. The soul that has never known the discipline

of sorrow and trouble has never yet learned the preciousness of the Lord's love and helpfulness. It is in seasons of overwhelming sorrow, when we draw near to the Lord, that He draws specially near to us. So the Psalmist found it, when, in deep affliction He cried to the Lord saying: "*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice: let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy*" (Psa. 130.1,2). Feeling his own shortcomings and longing for full deliverance from every imperfection, and prophesying the bountiful provisions of the Divine plan of salvation through Christ, he adds: "*If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.*"

How blessed are such assurances when the soul is painfully conscious of its infirmities and of its inability to measure up to the perfect law of righteousness. When the heart is true and loyal, God does not mark our infirmities in a record against us. They are not imputed to us, but are freely forgiven through Christ in whose merit we trust and whose righteousness is our glorious dress, arrayed in which we may come with humble boldness, even into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

If God so overlooks the weakness of our old nature and receives us into His fellowship in Christ, His children should look upon one another in the same light. It is different if these natural weaknesses are cultivated, indulged and justified so that the errors continue. (1 Cor. 11.31, 32).

The Psalmist continues "*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.*" How necessary is this patient waiting for the Lord! In the midst of cares, perplexities, difficulties and infirmities we may remember that all the jarring discords of this life are working together for good to those that love the Lord, to those called according to His purpose. But for the consummation of this purpose of God towards us we must "wait", and while waiting patiently, endure hardness as good soldiers. "*Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and He will bring it to pass.*" Time is an important element in all God's plans: we are not, therefore, to be disappointed when the test of endurance is applied

while the blessings we crave tarry long. God took time to frame the world and to fit it for human habitation. He waited to give the world its necessary experience with evil and time to prepare for the advent of Christ as the world's Redeemer. He gave time for the preparation of the church to share in Christ's glorious reign and time must be allowed for the shaping and adjusting of the individual experience of all His people. God has not forgotten when the answers to our prayers seem to tarry long. He who heeds the sparrow's fall and numbers the very hairs of our heads is not indifferent to the faintest call or the smallest necessity of His humblest child.

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." Christ's brethren are not in darkness about the dawn of the morning, because they are taught by the Spirit (1 Thess. 5.4) and their eyes of faith are on the Day Star. They know that *"weeping may endure for the night but joy comes in the morning"*. Many can see signs that *"the night is far spent and the day is at hand"* and soon and in spite of terrible storms of trouble that will temporarily hide the signs of morning all the world will awake to the fact that *"the morn breaks at last"*.

Many rejoice because in this age of human equality, general education, decreased toil, and

increased privileges, comforts and luxuries but *"God is not in their thoughts"* when they look for the morning. They are not guided by God's revelation and only those guided by the Spirit know the mind of God. (1 Cor. 2.11,12). They fail to see the real object of the coming age of blessing, and are championing the interests of the masses against the advantages of the wealthy. They cannot see the greatest blessings of the new day. It will bring the great blessing of a trial for everlasting life; that it will be the world's Judgment Day, to determine who, under those favourable conditions, will come into harmony with God's character.

While God's people should appreciate the coming earthly blessings, more importantly, it is the Lord, His character and His work as the great Physician, Priest and King than earthly favours that will attend His kingdom's rule. They wait for the Lord Himself, longing to see the King in His beauty, the fairest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely. Yes, truly we *"wait for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning."*

Then let all the Israel of God hope in the Lord (verses 7, 8), for with the Lord there is mercy; mercy not only in dealing with our infirmities, but also in shielding from overwhelming trials. He gives grace to help in every time of need to those who *"abide in the Vine"* by faith and obedience.

UNITY IN EPHESIANS

There are several references to unity in the epistle to the Ephesians, about relationships to Christ, to fellow Christians, to family and to the outside world. Never is it implied that those concerned will be unified by becoming exact copies of each other. That is uniformity rather than unity. For example, in the sixth chapter, advice is given to promote unity between masters and servants, yet it is not suggested by Paul that it can be achieved by abolishing the distinctions of master and servant. Some sociologists might reason that unity could be attained by dropping all thought of these differences and all becoming fellow-workers of equal standing, but that is not in the Bible. In the heavenly realms unity prevails but stars differ in glory. We do well to remember that Paul is writing to Christians, though all may profit by his advice. Servants (v.5) are urged to do their part in securing unity by obeying their human

masters in singleness of heart as though they were serving Christ. At times this admonition will be irksome to Christians whose masters are sharp men of the world. It will not be easy for the Christian when faced with orders that border on sharp practice to decide what to do. Duty to God is, of course, the greater obligation: but he will find that as his master gets to know his principles and practice he will honour him. It is by doing these "good works" for the master (usually unknown to fellow Christians) that the reputation of the servant is enhanced. If on the other hand the Christian fails in his duty of obedience, the master will be the first to judge his religious pretensions. From Paul's words it is clear that the onus is on the servant faithfully to serve, not with a view to securing favours; but having the satisfaction of knowing that obedience to an earthly master is noted by his Master in heaven. Paul also gives advice to those

who are masters (v.9), for unity is best attained when both parties contribute to that end. Servants should give loyal service but masters must not be overbearing and remember that like the servant they have a Master in heaven who deals impartially with all. Often in this world the servant will have a master who is not in the faith and a Christian master will have unbelieving servants; yet Paul does not allow either party to act differently in such circumstances. There will be times when master and servant will need to face some problem which will test their loyalty to Christ their Master. We may hesitate to give advice from the Word when particular difficulties occur between them, having been tested ourselves but we note that these problems in life give the Christian opportunity to let his or her light shine before men. Such problems invariably are met when one is without the help of other members. Hence faithful service and faithful management receives the heavenly Master's approval and he who sees in secret will reward openly. Apart from Christian duty all know that in business, in factory and in field, unity and wellbeing increase when employers and employees act in accordance with the Apostle's advice, even though neither may know that he had so written.

Again in Ephesians 6 we find the basis of unity between parents and children. Here we find that to achieve unity both parents and children must contribute something. We have all met those parents who quote "Children obey your parents" yet do not appear to know the remainder of the sentence or they avoid quoting it. Usually these parents have not followed the advice of v.4. The first step in family unity, as v.2 says, is that children should honour their parents. Where there is little respect for parents disobedience is rife. Parents will be spared many problems if they have "*brought their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*". Difficulties increase when either or both the parents are not Christians; or the children as they grow up do not embrace the faith 'and want to live their own lives'. Again all of us will be loath to advise what to do in particular cases. One can but say that Paul's words give the basis upon which we should act and leave it at that. As we think over these words of Paul and review our own lives, we will admit that we could have done better than we have. Blessed are those parents who having brought up their children in the fear of

the Lord, receive the reward of having their children reach manhood and wholeheartedly accept the faith. That does not always follow and some of the great men of the Bible had sons who did not follow in their footsteps.

In chapter 5, Paul teaches that unity can be secured between husband and wife. This is subsidiary to his teaching of Christ and the Church. The unity of the one is used by him as a picture of the other; and this should always be in mind when we hear the modern world criticizing Paul's use of the word "submit" in v.22. It is not unusual nowadays to hear that his words on family relationships are unsuited to present conditions although the critics have not given a better basis of unity. Even if Paul were only discussing husband and wife, it would be unfair to him to forget his words in verses 25 and 33. Nor may we discuss his advice to wives without mentioning also his words to the husbands and we have to admit that the closing words of the section are most reasonable.

Let us not dismiss these practical precepts from the Bible on the grounds that our own master, or children, or wife or husband are not covered by this advice. We are all prone to think that **our** home or business life is an exception. Some of us may pass over the sundry obligations of the last three chapters of Ephesians because of our liking for the great church truths of the first three. The advice is given in the latter part, because Paul having declared such glorious things, realizes that we must in all phases of life, walk worthy of our calling. How inconsistent it would be for those who hope to be unified with their God and their Saviour for eternity, to fail in their associations with their fellow men and their families! Perhaps we prefer to meditate on the unity of Christ and the Church as revealed by His sacrifice for them in giving Himself. Maybe we would rather think about His work cleansing them by the Word, and eventually present them to himself, a glorious church free of all blemish and wrinkle. That achieved there will indeed be unity. But that will result from what He has done for the church; they contribute very little. NT teaching is that He has done all, and we accept. That truth underlies the word "submit" in Eph. 5.22. In the relationships of master and servant, parents and children, unity is formed by each doing something to that end. In the relationship of Christ and His church the work is predominantly His and

we thankfully submit. Without question we accept all that He has done and so we become united to him. Our great sense of debt always remains in our minds and our thanks though inadequate keep us united to him. In the same way, if husband and wife feel indebtedness to each other, they will be unified.

Still reviewing the Ephesian points of unity in the reverse order from what they were written, we come to the well-known seven parts of unity (making one whole) mentioned in the 4th chapter. In fact the first sixteen verses deal with the subject, concluding with that perfect figure of unity, the head and body. The first three verses show how the unity prompted by the Holy Spirit may be maintained; and the words lowliness, meekness and long suffering show just what Paul had in mind. These are the virtues which, if unity is to exist in the church, will smooth over the differences of opinion that so easily disunite any community. The opposite of these principles makes for discord in the church and in the world. Many of mankind's troubles arise from the lack of forbearance with others. No dictator would ever succeed had he lowliness of mind and meekness, and none will advance far in the world today whose hearts are thus controlled. But in the church we can all contribute and possibly because of that Paul mentioned them before the seven points of unity of verses 4-7. One of the seven links of unity is the 'one faith' and immediately we are aware that our definition of 'the faith' may not suit other members' opinions. It may be well not to single out one phase and stress it to the detriment of the other six. We should also hesitate to say that any of the seven is the most important. All are important and all are links in a chain without a weak link. If that is so we can dispense with the ancient slogan "*in essentials unity, in doubtful matters liberty and in all things charity*" as being unsuitable for Christian problems. The slogan has its good points but the Bible is a better mentor for us all.

The last one the apostle mentions. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all" provides us with a great truth towards church unity. If we can gather all that is meant in the prepositions (above, through and in) we shall see

that the other phases of unity, including the one faith, are parts of His purpose. For this God and Father is the one who has formed the one body. From Him the one Spirit emanates; from Him the one hope of our calling has reached our ears. He is the Father of the Lord who died for us; who framed the one true faith, and who has baptized us by the one Spirit into the one body. Paul must be referring to a relatively small body within the larger company of believers, a little flock owning but one Master, animated by one Spirit, and governed by one God and Father, united even in this world.

In the second chapter Paul writes of a time prior to the First Advent when the favoured people Israel had the promises and blessings of God. During that long period the outside world of Gentiles had no hope in God and were without knowledge of Him and His purposes. So dissimilar was the status of the two that he refers to the one as being 'near to God' and the other as 'far off'. This enmity has been changed to unity by the cross of Christ reconciling both to God in one body spoken of in Ephesians 4. Those in Israel who accept His atoning work will be nearer to God than ever they were under the law of Moses. The Gentiles will now be alongside them and as near to God as they are because both will be "in" Christ. Thus unity is made not only by the two parties being united to each other, but both are united to God, in one new man, so making peace. In this truth we see once more that the blessedness we now enjoy in Christ is due to what has been done for us and to which we have not contributed. But the unity thus made for us we maintain by following the instructions of the fourth chapter.

In the first chapter there is revealed that unity which is the purpose of the ages. There we see (v.10) the Divine purpose is to unite all earthly peoples and worlds beyond our ken (and it is reasonable to think, worlds yet to be inhabited) under one Head. It is difficult to imagine the glorious outcome of this pre-determined plan, but one thing will satisfy the hearts of all Christians that all things will be united under the Lord Jesus Christ, an honour most justly due, for He is before all things and by Him all things consist.

Afterwards I will return and I will restore the fallen kingdom of David. From the ruins I will rebuild it and I will restore it, so that the rest of humanity might find the Lord, including the

Gentiles – all those I have called to be mine. This is what the Lord says, he who made these things long ago.

(Acts 15.16 New Living Translation)

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

15. Intercession

It must have been with a heavy heart that Moses began his sixth ascent of the mountain. Once more he spoke to the Lord *"Oh, what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold. But now please forgive their sin, but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."* Moses was offering himself as a sacrifice in place of Israel, a propitiatory sacrifice on their behalf. He was willing to give up his rights under the Covenant. This expression *"the book you have written"* is not easy to identify, "The Book of Life" was not known till much later. What is important is that God placed on record at this early stage in Israel's history a clear definition of the Divine attitude to sin and sinner. *"Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book"* (32.33). Moses was prepared to offer himself in substitution, the innocent for the guilty but the Lord declined the offer. This is remarkable because of the Old Testament theme of the Suffering Servant, the righteous innocent one who willingly submitted to an unjust death on behalf of the guilty (Isaiah 53), fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ on behalf of all mankind. Others in Israel's history also expressed this willingness to take the place of another, particularly Paul in Romans 9.3. But here on the mountain, the Lord was stating the principle that sin brings only death just as righteousness leads to life. Later, God revealed the truth that He is actively working to draw men away from sin so that they can, if they will, enter into enduring life. Israel's conception of God's treatment of sinners centred in revenge. Today, it is hardly realized that sin is disobedience to laws by which creation must continue upon its orderly course, and righteousness is willingness to conform to those laws. Humanity have found it difficult to understand that retribution is the logical Divine law; *"What a man sows that shall he reap"*. Nor could they comprehend that when He said *"When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sins"*, but chastisement contains the seed of future restoration.

There was an element of remorse in the attitude of the people recorded in Ex. 33.4. Was it apprehension of the consequences of Divine displeasure? There was a season of national humiliation and general self-condemnation.

The fearful prospect of retribution yet to come, at an unspecified time and manner, lay heavily upon Israel. In fact it came during the forty years of wandering, with all its disasters and calamities. None of the adult population present at Sinai would enter the Promised Land. As yet they were unaware of that fact. They readily accepted the institution of a formal centre of worship, a place where God's presence might be approached, yet away from the terrors of the mountaintop. *"Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp."* has often been misunderstood to refer to the "Tabernacle in the Wilderness" the construction of which is described in Exodus 36 onwards. This became the centre of Israel's worship for five centuries or so. But this was a different tabernacle for they had been at Sinai less than three months and the Levitical priesthood was not yet organized. The word 'tabernacle' only means a tent or temporary shelter. The tent that Moses put up after the affair of the golden calf, had no priesthood and no ritual. It was a place where Moses himself could go, in the full sight of Israel to consult with the Lord and from which he could emerge with the Lord's word for Israel. When Moses was inside the tent interceding with the Lord on Israel's behalf, the pillar of cloud descended from the top of Mount Sinai and stood guard at the door. And when the people saw the cloudy pillar thus they *"rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door"* (v.10). It seems that a measure of genuine contrition for their grievous lapse pervaded Israel and that a healthier spirit now prevailed.

There was no ceremonial associated with this tabernacle, nothing of the sacrifice and symbolism characteristic of the later and greater tent to be built in the next few months. Within the tent *"the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend"* (v.11), and when Moses went back to Israel after his audience with God only his faithful lieutenant, Joshua, remained to guard the sanctity of the place.

Moses' audience with God in that desert tent is remarkable because of his insistence that he was unable to lead Israel into the Promised Land without Divine power. Unless God would go with them they must surely fail (vv.13-16). So he won a promise from God that was not only a source of

assurance and relief to Israel but has been an inspiration for all generations of believers to this day, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." So Moses was content, he had at last effected a reconciliation between God who had been so grievously outraged by the incident of the golden calf and the repentant people who now bitterly regretted their lapse. Thus was the stage set for the final scene on the mountain top, in which Moses at his seventh and last ascent of the sacred height, was to receive two new Tablets of the Law in replacement of those he had dashed to pieces.

The responsibility of retaining the detailed instructions concerning the Law and the Tabernacle, coupled with the mental strain of Israel's apostasy would have broken a lesser man. He had the Lord's assurance that He would go with Israel, yet his troubled heart yearned for some further evidence that all was well and he prayed "Now show me your glory". All those expressions of the Divine presence which they had seen in the last three months, of fire and smoke and shaking earth had greatly impressed him but somewhere hidden amongst it all, God Himself dwelt. The glory of the Almighty was so much more than all the gods of the Egyptians and Canaanites. He wanted to glimpse it but God said that was not possible. "You cannot see my face for no one can see me and live" (Ex. 33.20). In later years Solomon at the dedication of the Temple had said "But will God really dwell on earth with men? How much less this Temple that I have built." (2 Chron. 6.18). Later still Paul wrote "God the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6.15,16).

Moses must have been well content with what he was able to see. God hid him in the cleft of the rock and in some inexplicable way all His goodness passed in front of him. Then the Lord proclaimed "The Lord, the Lord; the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished, he punishes the children for the sin of the father to the third and fourth generation." This statement about God punishing children for their father's sin seems out of character and sometime provokes inquiry. Firstly, wrong doing sometimes does badly affect future generations, logically and in the nature of things. Secondly, this did affect Israel's immediate children because five or six generations together came out of Egypt. Thirdly, God has said that such a state of things will not last forever and Ezekiel 18.1-4 makes this clear when the proverb about fathers eating sour grapes and children's teeth being set on edge will no longer be appropriate. In fact this effect of sin from generation to generation largely concerns the immediate future of Israel before they settled in the land.

What was really important to Israel then, and to the Israel of God now, is the immeasurable contrast between the mighty Creator of the Universe in character, purpose and action and the gods which men create and worship in their ignorance and sin. The imagined gods represented in gold, silver, wood and stone were gods in the image of man, with all their weakness and frailty of spirit. The gods of today, representing the great financial and commercial interests of the rich nations, fortified by technology and run on the principles of greed and selfishness contrast with the great Creator of the universe who is unimaginably kind, tender, patient and gentle.

Moses descended the mountain for the last time, unaware that something of the glory of the One with whom he had enjoyed fellowship, now shone from his face. Once more, Paul was to take this story and use it in relation to a better covenant, and the changes that must be affected in those who are involved. The vital issue for us is whether we spend long enough with and at close enough proximity to God to catch some of His glory that will then be seen by the children of men. Does the glory of His faithful compassion really shine from our lives?

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join

God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

(Romans 8.18-20 New Living Translation)

THE WHIP OF SMALL CORDS

A note on John 2.15

A much misunderstood incident in our Lord's life is that recorded by John as occurring during the early stages of His ministry, the cleansing of the Temple. The other three evangelists record a similar incident that took place much later. The one now considered is spoken about in John's Gospel and mentions the whip of small cords. The generally accepted impression is that Jesus, entering the Temple and finding it given over to all manner of merchant trading connected with the ritual sacrifices made Himself a whip (more properly a flail or scourge) and drove out the traders by the use of sheer physical violence. This action so contrary to the general tenor of His conduct and teaching that it has been made the basis of argument to the effect that the Prince of Peace sanctioned the use of violence. A brief study of the passage in question reveals the false premise upon which this conclusion rests. Jesus did not in fact assault the traders with His flail at all. He drove out the beasts, the cattle and sheep, and then returned to upset the money-changers' tables and utter those burning words of denunciation which caused the guilty men before Him to slink out of the Temple precincts, quailed and cowed under the heavy fire of His indignation.

The Authorised Version is at fault in rendering the passage "*When he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and oxen*" (John 2.15) The Revised Version corrects this mistranslation "*He made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and oxen.*" This is confirmed by the following translations: "*So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple*" (GNB) "*So he drove all the sheep and bullocks*" (Weymouth) "*He drove them all, sheep and cattle together*" (Moffatt) "*So he made a whip of cord and drove all the sheep and bullocks out of the Temple Court*" (20th Century).

The sheep and cattle were driven out and their owners were left to round them up as best they could. The money changers had sat bartering pilgrims' coins of all nations, for the Jewish coin in which alone the Temple tribute could be paid. Now they grovelled on the ground seeking to recover their ill-gotten and scattered gains; while the sellers of doves for the sacrifices of the very poor quickly carried their cages away. His piercing voice rang in

their hearts, "*Take these things hence: make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.*" The time was the Passover. Every orthodox Jew had within the past few days scrupulously searched his house for hidden leaven and anything else that might defile, and attended to his own ceremonial cleanliness that he might keep the Passover according to ritual. Now there appeared one who took to Himself the role of a prophet in Israel and commanded men to cease from desecrating the Temple of their God. With that inborn awe of a man who spoke to them in the name of God, they hastened to remove themselves from the Court that they knew was defiled by their presence. The fact of Christ's indignation joined to their own knowledge that their conduct was indefensible, was sufficient to empty the Court of the Gentiles of its trafficking crowd. It was not until after the occasion had passed and the cupidity of these men once again overcame their temporary confusion that they began to ask of Him a sign. They wanted a miracle to establish His right to act as He had done in claiming the authority of a prophet of Israel.

Editor's note:

Professor William Barclay commenting on this passage says that the temple tax was half a shekel valued at 6p. A labourer's wages for a day was 4p. Pilgrims came from all over the Roman world with silver coins from Rome, Greece, Egypt and Tyre. Every time a Jew from another part of the empire exchanged money for the half shekel the money changers made 4p out of him – value of a day's wage on top of the tax. They made a fantastic profit running into millions of pounds in today's currency which the Roman general discovered.

Professor Blaiklock draws attention to the records in the Gospels of a similar incident just before the crucifixion when Jesus quoted Jeremiah that God's house was a place of prayer for all nations but these Jerusalem Jews had made it a den of thieves. He goes on to say that the implication for us lies in Paul's words concerning the keeping of the Temple of God clean and offering "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

It is further interesting to note Jesus' attitude to this Temple, which in boyhood He called His Father's house; he was now showing true righteous indignation that trading was going on in that Temple courtyard. Herod the Great had built this Temple.

BELSHAZZAR

The story of the writing on the wall that heralded the fall of Babylon is well known to most readers of the Bible and has passed into current language in the proverb "the writing on the wall". The man who occupies the centre of the stage in the story was the last to exercise royal power in the history of the Babylonian empire, Belshazzar the king. This ruler takes his place with Sennacherib the Assyrian as one of the two who publicly defied God and met retribution.

Until a little over a century ago, the name of Belshazzar was unknown outside Bible history. None of the old classical historians mention him; the only ancient writers who do are Josephus and Jerome, both using the Greek form of his name, Baithasar, clearly taking their information from the Bible. On this account 19th century critics of the Book of Daniel dismissed the account in Dan. 5 as fiction. "Belshazzar, history knows no such king!" wrote one scholar of the early 19th century. Then in 1854 the Assyriologist, Sir Henry Rawlinson, set out to decipher some tablets discovered in the ruins of Ur of the Chaldees and found they were authentic records of the fall of Babylon, made at the time by order of Cyrus the Persian, who captured the city. These records contained the name of Belshazzar and made it clear that at the time of the fall of the city he was ruling as regent in the place of his father, who was absent in distant parts. So the Book of Daniel was proved to be correct in this respect and the critics' opinions unjustified.

The Bible account in Dan. 5 and the tablets confirm each other and the latter explain several allusions in the former. Published and made available to scholars and students over the period 1882-1929, some five hundred different tablets afford a very clear picture of the last days of Babylon.

Belshazzar was the eldest son of Nabonidus the last true king of Babylon. Nabonidus reigned for seventeen years but during the final ten years was mainly absent from Babylon with his army, building a new city and fortress at Tema, four hundred miles away in the heart of Arabia. He appointed his son, the Crown Prince, to reign as regent; this is why Daniel refers to Belshazzar as king. Daniel never mentions Nabonidus and there

is probably a reason for this. Nabonidus was not of the blood royal. He was the son of a Babylonian nobleman and had married Nitocris the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. By devious means he had eliminated other contenders for the throne and some seven years after the great king's death had secured it for himself. Daniel, loyal to his old master and friend Nebuchadnezzar, probably refused to recognise this upstart's right to the throne, but did recognise that of Belshazzar through his mother Nitocris.

Two allusions in Dan. 5 are illuminated by this fact. Belshazzar promised Daniel that if he could interpret the meaning of the mystic writing he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. His father the king was first, he himself second, and so Daniel could only be third. The other is that the queen of v.10, who came in to advise Belshazzar and was able to tell him about Daniel and his services in the days of Nebuchadnezzar was obviously his mother, Nitocris the queen-mother. Some forty years earlier she would have known Daniel well when he was her father's Chief Minister. (The allusions in this narrative to Belshazzar being the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar should be read "grandson". The Bible makes no distinction between sons and grandsons, the same word serving for both; see Gen. 29.5 and 1 Kings 19.16 for similar examples, Laban said to be son of Nahor and Jehu son of Nimshi whereas both were in reality grandsons.)

Many tablets have been found to be commercial documents signed by Belshazzar himself. He would appear to have been a shrewd business man, a good administrator of government, a capable military leader and a great devotee of the Babylonian gods. He is also indicated as being very much a "man about town" and given to high living. As this latter he is presented in the 5th chapter of Daniel.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand." This was hardly the time for a feast. Cyrus the Persian had been ravaging the adjacent lands for about six or seven years, adding to his territories, and was at this moment at Opis, only some sixty miles from Babylon, advancing swiftly. The troops of Gubaru, the Persian General, were even now encircling the city while the feast

proceeded. Nabonidus was out in the field somewhere with his army, leaving Belshazzar to defend the city. Heedless of the threat and oblivious to the danger of his position, the young prince caroused with his companions and his womenfolk. Growing more reckless as the wine flowed, he gave orders that the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Solomon's Temple half a century previously and placed in the idol Temple of Marduk in Babylon should be brought to the palace and used by the guests. This, even for Babylonians, was sacrilege and in his right mind even Belshazzar would have hesitated to do such a thing. The cups and goblets brought, they were filled and used to do honour to the gods of Babylon. In that moment there appeared the form of a man's hand writing on the wall and the revelry abruptly ceased. "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*" "Numbered, numbered, weighed and divided"! To the assembled company the words conveyed no meaning, but the mystery of the occurrence filled them with foreboding and terror. Daniel was called to the scene at the instigation of Queen Nitocris. His knowledge of the Divine programme enabled him to interpret the mystery, and He told those assembled that the political power of Babylon would pass to Persia. "*God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it. You are weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*"

The Persians were already within the gates.

According to some of the classical historians they found the entire city given over to revelry and the gates unguarded. Xenophon, who is not a very reliable historian, says that Gubaru made his way to the palace and "*slew the impious king*", without mentioning names. This is confirmation of the Bible account so far as it goes, for Nabonidus is known to have survived and been appointed governor of the Persian province of Carmania by Cyrus after the fall of Babylon. None of the tablets so far discovered say how or when Belshazzar met his death but none of them mention his name after the fall of the city. Nothing therefore impugns the accuracy of the Scripture account. The picture in Daniel 5 is that of a capable and active man who because of a fatal weakness for dissolute living failed his country at a crucial moment and lost the empire his forebears had built up. Unwittingly he became an instrument in the hands of God. It was decreed that Babylon should fall, and Isaiah nearly two centuries earlier had foretold the name of the man, Cyrus, who would overthrow it. Now that the time had come, by the providence of the Most High the destiny of the doomed empire was in the hands of a man of straw, too weak to withstand the resolute conqueror who came against him. And the very name of the instrument dropped out of history, preserved only in the writings of one who, in that festal hall, had pronounced God's judgment upon him.

AOH

RECOGNITION

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13.35).

The people of God of the Old Testament should have had no difficulty in recognising fellow Israelites. Unless Israelites did something that cut them off from the nation they were part of the people of God by right of birth. So long as the compulsory ritual was performed and they obeyed the Law throughout their lives, men and women of Israel, were under the covenant which assured their relationship to God and each other. How this all worked out in practice is hard to fully appreciate but by New Testament times there was a tendency for religious people of Jerusalem to regard Galileans as second rate citizens. Pharisees would not recognise those who they said did not keep the full traditions of the Law as true children of

*How do we identify
brethren in Christ?*

Abraham. Jesus did not approve of their attitude.

In spiritual Israel it is somewhat different. There is no outward ritual, no physical ancestry (they cannot depend on the genes) and brothers and sisters in Christ are called from all nations. Jesus made it clear that the identifying characteristic of those who belong to Him is their love for one another. At another time, speaking of those who would be part of the Kingdom of heaven, He said "*By their fruit you will know them*". So we have to learn to identify fruit. Paul in the later part of his letter to the Galatians gives clear details of what the fruit of the Spirit is (Gal. 5.22, 23). Wherever fruit is mentioned in the New Testament the emphasis is upon spiritual morality. Through the period of Church history, during the Gospel era, to this present day, groups, sects and denominations have

defined their own standards. These have been based on private interpretation and personal opinions about 'doctrine' with the result that intellectual knowledge has become the key that opens the door to their fellowship and not the characteristics of the New Testament.

The heart of this subject lies in the relationship between God and His people. In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth where there had been such serious problems of division, Paul strongly chastised this Gentile community because of the attitude they had towards each other. Their problems were rooted in a belief that they had special knowledge that made them superior to their rivals. In 1 Cor. 1.31 Paul makes a reference to Jer. 9.24 where the wise, strong and rich are told to boast only in knowing God and growth in character likeness of kindness and justice. In chapter 8.1 Paul writes of the danger of making too much of knowledge. In modern terms he says if your head is too big you will have a shrunken heart. Too much emphasis on intellectual knowledge will leave the character likeness to Christ underdeveloped and unready for His work in the Kingdom. Then come those telling words "*The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.*" So writes the greatest thinker and exponent of New Testament doctrine. In chapter 12 Paul gives the other vital element in this process of recognition. It is the fact that we are part of the 'body of Christ' and therefore must know those with whom we are an organic part. Verses 14-20 of that chapter discuss the situation of a part of the body Christ having no use for other parts of the same body. His argument demonstrates the absurdity of one Christian not willing to accept another. They are like eyes that want nothing to do with hearing, and ears that want nothing to do with smelling.

So we are faced again with the question that we started with: how do we recognise our brothers and sisters in Christ. It might be quickly answered by the suggestion that if we are truly 'in Christ' then we will have no difficulty in discovering those of

'like mind' for like Paul we shall have the 'mind of Christ'. Or again, the question might be posed, will not those who are in God's family recognise the 'family likeness'? The feeling of 'being lost' and of parents and siblings not recognising us is quite terrifying to a small child. Those who are 'growing old' in the Lord need to be patient with those who find recognition difficult. Some things are hard to understand. But it is a vital part of our growth in Christ that we recognise other sheep in the fold; other branches in the vine; other members in the body. How else can we express that special love that we should express towards our brethren and so show that we really love God. In John's first letter he had some very sound advice about love. Perhaps this section is summed up in ch. 3.18 where he writes "*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with action and truth.*" Does not the word 'truth' here, as in John 4.24 mean 'reality'. Our love has got to be real.

When we are tempted to stick a label on someone else, let us question our motives by asking whether Jesus would have done such a thing. His life displayed in the Gospels shows that He spent His time with those labelled 'outcast' and 'sinner'. Barriers between people are of human construction and Jesus spent His time here breaking those barriers down.

The following quotation is from a youth magazine of 55 years ago. "If we remember the love and care of our Heavenly Father for us and realise that to retain that affection we must show it to our brethren, our lips will never utter Cain's question, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' It is our privilege to acknowledge all our Christian brethren by laying down our lives for them. We must be kind and affectionate one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12.10). Thus, becoming mature in this godly attribute, we shall be fitted to glorify our Creator by bringing earth's millions back into harmony with Him and with each other. 'Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, Our comforts and our cares'".

DN

The simplicity of the Gospel message is mirrored by the simplicity of the words in which it is conveyed to us. That is why the Bible has a message for all, learned and unlearned alike. Books written to explain the Bible are often far more difficult to understand than the Book they

profess to explain. And that is true of many sermons and addresses and expositions given from the pulpit and platform. In all our service and ministry let us seek for simplicity of expression, for that will appeal to the greatest number and effect the greatest good.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

2. Encounter with Goliath

Several years had probably elapsed since the prophet Samuel had anointed David prospective king of Israel. David had gone back to his sheep, perhaps pondering what the strange interlude in his life could mean. He probably did not seriously think at this stage in his life, that he really would be king one day. He went back to his pipes and his harp. As the sheep wandered over the grazing land he kept an observant eye upon them while giving vent to his reverential feelings in the words of those pastoral psalms which were probably composed at this time. A few years later, when he was either fighting the Philistines for Saul or else on the run from Saul, he would have had little time for such poetic excursions; still less when he had all the cares of kingship upon his shoulders. So it might well have been in this period that he composed such gems as Psalm 23, "*the Lord is my shepherd*" and Psalm 8 "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" and Psalm 24 "*the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*" and others like them. These are the psalms of Nature where the world of men and the deeds of men have no place. These were his reflections as he reclined on some grassy bank in the brightness of day, or watched his sleeping flock sitting beside his camp fire in the darkness of the night. This was the time when he learned from Nature herself of the greatness and the power of God, to such good effect that, despite his many failures and transgressions of Divine law, he never lost faith.

These were peaceful days that came to an end all too soon. They never came back. He was shortly to find himself a member of the royal court and implicated in all the intrigues and jealousies which that involved. One more short interval as a shepherd was to be his lot and after that he left his pastoral life and his family for ever. It was his very skill with, and his love for, harp and song that became the occasion for that change and the means by which he embraced the life that eventually led him to the throne of Israel.

King Saul began to develop fits of intense melancholy. He had been king now for perhaps ten to twenty years, it is impossible to say definitely, and the appearances are that the appealing and upstanding youth who Israel so enthusiastically

adopted as their first king had become a hasty-tempered and embittered man, increasingly irresolute and uncertain of himself. The reason is not far to seek. At the beginning Saul had followed the Lord's instructions through his mentor Samuel implicitly and faithfully, and had prospered in consequence. His military prowess and leadership had enabled the Israelites to keep their old enemies, the Philistines, at bay. But for some time now he had been increasingly impatient of Samuel's guidance and more and more disposed to order things in his own fashion and without heed to the word of the Lord. In consequence he began to suffer defeat at the hands of the enemy, and when at last Samuel told him that because of his rebellious attitude the Lord had deposed him from being king and would shortly appoint another "after his own heart", Saul became morose and resentful. The account in 1 Samuel 16 says that "*the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him*". Saul's servants took his fits of melancholy as Divine retribution for his divergence from God's ways. That they knew the seat of the trouble was in Saul's own mind is evidenced by the remedy they proposed; the acquirement of a skilful musician to soothe and cheer the despondent monarch in his bad moments.

Saul agreed to their proposal that they should "*look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it and you will feel better*." One of them was immediately ready with a suggestion. He knew one such, a son of Jesse of Bethlehem, who was not only "skillful in playing", but "*a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him*". It would seem that Saul rather liked the idea of this paragon of virtue and straightway sent a request to Jesse that his son should attend court. This remark, that David was "*a mighty valiant man, and a man of war*" implies that he was quite a bit removed from the sixteen-year-old whom Samuel had anointed. He could hardly merit this description, or have earned this reputation, at less than nineteen. He must have waited some three years at least for the call, long enough to test his faith and his assurance that the anointing had not been in vain.

Now he came to Saul, knowing not to what kind of life he was being introduced nor to what destiny the Lord was leading him, but like Isaiah in much later days with the ready response in his heart "Here am I; send me".

The experiment succeeded. Saul instantly took to this fresh and vigorous young man – perhaps seeing in him an image of himself as he had been twenty years earlier, full of enthusiasm to fight the Lord's battles. He himself had come from a farming family and perhaps the pastoral songs which David sang and played before him, were reminiscent, not of royal courts and marching armies, but of fields and streams and serene skies. He was reminded of long past days when he had led a very similar life. At any rate, the consequence was that when the evil spirit came upon Saul, David played, and "*Saul was refreshed, and the evil spirit departed from him*".

This state of affairs could not have lasted very long. To fit all that is recorded of David's activities in the next ten years of his life it is necessary that each incident follow its predecessor quite closely. It might have been that David was less than six months in the royal court before there came a call to arms. The Philistines were invading Israel again.

The Philistines had always been a thorn in the side of Israel. From the days of the entry into the land, they had been there, occupying the strip of land along the sea coast more or less in the area that is now known as the Gaza strip. They were an alien race, hailing from the island of Crete, tall, muscular men arrayed in armour and equipped with weapons that the Hebrews could not equal. Saul had already had one encounter with them, in the early part of his reign, in which he gained the victory so that there was a period of peace from their attacks. Unfortunately on that occasion he had exceeded his authority in the matter of offering sacrifice to the Lord and Samuel had strongly reproved him. Then he had what appears to be a second chance when he went out to do battle with the Amalekites from the southern desert. Again he was guilty of flagrant disobedience and it was on this occasion that it is said the Lord formally disowned him. Now he was faced with the Philistine menace again but this time the Lord was not with him and he knew it. The victory this time, if victory there was to be, must be gained by his own might and that of his army. It must have been with a heavy heart that Saul

prepared for the conflict.

The king and his sons took the field. 1 Samuel 17 tells the whole story. David was sent home for the time being; there was no time for music at court (1. Sam. 17.15). In any case he was needed to look after his father's affairs, for the three oldest of Jesse's sons had been drafted into the army and were fighting with Saul's men. Upon their arrival at the scene of operations, however, they found that the Hebrew forces had a problem. The Philistines had a champion warrior, a giant of a man, by name Goliath. He was of unusual height, broad and powerful, for his armour weighed five thousand shekels which is equal to 92 lb. or 42 kg. This would be quite enough for even a giant to carry into battle. The early Hebrew cubit like the Sumerian/ Assyrian cubit was shorter than the Egyptian/ Jewish cubit which exaggerates Goliath's height to over 9 feet. There is evidence in the records of Josephus and the Septuagint that gives his height as four cubits and a span, whereas the A. V. has six. Goliath was about seven and a half feet tall, an awe-inspiring proposition. He challenged Saul's army to produce a man to meet him in single combat, the side thus losing the contest to submit to the other, without further fighting. The more the Israelites looked at the Philistine champion the less they liked the idea. Ch.17 shows that they were in a state of complete panic over the issue.

This was the army that, only a few years previously, under the leadership of Saul and in the conviction that the Lord was with them, had decimated the Philistine forces and quelled them into submission. Now they had lost that inspiration, their king was apprehensive and undecided, and they were just about ready to give up. Their old national leader Samuel had retired from public life and was living in obscurity. The king they had chosen to lead them to victory in a battle had failed them and all the high hopes of Israel were laid low. This is the point at which David comes back into the story.

According to ch.17, Jesse had instructed David to take some provisions to his three sons fighting at the battle front, with a little gift for their company commander. He was then to bring their father word again as to their welfare. It would seem that army discipline was a little less formal in those days. He arrived at the scene and talking with his brothers, David saw for himself the Philistine giant

advancing towards the Israelites with his repeated challenge to come out and fight. He saw the Israelites scattering and running away from their enemy and his indignation mounted. "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine*" he demanded of those around him "*that he should defy the armies of the living God?*" That must have brought some of them up with a jerk; it was a long time since they had gone into battle with the high praises of God on their lips and faith in their hearts that He would give the victory. But somehow or other news of this youngster and his words of defiance were taken to Saul, and he, curious perhaps but probably no more, gave orders that David should be brought before him.

It would seem from the closing verses of ch.17 that Saul did not recognize David as his erstwhile musician. That is not surprising. There must have been many coming and going in Saul's court and David had not been there very long. The king now faced a sturdy and resolute young man who told him quite plainly that the army need fear no longer: he would go out and fight this Philistine. Saul probably leaned back and laughed scornfully. "*You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him for you are just a boy and he has been a warrior from his youth.*" Modestly but resolutely David responded "*Your servant used to keep sheep for his father, and whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them since he has defied the armies of the living God*". Saul was suddenly serious. He looked again at the fresh-faced youngster before him, and he listened to his frank avowal of faith that the Lord would go with him and protect him and give him the victory, and a thought flashed into his mind. He was painfully conscious that he was the one who ought long since to have armed himself and gone out to meet Goliath in single combat on behalf of all Israel. But the Lord had departed from him and he no longer had faith in himself. He, Saul, king of Israel, was afraid. But might it be that the Lord would indeed honour the faith of this lad who so openly and avowedly relied upon Him? Was there a chance, after all, that the Lord could be brought back into the picture and

induced to give Israel the victory through the instrumentality of this lad who seemed so sure of his standing with God? It was, at least, worth a try. Saul took a sudden decision. He leaned forward and said to David, "*Go, and may the Lord go with you*".

With the impetuosity of youth, David turned to go. He was stopped by an imperative gesture from the king. Taking off his own armour, a replica of that used by the Philistines, he fitted it on David, followed by placing the heavy bronze helmet on his head. Stepping back to judge the effect, he picked up his great sword, and put it in David's hand. "If you are going to fight the Philistine, you must do it on equal terms" he said.

David made as if to walk away, and found his movements impeded by the unfamiliar garb. He looked at the sword in his hand, and with a gesture of contempt threw it on the ground. He took off the armour, piece by piece, and threw them down also. "I cannot go with these" he said "for I have not tried them. The Lord has no need of such weapons". Even as the king opened his mouth to expostulate, David turned his back on him and was walking briskly through the camp in the direction of the Philistine host gathered on the opposite hill half-a-mile away, Saul and his attendants watched him go. The Israelite soldiers, sitting and standing about, wearied at the inaction and lack of leadership from their king, looked at this shepherd lad with increasing interest as he made his way down the hillside, an interest which speedily changed to excitement as they began to perceive his intention. They saw him pause and stoop as he crossed the brook at the bottom of the hill and pick up several pebbles from the bed of the stream, and then he was climbing the opposite slope, taking his sling out of his scrip as he did so.

The Philistine warriors looked on attentively as David crossed the intervening space, uncertain what this shepherd lad was doing between the armies. It was a little while before they realized that he was there to challenge their champion, and as he took his stance there were shouts for Goliath. Soon, the giant appeared, fully dressed in his bronze armour and helmet, carrying sword and spear, looking for his opponent. Discovering that this lad was the challenger, he at first looked incredulous then threw back his head in a gust of coarse laughter. "*Am I a dog*" he demanded, "*that you come to beat me with a stick?*" He stood and

regarded David, *"Come you to me, and by all the gods of the Philistines, I swear that I will feed your body to the birds and beasts"*. He moved forward menacingly, David's clear voice sounded on the air. His own people, venturing now to approach within earshot, could hear him as plainly as did the watching Philistines. *"You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down ... so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel"*.

The giant's expression changed to one of deep anger and he strode forward with long, quick paces, raising his spear threateningly. David also was advancing, running with lithe, quick steps, to meet his adversary. As he did so he was putting his hand into the scrip hanging from his shoulder.

No one saw quite clearly what happened; David's action was almost too quick for the eyes of the watchers. He had extracted a pebble from his scrip, fitted it into his sling – a sudden circular movement of his arm; and the Philistine giant reeled back and slowly collapsed in a crumpled heap. David's sling stone had struck him squarely above the eyes on the only unprotected part of his body. There was a moment's stunned silence on the part of the observers. Like lightning David had leaped upon the body of his fallen foe, and taken the great sword out of his nerveless hand. A swift flash in the sunlight, first up, then down – and David was holding aloft the severed head of the Philistine champion for all to see.

There came a great shout from the watching Israelites. In another moment the entire host was advancing across the valley, the noise of the clashing of weapons mingling with cries of exultation. The Philistines, aghast at the sudden and unexpected fate of their champion, took one look and ran in panic. Within a few more minutes the Israelites had passed David in hot pursuit of the fleeing enemy, a pursuit that did not stop until they had reached the gates of their cities Ekron and Gath

some twenty miles away. Then the Israelites returned more leisurely and looted the abandoned camp.

Saul with his attendants stood outside his tent, watching this unknown shepherd lad making his way back to the Israelite lines, deep in thought, carrying the sword of Goliath in one hand and his head in the other.

1 Sam. 17.54 says that he took the head to Jerusalem but that was much later. Another sixteen years or so were to elapse before Israel gained possession of Jerusalem. It was evident that the head of the Philistine was preserved in some way so that it could be permanently exhibited as a trophy when eventually David ruled in Jerusalem. In the meantime it must have followed David in all the vicissitudes of his adventurous life before becoming king. It was a barbaric act, but he lived in a barbaric age.

There is no evidence that Saul honoured God as a result of this deliverance. This was his third chance to reform and return but he ignored it. He honoured David, but not David's Lord. Nowhere is his unbelief more plainly shown than in this incident. The Lord had sent him the instrument whereby He had delivered Israel with a mighty deliverance, but he heeded it not. He was doubtless greatly relieved that the Philistine menace was lifted, at least for a time, but that was all.

He did not let David go again. This time he was attached to Saul's court and given high rank in his army. Saul attached much greater importance to David's physical valour, which he could see, than to his reliance upon God by which victory could be gained, which he could not see. That was his undoing. To the end of his life he relied upon the power of the sword, and at the end he died by the sword. David, despite his mistakes and misdeeds, did rely upon the power of God, and endeavoured to conform his life and his works to what he believed was the will and guidance of God. This was his first great test, and he came through it with flying colours.

To be continued

AOH

From the Ministry of the Word – 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 enters as an anchor, within the veil. BSM 61

THE TRUE CHURCH

J. C. Ryle, (1816-1900), Bishop of Liverpool 1880, was leader of Evangelicals in the Church of England in his day. A man of deep spiritual insight and a prolific writer, this article from his pen on an important subject appears worthy of reproduction and preservation.

Where is this one true Church? What is this one Church like? What are the marks by which this one true Church is known? You may well ask such questions. The one true Church is composed of all believers in the Lord Jesus. It is made up of all God's elect – of all converted men and women – of all true Christians.

They are born again of the Spirit. They all possess "repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ", and holiness of life and conversation. They all hate sin, and they all love Christ. They worship differently and after various fashions; some worship with a form of prayer and some with none; some worship kneeling and some standing but they all worship with one heart.

They are allied by one Spirit; they all build upon one foundation; they all draw their religion from one single book – that is the Bible. They are all joined to one great centre, that is Jesus Christ. They all, even now, can say with one heart "Hallelujah", and they can all respond with one heart and voice, Amen and Amen.

It is a Church which is dependent upon no ministers upon earth, however much it values those who preach the Gospel to its members. The life of its members does not hang upon Church membership and baptism, and the Lord's Supper – although they highly value these things, when they are to be had. But it has only one Great Head – one Shepherd, one chief Bishop – and that is Jesus Christ. He alone, by his Spirit, admits the members of this Church, though ministers may show the door.

Till He opens the door no man on earth can open it, neither bishops, nor presbyters, nor convocations, nor synods. Once let a man repent and believe the Gospel, and that moment he becomes a member of this Church.

Like the penitent thief, he may have no opportunity of being baptised; but he has that which is far better than any water-baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. He may not be able to receive the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper; but he eats Christ's body

and drinks Christ's blood by faith, every day he lives, and no minister on earth can prevent him. He may be excommunicated by ordained men, and cut off from the outward ordinances of the professing Church; but all the ordained men in the world cannot shut him out of the true Church.

It is a Church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates, or any act of favour whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it; it has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and his Spirit; and they being ever with it, the Church cannot die.

This is the Church to which the Scriptural titles of present honour and privilege, and the promises of future glory, especially belong: this is the body of Christ; this is the Bride; this is the Lamb's wife; this is the flock of Christ; this is the household of faith and the family of God, this is God's building, God's foundation and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This is the church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven. This is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, the peculiar people, the purchased possession, the habitation of God, the light of the world, the salt and the wheat of the earth. This is that Church to which the Lord Jesus promises "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" and to which He says, "*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matt. 16.18; 28.20).

This is the only Church which possesses true unity. Its members are entirely agreed on all the weightier matters of religion for they are all taught by one Spirit. About God, and Christ, and the Spirit, and sin, and their own hearts, and faith and repentance, and necessity of holiness, and the value of the Bible, and the importance of prayer and the resurrection, and judgment to come – about all these points they are of one mind.

Take three or four of them, strangers to one another, from the remotest corners of the earth, examine them separately on these points; you will find them all of one judgment.

This is the only Church which possesses true

sanctity. Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name, and holy in judgment of charity; they are all holy in act, and deed, and reality, and life, and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. No unholy man belongs to this Church.

This is the only Church which is truly catholic! It is not the Church of any one nation or people; its members are to be found in every part of the world where the Gospel is received and believed. It is not confined within the limits of anyone country, or pent up within the pale of any particular form of outward government. In it there is no difference between Jew and Greek, black man or white, Episcopalian and Presbyterian, but faith in Christ is all. Its members will be gathered from north and south, and east and west, in the last day and will be the Church which is truly apostolic. It is built on the foundation laid by the Apostles, and holds the doctrines which they preached. The grand objects at which its members aim are apostolic faith and apostolic practice; and they consider the man who talks of following the Apostles without possessing these two things to be no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

This is the only Church which is certain to endure unto the end. Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, burned; but the true Church is never altogether extinguished; it rises again from its afflictions; it lives on through fire and water. When crushed in one land, it springs up in another.

The Herods, the Neros, have laboured in vain to

put down this Church; they slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church outlives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. It is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still, it is a bush which is often burning and yet is not consumed.

This is the Church which does the work of Christ upon earth. Its members are a little flock and few in number compared with the children of the world, one or two here, and two or three there; a few in this parish and a few in that. But these are they who shake the universe; these are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled; these are the life-blood of a country, the shield, the defence, the stay and the support of any nation.

This is the Church which shall be truly glorious at the end. When all earthly glory is passed away, then shall this Church be presented without spot before the Father's throne. Thrones and principalities and powers upon earth shall come to nothing, dignitaries and offices and endowments shall all pass away; but the Church of the Firstborn shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father's throne in the day of Christ's appearing. When the Lord's jewels are made up, and the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, episcopacy and presbyterianism, and congregationalism will not be mentioned; one Church only will be named and that is the Church of the elect.

(Reprinted from BSM 1982)

MARK'S GOSPEL

The Gospel of Mark was the first of four Gospels to be committed to writing. Recent scholarship points to a date about the year AD65 for its composition – or about 35 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. If, as is generally thought, John Mark was a lad of about 14 at the time of Jesus' ministry he must have been nearly fifty years of age when he wrote his Gospel and Peter, who is thought to have inspired much of Mark's writings, an old man, perhaps seventy years old. The structure of the language used in this Gospel shows it was written by one who thought and wrote in Aramaic, the common language of the peasantry of

Palestine, and this fact accords with what we know of Mark. It is evident too that Matthew and Luke, who both wrote later, had Mark's gospel before them when they prepared their own. There is something appealing in the thought of this fourteen year old boy, probably always on the outskirts of the band of disciples surrounding our Lord, listening to all that went on and in his boyish fashion endeavouring to take it all in, becoming the one who in after years should first give to the Church of Christ a written record of the earthly life of One Who "spake as never man spake."

BSM, 1961

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

7. Chapter 5.1-26

Luke 5.1-11 A fishing miracle. Lake Galilee is harp shaped, 13 by 8 miles. High hills give a beautiful setting; wind funnelling through them causes sudden violent storms. It is in a dip in the Earth's surface c700 feet below sea level with a tropical climate. The Lake had several names, Chinnereth (OT), Tiberias and Gennesarat in NT times when there were 9 towns around it, each having 15,000+ population. Each Gospel has a similar story but different in time and detail; see Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Jn. 21. Jesus sat to teach in a boat away from the shore so that there was maximum visual and acoustic advantage. Only Luke (v.5) uses Gr. *epistata* – master to be obeyed; denoting authority but not rabbi. Peter reluctantly threw out the net. What did a carpenter know about fishing? He had been cleaning nets and was tired. He fished at night, not in sunlight except in the shallows. It was a lake full of fish. Peter probably knew every inch of the lake. There was overwhelming surprise at the huge catch. Simon addressed Jesus as 'Lord' expressing holiness of which he was afraid – it created moral agony. His reaction was an echo of the O.T. (Gen. 18.24; Job 42.6; Ex. 20.19; Isaiah 6.5) should we react as Isaiah and Peter did? Can we share their feelings? Are we aware of the awful holiness of God and His Son? Now Peter is to catch men, alive (Gr. *zogreo*), his first great commission as an evangelist. Here, later, he would receive his second great commission (Jn. 21)

Vv 12-16 This incident is differently placed in Matt. Leprosy covers several diseases and they are different from the one now known by that name. It is dealt with in Lev.13-14. It always carried a stigma, produced isolation, shame, disfigurement; is regarded as a picture of sin; a death sentence. It was illegal for this man to enter towns. Luke used 'full' as a medical term (Gr. *pleres*) advanced – no one had touched the man for years and Jesus touched the untouchable which is the 'essence of Christianity' (1). Where the law of love and pity conflict with ceremonial law, 'love has precedence' (2) but Jesus told the man to keep the Law by going to the priest as a kind of health inspector thus testifying to all that he was 'clean'. He failed to obey Jesus about telling others. Why was he forbidden to spread the good news? Amid all His pressing duties Jesus needed time out to

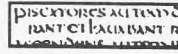
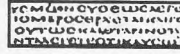
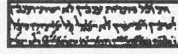
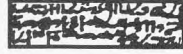
pray (3). Do we take adequate time for this vital activity?

Vv 17-26 Controversy with the Pharisees. Returning from the Exile, Jews thought deeply about their past failure as a nation and about what was important in the future. Greatness as a political nation was past; so they concentrated on a spiritual kingdom by 'keeping the Law'. It started with Nehemiah but they became paranoid about it – it became an obsession. It was important that Jesus was watched; Pharisees from Jerusalem had come. Houses had flat roofs; some had tiles and gave easy access via outside staircase; through twigs and marl (wattle & daub). Four men set an example in taking a friend to Jesus. Is illness caused by sin? Jesus implies so and forgave him. Did He do so at any other time? Why did He do so now?

Jesus showed God's authority (Gr. *exousia*) power and authority from His Father, which the disciples would also have (John 20.23). Contrast the approach by the four friends with the leprous man. Jesus alone uses 'Son of Man' (80 times) except Stephen (Acts 7.56). People watching the healing were very surprised; Moffatt uses 'incredible'. Religious Jews stumbled because Jesus did the unexpected; he broke down 'hedg'es' that they had put round the Law. They stumbled because He worked contrary to their interpretation of the Law. May we not stumble? Do we prefer a nicely structured set of beliefs? When God does things differently, packaged religion and secure tradition are upset. Luke's is the only Gospel that tells us that the man went away praising and glorifying God. What authenticates our witness?

(1) Barclay (2) Geldenhuys (3) Morris

It is a great moral truth, attested on all hands alike by experience and observation, that any covert alliance with sin makes a man not more, but less lenient to his fellow-sinners, and that if we desire to have a keener sensibility and a stronger sympathy for the sorrows which men by sin have brought upon themselves, the only way to approximate to this end is by separating ourselves more completely from the sin that is in and around us, and cultivating (under God's hand) a higher standard of moral purity.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

huph hinc: middan cap
Tôhip agnû be corn

• B'fets me ye when men cruise
pericome ye, and shall fells for
art of yeel sapaga agnû? nu

"All holies that be exalts
mountains and hills laye
to is robes that be made of

ye seed of Abraham his servan
Jacob his chosen
in the L o R s our God: his ji

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

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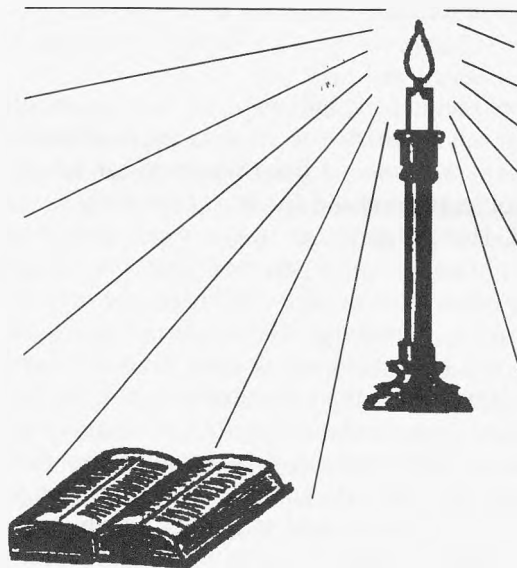
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH – Great is Thy Faithfulness

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
(Lamentations 3.22, 23 NRSV)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions,
they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou for ever wilt be.

Thomas O Chisholm

One of the greatest human needs is someone on whom to rely, someone to trust in times of stress and weakness, someone from whom to ask advice when problems press and anxieties take away peace of mind. Human nature is fickle, weak and often unwise. Friends betray friends and are found wanting when most needed. Promises are broken, trust turns to treachery, the sheltering arms are missing, the heart cold where once love was used to lean. How lonely then the situation, how dismal the aspect, how hard the conflict if there is no sympathetic affection, no wise counsel, no firm hand-clasp to comfort, guide, encourage through those sorrows, mazes and struggles which come into every human life. If there is nowhere to turn, if there are none to help, what then?

People have called on God in extremity as upon some genie who ought to succour them. When their trouble was past, God was promptly forgotten, as previously He had been scarcely recognised. This is poor treatment of one who never fails in His goodness to send rain on the just and the unjust, make His sun shine, to light the night with moon and stars. His many coloured bow still spans the rain-washed heavens, the seas keep their appointed places; of His many promises to men, not one has

failed. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease".

The Earth, fertilised by His bountiful hand, yields abundance to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Human greed, selfishness and pride spoil the good that God does. Man fails but God keeps faith. He will always keep faith. If He must chastise it is that He may make man more worthy of His blessings. He calls, He begs, He invites all people to turn to Him, to come with all their load of care and find rest and peace. "Turn unto me and live", is one of the great invitations of God. He promises, He provides and He gives. Should such faithfulness go unaccepted by the needy, unpraised by those who have found their every need abundantly supplied by His generosity? Nay before the day begins, turn to Him for all its needs.

His faithfulness provides a safe conduct all the way. Purse, provisions, protection, guide, counsel, rest and vigour, all come from the same bounteous source. How often might pilgrims perish without them, but because "*his compassions fail not*" they run without being weary, they are able to walk without growing faint.

TH.

Gone from us

Sister Fannie Harrison (Manchester & Warrington)

Sister Jessie Norman (Chesham)

Brother Harry Beswick (Manchester)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

3. The Popular Hero

The slaying of the Philistine champion Goliath established David at once as the idol of the people, the hero of the army, and the favourite of Saul. David was at once made a permanent member of the king's entourage at his court at Gibeah, and apparently entrusted with various commissions that he executed with such grace and discretion that he quickly became popular among all his fellows at court and in the sight of the people. This also was the period during which he and Saul's son Jonathan formed the close friendship that meant so much to David in the events that were to follow. Jonathan was probably the youngest of Saul's four sons and about the same age as David. The close companionship of these two, continued until Jonathan perished with his father at the battle of Gilboa, which ended Saul's reign as king. But that event was still ten years away; at this moment Saul looked upon David with his military valour as a most welcome addition to his own warlike sons and other valiant men upon whom he relied to keep the Philistines at bay. It is plain to see that Saul had rejected all thought of reliance upon the Lord and was counting on the strength of his warriors to keep his throne. Samuel, the old prophet, had now been retired into obscurity some four or five years and Saul no longer saw him nor sought his counsel. Neither was he at all interested in David's profession of faith in God; it was his military prowess he valued and that to such an extent that according to 1 Sam. 18.5 he now appointed David supreme commander over all his army. The account reads as if this was directly after the affair of Goliath but this is most unlikely. More probably David "worked his way up" over a period of several years so that the events of this chapter might have their place when he was about twenty-three years of age.

This is when Saul began to wonder whether he had rather over-reached himself in the matter of David. It was one thing to acquire an exceptionally valiant and successful warrior to lead his troops to victory: it was quite another when that warrior was so outstandingly successful that the people began to compare him with Saul himself, to the King's discredit. Returning from a victorious battle, Saul and David, with their forces, were met by the

women of Israel coming out in dances and singing in triumph, "*Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*". That did not please Saul at all well. "*They have ascribed to David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed but thousands, and what can he have more than the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward*" (1 Sam. 18.6-9). He suddenly saw in David a possible rival for the kingship, and the jealousy in his nature came to the top.

Saul had originally been made king by command of the Lord and at first he had accepted that position and ruled as the Lord's anointed. On that basis he had gone forth to war and on that basis he had gained victories. But he then repudiated the Lord's guidance and turned instead to his own military prowess and that of his soldiers. It was then that his troubles began. Saul and his men were unable to resist the Philistines until the incident of Goliath. Then he was only saved by the timely advent of David who went forth in full faith in God and slew the giant. But Saul had forgotten all that and was still fighting the Philistines in his own strength. That strength was ebbing away and that of David taking its place, so he was morose and resentful. It should be noted that Goliath's death did not permanently end the Philistine menace; Saul was fighting them more or less continuously to the day of his death. The account in 1 Samuel 18 is often read as though it was on the return from the slaying of Goliath that the women danced and sang. This is not so for in 1 Sam. 18.6 the AV has "Philistine" but in the Hebrew it is in the plural. Saul and David were returning from a later battle with "the Philistines" when they experienced the singing that aroused Saul's anger.

Back at court after the victory, Saul's jealousy, and incipient insanity, overcame him again, and David thinking to appease him, produced his harp and sang again some of the songs of God which had pleased the king in the past. Saul was in no mood to listen to the songs of God; irritated beyond endurance, he picked up a javelin and threw it at David. The latter adroitly avoided it, and the incident passed. But David knew then that Saul had become his enemy. This became even clearer a little later when Saul demoted him from being

Commander-in-Chief of three hundred and thirty thousand men to the captaincy of just one thousand. Many a soldier treated like that has revolted and led his men against the king who had dared to treat him thus but not so David. He continued in the new sphere to which he had been relegated, and says the chronicler, "*all Israel and Judah loved David*" (18.16). If Saul hoped to provoke retaliation that would enable him to treat David as a rebel he was disappointed. In favour or out of favour, David served his king faithfully, because Saul was the Lord's anointed.

So David passed his second test which was to treat honour and glory and the plaudits of men on exactly the same terms as disgrace, reproach and insults, all as from the hand of the God he served and in whom he had absolute faith. Saul was afraid that David would try to displace him and set himself up as king. The people and the army regarded him with so great favour that such a revolt had every chance of success and David probably knew that very well but he never gave way to such a temptation. When the Lord was ready for him to be king He would arrange matters in His own way. In the meantime David was content to serve in the place to which he was appointed.

Frustrated, Saul then tried another tactic. He would publicly humiliate David in his deepest feelings in the eyes of all the people. The plot was to offer his eldest daughter, Merab, in marriage to David, thus allying him with the royal house. No greater honour could be imagined. Then at the last moment Saul would give Merab to somebody else and sit back to observe the effect of his snub. David demurred at first, out of modesty, on the grounds of his lowly birth, but, probably after this being brushed aside by Saul, assented. Merab herself would most likely be only too pleased at the prospect of marrying the handsome and valiant idol of Israel. So the match was arranged, and all Israel rejoiced. Then, just as the nuptials were about to be celebrated, the whole thing was called off and the unfortunate Merab married off in haste to a man of Issachar, Adriel a man so obscure that he never figures again in the history of the times. If Saul expected a violent reaction, he was disappointed again, for David seems to have taken this insult with studied unconcern. It might well be that he was not particularly drawn to Merab and not sorry at the outcome. What did come out of it was the

realization within Saul's household that his younger daughter, Michal, was in love with David. It seems too from the account, although not plainly stated, that David on his part was not insensible to her charms, and this set Saul thinking again.

The plot this time was that David could have Michal if he first brought to the king concrete evidence that he had killed a hundred Philistines. Saul doubtless reasoned that this yielded a first-class chance of David getting himself killed in the process. The more he thought about the scheme the more satisfactory he felt it to be. There was one snag; he felt somewhat diffident about broaching the matter to David himself, after the manner in which he had just treated him over Merab. So he persuaded his household servants to handle the matter for him. They were to enlist David's interest and obtain his consent. David seems to have been much more receptive this time. "*it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law*" (1 Sam. 18.26). He felt perhaps that the proposal constituted a conditional contract that he could easily fulfil on his side and he would ensure the promised outcome without hitch. He set out with some of his men for the land of the Philistines.

Saul must have been considerably vexed upon receiving the announcement from his attendants that David was back, and even more so when his prospective son-in-law produced evidence that he had killed, not merely one hundred, but two hundred Philistines!

Saul probably looked round his circle of attendants but received no looks of sympathy. "They, too, are all on David's side" he must have thought bitterly. With the evidence before them of more of their hated enemies slain they were not likely to do other than applaud the champion. Saul realised he could not afford to lose face. Reluctantly, we may be sure, he gave way and kept his word. So David was married to Michal.

One wonders if this was the point at which the guileless shepherd lad changed into a hardened and, later, embittered man. For something like four years he had waged war against the Philistines in the defence of Israel and in that time had been responsible for the deaths of many men. But in all that he went out in the belief that he was waging the wars of the Lord and what he did was with the power of God behind him. This was different. This time he went deliberately into the enemy land with

the avowed purpose of killing two hundred Philistines as the price to be paid to get the woman he wanted. In his Philistine campaigns the previous narrative says that the Lord was with him – in the story of his marriage the Lord has no place and there is no indication that the Lord had anything to do with it. Was this the first time in his colourful and varied career when he embarked upon a major action without first and foremost consulting his Lord?

Be this as it may, it is undeniable that at this point of time David's initial prosperity ended and he entered upon a time of adversity. Saul, of course, did not forgive him. He was resolved more than ever upon the death of David. 1 Samuel 19 tells how he next consulted with his son Jonathan and his house servants to encompass his son-in-law's death. He must have been a singularly obtuse man in many ways, or else the intensity of his hatred clouded his judgment. He knew the regard in which his servants held David. He knew that Jonathan looked upon David as his closest friend. What help could he have expected from them in a murder plot? Naturally enough. Jonathan dissuaded his father, reminding him of the great service David had done him in slaying Goliath, and for the time being Saul was reconciled. Then the Philistines staged another invasion and David again

distinguished himself in repulsing them. It is quite a question whether this invasion was in retaliation for David's incursion and slaughter when he married Michal and once again Saul, in jealousy at David's success, tried unsuccessfully to kill him with his javelin. Michal, knowing her father perhaps better than did David, saw that the position was becoming serious. She urged him to flee for his life, and when Saul's men arrived at her house she met them with the bland assurance that David had gone.

So ended David's association with the court of King Saul. After perhaps five years commencing from the fight with Goliath, he found himself reduced in a moment to the status of a fugitive. He had married the king's daughter, was held high in honour by army and people alike, feared by the Philistines and invincible whenever he led his men against them in combat, but now was without possessions, without friends, without home. He even had to leave his newly married wife behind. He departed from Gibeah in Benjamin in the darkness of that night, not knowing where to go or what to do next. What prospects now for David, would-be king of Israel?

(To be continued)

AOH

ESTABLISHED, STRENGTHENED, SETTLED

"The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Pet. 5.10)

Peter who, after years of experience in the Master's service and under His discipline, wrote those words as one established, strengthened and settled. Through much tribulation he had reached that blessed experience in the faith and in the practice of the principles of the gospel. Peter had much to suffer and endure in his continuous effort to overcome. In common with all our Lord's disciples, he had much to bear from without, in the way of reproach, and sometimes of persecution, for the Word of God. He probably had much more to contend against from within. His disposition was naturally impulsive, wavering and difficult to bring under restraint, even when truth was clear to his mind and when his affections were fastened upon the Lord.

It should be the aim of every truly consecrated saint to reach this condition of strength and settled establishment in the faith. It cannot be reached at a single leap; it is gained by a gradual steady growth under the discipline of suffering; as the Apostle says, *"after you have suffered awhile."* As Hebrews 12. 11, 12 (NRSV) has it, *"Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed."*

Are you weary and disheartened in the journey; discouraged at your slow progress and almost overwhelmed with the cares and various besetments of this life? Is a lethargy and indifference creeping over you, cooling your ardour for the Master's service, relaxing your energies in

that direction, and enlisting your interest more and more in other matters? Then beware! It is high time to wake up. *"Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5.8 NRSV). Sometimes he goes about as a roaring lion, and sometimes as a skulking serpent in the grass. Sometimes, lion-like, when we are off guard he springs upon us unawares, stirs up the devil of the old nature, and unless desperately resisted he will take full control and drive us on to ruin. Or he will endeavour at least to turn us off the track of the narrow way. Sometimes, serpent-like (2 Cor. 11.3) he assumes a pleasing and seemingly reasonable aspect, and endeavours to beguile us from the way. If we permit ourselves to be off guard we may be sure that our ever vigilant adversary will gain an advantage over us which we may not be able to resist. This may occur either by neglect to feed upon the Word or by indifference to the reception and cultivation of the Spirit.

Our only safety, then, is in giving earnest heed to the Apostle's counsel. Be sober, be steadfast in the faith, be vigilant, and resist the adversary. We find foes within as well as foes without with which we must not deal too gently. The human nature that we covenanted to crucify must not be too sensitively regarded by ourselves, though we should be careful and thoughtful in our dealings with others.

We must let the human nature die, and rejoice to see the new nature triumph over it. We must look our old nature squarely in the face, thankful for a brother's or a sister's kindly showing us a fault or even the heartless rebuke of an enemy. Even the impatient criticism of an unwise but well meaning friend, should be soberly considered and profited by, though it may severely wound the sensitive flesh. All this is a part of the crucifying process, a part of the humbling under the mighty hand of God,

under the discipline of His truth. If we study it carefully and cultivate its spirit day by day, seeking constantly to purge out all that is contrary to it, our characters will mature, ripen and grow more and more like the glorious model given for our imitation. Our convictions of the truth will become more settled and clear. Our faith in God and in the power of His love and grace will be more and more established; and our constant effort to learn and to do the will of God will harden into habit. Thus we will grow strong in the Lord and be able to strengthen and confirm the faith of others.

If we have cares, we are invited to cast them all upon the Lord, knowing that He cares for us. We have the encouraging assurance in the midst of present trials that we shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. First in steadfast sobriety and humility we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ and through faith have gained the privilege of working it out. We are comforted in the midst of trials with the blessed assurance that while God resists the proud, and they also resist Him, He gives grace to the humble. Let us humble ourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt us in due time. Let us bear in mind that not all the suffering and cross-bearing comes from the world's oppression of truth but from faithfulness in not excusing and cultivating evil propensities of our fallen nature. These must be humbled and subdued. *"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he had heard; but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does."* (James 1.23-25 NRSV).

BJD

Why not take advantage of the quiet time of our daily opportunities that strength may be imparted to us by the only source profitable to man? Nature works in quietness; strength is begotten by admitted methods and formulated habits, thereby accepting God as "the Live Wire" to every fibre of our being. The Upper Room experience of added strength came conditionally, by process of waiting. We are all the time busy at our work; we do not know the sacredness of resting. We know how to

toil and how to give, but we do not know how to sit still and how to receive.

When the heart is quiet and the door is shut on the world, we can give thanks to God for sleep, for merriment, for our opportunities to worship with others, but let us not neglect to give thanks for this same quiet hour when the heart communes with God and is still.

(Selected)

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

4. The Temple Tax, Forgiveness, Rewards

Peter was unusually silent. Making his way, with Jesus and the other disciples, to the house in Capernaum where they were to spend the night, he was walking a little apart from the rest, apparently lost in his own thoughts. The others had taken no notice, but Jesus had, and He glanced once or twice at the rugged fisherman: in his glance there was understanding. Peter had been like this since the two Pharisees had accosted him as the little party entered the town; he had stayed behind to exchange a few words with them. Now he was wondering whether he had spoken wisely in reply to their question, and whether Jesus would approve of what he had said. Once again, as so often, he scolded himself for the impetuosity that had led him to speak hastily and without proper thought of the implications. All he had wanted to do was get rid of those interfering Pharisees and hope nothing more would come of the matter. Now he was not so sure.

It had been such a simple question but it was loaded and he could see that now. "Does your Teacher not pay the Temple tax?" (Matt. 17.24 RSV). There were two kinds of tax imposed upon Jews at the time. Firstly, the "things that are Caesar's", the civil tax due to Rome collected by its tax-gatherers. Secondly, the annual levy upon all Jews everywhere, at home or abroad, for the upkeep of the Temple, collected by the High Priest's agents. This was known as the "*didrachma*", the half shekel or "shekel of the sanctuary", worth two *denarii* (the "penny" of the N. T.). In the past the offering had been voluntary, but sometime before our Lord's day, following a celebrated dispute over the matter in the Sanhedrin between Pharisees and Sadducees, in which the Pharisees were victorious, the tax was made compulsory. The collectors harried every Jew until he had paid his half-shekel. Doubtless the constant movement of Jesus from place to place left room for doubt as to whether in His case the tax had been paid, hence the raising of the question at this juncture.

Peter had said 'yes' without thinking very much about it. He had probably paid his own contribution in the past when demanded and thought of it no more. But he had been in secular work then as a fisherman and always had the money to pay. Now

he was a full-time itinerant evangelist and had no money. He had been with Jesus for a little under twelve months so the question had not been asked before. Now he was beginning to doubt whether he had done right in committing the Master to this payment. He knew that despite the Pharisees' dictum, the tax was in principle a voluntary one and it could be that Jesus might have an objection to subsidizing this current Temple administration that He had condemned in no uncertain terms. Also, where was the money to come from? The Temple tax represented two days' wages of a working man in full employment. By today's standard that could represent £80-100, but Jesus and his disciples were penniless preachers and there was no "social security" in those days. No wonder Peter was silent. Jesus looked across at him again. There was sympathy in that glance and perhaps a certain humour too. He knew just what Peter was thinking about, and the nature of his dilemma. In a while He would help him out of his difficulty but before doing so He would use the incident for Peter's instruction, and too, for all the disciples. He stopped Peter as the others were entering the house. "*What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take duty and taxes? From their own sons or from others?*" (Matt. 17.25 NIV) Peter roused himself from his thoughts. He knew that something important was coming but he had no idea what it was. The question, however, was an easy one to answer. He was thoroughly familiar with the policy of the Roman power that taxed subject nations and let off their own nobility and free-born citizens lightly or completely. "*From others*" Peter responded. "*Then,*" said Jesus "*the sons are exempt*". Freeborn citizens of the Empire do not pay tax. In just the same way every Israelite was a freeman of the commonwealth of Israel, and his offerings to God were traditionally to be voluntary, of his own will. Thus our Lord condemned the action of the Pharisees who compelled all Jews to pay the tax. Paul said much the same thing to the Corinthians; "*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor. 9.7 RSV). Here, as when He talked to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well

(John 4). He was leading His disciples, and others, to the realization that God will not accept reluctant service but that He wants those that worship Him to do so in spirit and in truth.

So much for the lesson; the practical problem still remained; the collectors were waiting for their money. That introduced another consideration, also of importance. The Temple tax was an institution; compulsory or not, it was looked upon by most men as a necessary and desirable means of ensuring the orderly continuance of the ceremonies and services at Jerusalem which made Judaism what it was. In all probability the collectors themselves were perfectly sincere about it, just as many in our day solicit donations for good causes. Would those of first century Judaism, even begin to understand this revolutionary new principle being explained by the Man of Nazareth? They might interpret the Lord's words as an excuse to avoid payment. Jesus knew that and was ready to meet them halfway, until they could fully understand. So He said *"Then the sons are exempt ... but so that we may not offend them ... go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch, open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give to them for my tax and yours."* (Matt. 17.26, 27). "Not to scandalize them" is the literal meaning of the Greek. It would be so easy to cause misunderstanding, and the point was not one in which a vital principle was involved. There was every reason to contribute an offering to the upkeep of the Temple. Our Lord commended the poor widow who cast in "two mites"; all the living she had. What the Pharisees demanded as a right He would willingly extend to them as a free gift. Again, Jesus anticipated Paul, who likewise said *"nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love"* (Rom. 14.14-15 RSV). That was the second lesson for Peter.

There still remained the question of finding the money. Without much doubt it could have been provided. Although poor, the little band needed and possessed a 'slender store' to meet their simple but essential needs. We know that this was supplied by those to whom Jesus ministered and his followers among the people, including one or two somewhat better off women, who *"provided for them out of their means"* (Luke 8.3). However, Jesus would

not use their offerings, often contributed out of very scanty resources for the sustenance of Him and His disciples, for this purpose. He gave Peter instead an instruction that seems to border on the miraculous, and the question arises: why adopt so unusual a way of meeting the need? Was it to teach Peter lesson number three, that his Master could very appropriately call upon the wealth of His Father in heaven who owns all the gold and silver, and all the treasures of earth? Evidently He thought that the tax should not be taken from the sacrifices of the poor from which their daily needs were supplied? The Father in heaven needed not this kind of offering from the Son on earth and so He provided the money Himself from His own store. The fish swimming in the sea brought it to Peter that he might pay it over as Jesus had directed. The *"stater"* was a silver coin worth two *didrachma* and so met the tax for the Lord and for Peter also.

The simple, matter-of-fact manner in which this part of the story is related makes it appear as though Peter saw nothing in the instruction to wonder at. He was getting accustomed now to the marvellous powers of Jesus, much more than many commentators who decry the incident as incredible. But is it so incredible in the light of modern technology? Men in a ship's cabin can, with the aid of a box of electronic gear, watch every movement of their fellows in a submarine on the sea bed a mile below them, and talk to them. Even more marvellous, people in a control room on Earth, can see and talk to astronauts walking on the Moon a quarter of a million miles away. Is it therefore unreasonable to visualize Jesus watching the movements of a fish in the water probably no more than half -a-mile from where He was standing, or of so controlling its movements that Peter should catch it as soon as he had cast his line? Divine power is fundamentally infinitely greater than the powers of man.

It is an established fact that to this day there is a species of fish, called the *musht* in the Sea of Galilee which is known to carry small objects such as pebbles or coins in its mouth, being especially attracted to anything bright or shining as a coin. Known also as "St. Peter's fish", the *musht* is reared in quantity nowadays in Israel for commercial food production. Peter probably already knew of it and its habits; in simple trust he walked down to the lakeside in full assurance that Jesus would bring

this particular one, bearing its coin, to him.

It could not have been many weeks later that Peter was given his famous lesson on forgiveness, highlighting so important an aspect of the Divine character and the Divine plan. It is a regrettable feature of traditional theology that emphasis is placed upon punishment for sin, as though God is seeking for an excuse to hurl His thunderbolts of judgment upon the wicked. In fact the reverse is true. He is always seeking ways and means to save the evil doer from his evil way and bring him back into a state of reconciliation. Jesus had been talking about this for some time and the disciples must have found His words strangely at variance with their training in Judaism. The law of justice demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They believed the enemies of God and of Israel were most certainly to be visited with punishment and everlasting destruction without appeal. Now Jesus was telling them about the shepherd who left his ninety-nine safely housed sheep to go out on the mountains to seek the single one which was lost, not stopping until he had found it. "*For*" He said "*the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost... it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish*" (Matt. 18.11-14). At a much earlier time Jesus had told Nicodemus, the enquiring Pharisee, "*God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him*" (John 3.17). All this was alien to orthodox God-fearing Jews like Peter, brought up to look for swift and merciless judgment upon the godless without thought as to the possibility, even at the eleventh hour, of their repentance and conversion. Jonah had been angry with God because He had lifted judgment upon the Ninevites consequent upon their conversion (Jonah 3.10; 4.1), and he was not the only one. Not long after this very time, and despite the principles our Lord had sought to inculcate, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the unfriendly Samaritans who had spurned the Lord, and had to be reproved (Luke 9.51-55). There is no doubt the lesson was sorely needed but it had to be brought closer home. From His own position as the One who had come to earth to seek and save the lost ones, Jesus turned to the disciples' relation to one another in the matter of forgiveness for wrong done. If your brother sins against you do all that is in your power to win

him back. The old Mosaic Law did not talk like that; it defined penalties to be paid and vengeance to be exacted for wrong done. But now if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. The principle, upon which God is working with all men, is to be exemplified in the daily lives of God's children now in all their relationships with their fellows. It is one that will be openly manifest in the coming Messianic Age when all men of all generations will have the opportunity to 'listen to' God and so be 'gained' for all eternity. The keynote is to be forgiveness leading to repentance and reconciliation. Peter had listened attentively up to this point but the old Judaism died hard and he wanted to know where the limit stood. There surely must be an end to this process of forgiveness and reconciliation. "*How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?*" (Matt. 18.21,22) This last he suggested, perhaps hopefully, that he might have a chance of executing judgment eventually. He might have been thinking of the vision of Amos the prophet of Tekoa, to whom the Lord revealed that He was bringing judgment upon eight peoples after their seventh transgression in each case and would condone their wrongdoing no longer. But again Jesus led him away from the standards of the past age and showed him the ideals of one that is to come. "*Seven times? Nay; seventy times seven*". In other words, there was to be no limit to Peter's forgiveness if by such means he could eventually save his brother. That, of course, is what God is doing with man. There is no limit to the Divine endeavour through Christ, to save every man from the evil of his way and bring him into the Father's family. Only if and when, in His wisdom, He knows that the case is hopeless, will He turn sorrowfully away and leave the determined evil-doer to the consequences of his choice.

For the next six months, there is no mention of Peter. He was with Jesus all through that time, doubtless breaking in from time to time with his impetuous questions and receiving in return new lessons upon which he would ponder and grow a little more into the likeness his Master had planned for him. They went through Samaria again to Jerusalem, little dreaming that they were leaving Galilee and Capernaum for the last time until after the death of Jesus. They roamed through Judea and the region beyond Jordan, as the weeks passed, bringing them nearer to the tragic events of that last

Passover in Jerusalem.

One cameo remains before that. The rich young ruler had accosted Jesus, asking what good thing he must do to attain eternal life, and Jesus had told him to sell all that he possessed to give to the poor, and become a disciple like the others. The young ruler had gone away, sad and regretful, for he had great possessions, and no one now knows whether he ever did come back. Jesus took advantage of the incident to warn His disciples how the rich, find it hard to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples wondered aloud how it could be that if the rich, with all their advantages, could not obtain entry, whether any at all would be saved. At which Peter, quick as ever, glimpsed a connection between their own renunciation of worldly advantage now and their hoped for regal power in the days of the Kingdom. He sought, as ever, precise definition, he came out with *"Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?"* (Matt. 19.27 RSV). Jesus replied *"Truly I tell you, in the renewal of all things when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory that you who have followed me, will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"*. The Greek word for renewal means the giving of new life. The time of the giving of new life is when the Son of Man is to sit on the throne of His glory and that is the Messianic Age of His reign over the world. To the

disciples in their immature stage of understanding that meant the exaltation of Israel over the rest of the nations and the exaltation of the disciples as rulers over Israel. Later they came to a better and clearer understanding of the Divine purpose and realized that their rule as members of Christ's church was not merely over Israel but over all mankind. They knew that their position as rulers was not for personal glory. It was for the service and instruction of the ruled, that they might be persuaded to turn away from the practices of selfishness, injustice and violence which is so characteristic of this world, and led to accept the life of selflessness and justice and peace which is the hallmark of the Age to come. Above all things they were to bring new life, life that comes from God to everyone whose heart in that glad day will be given to him, and because it comes from God, it will be life that is eternal, never-ending.

So Peter was left with the golden vision of what one day would surely be, if his faith held fast. It was a vision he was going sorely to need at a time that now was close at hand, for the shadows were gathering around Jesus, and the next that is related of Peter is the tragic incident of his temporary loss of faith when he denied his Master. But happily that was only an incident; it was not the end of the story.

AOH

Continued

THE POWER OF TRUTH

Pilate's question, put to Jesus when He stood trial before the Roman governor, is one that thoughtful people have been asking ever since; indeed were asking before the first century AD. Pilate has been blamed for not waiting for a reply but it's possible that he did. We may not know everything that happened at that remarkable interview recorded in John 18. What did he expect in reply? Was he, like the Greeks, searching for knowledge or was his question just a cynical response to Jesus' claim? Hebrew thinking was practical rather than speculative, synthetic or academic and could be summarised in the words 'Do and you will know'. That expression has a modern ring in educational circles. A useful working definition of 'truth' might be Paul's prayer in Colossians 1.9 (NRSV) when he wrote *"that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"*.

Truth would appear to be linked to knowledge and reality. It is not false but is an accurate representation of what is seen. It is sincere, not a fake, it is honest not a deception, it is valid and sound, it is genuine and linked to integrity. In the Grimm-Thayer lexicon, the Greek word '*aletheia*' is said to be 'reality', a word used in Phillips' translation of John 4.23,24. So what does 'truth' do? The Psalmist suggests that it protects and guides (Psalm 40.11; 43.3) and so we are exhorted to walk in the truth (Psa. 86.11) or perhaps live in the light of reality. Does it matter what we believe? In answer to this commonly asked question, the answer must be 'yes' because what we believe affects our behaviour. Contrariwise, demonstrably bad behaviour does not spring from 'truth' but comes from the 'father of lies', the Devil. More positively, John tells us that we belong to the 'truth' if we express Christ's love (1 John 3.18,19). No

matter what our opinions about knowledge of the Scriptures, unless we seek to live like Jesus in thought, word and action, we are not of the 'truth'.

Interpretation of principles and facts is a fascinating study in the Old Testament. Abraham's relationship to Sarah is an example. Isaac followed in Dad's footsteps concerning his wife. The relationship between Jacob and Laban seems rather confusing in the light of modern Christian ethics but are we always so transparently genuine? Nothing is hid from God as David found out and God's ethical standards were heard strongly through the voice of the prophets in Samuel and Nathan. In quite different circumstances Nehemiah's use of a military escort, contrasts with Ezra's refusal to have one for their return to Israel.

Definition of 'truth' in the Gospels is demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, Jesus said over and over again, "I tell you the truth". Secondly, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. So if we want to know the truth we must get to know Him. Those words recorded in John 14.6 were Jesus' response to Thomas' questionings. Jesus had told the disciples that they knew where He was going. Thomas was the kind of person who needed an address and a map. What Jesus was saying was that anyone who follows Him, as a disciple, will arrive in His home. The actual or literal transportation to that home is in God's care and plan. All we need to do is to get ready, really and truly ready. We can't play-act in this matter or we shall end up in the same place as the pharisees. We may 'kid' ourselves about what we know and what we are doing but we will never deceive our Father in Heaven. Yet the Gospels clearly show that natural ability is not what counts towards sharing our Lord's home. The knowledge and skills for getting ready to meet Him can all be learned through the power of the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Truth. We don't need to belong to a Secret Society with its special knowledge. We don't need the confession of faith of a particular sect or group. We need to trust and obey the Word of God. Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 1 that it was not the clever people of this world who really understand about truth and he was echoing Jeremiah 9.23, 24.

When Thomas stood among his fellow disciples and asked his question, their minds were focussed on a Kingdom but it wasn't God's Kingdom. We need to have our eyes focussed on the King

"looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12.2). Following Him will take us 'outside the camp' which in Israel was the place of the unclean, the alien, the criminals, those suffering from dreadful diseases and where carcasses and refuse were destroyed.

Jesus, the Son of God, had stood among God's people but they really didn't recognise Him. Human eyes so often wear dark or even dirty glasses. All we see is puzzling reflections. The religious folk around Jesus couldn't see the truth that clothed his miracles and parables nor could they understand His teaching. That which was 'good' in Him they called 'bad', while their own pious acts and prayers which were 'bad' they thought were 'good'. This resulted in them condemning the innocent, sinless Lamb of God.

Truth is for all God's people and is not exclusive or restrictive as Joshua discovered when Eldad and Medad, who were not part of the establishment, prophesied to the people of Israel in the desert. Bible knowledge, including history, predictive prophecy and theology is valuable if it leads us to know God better. Just as the Law had set Israel free from sin and fear at Sinai so the Sermon on the Mount set free the followers of Jesus thirteen centuries later. Paul describes something of the battle for freedom in Romans 7 and that battle has continued through 2000 years as each generation has faced the situation of living in the Spirit while in this old human tent.

Jesus said, in His prayer recorded in John 17 "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*" (NRSV). It is suggested that 'sanctify' means to make pure and holy. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (5.25, 26 NIV) that Christ loved and died for the Church "*to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word*". Jesus used the word 'cleansing' when He spoke of pruning branches to produce more fruit. Truth cleanses and produces fruit. To do that truth must be allowed to challenge us. Our reading and study of God's Word must not lose the power of truth by being inhibited with preconceived opinions. We need transparent honesty in asking the question, do the Scriptures really say what I have always thought they said? Then we shall with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) learn that God wants our worship to be in spirit and in truth.

THE EXODUS

A series to help younger readers discover the Bible

16. The Tabernacle

The six months following the making of the Law Covenant was spent very quietly. A small band of artificers and weavers were engaged in the construction of the Tabernacle whilst Israel in general were busy with the care of their flocks and herds grazing in the extensive plain which lay at the foot of the Mount.

Chapters 25-31 record the Divine instructions given to Moses in the Mount for the construction of this Sanctuary and the appointment of its Priesthood. Chapters 35 - 39 describe the execution of the project and consist very largely of an almost word-for-word repetition of the instructions. With the completion and erection of the Tabernacle the Book of Exodus comes to its close.

The purpose of the Tabernacle was to provide a meeting place between God and man, where God could symbolically dwell and be approached through the avenue of an appropriate ritual by a suitably ordained priesthood. It was also a place where offerings could be made to express contrition for sin and in a symbolic sense where cleansing from sin could be effected. The Tabernacle, with its different apartments and varied furniture, its ritual and ceremony, was really an elaborate piece of symbolism in which every element possessed a meaning illustrative of the fundamental principle governing the Divine relationship to man. This makes the Tabernacle and its ceremonies important to the Christian. Every aspect of the building and ceremony is a type or 'shadow', as the Book of Hebrews has it, connected with God's redemptive purpose. A tent protected this sanctuary or Tabernacle from the weather, and it stood in an enclosed space known as the Court. The Tabernacle comprised a portable building forty-five feet long by fifteen feet wide and fifteen high, constructed of acacia wood boards covered with gold leaf and roofed in by a richly embroidered tapestry. This building was divided into two rooms. The inner one called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy, contained the sacred "Ark of the Covenant" where a mysterious light, the 'Shekinah' represented the Divine presence. The outer room, called the Holy Place, contained the Incense Altar, the Golden Table and the seven-branched Lampstand. This outer apartment was the

place where the High Priest stood before God to offer incense before entering the Holy of Holies, for the ritual of cleansing away the sins of Israel. A heavy tapestry 'Veil', adorned with figures of Cherubim, divided the two apartments and another tapestry door hung across the entrance to the Holy Place from outside.

Above this building was erected the Tent, carried down from a central ridge pole about twenty-two feet high at a slope sufficient to conduct away all rain water. The Tent consisted of woven goats-hair cloth covered with dyed rams' skins sewn together and then a waterproof top covering of the tanned skins of dolphins, dugong and possibly sharks. These were tanned to form a thick leather like covering which gave efficient weather protection. In the A.V. these skins are incorrectly translated "badger-skins".

The Court towards the rear of which the Tent stood, was seventy-five feet wide by one hundred and fifty long, surrounded by a white linen curtain some six or seven feet high carried on silver rods stretched between acacia wood pillars standing in cast sockets of copper or possibly bronze.

At the eastern end an opening shielded by an embroidered curtain gave access. Within the Court stood the Altar of Sacrifice and the Laver, a basin of water for ceremonial cleansing, both of copper. This Court was the place where the High Priest offered burnt offerings and sin offerings to God on behalf of the people as an essential preliminary to his entering the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies. None but Levites, members of the priestly tribe, were permitted to enter the Court. The remainder of Israel must remain outside, in the Camp.

On the annual Day of Atonement, the hosts of Israel gathered around the outside of the Court to await the ceremony of cleansing from sin. The High Priest, senior living descendant of Levi the son of Jacob, and titular head of the sacred tribe of Levi, took his place inside the Court arrayed in white sacrificial robes. Following his ritual cleansing with water at the Laver and attended by his subordinate Levites, he offered in sacrifice on the Altar, first a bullock and then a goat, in symbolic expiation of the sins of Israel. The flesh

of the sacrifice was burned with fire on the altar but its blood was carried by the High Priest into the Holy Place, where he offered incense before proceeding into the Holy of Holies where he sprinkled it upon the Ark of the Covenant. He then returned to the Holy Place, he exchanged his white robes for the splendidly adorned "robes of glory" in which he emerged into the Court, lifted up his hands and invoked the blessing of God upon the people in token that God had removed their sin. The details of this ritual are contained in Leviticus and form no part of Exodus but the initial inauguration of the priesthood does come within the scope of Exodus and is found in chapters 28-29. The splendid vestments of the High Priest comprised, principally, a blue robe adorned with blue, purple and scarlet embroidery in the shape of pomegranates interspersed with golden bells, above which was worn a richly ornamented breastplate seven inches square displaying twelve varied precious stones symbolic of the twelve tribes. A ceremonial white mitre on his head bore a gold plate frontlet inscribed with the words "Holiness to the Lord" and in a little pouch carried on the breastplate were placed the "Urim and Thummim". The words can be made to mean "Light" and "Truth", expressed in the plural, and in some manner they established the authority of the wearer to act as High Priest of Israel in the presence of God. These were not magical objects but something appropriate to a nobler conception of God. They lay next to the High Priest's heart and may have been a piece of writing material containing a summary of the Divine Law or other ascription of reverence such as that which appeared on his golden mitre plate. They were something that indicated his Divinely appointed office and authority but no one really knows; even Jewish theological circles are uncertain.

Thus splendidly attired, the High Priest and his sons, the deputy priests, were anointed with the holy anointing oil, compounded according to a formula set out in chapter 30. It contained four sweet-smelling herbs, myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia, in all fifteen pounds weight, powdered and mixed with an *hin* (twelve pints) of olive oil. This produced the necessary quantity that was used, not only on the priests, but on the Tabernacle furniture, formally making sacred all that was thus anointed.

The successive steps in the believer's progress

toward full communion with God as displayed in the New Testament may suggest the general manner in which the symbolism of the Tabernacle should be understood. Thus the Camp of Israel surrounding the sanctuary reflects the position of the unbelieving world which has less interest in the mystic glories of its interior and yet is deeply affected by what the ritual represents because it provides their ultimate salvation. The court, an enclosure of curtains, pictures the place of all believers who by reason of faith in Christ are 'justified' (Rom. 5.1). The Laver symbolizes their cleansing (the "washing of Water by the Word" Eph. 5.26) and the Brazen Altar, the central fact of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ offered Himself to be put to death on behalf of the people He came to save. In the Court the copper furnishings contrast with the gold of the Holy rooms within the Tabernacle. Here closer union with God is indicated. Christians who have been made right with God are invited to approach closer to the Divine Presence. Like righteous Isaiah of old, they glimpse something of the heavenly vision. They hear the Divine call "*whom shall we send, and who will go for us*" and cry out impulsively "*Here am I; send me*". Such are not content with the initial stage of conversion and reconciliation with God; they are ready in unreserved surrender and dedication of life and all that means to the service of God for whatever sphere He may direct. These are like the priests who alone have access to the Tabernacle itself. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit; they feed upon the Word of God and present themselves at the Altar of Incense. Beyond the veil, in light that no man may behold, dwells the Most High, the Father of All. This ancient building with all its elaborate ceremonial was devised not only for Israel at Sinai but it enshrines, in wonderful imagery, every aspect of the Christian faith and the progress of man from the state of alienation from God to that of reconciliation and freedom from sin.

Two men of Israel, Bezaleel of the tribe of Judah and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan, both craftsmen, were selected to have the oversight of this project (ch. 31). Under their supervision and instruction the people were encouraged to bring their offerings, of gold, silver, copper, woven fabrics, jewels, and to work according to their abilities in the manufacture and erection.

Something like one ton of gold, three tons of silver, two tons of copper and one ton of timber, were employed in the fabrication. (The "talent" of this account was a unit of weight equal to 67lb, the sacred shekel or "shekel of the sanctuary", of which 3000 went to the talent, being about one-third of an ounce). Some skilled metallurgy was involved. The statement in ch. 37.3 that they beat some of the gold into thin plates and cut it into wires means literally that they manufactured gold leaf to cover the wallboards of the Tabernacle and gold wires as fine as threads to be used in the embroidery. Articles discovered in Crete and dating from practically the same time as the Exodus include stone vases and an ivory gaming table covered with gold leaf with a skill that cannot be matched today. Bronze wire plated with gold and as fine as human hair was found doing duty on ivory human figures. Casting, welding, and soldering were all well-known skills to the ancients at that time and it seems that the Israelites had some among their number who were experts in these arts. It is not surprising therefore to read in this account that the sockets for the posts and the carrying "rings" for the altars and other articles of furniture were castings, made by pouring molten metal into sand or clay or even stone moulds. There is no doubt that Bezaleel and Aholiab were craftsmen of the first order.

There are quite a few words in the account the meaning of which is not clear in the Authorised Version because they have dropped out of the language or because the A.V. translators' inability to understand the original Hebrew technical terms. In the first category there are words such as *knop* (ch. 25.31) meaning a knob; *tache*, (ch. 26.6) meaning a clasp or means of attachment, *ouchos* (ch. 28.11) meaning the setting or mount for precious stones. Words which have changed their meaning since the A.V. was translated are *curious* (ch. 28.8) meaning that which is artistic or unique, and *cunning* (ch. 26.31) which had the sense of ingenious, intricate or clever. So a modern translation would be that he was a 'clever' craftsman. In the second category there are such words as *crown* (ch. 25.11) an ornamental moulding or cornice surrounding the top of the Ark and *corners* (ch. 25.12) properly shaped feet supporting the Ark and Table, similar perhaps to animals' feet like the legs of some Victorian furniture. Then there is *shewbread* (ch. 25.30) literally "bread of the presence" or bread exhibited in

the presence of God, as it was when placed upon the Table in the Holy Place. *Network* (ch. 27.4) is another word referring to the fire grate upon which burned the sacrificial fire of the Brazen Altar, *fillets* (ch. 27.10) or connecting rods of acacia wood covered with gold or silver, stretched between the pillars, and from which the curtains were suspended, and *pins* (ch. 27.18) tent pegs to take the guy-ropes which held the Tent in position.

The precise dimensions of the Tabernacle and its furniture have always been a subject of dispute owing to considerable uncertainty as to the length of measure translated 'cubit'. It is not always realised that the cubit changed its length more than once through the ages and that in fact the ancients employed a variety of cubits. It seems to be established that Hebrew length measures are derived from the Sumerian system. Ur of the Chaldees was a Sumerian city. The Sumerian system was based on a primary unit, the palm (Hebrew *tophach*) which was the width of the palm of an average man's hand and was equivalent, so far as can be ascertained, to 3.6 inches. This occurs in Exodus along with the *zereth* of 7.2 inches, the 4-palm cubit (*ammah*) of 14.4 inches, to which the furniture was probably made and the 5-palm cubit (*ammah*) for the structure and surrounding enclosure. This system of multiple "palms" of 3.6 inches each is the key that yields the most satisfactory explanation of the physical construction of the Tabernacle.

So, on the first day of the first month in the second year of their departure from Egypt, the erection of the Sanctuary was completed and the solemn initiation ceremony of the priesthood conducted. They had been nearly ten months at Sinai. The memorable Passover that marked the night of their escape from slavery in Egypt was nearly a year in the past and in another fortnight they would be celebrating Israel's first commemoration of that Passover. Hearts must have beat fast and hopes run high as the people gazed upon the white curtains of the Court and the upper part of the Tent rising above those curtains. They knew that within that Sanctuary was the place where God had set His Name and manifested His presence with His people, ever ready at all times to send out His power for their sustenance in the time of want and their defence in time of danger.

The Book of Exodus ends at this point. Six weeks later they were to leave Sinai and resume

their journey, embarking on the forty years, wanderings in the Wilderness, but that epic is the subject of the Book of Numbers. Exodus closes with the erection of the Tabernacle and Israel's rapturous acceptance of this visible symbol of their covenant relationship to God. The tragedy was that their faith did not hold and that even with God's presence in their midst and His ministers waiting to cleanse them of all defilement and maintain them at least ceremonially clean and acceptable in His sight they still came short of that which could have been. Once again the burning words of Dr. Becher

Webb come upon the mind;

*Just to have known themselves to be but men;
Just to have let Him lead them by His hand;
Just to have had a little faith, and then
All had come safely to the Promised Land.
And yet they failed! O, by their failure teach
Those that come after, in the same distress,
More faithfully to follow till they reach
The land that lies beyond the wilderness.*

THE END OF EXODUS

TRANSFORMATION

"We all with unveiled face reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord and are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." (2 Cor. 3.18)

This is a process that must occur in all the Lord's people. It occurs in the right conditions. The Creator who made beautiful flowers can also produce beautiful characters. There are natural laws and spiritual laws and both were given by one Lawgiver.

We cannot be transformed into the likeness of the Lord by resolving to overcome sin in our bodies and minds by sheer willpower. There is nothing wrong in resolving to overcome wrong doing but that misses the vital point. If a ship stops in mid ocean it's no use those on deck pushing the masts to move it. However much pressure they used; their strength would be used in the wrong way. They need to go to the engine room and put right what is wrong. Otherwise effort is wasted. A drowning man cannot pull himself out of the water by his own hair.

We need positive displacement. When the evil in our hearts is removed it needs to be replaced by the Lord's spirit or the last condition becomes worse than the first. It may seem good to copy Christ's virtues. Many believe in Christ as the standard to be copied, but none are able to copy Him fully. If the copying is done in the power of self, it will eventually fail for we need the power from without. We may honestly set about self-examination with a code of rules. If we do we shall be like a watchmaker trying to put the parts together without a spring. The vital thing is the power of the mainspring. The removal of sin and the changing to the likeness of Christ is done through sanctification. The formula for this process

is found 2 Cor. 3.18 in reflection, assimilation and influence. This text does not say that we are transforming ourselves into the same image from glory to glory. We are changed. The New Testament speaks of sanctification as something that is passive. We are changed under the influence of God's Spirit.

A barometer measures conditions and knowing these we begin to understand the weather but it does not change the weather. The barometer responds to changes in the weather. Our responsibility in the change in our heart and lives is to surrender ourselves so that God can work on our minds. We submit to His consecrating influences so that He can take out everything that would hinder the working of His Spirit. The Word of God must be received into our prepared hearts and the whole being must be yielded as members of righteousness. We behold Christ with unveiled face in our study of the Lord's example and teaching and see the glory of God. We see the beauty of God. He displays to us the character of God, and as we set our affections on that lovely character, our love for God and His Word becomes so close to our hearts, we cannot but reflect it. We are shaped and fashioned by that which we love. When two young people are in love they see something that they admire in each other. They marry and live together for fifty years sharing experiences and material blessings. In that time they begin to reflect each other's characteristics; with similarities in speech and even their very appearance becomes alike.

If we are in love with the Lord, the things He says are the things we would say. His words express the sentiments of our hearts. We take them to our hearts and reflect them. Beholding Christ, we

reflect His image, and we are changed from glory to glory. The word "glory" does not really express the thought here. The Psalmist says, "*The heavens declare the glory of God*". They demonstrate the glory of God in His power, wisdom and the grandeur of His mind. In other words, God's glory is His character. So we, looking intently at Jesus, reflect His image and are transformed from characteristic to characteristic; then to a still better one until we are ready for our final change.

What is it we reflect? We reflect what we have gained from our environment. If we choose an environment that leads to a depraved life, we shall reflect that depravity. If we have been reading uplifting books and have been in uplifting company these too we shall reflect. Are we living in an environment of the Spirit? Do we read the Word of God? If so, they are what we shall reflect. Do we keep the company of the brethren? Then we shall reflect the spiritual effect.

These reflections are not a matter of mind or memory. The impressions we have gained are made on our very beings, so much so that a person is shaped and fashioned by the things with which he or she comes into contact. Where we cannot change our circumstances, we can use them. It will either be a matter of our circumstances using us or we using them. This is important. We may find one who goes through a trial and the result is a stronger faith in God than ever before, whilst another may pass through similar circumstances in a spirit of questioning, murmuring and complaint, producing a very different result. By accepting Christ's precepts, no matter what experiences we pass through, they will all work out for our good; whether painful or pleasant and they will affect our sanctification. We not only reflect what we receive

from our environment and experience but these become part of our lives. These things are changing us into His likeness.

Finally influence. Our study of great men's works or our contact with individuals has an effect on our lives. David and Jonathan had a great influence on each other. If the influence of good people is great, they are but a shadow of the virtues of Christ. What is the influence of Christ on those who make Him their companion? Why are people their friends? Is it their attractive appearance or their large bank balance? Is it not because of their virtuous life? How much more so is it with Christ. It is His life and influence that transforms. It is the power of the Spirit of God that transforms the Christian in a way that the world cannot know or comprehend.

There are certain laws controlling the Christian. "*No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born from above.*" We must receive life from above before we can be transformed. There are laws governing the material world, organic and inorganic. A mineral is inorganic and remains so, for it cannot by itself become the lowest form of life. A plant obeys laws of growth by which it makes its food from water, air and minerals. A plant reaches down by roots to absorb minerals and then transforms them into part of itself. The mineral has been "born from above" and entered the Kingdom above it. No human can reach the spiritual by effort or power from within, but God can take hold of us if we yield ourselves to Him, and so we can be transformed into His image. The Word of God is involved in this new beginning and continues so. Through the Word we can study God's character and through the Holy Spirit we are changed from glory to glory.

Do we wonder about the world of men today? The sweeping changes coming over the church and state; the loss of faith and reverence and the growth of worldliness and frivolity, and the menacing blackness of the clouds of war and strife among the nations? Can we look around and see men without employment and without enough to eat and not be moved by it? But what can we do about it? It can burden down into utter despair, if we try to carry it as 'our burden'. Get where Jesus was – 'take it to the Lord in prayer'. Or perhaps it is not the national and international situation but the

condition of our church and of our brethren – the differences and divisions, the coldness and lack of appreciation in that brother or sister! Read again the words of the Lord, "Come unto me you that are heavy laden." We do not understand why it is that brethren in Christ should find it so hard to live in unity, but it is so. To worry about it will not alter it. Better leave it in God's hands and say 'Even so, Father, it seems good in your sight to sift and test, and even allow to stumble, those whose hearts are not right before You.'

BSM 1952

WRITTEN AFORETIME

1. For Jew and Gentile?

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15.4 NRSV)

The apostle Paul usually wrote his epistles to Christians with whom he was already acquainted, and that knowledge aided him when he wrote to them and heard of their difficulties, their failings, their gains and their hopes. It was different when he wrote to the church at Rome. for though he may have personally met one or two, he had not met them as a community and he relied on reports about them. He had heard well of them, for their faith was spoken of throughout the world and it may have been that having heard of their faith he wished to meet them face to face. As a Roman citizen Paul may well have wished to visit the metropolis of the world, but that was not the reason why he wanted to *"preach the gospel to you that are at Rome"* (Rom. 1.15). A close bond of unity tied Paul to the Roman church even before they met, so he longed to see them (Rom. 1.11). We can readily imagine how this unity had been made. Some strangers of Rome had been present on that memorable day of Pentecost (Act. 2.10) and would return to their home city with the truly wonderful news. Later they would hear of the great persecution against the church at Jerusalem in which Saul was active (Acts 8.2). He would hear how Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome. a decree that worked *"together for good"* as it led to Paul meeting with Aquila and Priscilla. They would tell Paul about the brethren at Rome. At times it seemed unlikely that Paul would ever reach Rome; but a greater power was at work. On his journey to Jerusalem for the last time, Paul met the elders of Ephesus and told them that he went *"bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there"* (Acts 20.22). On arrival he was gladly received by the church, but was soon apprehended by the Jews. Yet, while they were conspiring to kill him, the Lord told Paul that he would bear witness at Rome (Acts 23.11). So, throughout the protracted proceedings at Jerusalem and Caesarea he knew that he would surely see the church at Rome before he had finished his mission and that may have been in his mind when he ended his examination before

Festus by appealing to Caesar. Festus unwittingly furthered the cause of Christianity by answering "Unto Caesar you shall go" (Acts 21.12)

We may assume that the letter which Paul wrote to the Church at Rome contained many things which he intended to deliver later in person and naturally he hoped that the epistle would stir up their minds and give encouragement in the meantime. In all probability that Church comprised both Jews and Gentiles, with Gentiles predominating due to the edict of Claudius. With that in mind it may appear that the words *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime ..."* (Rom. 15.4 AV) is far too sweeping an assertion, for many Christians have been taught that the Old Testament is mainly for the children of Israel and that only fragments of prophecy and the Psalms should be held as applicable to the Christian church. At least these words of Paul have disposed for all time of that notion. But even allowing that there is much more for Christians in the Old Testament than was once supposed, can it be that *"whatsoever things written aforetime"* is for us? It is even so; and Paul gives an example of this in 1 Cor. 9.9-10 where he reasons that an item of Mosaic law relative to the care of animals was in fact full of teaching for us and that the law concerning animals is secondary to its application now! In this letter to Rome Paul is as good as his word, for when writing this letter he makes many references to the Old Testament, with the object that we who were Gentiles might obtain hope. True, not all quotations speak of **hope** (some, indeed tell of condemnation) but all are made so that the cumulative teaching removes all uncertainty of mind and gives eternal hope and comfort, being built upon that solid rock of truth, the Word of God. We who are not of Jacob may well be astonished that the law, prophets, and psalms, written by holy men of God and guarded so jealously through the centuries by the Jews find their primary fulfilment in promoting hope within us who once were aliens from the covenants of promise. It is not so surprising, if we recall that to those very prophets was revealed that they were ministering those things to us (1 Peter. 1.12). When Daniel asked for further enlightenment upon the

visions he was recording, he was told that the vision was for an appointed time and that at the end it would speak and that it was sealed till the time of the end. In agreement with this our Lord said to the disciples that many prophets and righteous men had desired to see the things which the disciples saw and had not seen them (Matt. 13.16-17). Blessed were the eyes that saw at the First Advent and have seen since that time because the One in whom so much prophecy centred has come. Blessed too because further additions to the Word of God confirming and amplifying the old writings were to be made; and blessed because the opening up of the prophetic word would give hope and joy to many hearts. Our Lord began His earthly ministry by quoting some words of Isaiah (Luke 4.18, 21; Isaiah 61.1, 2) and added *"today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* Further prophecies were fulfilled during His life and by His death; and thus He laid the foundation for Paul later to say that *"whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we ... might have hope."*

With these thoughts in mind, let us proceed through the Roman epistle noting how by Paul's references to Jewish Scriptures, the Gentiles as well as Israel obtain enduring hope. Let us also remember those other words of Paul (Eph. 2.11-13) referring to Gentiles who were void of hope in the days when Israel alone had the promises and blessings of God. To us, without hope, Paul reveals a prospect beyond our dreams and to those Jews who also accept the Messiah he gives a far better hope than was generally held by that nation. By his quotation of and reasoning upon the Old Testament he gave to us the comfort of the Scripture, an essential ingredient of hope, and to Jewish believers he gave proof that what they might have thought was new and doubtful had in fact ample support in their own prophecies. Thus what Jew would ever be able to say that the Christian doctrines are man-made if they prove themselves to be of God by quotation from the Old Testament?

There are fewer quotations from the Old Testament in the early chapters of Romans and these do not in themselves give ground for hope, for after the customary Pauline introduction he gives a deplorable picture of Gentile degradation and the certainty of coming judgment. But one verse from the prophet Habakkuk gives a ray of encouragement and is a foundation of Paul's gospel. The

words *"the just shall live by faith"* when made by the prophet were in anticipation of a fuller application in the Christian age. Whilst not in themselves conducive of hope they suggest to us that there is, in spite of the depravity to which man has fallen, a path along which we may all travel to life, and thus faith becomes the basis of things hoped for (Heb. 11.1). The words of condemnation in the section of the epistle ending at 2.16 are mainly descriptive of those outside Israel. On the whole the Jewish reader would agree with the apostle's observations; but proceeding further we note that the section which seems to end at 3.20 is largely condemnatory of the Jew. We see even that the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through the Jew (which Paul proves by words from the prophet). The section reaches its culmination in the words from the Psalms that *"there is none righteous, no not one"* and that all the world has become guilty before God. So Paul answers his own question *"Are we better than they"* by showing all, whether Jew or Gentile, to be under sin and therefore under condemnation. In all this reasoning Jews in general, who boast in the law, and the prophets cannot raise objection because Paul confirms his thoughts by quotations from their own writings. We might think from the apostle's letter so far, that very little has been said that gives either Jew or Gentile the hope they need. However the epistle does not end there, nor do the quotations; but Paul has certainly relieved us of any hope we had in ourselves. Thus having no standing before God we must of necessity look to Him, trusting that in mercy He will provide the way of escape. Now *"that every mouth is stopped"* we can better listen and providing that we do listen to the words of the Apostle and the supporting words from the prophets we shall find our God willing to give the ground for the hope that we need.

(To be concluded)

BJD

Open Thy word of Truth,
That I may see
Thy message written clear
And plain for me;
Then in sweet fellowship
Walking with Thee,
Thine image on my life
Engraved will be.

(From Mary Lathbury's hymn 'Break Thou the bread of life')

THE ADVOCATE

"The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14.26). The function of the Holy Spirit in the hearts, minds and lives of all Christians is to be to each and all now what Jesus in His personal presence was to the disciples and believers during His life on Earth. 'Comforter' is not a good translation and the Greek word *'parakletos'* really means one called to one's side as a helper or advocate. It is translated so in 1 John 2.1 AV. It appears four times in John's Gospel, always with reference to the Holy Spirit in its function of standing by and helping the disciples and all who would follow them in the way of Christ. *"Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age,"* (Matt. 28.20 NRSV). Jesus had told them and it was by means of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that His promise was fulfilled. In a very real sense Jesus was still with His disciples and that is what He meant when He said *"I will not leave you comfortless. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"* (John 14.18). The Holy Spirit was to be sent *"in my name"* (14.26), that is, in and with the power of Jesus, to impart only the words and instructions of Jesus (16.13-15), so speaking as it were on behalf of Jesus, to teach, testify, guide, recall, foresee and reprove. In these three chapters, 14, 15 and 16 of the gospel, all these operations are mentioned. Christ's entire work of pastoral care and spiritual enlightenment toward His followers is conducted through the medium of the Holy Spirit of God. The fact that He says the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent from the Father, in the same breath that He declares He Himself sends the Spirit (14.16; 15.26; 16.7) supports the concept of oneness of thought, action and power between the Father and the Son, which the New Testament so strenuously upholds.

Three times in John's gospel the Holy Spirit is equated with the Spirit of truth as though the two are identical (ch. 14.17; 15.26; 16.13) but this is only one aspect of that mighty universal energy which the Scriptures refer to as the Holy Spirit of God. It is the aspect in the mind of Paul, when he told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2.9-14 RSV) *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard; nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him God has revealed to us through the Spirit.*

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God". The office of the Holy Spirit in this connection, therefore, is to act as instructor that reveals Divine truth in all its aspects. This is done for those who have by total surrender and dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ entered into a state of union with God. The Holy Spirit has many characteristics. The earliest in time so far as man is concerned and the most spectacular in a material sense, is that described so vividly in the first chapter of Genesis at the time of creation. The earth was unformed; there was only chaos. The Spirit of God hovered over that chaos, and God spoke: *"Let there be light! And there was light!"* Simple words but they indicate a tremendous manifestation of energy, the energy that has its source in God and was mediated by the operation of God's Holy Spirit. From that point ensued the colossal action and interaction of natural forces that brought into being the earth as we now know it. All those forces were born of the Divine energy that is the Holy Spirit. Having brought this material creation into existence and introduced man to it, God exercises a continuous control over its ordering and destinies. Isaiah 40.22-31 is clear *"It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers,"* bringing the great men to nothing and giving power to the weak. He controls the whole universe by His word. The stars themselves follow their courses in accord with His command. A remarkable picture of this universal oversight of His creation is given in the visions of Zechariah in the OT and John in the Revelation in the NT. The Holy Spirit is depicted as the seven eyes of God, continuously scanning the whole earth and always aware of all that is going on. In Zechariah 4, the seven lamps in the vision, yielding light from the olive oil which is always a symbol of the Holy Spirit are the *"seven eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth"*. In that vision the application has to do with the moving of the Holy Spirit to the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of the Babylonian captivity, but John in the Book of Revelation sees the same seven lamps and seven eyes in a far more vital context. He sees (ch. 4 & 5) the triumphant Christ moving to the deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death. In the very presence of the Almighty Creator and Father upon

the heavenly throne stand the seven lamps which are synonymous with the sevenfold Spirit of God, waiting to go out upon this mission of deliverance. This John sees as the triumphant Christ Himself, also having the seven eyes that are the sevenfold Spirit. So the Son is identified with the Spirit here just as He is in the gospel of John. The operation of the Spirit is the manifestation of Divine power emanating from the Father and channelled through the Son.

Beyond the material lies the spiritual. Just as the power of the Holy Spirit is evident in all the works of Nature, so is it manifested in its energising effect of the minds of believers. The first and perhaps the most striking example of this was the powers received by those gathered in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. A group of quite ordinary men, from the lower walks of life, were distinguished by their common faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and their whole-hearted devotion to Him and His cause. There came suddenly upon them a new power, filling their minds and nerving their souls to deeds of daring they would not have dreamed of undertaking of their own volition. There was an outward sign, some kind of celestial radiance filling the room above their heads, 'tongues of fire' the historian termed it, and that to them was the sign of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit which had been promised. Immediately their minds were quickened and they saw all things in a new light. The dimly understood prophecies of the Old Testament came at once into focus with the things that Jesus had told them about Himself and His coming kingdom. The injunction so recently laid upon them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation suddenly opened out into a broad and clear vision of their future lives' work. In the inspiration and enthusiasm of that mystic and yet enthralling experience they went straight out into the streets and preached as they had never preached before. It was upon that memorable day that the energy of the Holy Spirit was exerted so to work upon the minds of a few totally dedicated men as to achieve the mightiest and most significant of all God's works since the beginning of Creation, the institution of the Christian Church.

That was not the end of this wonderful aspect of the Spirit's working. "To every man" says Paul in 1 Cor. 12, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given". Various gifts and powers, he says, but all by the

same Spirit. Various kinds of ministries and services, but all for the same Lord. Various directions in which Divine energy is exerted, but all from the same God ("operations" in 1 Cor. 12.6 is from a word meaning superhuman or spiritual energy only). In no better way could the Apostle have stressed the essential oneness existing between the Father and the Son in all that they accomplish through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is that which is beyond even this. The Holy Spirit is a life-giving force. Put more accurately, the life which comes from God to His creatures, and all life is from God: there is no other source – comes by the Spirit. We already know that life is only to be had through Christ "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men*" wrote John at the beginning of his Gospel and at the end of his first letter he wrote "*whoso hath the Son hath life, but whoso hath not the Son hath not life*". We have to accept therefore that life is of God, by the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of life, the joint power of Father and Son conveying spiritual eternal life to the believer. This was the truth Jesus imparted to Nicodemus (John 4.5-8). In a more material sense that is how man received a transient terrestrial life. The earthly life now is but a short-term travesty of what real life can be. If Nicodemus wanted the true eternal life which is God's purpose for man he must receive an infusion of new life preparing him and fitting him for that world which is to be. He must, to use an easily understood expression, be "born again". Nicodemus found that hard to understand. So did the disciples at that time. They realised the truth better later on. Paul was able to say "*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, then the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give new life to your mortal bodies by his indwelling Spirit*" (Rom. 8.11 NEB). The dying life inherited from Adam, which of itself can only lead to the grave and extinction, is superseded by a new and eternal life which after the dissolution of this body leads to a new and never-dying life in the eternal beyond.

The basis of that wonder was laid down in the Old Testament for those with insight to read and understand. Talking about the animal creation, whose lives also depended upon God, the Psalmist says (Psa. 104.29-30 NIV) "*When you take away their breath, they die, and return to the dust. When*

you send your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth." At a much earlier date Elihu the deep thinking friend of Job expressed the same truth in relation to man. *"The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life ... if he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together, and man would return to the dust"* (Job 33.4 and 34.14 NIV). That is the fundamental truth of creation, the basis upon which all things exist. Ignored and denied by the wise men of this world, many of the world's scientists and philosophers, it stands always as an irrefutable fact. God is the source of life; without God, life and creation cannot be.

From this it follows that the Spirit of God in us, our 'possession' of the Holy Spirit is the power which links us with God. This is not just a figure of speech, it is reality. 1 John 2.1 tells us that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The word there translated 'advocate' is *parakletos*, the same word rendered 'comforter' in John's Gospel. So the Comforter which He promised to send after his ascension was his own power and influence present with his disciples when He was no longer bodily present in their company. So we are united with God in Christ through the Spirit of God and Christ extended into our hearts and lives. The reality of this union is stressed time and again in the Gospel of John. "I am in the Father ... the Father is in me ... you are in me ... I am in you ... that they all may be one; as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they may be one in us." So as H. Wheeler Robinson says in "Christian experience of the Holy Spirit", "the Spirit is conceived as the projected presence and activity of Christ himself with His Church and this explains the personalisation of the conception."

Closely associated with the idea of union with God is that of intercession. Christ is shown in Hebrews as one who *"ever liveth to make intercession for those who come to God by him."* (Heb. 7.25). As a rule this 'intercession' is associated with the thought of Christ interceding with the Father for forgiveness for sins committed but the word *entunichano* means primarily to meet, consult or converse with a person, and only secondarily to supplicate. This is communion with God, and Christ is an intercessor not as a supplicant but as a communicant. Romans 8 also takes this position and relates our Lord with the work of the Spirit. In

v.34 Paul says Christ has risen and makes intercession for us at the right hand of God, but in v.26 the Spirit, the *parakletos* makes intercession. There is an identification here between Christ in person at the right hand of the Father and Christ present with His faithful upon earth through the Holy Spirit. The *"groanings which cannot be uttered"* of v.26 means a deep sighing from that which is felt but cannot be expressed in words. In Mark 8.12 we read that Jesus *"sighed deeply in his spirit"* at the Pharisees' obtuseness in seeking an outward sign. So in Rom. 8 there is a vivid presentation of the believers striving to maintain faith and hope against all apparent discouragement. We know not how to approach the Father for reassurance on these matters and the Holy Spirit within us assists us in our weakness and insufficiency to convey our unspoken and unutterable feelings to our Lord in heaven and He to the Father. The Father, one with the Son, already knows! *"He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit"*. Mind here represents thoughts, intents and purposes. This too is related to the oneness with the Father who already knows the unspoken thoughts which are being conveyed to Him from the believer by the Spirit. The result is the reassurance that *"all things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose."*

Finally there is the Holy Spirit in Christ. According to Heb. 9.14 it was through the eternal Spirit that Christ *"offered himself without spot to God"*. How did the Spirit assist in the act of Christ offering Himself? It is evident that there was an exercise of Divine power mightily involved in the events surrounding Calvary. Ephesians 1.19-20 tells us that God exerted "his mighty power" raising Jesus from the dead. The reality of our Lord's death and resurrection is plainly declared in the Book of Revelation. *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore."* (1.18). The Holy Spirit is the means of the power of God in active operation and the New Testament makes it clear that the power of the Spirit was in and over Jesus throughout His earthly life in a very special sense. At the very commencement the angel told Mary *"the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the God."* (Luke 1.35). Thirty years later, Jesus was baptised in preparation

for His mission, the heavens opened and a visible form signalled a new outpouring of Divine power whereby He could go forward upon that mission. (Matt.3.16). Following His time of quiet consideration in the wilderness He returned "full of the Spirit" (Luke 4.1). Soon after at His first public appearance, He declared "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, the Lord hath anointed me ...*" (Luke 4.18). Throughout His earthly life the Holy Spirit was the link for communion and power between Father and Son. It was this that enabled Jesus to do all that He came to do and to say at the end "I have

finished the work which you gave me to do. "*Now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began*" (John 17.5).

So the Comforter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit of God, that Jesus promised His disciples would be their life-long guide and instructor and inspiration after His departure, has indeed proved to be, to them and to us, the entire activity of the Father in relation to us and to all men as mediated through Christ.

AOH

NO MORE SEA

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea." (Rev 21.1)

More than once it has been asked if this text implies that in the Millennial world of the future, when Christ reigns as king and evil is progressively eliminated from the hearts of men, the seas will disappear and the entire planet become dry land.

That cannot possibly be John's meaning here. Without the literal sea all life, human, animal and vegetable would vanish from the earth. No terrestrial life can exist without water. The rain comes down from the clouds to supply man, animals and plants. It disappears into the ground, runs into streams and rivers then flows into the sea which is the great reservoir of water. It evaporates by the heat of the sun and rises to form clouds that are carried by the wind and falls as rain again. This process must go on as long as the earth endures and there will always be sea, and no less in extent than it is at present. The writer of Ecclesiastes knew this; "*All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from which the rivers came, thither they return again*" (Ecclesiastes 1.7).

The mistake is in supposing that John in Rev. 21 is describing the actual earth. He is describing a vision that is a symbolic picture of the Millennium. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, the old heaven and earth having passed away, and a wonderful city descending out of that new heaven, to settle on the new earth, made to look like a bride ready for her husband. Such a conception would be difficult to translate into literal reality. What we have here is the fulfilment of God's promise through Isaiah (65.17-25) quoted and confirmed by the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3.13). It is to the effect

that the old world order dominated by evil. "this present evil world" is to be superseded by a new world order, "a new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness". It is this new world order, headed and governed by Christ, which is to have "no more sea". What does that mean?

Peter's expression "wherein dwells righteousness" gives the clue. That world is one in which evil is banished and will be no more. The Devil will be "bound" and powerless (Rev. 20) and the evil forces of this present world order overthrown and destroyed (Rev. 19). There will be no evil force or influence to deceive and injure mankind. The ancients from earliest times believed a monster personified evil, lived in the depths of the sea, and to them the sea was the home of evil. There is an allusion to this belief in Isa. 27.1 where in the time of judgment the Lord will "slay the dragon which is in the sea". John is thinking of this in that new world that he saw in symbolic vision where there was no place for the Prince of evil, no sea from which he could rise up to ravage the world and harry mankind. The power of evil will find no place in the new heavens and new earth of the future.

AOH

Only let us have faith in Him who gave us the vision (of victory) and we shall be victorious.

A conscience void of offence, before God and man, is an inheritance for eternity.

"God's people never meet for the last time."

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.*"

WAKE UP!*A call to spiritual alertness*

"Sleeper awake! Arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Eph. 5.4)

One of the worst perils of those who explore arctic regions is that of falling asleep. Once the desire for sleep has overcome a member of the party, the others have to be constantly watching him in case he should fall asleep and perish in the snow.

How many of us started the exploration into the unknown spiritual regions with shining eyes and beating pulses, with the warm blood glowing within us. Hearts were eager for the great adventure of faith upon which we decided. But how many of us have become discouraged, lethargic and sleepy as the journey goes on and on, and the expedition loses its glamour, and the goal has even ceased to fascinate us. A dreadful numbness and paralysis has begun to creep over our souls and sapped the vitality and slowed down the circulation, so that the life-giving joy which formerly sent the warm, zealous blood coursing through our veins, and spurred us on in our quest has become cold and sluggish. Such is the state of many who set out in the race before us, and Paul, anxious to arouse them out of their apathy, gave these challenging words quoted above.

If our spiritual appetite has gone and we no longer have any inclination for spiritual food and like the children of Israel when given manna in the wilderness, we begin to long for the fleshpots of Egypt, let us seek to create an appetite. It is said that appetite comes with eating, and so it is with our spiritual food. As the refreshing water of the Word of Truth begins to slake our thirst and the Bread of Life to appease our hunger, we begin to 'live' again. Our souls are invigorated, we breathe, we open our eyes and we awake from our apathy, become alert, refreshed, restored and strengthened. The stupor that has been holding us in its icy grip loses its hold on us. We get up, stumbling, maybe, but praise God we are up and on our feet once more. Spiritual food and drink is sending the warm blood pulsing through our veins. The old zest for life sets our hearts beating and spurs us forward to new and greater efforts. We are ready for loftier heights, and, by God's grace, to victory, in the strength of Him through whom alone victory is possible.

May God grant us by His power to shake off any drowsiness that may be creeping upon us, and

enable us to be ever watchful "lest he find you sleeping". Walking and talking with companions in the faith is so valuable and keeps us from drowsiness. Working together in the cause of the Kingdom enables to reach forward in new strength from our Master.

Above all, He is the one companion we must have and our hearts will burn within us as we walk with Him, as did two 'walkers' of long ago. Our prayer life will keep us alert and full of energy and activity, and if this too, has become torpid, we can call to the Saviour to help us. He will stoop to our necessity and restore the precious communication, so that we may once more hear His voice, and so that He may "speak comfortably" to us and guide our feet into the way of life. *"You show me the path of life, in your presence there is fulness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore."* Ps. 16.11. Come, drink deeply of that Fountain of Life, and find Light and Life in Him.

Thankfulness stimulates and enlivens the sluggish circulation and to tell the Lord how grateful we are for His blessing spurs us on. We sing of His Love and the glorious promises of the Gospel, which are all 'yea and amen in Christ Jesus.' We need to praise Him for the beautiful things of the earth, the works of His Hands, and for the love of friends and brethren of the household of faith. There is so much to thank and praise Him for, and as the Psalmist says, by this we enter His gates into His courts. *"Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord."* Ps. 118.19. Praise and thanksgiving will open our hearts to the morning glory, as the lark soars at heaven's gates with its thrilling notes of praise and exquisite joy, and then descends to its humble nest – very simply and very lowly. Here we have an example of the text *"He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble"*, and we realise that all that is given to us is the 'free gift of grace'. We shall learn, like the lark, to praise and glorify Him who has given us such blessings and treasures, and to be ever like the lark, hovering over our own humble nest, examining ourselves lest anything has crept in unawares to separate us from the Angel of His Presence.

May God keep us, in these troubled days, from drifting into indifference, or casualness. May He grant us the power to 'shake ourselves from the

dust.' If we have lost the power to do even that, may He be gracious and send someone to shake us, even if it's roughly. So long as it has the effect of awakening us out of that dread sleep, so that we hear the sound of the trumpet. It must penetrate and not fall on unheeding ears. "O you who dwell in the

gardens, my companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it." (Song of Solomon 8.13) "Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendour" (Isa.52.1).

(An abridged article by AS)

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

7. Chapter 5.27-6.11

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

An invitation to Matthew to become a disciple:

Capernaum is on the north shore of Lake Galilee. A main trade route from Damascus to Acre on the coast passes through the town and may account for the site of the tax office. There was a tax on traders using a Roman road; as well as poll and land taxes. Tax Collectors were hated because they served Rome and because they could make extortionate demands. Matthew Levi was rich and to surrender his life to Christ was a sacrifice. Why did he invite his erstwhile colleagues? Why were Pharisees in the house? Large houses were often built round a courtyard where uninvited guests gathered. Jesus' outreach to the unwanted folk of society was something quite new and He offered a fresh start. Matthew's record (9.13) of this story tells us that Jesus quoted Hosea 6.6. What did Jesus mean and how important is that quotation to us? Barclay has some interesting things to say about this.

Questions about fasting: has fasting any significance for Christians? Is Jesus saying that unlike religious people, His disciples do not practice asceticism? Note Jesus' contrast in Luke 7.32. He doesn't comment on the need for prayer. Does His comment link with other scriptural references to bride and bridegroom? What did He mean by being 'taken away'; the Greek word used could infer violence (1). Do traditions uphold or circumvent God's principles? What did the parables of the 'wineskins and patches' teach? How are they relevant to our experience? Are we afraid of change? Jesus' teachings are ever new and are distinct from religion. Modern translations use 'rend' or 'tear' not 'putteth' as in AV v.36 for the Greek word 'schisma'. Why can't the 'old skins' of tradition contain the 'new wine of the Kingdom'?

Chapter 6 Opposition – about the Sabbath. The Sabbath teaching was important but had they missed the point of its value? Was their criticism valid? Was 'legalism' hindering a wholesome life

and 'obedience' developing into formalism? Laws were made for our benefit; to save us from selfishness; to save us from hurting others and most of all, from forgetting God. The Jewish definition of work bore no resemblance to the Law and Barclay's commentary has an interesting note. Deut 23.25 encourages gleaning. Why did Jesus refer to David's visit to the Tabernacle? How was it relevant to the Sabbath? Mark 2.26 refers to Abiathar but 1 Sam. 21.1 refers to Ahimelech; where did the change occur? Jesus' healing of the man's withered hand shows up the Pharisees' weakness. They lived to destroy; Jesus lives to give life. The Greek word for 'save' (6.9) means "everything conducive to true life and happiness" (2) The Greek word (psuche) refers to the whole person, physical and spiritual. The word translated 'wither' is often used to describe decaying plant material (3). The word 'madness' in v.11 is translated in the NIV and NRSV as furious or fury and means 'insane anger' (4) or "phrensy or loss of reason" (5). 'Trouble was brewing'.

(1) Moms (2) Geldenhuys (3) Moms (4) Barclay (5) Geldenhuys from Plummer

DN

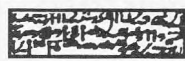
Barclay on Luke 6. 1-5

"Why did the Pharisees miss the meaning – and why do we so often miss it?

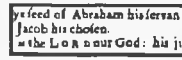
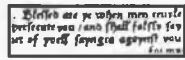
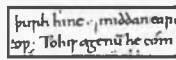
(i) They did not bring to scripture an open mind. They came to scripture not to learn God's will, but to find proof texts to buttress up their own ideas. Far too often men have taken a theology to the Bible instead of finding their theology in the Bible. When we read scripture we must come saying, not, "Listen, Lord, for Thy servant is speaking," but "Speak, Lord for Thy servant is listening."

(ii) They did not bring a needy heart. The man who comes with no sense of need always misses the deepest meaning of scripture. When need awakens, the Bible is a new book. "

William Barclay - The Gospel of Luke, p.68
Saint Andrew Press (1967)



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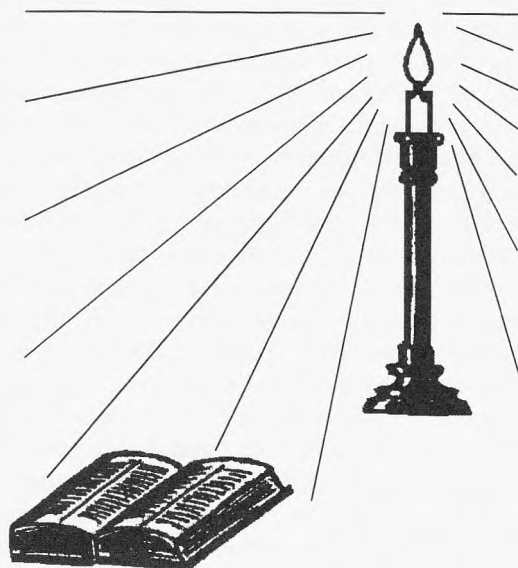
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH – With Jesus

“They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus”. (Acts 4.12)

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast
But sweeter far thy face to see
And in thy presence rest.

Education and social position make men proud. They feel they have special privileges to teach and preach, denied to those in humbler stations of life who have never learned their lessons inside those temples of learning which award degrees and scholastic honours to their students. The bold, clear oratory of Jesus aroused the envy of the scribes and priests. Where had this man learned wisdom and knowledge and the art of a preacher? Was not this the carpenter's son? When Peter and John held forth before them with the same confidence and fluency they were astonished. These working men had the same manner as their Master! They had not perceived, as many since have not done, that mere knowledge does not make a man either great or clever. Schools, degrees, books and ability to quote the Bible, do not make a Christian. The apostles had received power from on high as Jesus had before them. The spirit of God had given them illumination, courage, confidence and poise. Where once they had been timid, ignorant and without polish, they now stood boldly before the High Priests telling them plainly a few facts which quelled them into silence. They had Jesus put to

death but they dare not touch his preachers. So Peter and John were free to teach and preach, to shed their influence upon the lives of others as Jesus had influenced them. Influence is a wonderful and powerful alchemy in life. Everyone is exerting an influence on someone else, for better or worse. The stronger the personality the stronger the influence. These men had lived with Jesus for three years. During that time it is evident they had become changed needing only the energising power of the Spirit at Pentecost to kindle a flame in them which could not be put out. The base metal of their nature was by this means transformed into the gold of indestructible character.

Brave men influence other men to bravery. Good people make the not so good conscious that they could do better. Clever people, successful people, creators of beauty, give a needed urge to the indolent to get something done. The influence of evil is all too evident in the disorders of society, but the Christian has a responsibility as long as he is in the world, not only to let his light shine but to be as salt where the weakness of human nature is easily corrupted.

The influence of blameless, bold, truthful men and women who have been with Jesus is always felt. It makes an impact on people hungering for hope and life. The actions we do today, the wise words we spoke yesterday may be the influence that someone needs to shape their tomorrow.

T.H.

All we know about waterpots is that they were empty. Those at Cana were empty but the Lord filled them. Rebecca came with an empty water pot and she became Isaac's bride. The woman at the well came and went but brought the whole city to the Master's feet.

Prayer brings and keeps God and man together: it raises man up to God and brings God down to man. If you would keep up your walk with God, pray without ceasing.

(George Whitefield)

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

4. Fugitive in the Wilderness

The old man looked up from his writing as a furtive knock sounded on the outer door. His eyes held a question; there should be no one abroad at this late hour of the night. The villagers of Ramah would normally all be asleep and no traveller on lawful business should be out there in the darkness. He listened for a minute; the knock came again.

There was a movement in the big outer room where Samuel's students, 'sons of the prophets' were lying asleep and the sound of quiet footsteps going to the door of the house. He heard it unbarred and opened and the murmur of voices. Soon his own door opened silently to reveal the form of a young man.

"David is here" he said quietly. Samuel rose to his feet. Behind the other he perceived the athletic frame of the lad he had once, at the Divine command, anointed as Israel's future king. That had been seven years ago; he had not seen him since. Here in this quiet retreat, remote from the affairs of the nation since his parting from Saul, contentedly spending his time teaching a small band of young disciples the things of God, he had heard from time to time of the exploits of the son of Jesse. He must have rejoiced when he learned of the victory over Goliath and the discomfiture of the Philistines. He must equally have been saddened by news of Saul's continued rejection of God and consequent inability to deliver Israel completely from those same Philistines. Perhaps he wondered at times how the Lord would fulfil His expressed intention to replace Saul by David as king, but if so his faith would rise to the surface and he would rest the matter entirely with the Lord. Meanwhile he continued with the quiet work that the Lord had given him to do here in Ramah, a work seemingly so insignificant compared with the mighty deeds of his earlier life when he ruled supreme as Judge over Israel. Now he looked at David, mingled welcome and question showing in his eyes. David came into the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"I am David, son of Jesse, whom you once anointed to be king over Israel" he said simply.

"I know it, my son" came the calm reply, "What brings you here?"

"I flee from the face of Saul. He seeks my life. He uses me to lead his armies to victory against the

Philistines but he cannot bear that I receive the applause of the people when I return in triumph. He fears that I will lead an insurrection to usurp his throne and he cannot understand that I am content to wait until the Lord gives it to me in His own time and way. I have lost my wife, my home and my friends, and I am an outcast, destitute and alone. But I am still the anointed of the Lord. I come to you that you may tell me what the Lord would have me do next.

The older man spoke gently. "You will stay here with me, my son" he said "and soon I will tell you where to go and what to do. For now you will stay with me."

The other dropped into a seat and rested his head in his hands, elbows on knees. "But Saul will find out that I am here and send men to kill me, and you and yours will be involved on my account. I cannot allow that to happen."

Samuel spoke quietly. "Saul will discover that you have taken refuge here in my Natioth, school of the prophets and he will send messengers to take you. And when they come to this house, the Spirit of God will take possession of them and they will be unable to do anything but be caught up in a rhapsody of prophesying and so they will return to Saul without having achieved their purpose." His eyes grew sombre. "In his anger Saul will come himself with his servants to take you. When he sets foot in this house the Spirit of God will come upon him also and he will fall down prostrate before me a day and a night. Then he will rise up and go his way back to Gibeah, not knowing why it is that he cannot take you. That shall be a sign to you, my son, that the protection of the Lord is over you and that you will surely become king over Israel. Lie down now and sleep, my son, for the way before you is arduous and the trials severe. If your faith fails not and you endure to the end, you will yet sit on the throne of the Lord and rule His people in righteousness and equity. Lie down now and sleep, for the way before you is arduous.

So David departed from Ramah and went to Nob, five miles away, where the High Priest, Ahimelech, great-grandson of Eli, endeavoured to administer the ritual of the Mosaic Law within what

was left of the sacred Tabernacle. Its central glory, the Ark of the Covenant, taken in battle by the Philistines at the battle of Aphek more than seventy years previously was still in the house of Aminadab at Kirjath-jearim in the south. It is not definitely known what happened to the Tabernacle structure at Shiloh after that disastrous battle. Probably it had been hurriedly dismantled and hidden before the Philistines reached and destroyed Shiloh, and in later years re-erected at Nob. So David came to Ahimelech, tired and hungry after three days probably aimless wandering about the countryside since leaving Samuel, begging food and weapons from the High Priest. The poverty of Ahimelech's establishment is shown by the fact that the only food he could offer David and the young men with him was the cast out hallowed "shewbread" from the sacred table in the Holy of the Tabernacle. This bread that once had been consecrated to God should have been destroyed and not profaned by secular use. The measure of David's desperation is revealed in that he took and ate the hallowed bread, a sacrilege he would never have dreamed of doing in normal circumstances. He looked for a sword and the priest produced the sword of Goliath the Philistine giant slain by David, that had been placed in the sanctuary as a remembrance of that notable occasion. Armed with that he made his way across country some twenty-five miles to the Philistine town of Gath, hoping to find sanctuary with Achish the chieftain of the town. That he should run the risk of joining the enemy he had so consistently fought against demonstrates the fear of Saul he had developed. Only in the enemy land would he feel safe. Of course, in taking himself out of the Lord's protection he was not safe at all. It was not long before some of the Philistines discovered his identity. "Is not this David the king of the land?" They said. "Did they not sing ... of him in dances, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?". (1 Sam. 21.11 RSV). In panic David pretended to be mad, acting like an idiot, until the Philistines turned from him in contempt, and he was able to make his escape and get back into the territory of Judah. So he came into the rocky mountainous country between Jerusalem and Hebron and found a cave near Adullam, far from the haunts of men, and there he sank down, and rested, and pondered.

It is impossible to gauge the state of David's

mind at this time. He was to be on the run from Saul for another six years, always on the move from place to place and never knowing where he would be next. The one thing that does stand out in the narrative of 1 Samuel 20-26 is his determination never to take action himself to wrest the kingdom from Saul. He could have done it; there is much evidence that the south country, Judah, was behind him. On two occasions Saul's life was in his hands and he deliberately refrained from taking advantage of the opportunity. He was resolved to wait until the Lord gave him the kingship. There is here the paradox of a man who is possessed of faith on the one hand and consumed by fear of his adversary on the other. Perhaps David was not so unlike the rest of us after all. So often faith and fear, trust and doubt, co-exist in parallel compartments in our lives and it takes the lessons of bitter experience to enable the one to overcome the other. That at any rate is how it turned out for David.

He must have remained in Adullam for something like two years or more. During that time he collected around himself a band of four hundred men, renegades and outcasts mainly, but all consumed by hatred of Saul and prepared to fight under David's leadership. Such a number could only be sustained under such conditions by the material and moral support of the local populace; there is not much doubt that this was forthcoming. Adullam was in the centre of the territories of the southern tribes, Simeon and Judah, that were traditionally at variance with Saul's tribe Benjamin and the tribes of northern Israel. 1 Samuel 22.6 reveals that Saul at this very time had made his headquarters in his home town of Gibeah in a "grove in a high place" which means an idolatrous sanctuary. This indicates that Saul had finally rejected God and gone over to the gods of Canaan, acceptable to the north but anathema to the south. David's cause must have become identified with the re-establishment of national loyalty to God and his friendship with Samuel and Ahimelech would have buttressed that position. His "guerilla campaign" must have taken on more and more the aspect of a "holy war" to restore the worship of the true God in Israel.

For the next two years, David was on the move all the time, changing his headquarters from place to place to avoid detection by Saul's men. He went from Adullam to Hereth, from Hereth to Keilah,

from Keilah to Ziph. Then on to Maon, En-gedi by the Dead Sea and back to Ziph again. All these places were within twenty or thirty miles of each other and it is possible that his followers who had now increased to six hundred, were scattered over the whole area and formed an underground movement within the boundaries of Saul's kingdom. The hearts of the people were steadily turning more and more toward David.

It was at this time that there occurred the strange incidents, in which David had Saul at his mercy, but chivalrously refused to take advantage of the opportunity. The accounts are in 1 Samuel 24 and 26. In the one account, David and some of his men were in the recesses of a cave when Saul inadvertently entered, not knowing anyone was there. David silently cut off a piece of his outer garment without being noticed and after Saul had left the cave he called out to him to demonstrate how near death he had been. In the other account David with one companion crept into Saul's camp when all there were asleep and got away with Saul's spear and pitcher, forbearing to take his life. He then called to him from the other side of the valley. In both cases Saul expressed his contrition and vowed he would persecute David no more, but went back on his word almost immediately. What stands out in both events is David's determination not to be responsible for Saul's death. He was still resolved to wait the Lord's time, confident that the Lord would eventually fulfil His word.

David was increasingly becoming a man of violence. The story of his encounter with Nabal, a wealthy farmer (ch.25) shows this. Nabal's far-flung lands lay in the area scoured by David's followers. His shepherds enjoyed the protection of David's men from bandits and, probably, marauding Philistines. David sent a message soliciting a little material consideration for services rendered. Nabal refused with scorn and insult. Immediately David set out with four hundred armed men to seek revenge, vowing to kill all Nabal's household and take his possessions. Bloodshed was only averted when Nabal's wife, Abigail, went out to meet the avenging horde and interceded with David. David rather shamefacedly admitted that God had kept him from this bloodthirsty vengeance by sending Abigail in this manner, but the fact remains that his character was undergoing a change and that not for the better. In

the upshot Nabal died suddenly and David took Abigail to be his wife and inherited her late husband's not inconsiderable property. This made him a wealthy landowner but still a fugitive with a price on his head. At about this time a grievous blow fell upon him; his old friend and mentor, the aged prophet Samuel died.

Samuel must have been well over a hundred years old at his death. His political power had waned considerably with Saul as king, but his moral influence was still great. All Israel remembered and revered him as the man who in earlier generations had saved them from the Philistines: they could not but be painfully conscious that Saul, with all his warlike prowess, had failed to maintain that position. But Saul was still in power, and with Samuel now gone, David evidently felt that his personal safety whilst in Saul's dominions was less secure. "*I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul*" he said (1 Sam. 27.1 RSV). He took a bold decision. He would take his whole household (he now had two wives in addition to Saul's daughter whom he had left behind when he fled) and his six hundred men, and make alliance with his old enemies the Philistines. He went to Achish, a Philistine chieftain of Gath and proposed settlement in his territory. That worthy, knowing something of David of old and eyeing his six hundred stalwart warriors somewhat speculatively, probably reflected that they would form a useful addition to his own forces at the next showdown with Saul, and assigned him the nearby town of Ziklag for his use. What the citizens of Ziklag thought of the arrangement is not stated: they of course were not consulted.

David's occupation of Ziklag lasted sixteen months. He was no longer in fear of Saul and he spent his time now in a systematic ravaging and plundering of the nomadic tribes between Canaan and Egypt. It does not make pleasant reading. "David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel and returned, and came to Achish (1 Sam. 27.9). It looks as if Achish had a share of the spoils, upon which he probably congratulated himself; at the same time David pretended to him that his forays had been directed against the tribes of Israel at which Achish must have congratulated himself still more and now the sands were running out for Saul.

He had long since lost his best military leader in David. He had lost the sobering influence on the nation exerted by Samuel. His subjects were resentful, his warriors demoralized, he himself, at about sixty-five years of age fearful and panic-stricken at his continuous failures and the ever present Philistine menace. His ill-advised visit to a sorceress at Endor to try and raise Samuel from the nether-world to advise him only brought dark prophecy of doom and death. Now the Philistines, secure in the knowledge that David was no longer

a threat, invaded Israel in force. Saul and his men were forced back to the other side of the land, until at last, with virtually the whole of Israel occupied by the enemy, they made a last desperate stand on Mount Gilboa.

That was the end. As the Philistines scoured the deserted battlefield the following morning, they found, lying in the midst of his three dead eldest sons, the body of Saul, king of Israel. The time for the kingship of David had come.

AOH (To be continued)

CLAY IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER

A study in Psalm 50

"Gather to me my loyal servants, those who by sacrifice made a covenant with me ..." (Psalm 50.5 REV). So speaks the Eternal, through the Psalmist. The word 'saints' (AV) is significant. One of the problems perpetually confronting a responsible interpreter of Holy Scripture is that of determining that which has spiritual significance and a message for the Church and that which is of literal significance. The latter has a plain and clear meaning and allows of no involved obscure construction. Here, the message is at once both clear and involved, a message that at first seems natural and literal but at the second reading conveys a deep significant call to all who are truly God's people.

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." (v2). This is addressed to those who have been cleansed and sanctified in the spirit through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness, the 'Altogether Lovely One', in whom His people are seen and accepted by the Father (Eph.1.6). To and through these the Father speaks to those who have ears to hear, and says *"Gather to me my faithful ones"*. He speaks with a measure of judgment. (Psalm 50.3, 4, 6) and no wonder! *"What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done it?"* (Isa 5.4). Now he calls and calls with vigour, to those precious in His sight.

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence ... Hear, O my people" (vv 3,7). They who are worthy of the name, *"My people"* (1 Pet. 2.10) will hear. There is a beautiful natural parable of a potter sitting at his wheel, moulding a lump of clay and fashioning it to the beauty of design and workmanship in his mind. Jeremiah was shown a

picture which applies to natural and spiritual Israel (Rom. 9.19-26; 1 Cor. 10.11). *"As clay in the potter's hand, so are you in mine hand."* (Jer. 18.6); so speaks the great Creator, God and Father of mankind, to those upon whom He laid His hand as His chosen vessels, cleansed and ready for His use (Ezek. 40.1; Rev. 1.7; Acts 9.15; 2 Tim. 2.21). God could, had He wished, have chosen clay of finer, nobler substance than they. He could have chosen, even from among fallen men, a clay of better composition, of minimum fault and failure, that would have responded differently to the great Potter's hand, yielding an immediate valued product. He did not do so, either with natural or spiritual Israel (Deut. 31.27; 1 Cor. 1.26-29). There is hope when the clay is marred in the hand of the Potter, in that He does **not** cast it away and choose another piece, but remakes it, in a different mould, *"as it seems good"*. And now, behold, a wonderful thing. The fact that the clay has failed, and been remade, does not **diminish** its value or usefulness, but rather enhances it! Time has shown, many times, that not the shallow, inexperienced servants are the most useful to the great King. It is those who through failure, trial and suffering that come to know Him as a loving Father and His dear Son as the great High Priest. These who are able to bear patiently their infirmities are "vessels of mercy" and because they have experienced His mercy in themselves are able to carry the word of forgiveness and salvation to others! (Heb. 5.1, 2, 5, 6; 7.25; 1 Tim. 1.15, 16; 2 Cor. 3.6; Rom. 9.23) When a Persian carpet is being made it sometimes happens that one or more of the apprentices who are allowed to help may make a mistake in weave

or colour. When this happens if the artist be a past master at his craft, he does not undo the mistake! Instead he weaves it into the pattern achieving new and enhanced heights of design and craftsmanship. So take heart you who "kneel, conscious of our failure and our sin and dare to call his righteousness our own." God is never impotent amid the wreckage of anyone's hope and expectation. There is no 'cul-de-sac' in the Divine purpose. Abraham, father of the faithful, believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness; *"being fully persuaded that what God had promised He was abundantly able to perform..."* So tremendous was the faith that shone in the heart and life of Abraham and so pleased the Almighty that he was given the magnificent title of 'friend of God'. That wonderful faith can be ours also as we look up into the dear face of the Beloved and say "Yea Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief! I believe that what you have promised you are abundantly able to perform! You have begun a good work in me; and will complete it! That you will perfect that which concerns me ..." And one day we shall see this apparently ruined, wasted, emaciated, unprofitable life of ours crowned with glory and honour as the lovely product of His grace!

Keep on believing there's nothing to fear,

Keep on believing, Jesus is near,

Keep on believing in night and day

He is still guiding – and will guide all the way.

So to return to the Psalm, *"Those who have made a covenant with me by Sacrifice."* If this applied to natural Israel how much more must it apply to spiritual Israel; *"who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1.13). It is obvious that if natural Israel were in a "covenant by sacrifice", spiritual Israel (for whom the Son of God died Eph. 5.25) is much more so. For whereas the people of

Israel were involved in that Covenant whether they liked it or not, they had no choice in the matter for the covenant had already been made with their fathers. Spiritual Israel is in a very different category. Every member of the Church of the Firstborn, the New Creation, Israel after the spirit is there by specific invitation and acceptance, on the basis of the Sacrifice of God's Son, whose blood was shed for and accepted by each of them, as individuals, on an entirely voluntary basis. They are thereafter 'members of His Body' the Church of the living God.

"By sacrifice!" Admittedly we have offered our little all. "All we have, our hearts, we give you; consecrate them, yours alone ..." We have offered our feeble little all and have presented our bodies as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God ..." our reasonable service. But far transcending any or all of these is **His** great and tremendous sacrifice of His only begotten Son, the dearest treasure of His heart on our behalf. Thereafter all we can offer that could possibly be acceptable is, as the Apostle so beautifully and simply puts it, the "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13.15). This itself a most beautifully spiritual rendering of the final verse of Psalm 50. *"Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me; to those who go the right way, I will show the salvation of God."* (RSV). Can we not then, in view of all these wonders, realise the greatness of His love and mercy toward us, the unspeakable gift of the sacrifice of His Son, and, on this basis "Gather together unto him. ..."? Thus forsaking all lesser things, and on the basis of His great sacrifice for us, and full acceptance and belief of that great and vital fact, come together in love and gratitude, and with one mind and one mouth "Glorify Him" to whom all praise belongs, and His Son, who loved us, and gave Himself for us.

Abridged notes TWW

Angel's Food

"Man did eat angel's food." This expression occurs in Psa. 78.25 and refers to the manna sent as food for the Israelites in the wilderness. In the past, some thought that manna was indeed the food of angels, on the strength of this verse. The word here translated 'angel', however is *'abbir'* which is nowhere else rendered 'angel' but rendered 'bull' four times, 'strong' or 'strong one' (referring to

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

AOH

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

5. The Betrayal

Many facets of Peter's character seem to be revealed at the time of Jesus' betrayal. His fervent expressions of loyalty at the start are sadly belied by the story of his denials at the finish. We are left with the impression of a man who reacted quickly and not always advisedly to the circumstances of the moment. He desired and fully intended to be completely loyal to his Master at all times; it never entered his head that he could be anything else. But it was still a surface loyalty, taking its inspiration and power from his own interpretation of what Jesus had told them respecting their promised position in His Kingdom when that Kingdom should come. It was not a loyalty that was derived from a sober appraisal of the opposition and hardships that must inevitably come to those who avowedly took their stand with the Nazarene. Despite all that had happened in the past, Peter still had not realized that there was to be suffering and death before the promised glory and life. So it was with his usual assured demeanour that he went with John to prepare the room and table for their annual Passover meal. He probably wondered why Jesus had given him so apparently pointless an instruction instead of telling him plainly where the ceremonial was to be conducted. He was to go into the city and follow a man who would be carrying a pitcher of water (that in itself was a most unusual circumstance in a society where only women carried pitchers of water) and the place to which he was led was to be the venue. If, as tradition has it, it was the home of Mary the mother of John Mark, Peter and John must have known the house well. It is idle to speculate; suffice it that the two disciples carried out their instructions and at the appointed hour Jesus assembled there with the twelve.

The incidents of the supper are well known. The first one affecting Peter, so far as the record reveals, is the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus. It was an object lesson, an example they were to remember and emulate in after days, when Jesus was no more with them. It was a lesson in the spirit of service and mutual helpfulness. Their minds were still full of the idea and prospect of reigning as kings over Israel, an idea inspired by orthodox Judaistic Messianic hopes. But they needed to be shown that their reign was to be one

of service to the ruled, that as kings and priests among mankind they would be the servants of all; so Jesus pointed the moral by declaring "*I am among you as he that serves*" (Luke 22.27 RSV). "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (John 13.14 RSV). Perhaps some of the other disciples, the more thoughtful among them, understood and took to themselves the Lord's meaning, but not so Peter. "*You shall never wash my feet*" he protested. To him the very idea was abhorrent. He regarded Jesus as Lord supreme to be honoured and revered and kept on a pinnacle well above the common herd. He never realized that in this attitude he was also placing himself in a similar position in relation to the people around him. He would no more think of himself washing the feet of those whom he was called upon to evangelize than he would admit the propriety of allowing his Lord to wash his own feet. While he was in that condition of mind, Jesus had to say to him, as He did say, "*if I do not wash you, you have no part in me*". To which Peter reacted with his characteristic instantaneous change of mood and responded "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head*". And now Jesus had to restrain his sudden enthusiasm and bring him back to a calm and sober appraisal of the reason for which He was performing this little service in the first place.

Peter was irrepressible. Not many minutes elapsed before the time came for Jesus to utter the word that was to strike consternation into the hearts of all at the table. The time of the betrayal was at hand and Jesus knew the identity of the betrayer. It was with a heavy heart that He looked around the circle of eager faces and said "*Truly ... I say to you, one of you will betray me*". There must have been a sudden amazed silence as incredulity and dawning horror registered on each countenance, and then, furtively, each began to look to others, as though expecting to see the truth written on one of their faces. No one dared speak. The silence continued until Peter, impetuous as ever, motioned urgently to John, who was seated next to the Lord, to ask him of whom He had spoken. Peter had already on a previous occasion contradicted the

Lord when He had spoken of His coming suffering and death, and been rebuked. Perhaps he did not want to risk another rebuke at this moment. Perhaps at this startling blow to all his own hopes of an early assumption of kingly power by Jesus, backed by all the authority of Heaven which He so manifestly possessed, Peter could not trust himself to speak. At any rate it was John who asked the fateful question.

It almost seems as though only John and Peter heard the answer and understood the significance of the subsequent action. Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the liquid remaining in the dish, upon which the Passover Lamb had rested and handed it to Judas, who then hurriedly left the assembly. The following verses indicate that the disciples in general did not know why he went out or the significance of Jesus' words to him. Had they all understood the meaning of Jesus' action this could not have been said of them; they all would have known that Judas was the traitor. It would seem that Peter's gesture to John was unnoticed by the others. John's question and Jesus' reply were possibly uttered in a low tone of voice unheard by them. Peter watching from his position a little distance away sensed the reply by the movement of the Lord's lips or by his immediate action and was the only one besides John who did so. And that, at last, convinced Peter that his Lord meant what He said and was indeed going almost at once to betrayal and death.

It was in that mood that he listened the more intently to Jesus' next words. Only for a little while now shall I be with you, He told them, and *"where I am going you cannot come"*. Feeling himself blundering on the edge of a great mystery, Peter could not let such words pass unchallenged. He must know. *"Lord, where are you going?"* But Jesus was not explicit. He was going, and Peter could not follow him now but he would do so later. Peter was in no mood for conundrums. He only knew that he wanted to be with Jesus wherever He went and whatever He did, and if, as now appeared, that meant open conflict with His enemies and the risk of death at last, he was ready for that. *"Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!"* (John 13.37 RSV). Jesus must have looked upon him with eyes of love and sympathy, knowing how soon his rash avowal of loyalty to the end was to be put to the test. *"Even though they all fall away, I will not"* (Mark 14.29 RSV) the earnest

disciple insisted. Was it at that point the Lord spoke the comforting words which are recorded only by Luke *"Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again strengthen your brethren"* (Luke 22.31,32 RSV). Jesus knew of the denial that was so soon to come. Does this mean that He also knew Peter to be sound at heart; that despite the lapse he would come back and be the tower of strength to the church that Jesus had said right at the beginning he would be? Nevertheless there was a sad duty to perform, a hard word to fall on Peter's ears, unheeding though they be at the moment: *"truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times"* (Mark 14.30 RSV). Peter did not consciously disbelieve his Master. In his present excited and confident state of mind the significance of the words just did not sink in. He heard them, and understood their import, but they did not register as applicable to him neither did he receive them as a definite statement of an event which was certainly to come to pass. He answered hastily, perhaps only half appreciating the meaning of his own words; *"If I must die with you, I will not deny you."* The murmur of assent from the other disciples probably blurred the personal aspect of the matter in Peter's mind. It was an academic situation anyway, impossible of experience in real life, and he had returned Jesus an academic answer and there the matter could rest. And Jesus did let the matter rest there too. Only a few hours now, and what He had foreseen would, inevitably and tragically, come to pass. But first there was the scene in Gethsemane where Peter tried to defend his Master by the sword. It is a strange little episode. How did it come about that Peter was armed with a sword in the first place and why did Jesus allow him to carry it at all? They had just come from the scene of the Last Supper; no fitting place for swords there. And yet they had two swords even in that hallowed room! Just before leaving for Gethsemane, Jesus had told them in effect that the life which faced them after his departure would necessitate a change in His instructions to them as evangelists. Whereas formerly they were to rely on the hospitality of their fellow-Jews to whom they preached, taking neither purse nor script with them, they were now to traverse the wider wilder outside world. There they

would not necessarily encounter fellow Jews and must make some modest provision for their needs themselves. Hence they must now take purse and script, and in addition, a sword. It has been suggested that this was for protection against wild beasts although the allusion is not very plain. At any rate the disciples misunderstood him and excitedly produced swords that they had apparently smuggled in. Luke is the only one who records the incident (22.35-38). Our Lord's reference to the prophecy is Isaiah 53 that He was to be reckoned among the transgressors may give colour to the alternative idea that the presence of the swords was to demonstrate that he could have defended himself from the arrest if he wished. Hence his comment "it is enough". But the instruction in v.36 to sell their garments and buy swords must imply an application to the emergency that now faced them and hence after Jesus' death. At any rate He allowed Peter to take his sword with him knowing that He would not accept its use to achieve release from His enemies. Peter of course was not to know that, and in his present frame of mind he was prepared to take on all comers. When the Temple guards approached to arrest Jesus, Peter was sure that the hour of decision was come. Jesus would be compelled to declare himself now and use His heavenly powers to confound His enemies. But Peter intended to get one blow in first. His wild lunge missed whatever was its intended mark (he was probably not very expert with a sword anyhow). He succeeded merely in slicing off the ear of the High Priest's captain of the guard. For a moment perhaps, the nature of the arrest hung in the balance. Fired by Peter's example, the rest of the disciples might well have joined in defence of their Master and a general melee developed. But Jesus stopped them with an imperious gesture. "Put your sword back into its place." He said to Peter "for all who take the sword will perish by the sword". And then, more gently "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels" (Matt. 26.52, 53 RSV). A Roman legion consisted of six thousand men. Peter was stopped in his tracks; he had forgotten that Jesus had at His command other-worldly powers greater by far than this trumpery sword. And now he realised that Jesus had no intention of using that power; that He was not going to resist arrest. Perhaps, unbidden, words of

old, well-remembered words, flashed into his mind with a new and terrible significance "*He is led as a lamb to the slaughter*" and dark despair filled his mind. With the despair came fear, fear of the relentless guards who now had Jesus, unresistingly in their grasp. He dropped his sword and ran, following his fellow disciples, ran with all his might from a scene that would evermore be etched on his mind as the time of his life's great disillusionment. But once again his basic loyalty came to the top. Where he went we do not know, but it was not many hours before he was trying, with John to re-establish contact with his captive Lord. Of the others there is no record. They had evidently gone into hiding, but Peter and John were hovering on the outside of the High Priest's palace where Jesus was being examined. John was known to the palace staff in other connections and so was able to get inside and somewhere near the group surrounding Jesus without being challenged. Peter was not so fortunate; he mingled with a group surrounding a fire that had been made in the courtyard and there he remained hoping to escape detection until he could see for himself what the outcome was to be. It was an act of considerable courage entirely wiping out his previous momentary panic in Gethsemane for if he was identified with the man now on trial, in the then excitable atmosphere, he would most certainly have been denounced and made to share his fate. So he remained there, endeavouring to be inconspicuous and saying as little as he could to anyone. The attempt, of course, was futile. A Galilean fisherman in the midst of a crowd of town Judeans would be about as unnoticeable as a Cornishman in a group of London cockneys. Before long one of the young woman servants, passing by in the execution of her duties, looked upon him and remarked "*You also were with Jesus the Galilean*". The men around the fire looked up and there was a sudden silence. Peter looked around wildly for John; he was nowhere to be seen, and then at the circle of suspicious faces, and he panicked. "*I do not know what you mean*" he blustered, and got up and went outside to the porch of the building. It was colder there but away from those accusing eyes. But his retreat availed him nothing, for in a little while another servant came by and observed to the little knot of bystanders "*This man was with Jesus of Nazareth*" and again

with mounting fear, he denied the charge. *"I do not know the man"* he insisted, and then apparently, and strangely at variance with his evident state of panic went back beyond the group round the courtyard fire and into the building to a point where he was within sight of Jesus. Despite his repeated denials, he could not tear himself away from his beloved Lord. And it was while thus standing, trying to follow the course of the trial and to see what was going on without making himself conspicuous, that he suddenly chilled at the words of the third challenge. *"Certainly you are also one of them for your accent betrays you"*. His nerve suddenly broke, and he began to curse and swear, saying, *"I do not know the man"*. Hardly had the words left his lips than there sounded on the still night air, clear and piercing, over all Jerusalem, the long, drawn-out notes of the Roman bugle

announcing the changing of the guard at the third watch (3.00 am.). This was the signal that was known as "the cock-crow" because it heralded the imminence of dawn. Peter, horrified, heard those silver notes and realised what he had done, remembered his confident boast of a few hours earlier and his airy dismissal of the mere suggestion that he would ever falter in his loyalty to his Master. The Lord turned and looked upon him. He met those eyes, eyes not of reproach but of love and sympathy and understanding, and too, of forgiveness. And as the crowd closed in again around the beloved form, Peter stumbled, unheeding past the hostile bystanders, past the group still seated round the fire, through the porch with its crowd of loungers into the street and wept bitterly.

(To be continued) AOH

HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM

In the Old Testament our Father has provided many pictures to illustrate truths mentioned in the New. We find the particular truth of James 2.5 *"Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world; rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him?"* illustrated by the life and experiences of David and his men in the cave of Adullam. When David was forced to leave his house he went into the wilderness and selected a very large cave to dwell in. Then he gathered a faithful company from all the tribes of Israel, who shared his trials and experiences as an outcast, a fugitive while in the cave of Adullam, and later they shared with him his glory when he became king. These experiences of David, between his rejection by Saul and becoming king, picture something of this Gospel age. During this time our Lord has been gathering out a little band, not only from all the tribes of Israel, but from every kindred, tongue and nation. They are called to follow him through difficult experiences now; and later when He is recognized as King over all the world, they are promised a place with Him.

Who were the men who were drawn to David, and what were their characteristics? 1 Sam. 22. 1-2 says that all his father's household went there to him and also every one that was discontented, and he became captain over them. Some were drawn by ties of relationship, others by admiration of David

himself and his character, but many were drawn by personal trouble. Some were in distress, some in debt, and came to David to escape from those who oppressed them. Others came under Saul's wrath like David while some were discontented on account of the King's tyranny and oppression and came by way of escape. From some viewpoints they were not at all a desirable band. So we turn to the company the Lord is selecting and are reminded of the Apostle's words: *"Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."* Some have, indeed, been drawn to Him because of their great love for Him, others by an appreciation of His great sacrifice and many by personal affliction and trouble. Worn out by the trials and troubles of the world, we sought rest; discontented with the oppression and tyranny of the god of this world, we came to the Lord and can now say: *"Jesus has satisfied, Jesus is mine."* Perhaps on account of medical difficulties or the loss of loved ones we sought rest and were drawn to the Lord.

When David's men came to him no hard conditions were laid down before they could enter the company. Any might come to him; he set no age limit, no standard of fitness. Some were indeed strong, mighty men; others so weak that on some occasions they were left behind, unfit to stand the fatigues with the rest of the band. David did not pry into their past life; some had been noble, fine

characters, others ignoble, but David was willing to let bygones be bygones. Only two simple conditions were laid down. Do you accept David as your leader and do you believe that he can deliver you from your oppressors and Saul? Are you willing to follow him wherever he leads? It will cost you something. You will need to be, as David is, an outcast, a fugitive. You will come under the scorn of Israel. Are you willing to share his outcast experiences? These conditions were accepted by David's followers, as is shown by their exclamation, "*We are yours, O David, and with you O son of Jesse.*" (1 Chron. 12.18)

Those who would follow the Lord now find no hard conditions laid down; He places no age limit. Some give their entire life to Him in their youth, but others come after having spent the largest portion of their life in the pursuit of worldly hopes, pleasures and aims; yet the Lord accepts both. He also places no standard of fitness. Some have many talents while others feel they have nothing to bring. A dark past life is not against them. Some have spent their lives serving others, but some have lived for self. But the 'past in under the blood'. He lays down two conditions much as David did: Do you accept Jesus as your Saviour; do you believe He can deliver you? Do you accept Him as your leader and are you willing to follow the Lamb wherever He goes? We need to sit down and count the cost, for it will be costly. It will mean standing up for what is unpopular; going to Him 'without the camp, bearing His reproach'.

When these men came to David they entered into entirely new experiences. Old things passed away and all things became new. All would not run smoothly in the cave; they would have many trials to meet. They had come to David to escape trials, but they found trials right there in the cave. There were men from all the tribes of Israel, varying in habits and temperament. They were all men of grit, or they dare not have joined themselves with David. They were all forced to live together in a cave, and how apparent to each other their weaknesses would become; how often their ideas would clash. There would certainly be many difficulties in that cave; they would often rub one another the wrong way. One thing, however, would tend to bind them together, the desire of their leader that they should live together as one family and gradually that desire of David began to soften their

disagreements.

We have similar experiences, for the Lord has drawn His people from every kingdom, nation and tongue. He knew full well that there would be differences cropping up and we would be inclined to view things from different standpoints. He understood that there would be differences of opinion but the desire of our Leader is that we should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. It will take some effort but we remember our Lord's prayer. "*Father, just as you are in me and I in you, may they also be in us ... that they may be one as we are one*" (John 17.21-22 NIV). We know that our love for the Lord will be shown by our love for the brethren and we must endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. We cannot countenance revolution in the cave. The Lord will measure our love for Him by our desire to live in peace, but what can we do to keep this spirit of peace? When the children of Israel murmured on account of the report brought back by the spies sent to view the land of Canaan, Caleb was able to "*still the people before Moses*" (Num. 13.30) and the secret of Caleb's power is given in Numbers 14.24: "*But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me whole heartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to*". He had not the spirit of strife but of peace, and the secret of his great influence lay in the fact that he followed God fully.

The experiences of David's followers, however, would not all be trying; they also had blessings. They came under the influence of David's life, and his life was one of devotion. He was a godly man, a man of prayer, very often pouring out his soul in prayer to God; and he was a man of praise. Oft-times he would take up his harp in tuneful praise. How this would soften their harshness. David was so skilful on the harp that when, prior to his Adullam experiences, he played before Saul, evil spirits that possessed Saul, left him. He delighted to meditate on the law given to Israel through Moses and probably would often call his followers and read to them from the law (see Psalm 34.11). On two occasions he could have killed Saul but he refused to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed for he had implicit trust in God. His influence must have worked wonders on the hearts of his rough followers, as is shown by the testimony paid them by Nabal's men (1 Sam. 25.15-

16). What a splendid tribute to pay to this company, who, before they had come under David's influence, would have robbed and plundered whenever possible.

As with these men, so with the followers of the Lord. We come under the entirely new influences of the Master through the Holy Spirit. Jesus gathers us to Him to instruct us. *"Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them"*. Scripture does not read "there will I come." Jesus is already there, and we are gathered to Him. We do not come together to learn some new truth, nor to be refreshed by some old truths, nor yet to meet with the brethren, but we meet to hold communion with Jesus.

*Where two or three in sweet accord,
Meet in Thy name, oh blessed Lord,
Meet to recount Thine acts of grace,
Oh, how Thy presence fills the place.*

These men also entered into a new security. Adullam means 'resting place'. The cave was situated six miles south-west of Bethlehem, and to reach it one had to pass along a narrow path by the side of a precipice. On one side was a rocky gorge, and on the other high, towering rocks. Then one entered a crevice leading sheer into the face of the rock that was so low that it was impossible to stand in an upright position; one must enter in a crouched attitude. Against David and his men in the cave Saul was powerless, no matter how large an army he brought against them. They had to pass in single file along the narrow path on the mountain side, and enter one at a time what appeared to be a pitch dark hole in the rock. David and his men had the advantage of looking towards the light and could see each one as he entered. They were quite secure; only in the daytime dare Saul attack them, and at night they went down into the neighbouring villages for supplies. This pictures another blessing in our Adullam life. We have entered into a new security. *"Our life is hid with Christ in God"*, and no power in the universe can hurt the spiritual life of a Christian; none can pluck us out of His hand (John 10.29). If our faith were as strong as our security is good we should never be afraid (Psa. 27.1).

A later phase of David's life with his followers

What is the grace of God? To say that it is free unmerited favour only expresses a little of its meaning. It is the unhindered, wondrous, boundless love of God, poured out upon us in an infinite variety of

is given in 1 Chron. 11.3. David is now anointed king over Israel. He was no longer an outcast with only six hundred men but thousands flock to his side. It was now popular to be one of David's followers (1 Chron. 12.23-40). What now became of the faithful six hundred? Were they forgotten when David had so many? The time had come for them to be specially remembered. They shared in David's trials, so they were to share in his honour.

1 Chron. 11.11-12.24, tells of his faithful Adullam band. We know that we too will soon be involved in the greatest change the world has ever experienced. Soon, it will be popular to be on the Lord's side. All will then want to give themselves in full consecration, but the opportunity of becoming heirs of the Kingdom will be forever gone. Only those who have shared with Jesus in His Adullam experiences can hope to have a place on the honours list of the Kingdom. Those who would share with Him in His Kingdom must go with him outside the camp, bearing his reproach; for it's *"No cross, no crown"* (Matt. 19.28-29). The honours list is being written and we should note the names already written there and the great deeds that have won them distinction. There is Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. When his persecutors came against him he said: *"I see Jesus standing on the right hand of God."* He also prayed: *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"*. Col. 4 records a number of faithful saints who have found a place on the honours list. Epaphras an invalid who laboured *"fervently for you in prayer"*. v12 *"Priscilla and Aquila, who have laid down their own necks for my sake"* (Rom. 16.3); and among others mentioned in this chapter is *"Rufus and his mother and mine"*. Rufus' mother apparently had a very warm place in the Apostle's heart, as he referred to her as his own mother. Are we following in the Lord's Adullam footsteps? If so, He will certainly record our names there. *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* The matter now rests with ourselves. We must give all diligence to make our calling sure, and remember that God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, *"which He has promised to them that love him."*

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ways, without stint or measure, not according to our deserving, but according to His measureless heart of love, which passes knowledge, so unfathomable are its heights and depths.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

Reflections on John 21.18

These words were spoken by our Lord to Peter on that memorable occasion when Jesus, in a more public manner, reinstated Peter as an Apostle after his public denial of the Master during the trial before the High Priest. Jesus had met Peter privately on the day of His resurrection (Luke 24.34) and there can be little doubt that He had spoken words of comfort to his distracted heart. What passed in some quiet spot between the risen Lord and Peter with his overwhelming contrite heart, we do not know; it is not recorded, and it might be presumption to attempt to reconstruct their conversation at that time. Peter had evidently told his brethren about his interview with the Lord, for when the brethren from Emmaus returned to Jerusalem with the story of their wonderful experience the Jerusalem brethren rejoicing replied, "The Lord is risen indeed and appeared to Simon". Peter had thus been reconciled to his Master prior to this public interview, and held in his heart the full assurance he had been forgiven and that the Lord still loved him dearly, his failure notwithstanding.

In the grey dawn of this particular morning Jesus had searched the soul of Peter through and through by His thrice repeated query "Simon, son of John do you love me more than these?" Peter was grieved that the Lord so persistently put His question as to ask it a third time. It seemed as though the Master doubted his word and was not satisfied with the two assurances already given. But Jesus did not doubt his word, for whatever may have been the purpose in Jesus' mind when asking the question thrice, He immediately proceeded to tell Peter that He would serve him long and well right on into old age. *"When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."* (John 21.18)

John, who wrote these words, and lived long enough afterwards to see their fulfilment says "This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God". In the freshness of youth Peter had chosen his own course and acted on his own initiative but when he should have come to old age his freedom to act should be curtailed. No matter how he still

desired to serve and lead the flock of God, hindering circumstances would arise, and prevent the accomplishment of his heart's desire. Though the passing years brought mellowing ripeness to his soul, tempering the impetuous rashness of his early life, making him the more fitted to counsel and guide the pilgrim band. Yet the withering frost of age, or the hindering hand of circumstance, bar and check the work he would always long to do. How would that react upon his mind? How would he stand when, instead of being master of the situation, the situation became master of him; instead of serving long and late, his strength was spent before the sun was set, when, wanting to travel far, the journey was too great? Could he resign himself to his state without regrets or fears?

Among the many trials of the Christian life, the trials due to advancing age are not the least. Especially trying will they be when following on an active life. In the full hey-day of life when strength was equal to every opportunity, the faithful soul found joyous delight in every task. The thrill of contest on many fields, the pleasure of service in many spheres, the power to 'do' when duty called, all this had brought delight untold. Life teemed with purpose and accomplishment. Each passing day saw something attempted, something done. It was good to be alive. It was a touch of very heaven, to have a glorious message to tell and hearing ears to proclaim it to. To pass out from the crush of the arena into the quiet hush of the shadows for no reason besides advancing years may be extremely hard to bear. Only when in the earliest of declining years the spirit of sloth and slumber has settled down upon the mind can retirement into the shadows be accepted with total resignation. Only when the drag of inertia and irresolution of the will has made the easy chair more acceptable than the conflict can one regret that the day of opportunity is done. Those who drink deeply of the cup of joy in service do not lightly lay it aside. Unless dry rot had started ere the day was done, the evening twilight hours might chafe. The corrosion of rust would be more feared than all the wear of usefulness where service had been a delight. This pause from labour need not bring regrets nor cause repining if the heart is quietly at rest in God. To

grow old gracefully and peacefully is right and blessed in God's sight. It is not that He needed the puny hands to help in His task, even when quick and strong. He could have done it by some other means. It throws no added burden upon His mighty arms when we lay down to rest or cease from toil. Our best endeavours brought no profit or enrichment to Him. Our efforts yielded Him no wealth. Profitable servants we never were. Like some mere child with small toy spade, hindering perhaps more often than we helped, He watched us dig His plot. He bore our little whims, and overruled them all for good. We thought He needed us, or else the work would stop. Had we not swung the sword, we thought, the cause of Truth would fail. Had we not fed the flock, the sheep must famish by the way. What little vain conceits we had! He did not chide nor thwart our little task, but He who made the sun and rules the world; who filled the heaven with stars, pursued His sovereign way and out from our little effort, made His own pattern come true. Withal we fussed and prated, but He worked deep within, and now His work will stand to crown our closing years. Though memory now may fail us, He set the cast of our mind so that it turns to Him as the needle to the pole. Though eyes be dimmed and long-prized books perforce be laid aside, the fibre of the soul is sound, tinged through and through with root principles of Holy Writ. Though thought be slow and words be few, the sense of rest and peace prevails; the 'Peace of God' has taken sentry duty there. Though strength be scant and feeble, limbs scarce move at will, the faith looks through the thinning veil and soars aloft, beyond earth's sensuous things, to find in contemplation's quiet retreat the presence of Him who makes her foundation firm. The law of compensations now works strong within, for when the earth has little else to give the bounteous hand of Heaven gives more, and sublimates each act of life. He eats and drinks of heavenly grace unhurried, unperturbed. No hectic call of duty nor rush of common round breaks in upon the soul's

repose, as in the former years, in its 'at Home' with God. It is not loss, nor theme for vain regrets if Heaven thus loads the moments which Time filches from our scanty store. It is not lazing out life's remnant hours, to dwell alone with God. 'Rest' brings no 'rust', enfeebled limbs cause no inactivity, when we abide with Him. The hands may tremble and footsteps falter, this is no impotence if we walk with Him. This is that fruition and harvest-time for which our earlier sowings have been made. This is maturity, where crudities and greenness disappear in near-finished ripeness and sun tinting of the fruit. This is the completion of the sketch, the painting-in of the last glowing tints, balance out the background's sombre hues. It may be sunset-hour, but at "evening it shall be light", life's purposes stand out clear. It is a climax but not the end.

Dear child of God, whose steps approach the postern gate, these words are penned for you. You have grown old; perchance circumstances carry you whither you would not. Your race is nearly run. Your toil is almost done. The trail of life stretching back through years of tangled brier, but you are near the end. The Hand that led you last will lead you still; God will not suffer your faith to fail in your last days. He has ingrained too deep the precepts of His Word for you to drift away. "Hold fast that which you have", and keep the 'gold' already bought (Rev.3.18). Let none deprive you of your peace and rest and trust. God is your life and light, and will shortly be your salvation. Fret not you waning powers, nor pine because your eye is frail. Your Father knows all this, and he who marks each sparrow's fall will bear you up on His wings till you shall see His face. Perhaps you can no longer work for Him. Perhaps you cannot even read His Book with your own eyes. But mind it not, it is not what you have to give but you yourself the Master seeks and in the quietness of your evening hours He finds all that He desires. Have patience and hope on!

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Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable and keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful and endures through every circumstance.

Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear. Now we know only a little, and even the gift of prophecy reveals little! But when the end comes, these special gifts will all disappear. (1 Corinthians 13.4-10 New Living Translation)

WRITTEN AFORETIME

2. Promises of Old, now become New

In Romans 3.21 Paul introduces a new factor in his train of thought. It is the 'righteousness of God' but the hope of all creation rests upon His mercy. God need not grant benefits to a world that His justice had condemned because of sin but He has no pleasure in human death. In His mercy He waits for them to turn from their wickedness and live because He can intervene even when His law condemns. The righteousness of God is shown apart from the law and yet (as we expect to find in this letter) is attested by the Law and the Prophets. Mercy has provided the way of escape. He has declared His own righteousness in mercy without circumventing His own law, by regarding the sinner as justified who has faith in Christ Jesus. Having faith is not a ground for claiming justification. It is simply that it pleases Him to justify those who believe. This displays the righteousness of God; His own eternal righteousness and goodness in providing grace for believers; and that righteousness provides our justification. Paul says we find this in the Law and the Prophets. Is justification to be found in the Old Testament? It most certainly is and was not first revealed by Paul! In the chapter that follows, Paul refers to two great men of the past, Abraham and David; dissimilar but both men of faith. Before the enactment of the Mosaic Law, it was said that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15.6). It might be said that Abraham lived a pastoral life miles apart from the turmoil of town life and was always near to God. He is therefore not a suitable example of those of active life living among men of the world. Paul gives another example of justification in David whose life was fraught with all the dangers and snares of life. Many times had David fallen; just as many had he risen again with regrets for his failings. Thus he knew the gracious gift of God in a different way from that of Abraham. We should hardly expect Abraham to say, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" but it rings of David (Rom. 4.7, cited from Psalm 32). Not all Christians will readily follow Paul's reasoning in the fourth chapter of Romans, but they will note that though the early chapters speak of condemnation this letter

holds out a prospect of release through the righteousness of God. All may know the blessedness of sins forgiven, for so is the grace of God; and that blessed knowledge will prompt hope within. Thus Paul is working towards one of the objects of his letter to those he had not met. Already he anticipates questions that he might be asked when at last he reaches Rome. These are discussed in the succeeding chapters.

The next four chapters contain but few quotations from the Old Testament, but are the steps forward in pursuing the Apostle's argument towards full hope in Christ. In the fifth chapter is the fundamental truth that all descendants of Adam were condemned in him and all are covered by the death of Christ. When we were without strength and unable to help ourselves, God commended His love towards us in that Christ died for us. And from this gift will be seen that the love of God encompasses all, and so we who have obtained hope for ourselves, following justification, will note with gratitude that there is hope also for all mankind in that Divine provision.

Much of the sixth chapter is in the form of question and answer; just the sort of questions the Roman church will ask among themselves when they read the early chapters. The freedom from condemnation that we Christians enjoy does not give liberty to live unrestrained lives. Paul finds great cause for thankfulness that free from condemnation in Adam, we became servants of righteousness; thus concluding within ourselves that because God has graciously justified us, the least we can do is to become His servants. Still further reasons for hope and joy are found, in that becoming servants of righteousness we find that it leads to holiness, and that the outcome of righteousness is everlasting life. Thus the righteousness imputed to us, is not only a starting point but also a goal; and all due to the grace of God. This gives hope indeed. What else can result from such a cogent reason of the great apostle! The Jewish Christians in Rome will make another query and Paul must dispose of that. How could they be free from the condemnation of the Mosaic law by which they were bound as Jews? Paul himself had been, as touching the law, a Pharisee; and he answers the

question by narrating his own struggles to keep the law and his failure, in spite of all. He proves the Law to be good, but he has been sold (like a slave) under sin. If there were no conclusive answers to his question in ch. 7.24 there would be no hope even for the best of men but the answer of v.25 completely disposes of the question and leads to further hope and exultation in the eighth chapter. This chapter although giving less testimony from the Old Testament is full of hope; the new hope, the complete hope of the gospel church. In previous chapters Paul has said very little about the work of the Holy Spirit within the church, but having answered problems of law and sin, and established the righteousness of God, he can write of other doctrines. When at long last he meets the church at Rome he will declare to them their standing in Christ as sons, their election and their hope. This chapter is a foretaste of what he will proclaim more fully in person. What discussion this chapter will have among them! What hope and joy and confidence will be theirs in the meantime and what points he will have to amplify when he arrives! Most Christians are acquainted with the closing verses of chapter eight, but do we comprehend the fulness of the unanswered questions "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemns? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" until we understand the earlier verses concerning sonship? This transcendent chapter ended, Paul reverts to thoughts of his own nation – he has great heaviness of heart because they do not appreciate these glorious hopes. Much of the chapter is in question and answer form: just the sort of questions a critical Jew would ask about election and the entry of the Gentiles into the special purpose of God. Paul answers by reference to Hebrew scriptures, and he knows no Jew can gain-say them. Israel's faltering is still before him in chapters ten and eleven, and again he quotes from their own writings. Israel's backwardness is well expressed in the words of Rom. 10.3, and is related to the righteousness of God which Paul had mentioned earlier. They were ignorant of the righteousness of God, and were occupied in the hopeless task of establishing their own righteousness. Had they but received the truth of Rom. 10.4 that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes, their useless struggles would have ended and they would have fully enjoyed the hopes and

promises of chapter eight. Paul revealed to them the greatest of hopes, but they seem unable to yield their old standing in Jacob, their legal standing in Moses and the belief (true in time past) that they were the only chosen people of God. Paul ends his appeal to his own nation in the eleventh chapter by an ascription of praise to that God who in wisdom and love had devised all this wonderful purpose embracing all Jews and all others. Then he further appeals to all to surrender (Rom. 12.1, 2). It was far easier for the Gentile to yield to this appeal, for he had so little in which he could glory. The Jew was in a great predicament, for he was called upon to surrender his hold on the favours of God in Jacob and Moses, for the favour of God in Christ. The apostle, having almost finished his doctrinal teaching, in the closing chapters adds various exhortations by which all may know how to live within and without the church.

None of these commandments will be found to be grievous: many of them seem to be rules of conduct restated from the Mosaic law and therefore will be approved by the Jewish members of the church. It is noticeable in the fourteenth chapter the care with which the Christian must consider the weakness of fellow-members even in small things and even when he knows that his own position is correct and theirs weak. Thus the new relationship in one body is emphasized by the members having the same care one for the other. All have the one great hope in Christ. God has received the weak as well as the strong. The strong cannot forge ahead without the weak. In fact the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak, not pleasing themselves, (Rom. 15.1) thus proving themselves to be joint holders of the hope. Then follows the one example of Him who pleased not himself, which introduces us to the words with which we began. Then on to further quotations from the Old Testament to repeat that all Gentiles, though they may not be embraced in the special purpose of God, will nevertheless join in praise to God under the reign of the root of Jesse and return to peace with God in the earthly kingdom. So within this message to the Roman brethren Paul has completely revealed the plans of God that cover all mankind. There was ample proof of this in the old writings that the Jew had treasured. Thus does he commend the new Christian message to all in Rome whom as yet he had not seen. And until he reaches Rome he urges

that the God of hope will fill them with all joy and peace in believing, that they abound in hope. (Rom. 15.13). This epistle, complete in itself, gave to the Roman friends a grand foretaste of what they will

hear, when he writes (v.29) "when I come to you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ"

BJD

A NOTE ON GENESIS 1.6-8

In the second creative day God made what Genesis 1.6-8 calls the 'firmament' the expanse of air which surrounds the earth. The Hebrew word is *raqia*, which means something stretched and beaten out, as a piece of gold beaten out into a thin wide sheet, or a veil stretched out over an empty place. The A. V. term comes from the Vulgate, and is the Latin *firmamentum* meaning something solid or firm; this was due to the early belief that the sky was a solid vault in which the sun, moon and stars were fixed and which had portals through which the winds could blow upon the earth. Yet there is wonderful truth in the Genesis record. The firmament or atmosphere was to divide the waters below from the waters above. It is a familiar sight to watch the rain clouds sail by floating upon the upper air like ships on the sea; it is not always so easily recognised what colossal forces are involved. The amount of water vapour carried by the atmosphere over each square mile of the earth's surface amounts to the staggering total of 70,000 tons. If it all came down at once there would be some extensive floods, but no, the air holds it up and allows that which is necessary for the welfare of the world to come down as rain. Truly Job said "*dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge. Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, as a molten looking-glass*" (mirror) – Job 37.16-18. The air we breathe is so familiar a thing that we do not stop to consider how vital it is to life and what evidence there is of Divine planning in its provision. There is just a sufficiently thick belt of it around the earth to suit the needs of man and all animals. Two miles up breathing becomes difficult; at an altitude of six or seven miles human life is impossible without artificial aids. We must live and move and have our being in this close compass. And yet this atmosphere of ours is enough to shield us from so many natural forces which would otherwise harm or destroy us. Cosmic rays reaching us from outer space would speedily destroy all life upon earth were it not for the atmosphere that captures and

renders them harmless before reaching the ground. Meteors and shooting stars are burned up and disintegrated by the air long before they reach the earth's surface. That is just as well, for every day some twenty-five million meteors, mostly tiny ones, enter the earth's atmosphere and unless burned up would finish on the surface of the earth. The air tempers the sun's heat by day and conserves it by night; without it we should be alternately scorched and frozen. It provides oxygen for men and animals to breathe and carbon dioxide for plants to take. It was when air was breathed into Adam's nostrils that his bodily organism went into action and he awoke and became a living soul. It is when a man's breath goes forth that he returns to his earth and in that very day his thoughts perish (Psa. 146.4). The air is the vehicle of natural life to man; in just the same way the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of Divinely given life to man. It is not without reason that the Hebrew word *ruach* in the Old Testament and the Greek word *pneuma* in the New Testament mean both breath and spirit. In the minds of the inspired writers there was no real difference. The life that is in man, although outwardly sustained by the air around us is also sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. In him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17. 28).

THREE GATES

If you are tempted to reveal
A tale to you someone has told
About another, let it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold -
Three narrow gates – First, 'Is it true?'
Then 'Is it needful?' In your mind
Give the truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, 'Is it kind?'
And if, to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the result of speech may be.

HIS CALLING

The apostle Paul prays earnestly (Eph. 1.16-20) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would bless the Church so bountifully in wisdom, in knowledge and in heart appreciation that it would be able to know the hope of His calling. The word 'hope' is used in the best Bible sense of certain eventual attainment. On no occasion should we suppose the word to mean the hope of people today, for they in their most ambitious moments use the word in the sense of 'perhaps' and 'I hope so'. It is helpful to read v18 emphasizing the word **'His'**. Paul is stressing the fact that the invitation comes from the Father of glory alone. While the whole purpose of the ages is ordered by the great Creator, this phase of His plan is particularly **His**. Paul is impressing this upon us that we may the more value it and that our hope in it may increase. He would that we may gain confidence by knowing that the eternal Father has deep interest in this portion of His workmanship. God does not dwell alone in the inaccessible heavens waiting for His purposes to reach their inevitable triumph but is ever personally attentive to the needs of those who **He Himself** has called. According to vv 4 and 5 this calling was in His mind before the foundation of the world and that He had then predestined the honour to which those called should attain. Truly it is **His** calling. Planned long ago, but at long last at the appointed period, the call goes forth, first by our Lord and then through His faithful disciples, particularly the apostle Paul. God had through the prophets of old declared His intention to recover and bless mankind, but His sacred secret was not revealed by them or known to them. It may be that this purpose becomes clear by a study of the lives of God's early servants; but it is also true that it was "hidden in God" prior to the time of revelation. Truth concerning the Church has been revealed through the Holy Spirit and it could never have been found by a diligent study of the Old Testament. Throughout the law and the prophets God is declared as the creator, the lawgiver, the judge and protector; all that we revere in the word God. But it was from the time of Jesus that the Holy Spirit reveals God as the Heavenly Father. It is because He is the Father of the Church and they His sons as shown in the NT, that we may know that in the highest sense it is His calling. Hence His personal

interest in the welfare of His sons. That is why Paul, when writing such words as in Romans 8 and in the first four chapters of Ephesians speaks in such exultant tones. It was this new aspect of relationship to God in our Lord's words about His Father and our Father that caused Philip to exclaim "*Lord show us the Father, and we will be satisfied*" (John 14.8 NRSV). The answer to Philip and to us all who make the same request is the work of the Holy Spirit at this time and the answer is sufficient and it does satisfy us that "*the Father himself loves you*". Only by the knowledge that it is His calling can we understand the fatherhood and love of God. While Paul emphasizes the point that it is **His** calling in Ephesians; when writing to the Corinthian church he says it is **your** calling (1 Cor. 1.26). He changes the word to assure the brethren that they, even they in Corinth, were called. It is probable that if the work of calling was given to us, we should have passed Corinth by as unsuitable. None knew better than Paul the failings of this Church; he knew that when they considered the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love and the call of God they would know themselves to be unworthy and might become despondent by introspection. In the context of 1 Cor. 1, Paul has forestalled any plea of unworthiness by giving a description of the ones whom God has honoured by His calling, and it fits the Corinthian brethren very well. Thus by saying that He has called the foolish, the weak, the base and the despised he contrasts **His** calling of Eph. 1 with **your** calling of 1 Cor. 1. Both points of view are correct, for it is His because it is His purpose and grace and it is yours because you are called according to His purpose. Is there not strength and assurance in the belief that we are called, even though we know in ourselves that we often fall short and cannot ever be worthy in ourselves? In 1 Cor. 1.30 Paul adds that by God's provision, Christ "*is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and deliverance*" and thus we may know that our deficiencies are supplied by His gifts. Let us believe with James that God hath chosen the poor of this world who are rich in faith, for by doing this we shall assure ourselves that it is **our** calling. Hebrews 3.1 describes it as being a **heavenly** calling. It is heavenly in origin and in prospect. We who once were Gentiles may believe and hold the church

promises in this epistle but should remember that primarily it was written to those who had long been the favoured people of God. As children of Jacob they had promises that were heavenly in origin but not in prospect. They had blessings of which, like the Church later, they were not worthy. They had been 'called' out of Egypt: chosen by the Lord God to be a special people for Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. (Deut. 7.6-8). On Mount Sinai, Moses, as near to heaven as it was possible for man to be, had received the two tables of stone, written with the finger of God. By giving the Law with its provision of sacrifice and priesthood; and a fair land in which to live, with promises of blessing, in basket and store, they were ranked above the surrounding nations. It was to this favoured people that the 'Heavenly' call first is made and one would expect the people most likely to accept the new appeal. On the other hand, knowing themselves to be the chosen people with ample proof of Divine blessing, they might question any new offer purporting to come from their own God of Israel. So the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the heavenly prospect of the call as distinct from the best of earthly promises which they had enjoyed. He was offering something far better, something heavenly, based upon a better sacrifice. In the second chapter of Hebrews he expresses this new and heavenly call as bringing many sons to glory. The chief Son who had been made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death is now crowned with glory and honour, which in a later chapter he shows to be at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. From the words of our Lord himself we know that He has gone to prepare a place for these sons of glory and that at His coming again He would receive them to Himself, that where He is there they would be also.

When Paul writes to the Philippian church he refers to it as a 'high calling', and again the context tells why in that connection he so speaks. The heavenly calling is a high calling concerning destination, yet he speaks of the High Calling regarding rank. Think of the rank to which Paul had been born as a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as touching the law, a Pharisee (Phil. 3.4-5). His standing was so high that he could have boasted that if any man thought he had whereof he could trust in the flesh, he had more. But those things that

were gain he counted loss for Christ. His high rank as a Jew he renounced most gladly for the hope of the "*High Calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 3.14). He had been called in his youth and taught in the perfect manner of the law at the feet of Gamaliel. He had been called while on the Damascus road to be an apostle. There was another call to which all his powers were centred and he was pressing toward the mark for the prize of the **High Calling**. Thus he was able to forget those things which were behind, honourable though they were and reach forth unto those things which were before, knowing that "*when Christ, our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory*" (Col. 3.4). Writing to Timothy (2 Tim. 1.9) he speaks of the Holy Calling – a reminder that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. (Heb. 12.14). A call to be like Him who issued the invitation. "... *as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct for it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy*" (1 Pet. 1.15, 16). Here Peter quotes from words addressed to the nation that had been called out of Egypt to be a holy nation unto Himself. God's method of forming them into a holy people was to separate them from the surrounding nations and bless them. He blessed them so abundantly that He appealed to them in later times through the prophet Isaiah, saying "*What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?*" That they failed to be worthy of their status is too well-known to need detailing now, providing that those who now are called with the Holy Calling profit by their failings. For again the call is issued to us to be a holy nation, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a purchased people, that we should show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. The call of today will also be separate (though not isolated) from the world by the Father's answer to our Lord's prayer in John 17.15 "*I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.*" The sons of God may confidently know that He who kept Israel, never slumbering or sleeping, will also keep them; it being understood that the Sons will walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called.

AS

A NOTE ON ACTS 17.28

"For 'in him we live and move and have our being' as even some of your own poets have said 'For we are indeed his offspring'. 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 and imagination of man." (RSV). Who were these Greek poets to whom Paul referred and what was the purpose of his appealing to pagan writers to declare the fact of man being the offspring of God? Paul was an educated man and it was quite natural that he should draw upon his classical knowledge, when talking to educated men of this world, such as philosophers, to support the truth he was proclaiming to them. In this speech before the Athenians on Mars Hill he gave voice to the most profound of dispensational truths, explaining the whole of God's purpose for this age and the next and the reason for God's apparent silence in the past. At the centre of that truth lay the fact that men live, and move, and have their being in God, and cannot live eternally without Him, for they are in the last analysis the offspring of God and owe their life to Him. In making that statement he drew upon the considered conclusions of the Greek philosophers themselves, and quoted them to support his point. He was not so petty-minded as to ignore the insight of those philosophers because they were pagans and knew not the God of Israel. Even although the very words he quoted "For we are indeed his offspring" had been addressed to Zeus, the principal god of the Greeks and not to Paul's god at all, he gave those men credit for their perception. There is a lesson here worth taking to heart. We can take the words of these Greek poets, as did Paul, and apply them aright, because their authors had grasped the true principles, that men receive their life from God and owe their being to Him, and in the last resort are His children. The Prodigal Son in the parable was still his father's son when away there in an alien land, wasting his substance in riotous living. In these quotations to which Paul referred we have but to change the name of Zeus and there is not one word with which

we would disagree.

There are two poets, either of whom Paul may have had in mind when he made this remark, perhaps he had both. He says "certain also of your own poets"; one of these was Aratus, a Greek poet and astronomer who was born in Paul's own province of Cilicia about three hundred years before. Aratus became Court physician to one of the Macedonian kings and his works were esteemed so highly by the Romans in Paul's day that at least three men of letters produced Latin translations of them. The passage in which Paul's quotation occurs is from a kind of technical poem dealing with astronomical matters, called the 'Phenomena'. It runs:

"With him, with Zeus, are filled
The paths we tread and all the haunts of men.
He fills the sea, and every creek and bay;
And all in all things we need the help of Zeus,
For we too are his offspring."

The other was Cleanthes, who lived at about the same time as Aratus, and who was a leading member of the Stoics at Athens. In his Hymns to Zeus occur these lines: Most glorious of immortals, and many named:

Almighty and eternal, thou, O Zeus.
The God of Nature, guiding with Thy hand
All things that are; we greet with praise.
Tis meet that mortal call on thee
For we thine offspring are; and we alone
Of all who live and move upon this earth,
Have had from thee the gift of god-like speech.

The fact that we can thus identify the poets whom Paul is reported as quoting on that historical occasion, and read for ourselves the very line he had in mind, is an undesigned confirmation of the accuracy of the "Acts of the Apostles". This apparently quite casual allusion, coming to us down the ages, bears with it this testimony that it was no idle embellishment of a writer of fiction; it was a verbal transcription of words that were actually spoken before that distinguished audience in Athens two thousand years ago. AOH

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 cannon to call attention to their shining – they just shine.

INNER HOLINESS

Goodness, innocence, purity, freedom from sin, is not holiness; even before the fall human nature was not holy. Goodness is an attribute of Nature, as God creates it: holiness is something infinitely higher. Holiness is a moral attribute; in short, it is what a free will chooses and determines for itself. The human nature which God created and gave is only naturally good, but what man wills to have of God and of his will, and really appropriates, that has moral worth and leads to holiness.

We speak of the Holiness of God as his infinite moral perfection; man's moral perfection can only come in the use of his will, consenting fully and abiding in the will of God. Thus alone can he become holy. To be holy is to be Godlike; to have a disposition, a will, a character, like God. Holiness is not something we do or achieve: it is the communication of the Divine life. Where God is, there is holiness. It is the presence of God which makes holy.

Note how it was that the nearer the Presence, the greater the degree of holiness. Because God dwelt among Israel, the camp was holy; all uncleanness was to be removed from it. But the holiness of the Court of the Tabernacle was greater: uncleanness which did not exclude from the camp would not be tolerated there. Then the Holy Place was still holier, because still nearer to God, and the inner Sanctuary where the Presence dwelt on the Mercy-Seat, was the holiest of all, was most holy. And the same principle still holds good: holiness is measured by nearness to God.

There are Christians who dwell in the camp, but know little of drawing nigh to the Holy One. Then you have outer court Christians: they long for pardon and peace, and they come ever again to the altar of atonement; but they know little of true nearness of holiness, of their privilege as priests to enter the Holy Place. Others there are who have learned that this is their calling, and long to enter in, and yet hardly understand the boldness they have to enter into the holiest of all, and to dwell there. Blessed are those to whom this secret of the Lord has been revealed. They know what the rent veil means and the access into the immediate Presence. The veil has been taken away from their hearts, and they have found the secret of true holiness in the indwelling of the Holy One, the God Who is holy and makes holy.

Separation is not holiness but is the way to it. Though there can be no holiness without separation, there can be separation that does not lead to holiness. The Hebrew Word for holiness possibly comes from a root that means to separate. But where we have in our translation "separate" or "sever" or "set apart" they are translations of quite different Hebrew words. The Hebrew word translated "holy" is used exclusively to express that special idea.

Separation is only the setting apart and taking possession of the vessel to be cleansed and used: it is the filling of it with the precious contents we entrust to it that gives it its real value. Holiness is the Divine filling, without which the separation leaves us empty. Separation itself is not holiness. The Nazarite was a type of separation: the separation consisted specially in three things – temperance (in abstinence from the fruit of the vine); humiliation (in not cutting or shaving the hair – "it is a shame for a man if he has long hair"); self-sacrifice (in not defiling himself for even father or mother or their death). What we must specially note is that the separation was not from things unlawful, but from things lawful ... it is in giving up, not what can be proved to be sin, but all that may hinder the full intensity of our surrender into God's hands to make us holy, that the spirit of separation is manifested. Our holiness will consist not in a human separation in which we attempt to imitate God's; no, but in entering into his separateness; belonging entirely to him; set apart by him and for himself.

We must know the *need* for separation. It is no arbitrary demand of God, but has its ground in the very nature of things. To separate a thing is to set it free for one special use or purpose. that it may, with undivided power, fulfil the will of him who chose it, and so realize its destiny. It is the principle that lies at the root of all division of labour; complete separation to one branch of study or labour is the way to success and perfection. God wants us all to himself, that He may give all of himself to us. God separates us from all that does not lead us into his holiness and fellowship. The separating power of the Presence of God, this is what we need to know. *"Wherein now shall it be known that I have found grace in thy sight, I and thy people"* said Moses, *"is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be*

separated I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth". It is the consciousness of God's Presence, making and keeping us his very own, that works the true separateness from the world and its spirit, from ourselves and our own will. And it is as this separation is accepted and prized and persevered with by us, that the holiness of God will enter in and take possession. He separates us for himself and sanctifies us to be his dwelling. He comes himself to take personal possession by the indwelling of Christ in the heart. Not what I am, or do, or give, is holiness, but what God is, and gives, and does to me.

Holiness is not something we bring to God or do for him. Holiness is what there is of God in us ... our power to become holy is to be found in the call of God; the Holy One calls us to himself that He may make us holy in possessing himself. "I am the Lord who makes holy".

If we gather up the lessons we have found in the Word from Paradise downward, we see that the elements of holiness in us correspond to some special aspect of God's holiness, namely, deep restfulness, humble reverence, entire surrender, joyful adoration, simple obedience. They all prepare for the Divine indwelling, and this again we have through the abiding Jesus with the Crown of Holiness on his head. In the holiness of Jesus we see what ours must be; righteousness that hates sin and gives everything to have it destroyed; love that seeks the sinner and gives everything to have him saved. "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother".

It is a solemn thought that we may be studying earnestly to know what holiness is and yet have little of it because we have little of Jesus. It is a blessed thought that a man may be directly little occupied with the thought of holiness, and yet have much of it because he is full of Jesus. There is first what we might call "word truth" in which a man may have the correct form of words while he does not really apprehend the truth they contain. Then there is "thought truth": that is a clear intellectual apprehension of a truth without the experience of its power. The Bible speaks of truth as a living reality – this is the "life truth" in which the very spirit of the truth we profess has entered and possessed our inner being.

The chief means of sanctification that God uses is His Word, but it is not the Word that sanctifies;

it is God alone who can sanctify. Nor is it simply through the Word that God does it, but through the truth that is in the Word. As a means the Word is of no value if God does not use it. Let us strive to connect God's holy Word with the Holy God himself. God sanctifies in the truth through his Word.

Many Christians have no conception of the danger and deceitfulness of a "thought" religion, with sweet and precious thoughts coming to us in books and preaching, and with little power. The teaching of the Holy Spirit is in the heart first; man's teaching in the mind. Let all our thinking ever lead us to cease from thought, and to open the heart and will to the Spirit.

We are called to be prepared for a heavenly life. If we are to live throughout Eternity with him who is holy, we too must be holy, for without being holy we cannot share his life of holiness. We are on our way to see God. We have been invited to meet the Holy One face to face, and all our schooling here in the life of holiness is simply the preparation for that meeting, and that vision.

"*He hath chosen us in him, that we should be holy*" (Eph. 1.4) ... a calling before and above everything, to Holiness. "Be ye holy, for I am holy". It is as if God said, holiness is My blessedness and My Glory: without this you cannot, in the very nature of things, see Me or enjoy Me. Holiness is My blessedness and My glory. I invite you to share it with Me. Does it not move and draw you mightily, the hope of being with Me, partakers of My holiness? I have nothing better to offer – I offer you myself: "*Be ye holy, for I am holy*". The separating word in human language is **mine** It is the great word love uses God himself knows no mightier argument, can put forth no more powerful attraction than this, "*that ye should be mine*".

That holiness is more than cleansing, and must be preceded by it, is taught us in more than one passage of the New Testament. "*Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word*". The cleansing is a negative side – the being separate and not touching the unclean thing; the sanctifying, is the positive union and fellowship with God.

As soon as the people had been redeemed from Egypt, God's very first word to them was "Sanctify, make holy unto me all the first-born. It is mine"

(Exod. 13.2). The word reveals how proprietorship and in sanctification, the link that binds them is one of the central thoughts both in redemption together. Andrew Murray 19th Century

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

9. Chapter 6.12-49

vv 12-16 Selecting Apostles: Many thousands flocked to see and hear Jesus. Some believed and became disciples or learners who followed Him. Jesus spent a night in prayer before selecting apostles. Why was this so important? He invited 12 men 'to be sent' to preach and heal with His authority. Are they a strange, contrasting mixture? eg Matthew and Simon (zealot). They had ability but not wealth or influence. They had courage and were receptive to the Holy Spirit. Why are there differences in the lists in Matt.10 and Mark 3? Were the '12' the 'patriarchs' of the New Israel?

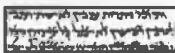
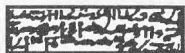
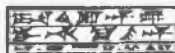
vv 17-26: Beatitudes: Which is better 'Blessed' or 'Happy'? Why are there differences here from Matt. 5.3-11. This is the code of behaviour by which Jesus lived and died. No one had ever spoken 'like this man' (John 7.46). His authority was unique. He gave the highest moral standard ever. It has been said 'a Christian is absurdly happy but never out of trouble'. Blessed are those with needs and know it. 'Poor' is almost equivalent to 'pious' (Psa.40.17). Riches are not condemned but we are warned that they can replace God. 'Woes' (Gr. *ouai*; NEB uses 'alas') occur only in Luke's record but this is not a threat nor do they make Jesus a 'kill-joy'. How do we summarise the blessings of poverty, hunger, sorrow and unpopularity? Is it a hunger for God, vindication of justice, tears for the tragedy of sin and evil which bring alienation from God? (Isa. 61.3; 65.13, 14; Mal. 4.2). We are warned about men speaking well of us but they should see our light shining (good actions) and give glory to God.

vv 27-36 Love in action: This demands the highest good of all. The heart of 'the sermon' is agape love; loving the loveless and unlovable, quite unlike all other 'loves'; unique to Jesus and those who truly follow Him. It goes further than previous teaching and is against all violence. It demands effort to overcome 'hurt feelings' when nature wants revenge. We can't earn God's forgiveness but we don't receive it if we don't emulate it. This requires that we do not congratulate self; never despair, and never serve for reward. God is kind to the ungrateful and selfish. Are we becoming like Him as His children? No one has laid down such a high standard of behaviour and no one has ever

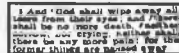
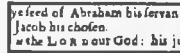
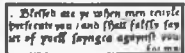
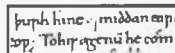
lived it out like Him. This was the standard set for the Apostles' ministry.

vv 37-42: Judging Others: The measure referred to the loose garments into which grain could be carried (Ruth had a shawl). Barclay reminds us that 'I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are.' Jesus gives his own endorsement to Scripture teaching about judging others with two parabolic sayings. The first has become part of traditional English conversation; 'the blind leading the blind'. For Jesus' hearers it must have had overtones for the Pharisees. Moffatt and Philips translations (among others) help to discover the force of the second metaphor with a speck of sawdust and a plank, so appropriate to a carpenter. Hession in 'Calvary Road' suggests that the plank is an "unloving reaction to the other man's mote". Judging others invites them to 'return the compliment' but it also calls for God's judgment on us. It's worth looking at the abundant New Testament testimony to these words of Jesus but looking at Church history to this present day, it has fallen on deaf ears. Somehow it's always the other person that is wrong. The pointing finger always has three fingers pointing back to the critic.

vv 43-49 Here we have logical cause and effect: sowing and reaping, good trees producing good fruit; deep solid foundations for houses that last. The Christian ethic is positive, demanding that 'extra' which brings godliness. In the 'Sermon' Jesus uses a rabbinical method of 'stringing ideas together'. We need fear no religious sect or political party or social group. Meetings and pamphlets will not prove them wrong but following Jesus faithfully will. The final teaching has a parable form based on experience in hot countries. Rivers dry up and lazy, short-sighted people build on the muddy sand of a river-bed. It's hard work to build on rock. Founded on Christ no storm in life can ever disturb. The 'Sermon on the Mount' (or on the Plain) is directed to followers of Jesus. They are spiritual rules for those dissatisfied with the world's standards and its readiness to resort to violence. Good behaviour comes from the heart and is learned by doing not listening.



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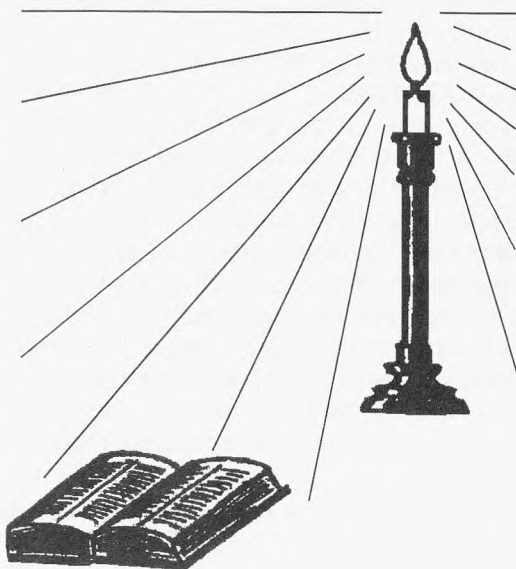
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NOTICES

INTERNET: The Bible Fellowship Union's web site can be visited at:-

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The site continues to grow. We are very grateful to our 'technician' who has given long hours to do this work.

TWO BOOKLETS: 'The Millennial Gospel of Jesus' and 'Cup of the Lord' are out of print and will not appear in the annual publications list in the March/April issue. The stock of several other booklets is low and may also be withdrawn. The interest shown in all these booklets will be kept under review and they will be reprinted if necessary.

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 but no one should hesitate to request the magazine because they can't send one. All BFU literature is free. If any have difficulty in returning the renewal form or forget it, none need worry. We do not cancel a copy of the magazine until we have reason to believe it is no longer wanted. Please tell us of any change of address or correction needed on the address label.

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MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT:

We try to make all publications as useful and helpful as possible to all readers. They live in many lands with different Christian and cultural backgrounds. We are 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 and guidance we will try to maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication. In order to reach all ages, modern translations are often used. Articles are kept to moderate length with varied presentation. 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.

This issue contains the first part of an article entitled 'The Eternal Foundation of the Heavenly Temple'. We publish this discourse believing it will be of much interest to many readers, particularly as it has an archaeological aspect. We are very grateful to the author for his co-operation in preparing it for publication. Separate copies of the two articles could be made available in booklet format if there is sufficient interest. The articles will appear, DV, on the BFU web site in due course along with other articles from this issue.

The Talking Book service continues to be a blessing to 14 of our readers. These audio cassettes are sent out without cost and each cassette contains one issue of the BSM. Again we are very grateful to one who has pioneered this service and spends long hours reading the material into the microphone.

It is appropriate to say '**thank you**' on behalf of readers to those brethren who work so hard in looking after BFU finances and who despatch the BSM and other literature.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Seasonal Reflections

"Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them" (Luke 2.9 REB). That must have been quite a shock and Luke's record gives that impression. It is not really surprising that there was a lot of angelic activity about that time. First Zechariah, then Mary and Joseph; the shepherds and the magi were all visited by a heavenly messenger. Sometimes it was in a dream, sometimes a bodily presence. The Greek word *angelos* could apply to a human messenger but it is clear that the visitor to Zechariah and Mary was someone rather special (Luke 1.19, 26). The most stupendous event in history was about to take place; the Son of God was about to enter this world as a human being. The extraordinary thing is that there was not much more dramatic activity.

No amount of 21st Century explaining away will account for what those people saw and heard. There will be those of course who are under the impression that contemporary thinking is so much superior to that of two thousand years ago and that men and women of the 1st century were not capable of observing accurately or thinking carefully. In both respects, the writer of the third gospel and the history of the early Christian Church in Acts, was equal to any scientific writer of modern times. More important to those who believe God's Word, the Holy Spirit led such writers to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. What is there about human civilization that makes anyone believe that 21st century people are so superior to what has gone before?

Why Angels? The Creator of the Universe made His presence felt and His will known to people by various means appropriate to each one. Three angels visited Abraham concerning the coming of his son. He spoke to them as if he was speaking to God Himself. Moses had very special audiences with God but after that ordinary people could not look at him while his face was unveiled. Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road saw the risen Lord but was temporarily blinded. Was the glory of God too bright for unholy eyes? Were those who saw such splendid sights nearer to God's holiness than the rest of us? Has God drawn a veil over Himself to protect those who cannot endure His holiness? Why have there not been angelic appearances in recent times? Some will say that

this has been an age of 'faith' and therefore we can't expect to see angels now. Were not men and women of old made right before God by faith? Some will say that throughout the history of the Church there have been appearances by angels at critical times in the lives of God's people. Is it wise to deny that something has happened just because we have not seen it for ourselves?

It is clear from the Scriptures that those who trust God believe that there are angels, whether seen or unseen. Many have drawn real comfort amid the traumas of war, disease and famine, from the promise that God is a refuge of His people and that He said "He will charge His angels to guard you wherever you go". The Tempter's misuse of this text (Psalm 91.11 REB; Luke 4.10) has not reduced the value of the promise. For many it has been more than just a comfort; it has been a fact in their lives. Jesus warned *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. I tell you, they have their angels in heaven, who look continually on the face of my heavenly father."* (Matt. 17.10 REB). That was a very solemn thing to say and should put us on our guard against the possibility of hurting someone else.

Angels were just one of various ways in which God communicates with people here on Earth. Many Christians are aware that God speaks directly to their hearts and minds; others recognize His command to them through circumstances. There were times when He knew that it would be more effective to speak through a vision of some kind. Whichever way God sends a message, the touchstone to check is by reference to His Word, the Bible which 'speaks' with God's authority. We can accept that God is saying something to us because the message received agrees with what the Bible says. He will not contradict what He has already said. In times of great difficulty, it is important that God's people are assured that He is with them, as He was with Israel through the floods and the fire.

Due to the disobedience of the human race in the 21st century we live in 'perilous times'. How they have come about and what they betoken is not our present discussion. The anguish of ordinary folk in various environments across the world is sufficient to make it clear that these are turbulent, even terrifying days. There is little cause for one

people or nation to blame another. All have sinned; perhaps the rich (nations) more than the poor. The Bible would seem to give that impression. Two things are important to those who claim to be God's people. One is that they should trust their Father in Heaven to permit only such circumstances as will be for their highest good. The other is that He will never forsake us or let us down. His angels are as watchful of our welfare as ever they have been of the Lord's people and that will be so till the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

The Almighty, the Creator of the Universe, to

whom the nations of the world are but the fine dust on the balance, has given command that His messengers should protect us. They provide just those things that will enable His children to reach the goal for the prize of the High Calling. There will be no skimping of the material, no rushing of the workmanship; there is no need to fear whether He is able to complete that which He has begun. He has all the time and skill He needs for the task in hand. Nor need we fear failure on our part if we love and trust Him. For **that** above all we must pray.

DN

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS. SON OF MARY. SON OF GOD

It is well known that two parents can have widely differing memories of their children and their childhood. Scripture contains two very different accounts of the amazing events that accompanied the arrival of the Lord Jesus into this world. Both their geography and their chronology appear to differ. Matthew's account gives the events from the viewpoint of Joseph, Luke's account from the viewpoint of Mary. Both must have been reported by them to the gospel writers three or four decades later. Mary completely omitted the visit of the magi and its tragic consequences. She appeared to recall their return to Nazareth as occurring some six weeks after the birth of Jesus, i.e. shortly after His presentation in the Temple and their inspiring meeting with Simeon and Anna. Joseph, on the other hand, remembered most clearly the arrival of the magi at a house, evidently in Bethlehem, and a series of five dreams, four of them his, regarding their escape from Herod and becoming refugees in Egypt until Herod's death.

A childlike explanation of the differences, that does not violate Luke's account, could well be that Mary, in her attention to the welfare of the Baby, and all that followed in the next thirty years, had forgotten the trauma that involved Joseph in long journeys, in which he took full responsibility for all the problems of travel and accommodation of mother and child. Mary simply recalled that when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. She did not however say 'straightway'. Memory has a happy knack of

overlooking traumatic times in our lives. But Mary, endued and overshadowed by God's Spirit may have deliberately chosen to blot out those months of tragedy from her mind and to meditate on 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report'. Her life was totally taken up with the care of her unique Son, pondering in her heart all that He showed her of the love of His Father. Gabriel's extensive conversation with her could never be erased. Her thrilling three months with Elizabeth, at opposite ends of their pregnancies and the excitement of the shepherds at the angelic message, would often fill her heart with joy. It was left to Joseph to take care of his wife and her holy child through those months of sadness and exile. He was given angelic instructions by means of dreams at key points until they were safely back at their home village. He sought to return to (his house at Bethlehem?) Judea but was overruled. His account of the magi and the fleeing to Egypt formed a mosaic of dream encounters with angels and must have often been re-lived in his reflections on the arrival of Jesus in the world. Both Mary and he were told separately of the saving name of the baby: JESUS*. This name was duly given to Him at His circumcision at Bethlehem, eight days after His birth. On this memory they were totally agreed.

* JESHUA = JEHOASHUA = SALVATION OF JAH (JEHOVAH), the name given by Moses to Hoshea: JOSHUA, the soldier who led God's people into the promised land.

JT

THE EVERLASTING FOUNDATION OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE

Part 1 of a Conference Discourse

"Behold! Here I am laying as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tried stone, the precious corner of a sure foundation." (Isaiah 28:16 ASV. See Is. 14:32, also 44:28; 51:16)

Obviously the prophet Isaiah is not here speaking of a literal stone, he speaks of Jesus Christ, and since the stone is not literal nor earthly, neither is the Zion in which it or rather He is laid by the LORD. The Hebrew word 'foundation', 'shethiyah' means 'God has set it'. (1)

The most important part of any structure is its foundation, its substructure. For a building to endure its foundation must be sound. On it rests everything else. It must have the qualities that the prophet extols; it must be a tried stone, it must be precious, the most important stone to the builder, and it must be sure. In Jesus Christ were found these qualities to such an extent that *"no-one who puts his trust in him will be disappointed"* (Rom. 10:11 New Berkeley Version, Revised), for the writer of Proverbs was also inspired to write *"The righteous has an everlasting foundation"* (Prov. 10:25 NKJ).

Foundation cornerstones became so important in the ancient world, guaranteeing strength and stability, that they became a figure of speech in Israel and are referred to in the OT when describing chiefs or prominent men on whom the community relied. The Hebrew word "cornerstones" is often translated "keymen", "leaders", or "chiefs" (Judges 20:2; 1 Sam. 14:38; Is. 19:13; Zech. 10:4).

Good foundations were vital in Israel to withstand, not only the heavy rains, winds and floods, but also earthquakes, as this region is an earthquake area. When the stonework associated with the building of Solomon's Temple and especially its foundation stones are examined, we learn much about the greater foundation, and one particular stone emerges from archaeological excavations as being of supreme importance; it is called the Chief Foundation Cornerstone of the whole Temple edifice.

The Temple itself was built on Mt. Moriah, which was at the time, a hilly uneven surface. To make the surrounding ground level, Solomon constructed a stupendous foundation platform, raised

high above the valley beneath, using an immense number of great hewed stones of white limestone. This foundation platform, the Temple Mount Platform or Courtyard, almost tripled the size of the place David chose for the Temple site (purchased from Araunah; 2 Sam. 24; 2 Chron. 3.1). Josephus informs us that such was the unevenness of Mount Moriah, that in laying the foundation of the Temple, it was necessary to lay it far below the surface of the ground reaching to the bedrock, and raise a massive foundation on it, which is evident from the fact that while for example, the inside of the Western wall is only 12 feet high, the outside is 70 feet high (Ant.B xv, cxv, s.3). This would require vast masses of masonry. Where did all the stone come from? Timber came from the forests of Lebanon, but where did the stone come from?

Next to the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem there is a rugged rock 50ft high, on which the northern wall of the present city has been built. At the foot of the rock is an entrance to a cave. The size of the cave increases rapidly and develops into vast caverns called the Royal Quarries, or King Solomon's Quarries, where rock has been cut away with tools. It is also called Zedekiah's Cave as it is thought to be the place he fled to when the Babylonian armies were breaking through the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4,5). Tunnel-looking cuttings diverge in various directions, one tunnel reaching 750 feet into Mt. Moriah. At one point the quarry is 325 feet wide, and 50 feet high. Pillars of solid rock left in place support the ceiling and prevent the cavern from collapsing, since part of the northern city of Jerusalem is above it. The quarry is alongside a natural cavern that descends to the Valley of Achor. Steps have been cut into the rock and descend to lower levels penetrating into mammoth caves like dark amphitheatres. Subterranean quarries run in all directions that "form a spectacle never to be forgotten" according to one member of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and were discovered quite by accident in 1852 by Dr Joseph Barclay when going for a walk (2). The existence of this quarry was not a well-known fact and was always kept completely sealed for fear of enemies tunnelling into the city. The first reference to this place is in

Joshua 7.4, 5 where 3,000 Israelites fled from Ai to these quarries. The passages were hidden in, in times of war.

Large fragments of quarried stone lie around in these caverns, and several massive blocks half cut still adhere to the rock walls. There are niches here and there in the rock, which turned out on closer examination to be incisions made in cutting the stone using chisels. The white limestone ceiling is blackened by smoke from burning wicks in oil. Indications are found of wooden wedges used to remove the stones when cut from their original position. One of the methods for hewing the stones was to carve broad slits along the rock face, and to drive dry wooden wedges into them. Water was then poured over the dry wedges, causing them to swell. The resulting pressure then split the stone along the chiselled slits. Greatly helping the quarrying was the fact that this limestone in its natural state is so soft that it can be cut with a saw. So long as it remained underground, the limestone rock was fairly easy to cut. When exposed to the sun and air however, it becomes as hard as marble and is capable of a very high polish. Marble is in fact a type of limestone.

The stone did not come from the mountains of Lebanon; the timber did but not the stone. The Biblical Archaeological Review (1986 p.21) also informs us that Jerusalem limestone has a rare chemical fingerprint, it is called travertine aragonite and is far rarer than the more common form of limestone known as calcite. It is different from any other rock in the region. But who did this quarrying, cutting and preparing of the stone?

1 Kings and 2 Chronicles record Solomon's dealings with Hiram the king of Tyre, and another Hiram, the master workman of the same name. Previous to this 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles record King Hiram supplying King David with cedar timber from Lebanon, as well as craftsmen skilled in working wood and stone to build him a house on the stronghold of Zion (2 Sam. 5:11). Once David's palace is built he reflects on the situation and says to the prophet Nathan: "*Here I am living in a palace of cedar while the ark of God remains in a tent.*" (2 Sam. 7:2 NIV) But God's reply to David was rather different from what he had expected: "*Can you yourself build me a house for me to dwell in?*" (2 Sam 7:5 NKJ) and in v.7 He basically says 'whenever did I ask for a house to be built for me?' 1 Chronicles 17 records God's promise to King

David in his desire to build a temple that He would raise up seed to David who would build a house that would last "forever". David perhaps wanted to be like the kings he had vanquished in battle, all of whom had built temples to their gods. In the Canaanites' view, a god actually dwelt in a temple. God however did not approve and because of David's sins he was not granted his wish. But it was given to Solomon. He granted Solomon to build a house but had to remind the people as in Is. 66.1 (REB). "*The heavens are my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is the house that you people can build for me?*" (See Acts 7:48; 17:24)

After building the Temple, Solomon undertook a government-building project (1 Kings 7), and then engaged in a nationwide construction program (2 Chronicles 7:11 and chapter 8). The building work proved controversial among the people and led to a split in the kingdom (1 Kings 12).

Nevertheless, toward the close of David's reign preparations on construction materials for the Temple began (1 Ch.22.1, 2, 15) and on hearing of David's death and that Solomon reigned in his stead, the Phoenician king, Hiram, sent his servants to renew his friendship (1 Kings 5:1-12) and sent craftsmen of every description. Solomon drafted 30,000 Israelites who served in relays of 10,000 working one month in three in the forests of Lebanon, as well as 70,000 burden bearers and 80,000 woodmen, cutters and carpenters, as well as 3,300 foremen (2 Chron. 2:17, 18). 1 Kings 5:17, 18 (REB) records: "*By the king's orders they quarried huge, costly blocks for laying the foundations of the LORD's house with hewn stones. The builders supplied by Solomon and Hiram together with the Gebalites shaped the blocks and prepared both timber and stone for the building of the house.*" The Gebalites were from Gebal (Byblos), a Phoenician city on the Mediterranean Sea coast. While these figures seem large, 200,000 workers, they compare favourably with those given for the time and workers it took to build the temple to Diana at Ephesus and the Taj Mahal in more recent times. To appreciate how much work was involved, it is necessary to remember that the Temple was built on Mt. Moriah. To have room on this hill for the Temple and its courts required the building of an enormous limestone platform, with walls hundreds of feet high, all of which served as a massive foundation for the Temple itself. Some of the walls stand to this day.

The ancient quarry men, the Phoenician stonemasons sent by the King of Tyre, King Hiram, quarried stone from within Mt. Moriah itself, from subterranean quarries. In a corner some distance from the main thoroughfare of this quarry, a basin was discovered scooped out of the rock, which was designed to collect water that percolates through the roof and fissures of the limestone walls. On the floor around the basin, fragments of pottery drinking vessels have been found. Other telltale signs of stone masons' activities have also been discovered and go back to the time of Solomon.

How were the blocks of stone after being cut and dressed in the quarry, transported to the Temple site? Although the quarries were close to the site it is not thought the stones were taken to the entrance of the cavern, down into the valley, around and up the western slope of Mt. Moriah. The stones were brought up into the city through a hole in the ceiling. When the pillars of stone left in this quarry were examined carefully one was found to be a giant mound of earth and debris piled up to the ceiling. The section above the rock was cut away in a manner that would allow the cut out section to fit back over the hole like a manhole cover. This artificial entrance, from the quarry to the city, has been found through which the stone blocks were transported.

Could all the stone needed for the Temple foundation, the walls, and the Temple itself come from one quarry? "When it is remembered that nearly the whole city of Edinburgh has been built out of Craig Leith Quarry and that many a town of England has been built of stone taken from one rock-cut excavation; when moreover, we reflect upon the immense size of the Jerusalem quarries, we are led to the conclusion that all the stonework of the Holy City, including the Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod, the gigantic walls ... as well as the wall encompassing the city, have been excavated from one and the same spot, namely from the Royal quarries underneath the north part of the Holy City. This ... gathers strength from the fact that all the stonework is of one formation, and corresponds to the hard limestone rock of the aforesaid caves." (3)

King Hiram's skilled quarry-men were extremely careful about the foundations of their buildings and sometimes cut trenches out of the solid bedrock in which to place the foundation. This was done in the case of the Temple. The skilled masons, taking considerable effort, have

gone down to the native rock and laid foundation stones on the solid rock of Mt. Moriah itself. The Psalmist's words are literally true when he proudly sings, "*His foundation is in the holy mountains*" (Ps. 87:1 ASV). Sometimes the masons had to go down nearly 100 feet to cut into the bedrock as a base for the foundation. The lowest point within the whole Temple platform, and hence the most critical point in the whole substructure, was the **south east angle**.

The foundation stone at the bottom of this SE angle, which is also a cornerstone, is the most interesting stone in the entire world, for it is **the foundation stone, the chief cornerstone** of the Temple platform and of its walls. Upon this **everything** rests, and on this single stone, outwards and upwards every other piece of masonry is dependant. It is still in situ, it is still there. The stone itself was carefully chosen and meticulously examined. It had to be sound, being limestone it had to be without any white streaks of spar that, under pressure and strain might lead to cracks and split. It was the very first stone to be laid and it had to be laid in position accurately. It had to be of the right size and of the right dimensions. It had to be carefully dressed so as to form a rectangular block. Being also the Chief Foundation Cornerstone it had to face both ways, it was a bond of union between the two main sides of the foundation substructure. It had to be expertly hewn as it had to come into close contact with the bedrock below and be a support for the masonry above. Once laid it would set. In fact, once the foundation stone was laid, the other blocks of stone had to be laid in position quickly so that they welded together and dried out in an immovable solid mass.

Accomplishing this feat for a structure so large would take a great deal of surveying, calculation, thought and preparation. In 1 Kings 6.1, 37 we are told that building began and the foundation laid in Solomon's fourth year of rule, King David making preparations for the building before Solomon became king. Preparations for the Temple took from David's last days into Solomon's fourth year when the foundation was finally placed in position. That would entail a great deal of work, excavating, preparing and levelling uneven ground with stone, preparing all the foundation stones, and cutting paving stones for the surface of the Temple's Great Courtyard. It would require detailed plans, calculation, and expert specialist skill.

When engineers in the 1800's excavated the Temple's foundations and located the Chief Foundation Cornerstone, at the SE angle, they ascertained this stone dimensions to be 14 feet in length, 3 feet 8 inches high and about 7 feet wide. It is enormous. But it is not the largest foundation stone. To be the Chief Foundation Stone it does not have to be the largest. At the SW angle (opposite the SE angle, at the other end) there is a foundation stone 31 feet long, 7 feet wide and 5 feet high. It weighs over 100 tons, but it is not the Foundation stone. Its position is nowhere near as crucial as the one at the SE angle. At this position, it is the lowest point in the structure. The geometry and inclination of the site make everything dependant upon this one Foundation Cornerstone. And this stone is also laid in the live bedrock of the mountain itself and is out of sight.

The engineers who excavated this area were struck with admiration at the vastness of the blocks and the excellence of the workmanship. Other fascinating features discovered at this site confirmed they had discovered the original foundation cornerstone dating from the time of King Solomon. On the polished surface of the stones they noticed with considerable interest, incised marks and red painted characters; but they were unable to decipher these strange figures, nor could they tell to what language they belonged. They contacted an official in the British Museum (Emanuel Deutsch), an expert in epigraphy, the study of inscriptions. He concluded that the marks were partly letters, partly numerals, and partly special masons or quarry signs of Phoenician origin. They were the marks of the King of Tyre's stonemasons, and the same markings have also been discovered on ancient Phoenician buildings from the same period in present day Syria. That is very interesting because all the stonework was cut, prepared and polished, not on the site but in the quarry away from the site. So how did they know which stones went where? And, there were a great many stones. From the discovery of the ancient quarrymen's marks, it was discovered that by the use of a system of numerals and letters and special masons' marks placed on the stones, the masons would know where to place each block as each came, fully prepared, from the quarry. Knowing which stone went where, as for example, what course a stone belonged to, could not be left to last minute decisions. Many of these stones were so

huge no margin for error could be or was allowed. For example, 100 feet above the Foundation Cornerstone, also on the corner, is another cornerstone, a gigantic block, 26 feet long, over 6 feet high, and 7 feet wide. It forms the seventh course from the ground. It also weighs over 100 tons, and is the heaviest though not the longest stone visible in the foundation. Charles Warren uncovered one stone in the Temple, which measured 30 feet 9 inches in length. (4) Manoeuvring stones of that size and weight would leave no room for inaccuracy or miscalculation, and would take meticulous experience and skill. In fact, the world's greatest engineers and masons were brought into Jerusalem to lay these stones.

These stones also form part of the platform's south walls (Wall of Haram) foundation, being over 900 feet long (divided into 3 sections by two gates or entrances, Triple Gate and Double or Huldah Gate). The South wall, from the SE angle extends to the SW angle and here, interestingly, the foundation stone rests on the slope of the western bank of the base of Mt Zion, not Mt Moriah. Again it is literally true that as the Psalmist (87:1) said the "*foundation is in the holy mountains*", mountains, plural, the foundations are laid both in Moriah and in Zion.

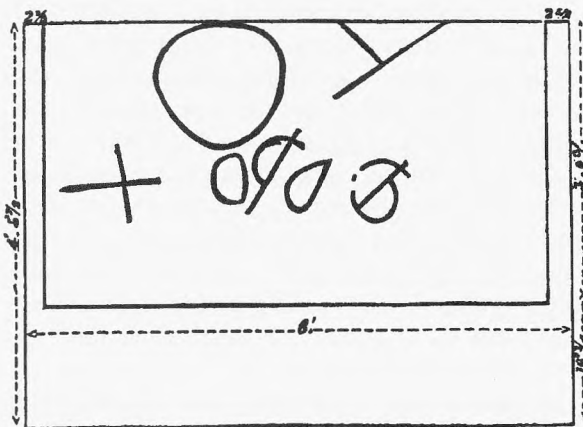
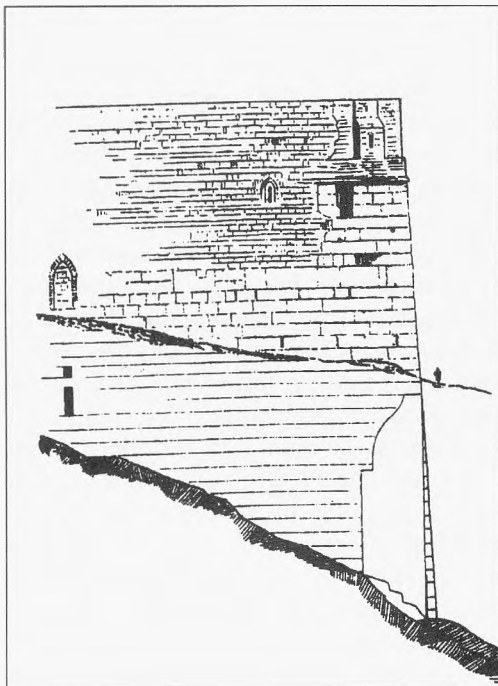
The bedrock of Moriah comes to the surface at the sill of the Triple Gate. Level with this is the bed of a colossal course of masonry. It runs from the SE angle for a distance of about 600 feet. It is called the Great Course. Engineers noticed that this Great Course is not quite horizontal, it is "imperfect" you may say. "The outer lines of spires and columns, when perfectly straight, appear from some optical illusion to be slightly convex, and in order that they may appear straight the outer surface must be made slightly convex." (5) Greek architects, who strove for "rectitude" in the lay of their buildings, seeking perfection in outline and in number, also made provision for this optical illusion in some of their buildings.

(To be continued) KW

- (1) G.Friedlander, Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, 1916 p.266. This work is an ancient rabbinical commentary on the work of God in His creation, and the oldest history of Israel. It is attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, a Palestinian sage ('Tannaite') of c.90-130 AD, but written during the eighth or early ninth century in Palestine.

- (2) J.King, Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill,
1884 p.9
(3) Ibid, pl4,1S

- (4) C.W.Wilson & C.Warren, The Recovery of
Jerusalem, 1871 p.121.
Rawlinson, History of Phoenicia
The Biblical Archaeologist May 1941; Feb. 1951



Marks on Stones at the South East Angle

The South East Angle

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

6. Resurrection Days

There came a violent hammering on the door; John looked across to Peter and for a moment; both men sat tense and rigid. Had Caiaphas' men discovered their retreat and was this to be the end? Jesus was dead but the vengeance of His enemies was certainly to be visited upon His disciples if they could be found. The two had remained hidden in this room since the terrible climax of two days ago and there was no knowing what had been happening in the outside world during that time ... The tension relaxed at the sound of a woman's voice outside the door: "It's Mary; let me in". A swift movement and Peter had crossed the room and unbarred the door. In another moment Mary of Magdala was with them, distraught, frightened, her veil awry and her hair in disarray. Peter led her quickly to a chair and stood, with fear-shadowed eyes, as she sat endeavouring to regain her breath. She had been running and she was exhausted. But in a moment, brokenly, she was able to speak. *"They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."*

A moment of stunned disbelief, and both men were out of the house and running hard towards the sepulchre. Gone now were all their fears of apprehension by the High Priest's officers. This was a totally unexpected turn of events and they must inform themselves of the situation at first hand. Mary was left to follow as best she could; they had to get to the sepulchre as quickly as possible. Assuming that their hiding-place had been the house of Mary the mother of Mark they would have a little over a mile to cover, along the undulating tracks which traversed the rocky ridges and ravines outside the western wall of the city. John was in better shape than his fellow disciple, he was probably a few years younger and he got there first. Nevertheless he did not go in. Perhaps his Jewish upbringing made him afraid of ceremonial uncleanness during this Passover week. He looked inside and saw that the body of Jesus was gone and the grave clothes were lying on the rock-cut shelf. Then Peter arrived, panting, and without ado, ceremonial uncleanness or not, went straight inside.

He could only confirm what Mary had told them; the Lord was not there. But he did notice something the significance of which had escaped Mary when first she looked into the tomb. The grave clothes were certainly still there; whoever had taken the body had removed them and left them behind. And as he looked at them Peter was conscious of another inexplicable factor; as John, overcoming his reluctance, came inside and stood looking, he too became conscious of it, and recorded it later on in his Gospel. Those wrappings had not been unwound as would normally be the case. They were lying folded in their respective places just as though the body had been extricated without disturbing them, almost as if it had been dissolved out of them so that they fell neatly flat, but still folded, on the rock shelf.

Long and silently the two men looked, and then, without speaking, turned away. Mary was waiting outside as they emerged but they did not say anything to her. They looked around the garden but there was nothing unusual and no one else in sight. Perhaps if they had remembered the Lord's assurance that on the third day He would rise again they might have found the explanation of those folded grave clothes but they had taken so little heed of that assurance that they had forgotten all about the promised Resurrection. They only knew that Jesus was dead and all their hopes were dashed, and all they had left was His grave where they could come and remember Him, and now even that was denied them because someone had taken the body away and they knew not where it was. For once, Peter had nothing to say and nothing to suggest. With an expression of defeat on his face he turned away from the sepulchre and in company with John made his way back to the house he had so recently left.

Mary remained – and saw the Lord. Had Peter and John stayed with her a little while, they too would have seen Him. But it was Mary and the other women who had braved the possible dangers of being accosted by the Temple guards appointed to watch the sealed tomb, and to them it was given to see and talk with the risen Lord first of all. First to Mary, and then to all four of them as they made their way to the disciples. All that is recorded in detail, but of the next appearance nothing is preserved save the bare fact. At the close of that eventful day, two excited men from Emmaus burst in upon the assembled disciples with their news

that the stranger they had entertained to supper had turned out to be the Lord Himself. In turn they were met with the jubilant news "*the Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared unto Simon*" (Luke 24.34). In the next few minutes Jesus Himself was standing in the midst of the assembly. That appearance to Peter must have been at some time during the Sunday, after Mary and the women had brought the news and been disbelieved. Paul in 1 Cor. 15.5 refers to this same appearance as being the first after the Resurrection; he ignored the part played by the women. How Peter came to see the Lord and what passed between them no man knows; perhaps in view of Peter's tragic denials of only a few days earlier the episode was too sacred to talk about. Peter never referred to it afterwards. One cannot doubt though that he sought and obtained forgiveness for what he had done and that he became a better man for the experience. From then on he was a pillar of strength to the little community of believers which very soon became the nucleus of the Christian Church. At Pentecost, only seven weeks later, he espoused the cause of Christ in public without fear, and the authorities, with all their threats, found it impossible to shake or weaken his rock-hard resolution. At long last Peter began to understand those many things his Lord had told him about; His coming death and resurrection. For so long the Galilean fisherman had allowed his Judaistic beliefs and expectations regarding the Messiah to colour his reception and interpretation of Jesus' words. He did not really believe that Jesus was going to die and for that reason all the talk of rising again on the third day had passed over his head. But now he had experienced the bitterness of realizing that his Master had indeed suffered death at the hands of His enemies and God had not intervened to save Him. He knew what it was to feel like a sheep that had lost its shepherd. He saw all his dreams and hopes and expectations dashed. He found himself hiding from the vengeance of enemies seeking him for his adherence to what he now felt to be a lost cause. "*We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel*" said his two sad compatriots to the stranger who had accosted them on the way to Emmaus. We had trusted, but we trust no longer; that was their unspoken feeling and it had been that of Peter also. But now all that was changed; he had seen his Lord again, he knew now that He had survived the death on the cross, and His enemies no

longer had any power over Him. In the light of that tremendous revelation and the knowledge of forgiveness for his own sad lapse, Peter was ready, fully ready to embark upon his destiny to be a fisher of men.

One more experience during that halcyon seven weeks must have stood out in Peter's mind in later life whenever he thought of those days. He and the rest of the disciples, in obedience to the Lord's injunction, had left Jerusalem and gone back to Galilee, probably within two weeks of the Resurrection, there to await further intimation of their Master's will for them. They still had no idea in what way they were to continue His work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was clear now that the Kingdom was not yet to be established and the appearance of Messiah in glory and power was at some indeterminate point in the future. And in the meantime they must live. So they overhauled their boats and nets that had been lying idle these past three years and set out for their first catch. *"And that night they caught nothing."*

They must have been puzzled. Most of them at least were expert in their trade and knew all the moods and characteristics of the Sea of Galilee, when and where to expect the shoals of fish which their net was designed to take. Dispirited, at daybreak they headed for shore. Approaching, they discerned a solitary stranger standing on the beach. To his shouted enquiry as to their catch they responded with the dismal news. He told them to cast their net again on the right side of the ship and they would have better fortune. Probably to humour him more than anything, they did so, and immediately the net filled with such a shoal of fish that they could not get it into the boat. In a flash John perceived the situation. *"It is the Lord"* he said. In a moment Peter was over the side and in the sea making his own way to shore. The boat was only three hundred feet away and the water was probably shallow enough for wading; in any case Peter would certainly be a strong swimmer. By the time the others had got the boat to shore with their catch Peter was already with Jesus and there was a fire burning with a meal of fish and bread waiting.

Many things must have been said at that meal which have not been recorded. What has been preserved is the thrice-repeated question of Jesus addressed to Peter: *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* Each time Peter replied in the affirmative

and each time he was told in response to "feed my sheep". Peter was grieved at the reiteration we are told and that was certainly in part because he remembered his thrice repeated denial of his Lord at the trial. Yet perhaps he took a grain of comfort from the circumstance. Three times he had denied; now three times he had affirmed. The Lord had publicly restored to him his office of pastor and leader of the little company which so soon was to grow into a great and numerous Church. That forgiveness which Jesus undoubtedly did extend to Peter when He appeared to him in private a little earlier was now reiterated and confirmed in public, in the hearing of the other disciples. From now on, no man could hold Peter's lapse against him and all knew that he was still the Lord's choice for the leadership and guidance of the little band which was to plant the truth of the Gospel in the world.

There must have been other appearances. Only some eight or nine are recorded, all of them during the first couple of weeks or so, but Luke says (Acts 1.3) that He showed Himself *"by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"* and that must imply a virtually continuous series of meetings. They had returned to Jerusalem from Galilee and were commanded to remain there until the Holy Spirit should come upon them on the Day of Pentecost. And at the end of the forty days Jesus led them out of the city to the heights of the Mount of Olives above the village of Bethany, out of sight of Jerusalem. There they asked Him, hesitantly, if the time had come for the establishment of His kingdom over Israel, and gently He indicated that it had not. Again He reiterated their commission, the work to which their lives were to be devoted. *"You will bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and throughout all Judaea and in Samaria, and even to the farthest corners of the earth"*. And Peter, listening quietly now, understood at last what it was that lay before him and what it was that he must do.

So they watched Jesus ascend into heaven and knew that now they would not see Him again, until in some far distant day He would return as He promised in the reality and the glory of His Kingdom. But first they had to be His witnesses and proclaim His Gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations. Only after they had done that would the consummation of all things come.

(To be continued) AOH

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

*Examining an Old
Testament story.*

Jephthah was the Israelite hero who vowed, according to the A. V., that if God gave him victory in his war with the Ammonites then whatever living thing first met him on his return home would be sacrificed as a burnt-offering in token of his gratitude. He did gain the victory and the first to meet him was his only daughter. The narrative says briefly that "*he did with her according to his vow*" and has thereby given occasion for many a sceptic's jibe at belief in a God who would assent to such a proceeding.

As with so many Old Testament stories, this one requires examination before judgment is passed. The turn of a phrase, a difference of meaning in a word as between the seventeenth century, when the A. V. was produced, and the present time, can alter the entire position. In order to achieve correct understanding it is necessary first to look at the background.

The story is found in the eleventh chapter of Judges. The time was possibly in the second half of the period of the Judges, about 1100 BC. It was a rude and barbarous age in Israel and the ruthless, warlike Israelites had little to commend them beyond their fierce belief in the God of Israel and, in the main, a regard for the Law of Moses. "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" is how a later chronicler describes the times. Before judging them too harshly we have to remember that we, through our forebears, possess a knowledge of Divine laws and standards and the way of life which is right in God's sight which is the accumulation of over three thousand years of Divine revelation. The men of Jephthah's day had only the advantage of two centuries.

By force of circumstances Jephthah found himself at the head of the Israelite forces, determined to make a bid for liberation from the Ammonite yoke. Under the terms of the Mosaic covenant national apostasy from God was punished by servitude to a foreign nation and for eighteen years past they had paid tribute to Ammon. Now there had been a national repentance and by the same covenant, that should be followed by deliverance. Jephthah felt therefore that the Lord was with them and would fight for them.

This is the first factor to consider. Despite his

early years spent as leader of a dissident group of "resistance fighters", with the lawlessness and licence which that must have entailed, Jephthah emerges as a serious-minded man. He is conscious of Israel's special position before God and the obligation of loyalty to God devolving upon himself as leader of the hosts of the Lord. Like so many Old Testament heroes, he was probably very much a swashbuckling freebooter. But this was a reflection of the times in which he lived; underneath that apparently reckless exterior there are glimpses of a nobility of character and a keen penetrating mind which go far to illuminate the story. Before advancing into battle with the Ammonites he first entered into prayer with God, and addressed a formal request to the king of Ammon to state the grounds of his complaint against Israel. The reply was a completely false assertion that Israel had appropriated territory rightfully the property of Ammon. Jephthah countered that by a logical and reasoned recapitulation of the historical evidences back to the original entry of Israel into the land after the Exodus, demonstrating the falsity of the claim. "*We have done you no wrong; it is you who are doing us wrong by attacking us. The Lord who is judge will decide this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites*" (Judges 11.27 REB). So they went to war.

Here comes the point at issue. Jephthah made this vow to the Lord. '*If you deliver the Ammonites into my hand, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house, to meet me when I return from them safely shall be the Lord's; I shall offer that as a whole offering*' (11.31 REB). Jephthah must have known that under the Mosaic Law a burnt offering must be a male animal, in perfect condition, and not of those classified unclean. Human sacrifice in any case was expressly forbidden by the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18.21; Deut. 12.31). Barbarous as were the people in the days of the Judges, and common as was this practice among the surrounding nations, there is no trace of it in Israel until the decadent days prior to the Captivity, some eight hundred years later, when this abomination did penetrate into Israel with the adoption of Moloch worship. The impulsive champion of Israel probably uttered his vow in

some haste without stopping to think of the situation that would be created if the first creature to meet him should be ineligible for a burnt-offering. In any case the vow was out of order and entirely unnecessary, for victory depended upon Israel's heart condition before God, and since in chapter 10 the fact of their national repentance is recorded Jephthah should have realised that deliverance was thereby assured.

So Jephthah sallied forth at the head of his armies, and in due course returned, the triumphant conquering hero. The Lord had given deliverance to Israel, and there was universal rejoicing. His home town of Mizpeh was sixty miles from the frontier and all along the way the crowds must have met him with acclamation, the name of the Lord upon all lips for His goodness and favour returned to Israel. That the national feeling was a religious one is evidenced by the action of Jephthah's daughter in coming forth to meet him "*with tambourines and dancing*". This was the traditional method of ascribing praise to God for a resounding victory, instituted by Miriam, the sister of Moses after the Red Sea crossing, a procession of maidens singing the high praises of God and recounting the deed of valour associated with the particular victory being celebrated. There must have been many such processions during the conqueror's sixty miles journey homeward with his victorious warriors.

It was the sight of those gracefully moving girls and the sound of melodious voices and tambourines that brought Jephthah to an abrupt halt. His eyes beheld his own daughter, leading her companions, and the recollection of his vow flooded into his mind. This was a possibility he had not imagined, and as he realised what was involved he rent his clothes in his anguish of spirit. Gone now was triumph and exaltation and rejoicing, yielding place to sorrow and utter despair. "*Oh, my daughter*" he groaned "*you have broken my heart! Such calamity you have brought on me! I have made a vow to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it.*" Here is revealed the man's sterling loyalty and allegiance to God. Despite the depth of sorrow and grief into which the fulfilment of his rash vow must now plunge him and the fate to which he had condemned his innocent daughter there was no thought of going back on his word or seeking to avoid his obligation. "*I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back on it.*" So far from being an

uncultured robber chief, as some critics have maintained, this man was a true son of Israel.

His daughter displays equal nobility of character. Whether at this moment she realised the nature of the vow does not appear. Probably she did not. But without hesitation she put herself at her father's disposal.

"*Father, since you have made a vow to the Lord, do to me as your vow demands, now that the Lord has avenged you on the Ammonites, your enemies.*" Evidently this was a household where God was known and honoured and worshipped and the daughter, no less than the father, had no other thought than to do what was right in the sight of God, at whatever personal cost.

Here lies the crux of the question. Did Jephthah actually sacrifice his unresisting daughter upon a smoking altar, a burnt-offering unto God, or was the discharge of his vow effected in some other legitimate manner? What actually happened to this loyal noble-spirited girl?

It goes without saying that such a sacrifice would have been totally unacceptable to the Most High and could only incur His strongest condemnation. It remains then to examine the position in the light of the Mosaic code regarding vows and sacrifices to discover exactly what Jephthah, as a law-abiding man of Israel, would be obliged to do.

The laws governing such vows appear in Leviticus 27. From this it is apparent that there are two cases. A man could dedicate himself or any member of his household upon condition of some Divine favour such as recovery from an illness, deliverance from an enemy, or granting of some request. Thus Hannah dedicated her first-born son Samuel to the service of the Sanctuary upon receiving the blessing of motherhood. Animals or property of any description might likewise be dedicated. Should the animal be a perfect male of the flocks or herds then it must be sacrificed by fire. If it was an unclean beast, a human being or item of property such as land or houses then it could not thus be sacrificed but must either be given to the Sanctuary to be the Lord's forever, or redeemed by payment of a sum of money into the Sanctuary according to a scale laid down in Lev. 27. This discharged the vow. The other case concerned captives or booty taken in war which were to be "devoted" because of unfitness to remain in

existence. The booty must be utterly consumed with fire and the captives must be slain. Jephthah's vow clearly comes within the first category. The offering was to be an acknowledgment to God in gratitude for victory. (The word "*burnt-offering*" in the A.V. is the rendering of a Hebrew expression meaning literally "that which ascends", primarily referring to the smoke of the sacrifice going up to God but having as its basic idea the presentation of an offering, the burning being only incidental). The victory had been granted and the vow must be implemented. Under the Law that meant either that Jephthah's daughter must be redeemed with money or else taken into perpetual service in the Sanctuary. It might be that the spirit of Jephthah's undertaking that the one meeting him "shall be the Lord's", precluded him from availing himself of the provision for redemption. It also might be that the magnitude of the victory demanded a positive sacrifice on the part of Jephthah, greater than could be made by the mere payment of money. It is evident from the rest of the account that in fact his daughter did enter the service of the Sanctuary thereby remaining unmarried to the end of her days. This is shown by the girl's request that before the irrevocable step was taken she might be allowed to spend two months with her companions to "*mourn that I must die a virgin*". Besides the customary expectation of marriage and motherhood normal to her sex, every Israelite girl was encouraged to hope that she might become the mother of the "seed of blessing" later on crystallized in the person of the Messiah. To be destined to a life of perpetual virginity was a crushing blow. It was this, and not the prospect of sacrifice, which Jephthah's daughter and her friends lamented those two months. At the end of the time her father who "*fulfilled the vow he had made; she died a virgin*." Thus she remained unmarried, consistent with her being "hallowed to the Lord", for the rest of her days.

Verse 40 as it stands in the A.V. conveys a wrong impression when it says that the "*daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah four days in a year*". The word translated lament really means "to speak praise". The RV gives "*The daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite four days in a year*". The implication is that once every year the young women of Israel visited her to

commend and praise her for the devotion which led her so willingly to accept her fate. The visitors would have to journey to Shiloh, in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, the geographical centre of the entire land, for here stood the Sanctuary of God, the Tabernacle which Moses constructed in the Wilderness. Here too the High Priest of Israel conducted the duties of his exalted office, Jephthah's daughter spent her life in the service of the Sanctuary.

There is not much said about the place of women in this service but that they were so employed is clear from a comparison of Exod. 38.8 and 1 Sam. 2.22 with Num. 4.23 and 8.24. The first two texts refer to the women who "assembled" at the Sanctuary whilst the other two use the same word, *tsaba*, to describe the work of the male Levites in the service of the Sanctuary. The Tabernacle at Shiloh was the central religious establishment of the country, fulfilling the function that in much later days was taken over by the Temple in Jerusalem. Pilgrims and visitors continually came for various religious exercises, and the tremendous influx three times in the year upon the occasions of the great "feasts", it is probable that the services of these women were very necessary in many ways. They were possibly in the main wives and daughters of the Levites attending on the Sanctuary, assuming their duties voluntarily and performing them within the routine of their normal daily lives. Jephthah's daughter, because she had been given to the Lord, was there on a different basis. She was not free to leave and for her there could be no normal life, no husband and family. For Jephthah her father, because she was his only child, there could be none to continue his line; his name must perish out of Israel. Those were the consequences of a rash vow, uttered unthinkingly and in haste and that never need have been made. But it was made and fulfilled despite the cost to those concerned not only the Israelite conqueror but also his unnamed daughter. Surely she must occupy a place among that "great cloud of witnesses" whom the writer to the Hebrews sets forth as examples of sterling faith to the Christian Church.

AOH

ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS

"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." (Col. 1.19, 20 NRSV). To discover the need of this process of reconciliation we must go back to the days of Creation where, in a garden, God gave life to humanity by breathing into Adam's nostrils so that he became a living being (Gen. 2.7 NRSV). Not only did God give life but he has sustained life ever since and when He removes life we die. So states Psalm 104.29-30 and Elihu in Job 34.14.15. When Paul spoke to the people of Lystra on his first missionary journey, he did not introduce the Gospel with the Law of Moses as he did when speaking to Jews. Rather he brought to the Gentiles' attention the facts of Creation and God's control of all living things (Acts 14.15-17). Later in his ministry, answering the wise men of Athens, he spoke of God's control of human history (Acts 17.26, 27). It is clear from his remarks that God has always been interested in the well being of His whole creation and not just in a limited elite as ancient Israel, and more recently the Church, have thought. Jesus came into the world to save all mankind (John 3.16,17) not just Israel and the Church. As the old hymn has it, "The whole Creation is Thy charge but saints are Thy peculiar care."

There was a time when God shared evening walks and talks amid the beauty of the Earth with our first parents but disobedience to His known will brought sin into the world and reason for them to hide from Him. This thought was expressed in the poetry of Israel when the prophet wrote *"The Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."* (Isaiah 59.1,2 NRSV). Sin separates from God, yet He has been watching over His Creation in His love. Many a person has benefited from that watch care unbeknown to them, as curious 'coincidences' occur in their lives. God never cuts Himself off totally, nor did He do so when Jesus hung on the cross. Maybe God did hide His face from His Son when Jesus cried out *"why have you forsaken me?"* for in that moment the Son discovered what humanity had suffered in being hidden from Father. It may be, that idea of 'God hiding His face' explains many of the experiences of mankind and many of

the records, hard to understand in the Bible just as Job's spasm of suffering also gives us clues.

God's concern for the 'nations' was shown by Jesus when He spoke to the people of Nazareth in their synagogue recorded in Luke 4.25-27. There had been many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah but he went to the foreign lady of Zarephath. There had been many suffering from leprosy in the time of Elisha but he healed the foreign general from Damascus rather than his compatriots. In Acts 17.28 we have the wonderful thought that *"In Him we live and move and have our being"*; that applies to all mankind. Paul quoted from a pagan poet about an idol god, yet in that poetry there are fragments of truth that came from earlier ages when mankind understood something of their Creator's purpose. They wanted their own way to do what they liked and so they invented gods in their own image from their own imagination. Originally they had been made in God's image and veiled reflections of Him linger in their faces.

The age-old question must be asked again. Why did God make humanity so that it could turn away from Him and thereby do such dastardly things to each other as we see today. The solution to the problem lies in the fact that men and women try to go it alone without God. They devise wonderful philosophies for living, sometimes labelled 'humanism'. Some try so hard to live rightly without God. But they have not the power of His loving Spirit to enable them to obey His simplest rules and until they turn to Him they will make no real headway. While one or two are seeking to give life and hope to their fellows, there are thousands ready to destroy those around them. Why then did He make us so? Would we challenge God's wisdom as did Job? Would the pot question the potter's skills. Creation is out of gear through disobedience and it will not be right until the Potter decides it is the right time to remake the pot as Jeremiah and Paul discovered. And as old father Abraham asked a long time ago, *"Shall not the judge of all the Earth do right?"*

God began to put things right first with one man, Noah, after the Flood. He made a covenant with him and set His bow of promise in the sky for all to see. Then He took a family, Abraham and Co., and again made with them a covenant. Genesis 15 describes the making of that covenant. It seems to be similar to the Hittite ceremony at the time of Abra-

ham whereby they made a covenant bond with conquered tribes. The blood of a sacrificed animal was sprinkled on both parties to the covenant. They were then bound together in the life of the animal. An attack on one was an attack on the other. Modern nations have made similar 'treaties'. Something like this appears to have happened when Abraham divided an animal into two sections and then fell into a deep sleep. Symbolically his life was now bonded to God. A similar ceremony is recorded in Exodus 19 and 24 when the blood of a sacrificed animal was sprinkled on the 'altar' representing God and the people. Nothing could more fittingly describe how Christ's sacrifice binds us to God and brings reconciliation and peace "*through the blood of his cross*".

Thus God began the process of reconciliation to a nation through the ceremonies of Sinai. The covenants that followed in the history of Israel were really renewals and extensions of that original covenant. There is an interesting expression in 1 Cor. 10.2, 3 where Paul writes of Israel being baptized into Moses and he was the mediator between God and His people. So Paul writes in Rom. 6.3 we have been baptized into Christ Jesus (not into a church or sect or denomination). The old life has gone and now we '*are married to another*' or as the RV has it '*joined to another*' (Rom. 7.3). There is a sense in which partners in marriage become one flesh and this is a truly Bible concept stated at the beginning of Genesis and echoed in the words of Jesus. Marriage is the deepest, richest and most satisfying human relationship; surrender without absorption; service without compulsion; love without conditions; illustrating God's love and grace. Oneness with Christ describes a personal relationship in which a disciple remains a distinct individual; developing into the new person.

So in Him were all things created and in Him all will be restored (Col. 1.15, 16). The whole fundamental doctrine of the Atonement upon which the work of restoration is founded operates simply by being 'in Christ'. It requires no long complex understanding of theological processes, interesting though they may be. Paul states it in a nutshell in 1 Cor. 1.30 "*It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God, that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*" God is the author, initiator and source of our salvation and will see us through until final deliverance. Paul in Romans 8.1 (REV) defines that so well in the words "*there is now no condemnation*

for those who are united with Christ Jesus". Being in Christ means so much, but what does it mean to us in practical terms? Paul uses several expressions such as 'in the Lord' and 'Christ in you'. While we live in the old nature (flesh AV) our hands and feet obey sin. When we live in the spirit, Christ becomes our environment. It is the closest possible relationship and Jesus used the wonderful pictures from the Old Testament to describe what 'abiding in Him means'.

Lord, Thou has made Thyself to me,
A living bright reality,
More present to faith's vision keen
Than any earthly object seen,
More dear, more intimately nigh,
Than e'en the closest earthly tie.

When did Jesus begin to teach His disciples about this relationship? Quite early in His ministry He said to His disciples "*He who receives you receives me*" (Matt. 10.40). Much later He spoke in a parable of those who fed Him when He was hungry, those who gave Him a drink when He was thirsty, those who took Him in as a stranger, those who gave Him clothing, those who cared for Him when He was sick, those who visited Him when He was in prison for as much as these things are done for the least of His brethren, they done for Him (Matt. 25.35-45). On the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus began to understand the closeness of the disciple to his Lord. "*Why do you persecute me?*" The persecution, the suffering and destruction of Christ's people was suffering shared with Christ. He knew their pain. Ananias who went to Saul and put his hand on him and said 'Brother Saul' could never have done so unless he knew His Lord very well indeed. He knows our pain too and shares it. The analogy of Christ's unity with His church expressed in the human body so readily fits Paul's own experience. If one member suffers, all suffer, and if the body suffers, so does the head. Members of the body not only need each other but operate only by complimenting each other. Just before He died Jesus taught about abiding in Him. The lessons of abiding or remaining in Christ in the picture of the Vine, was specially vivid to John and in his first letter (2.6) he presses home the point that those who wish to abide or remain in Christ must also live as He did. Again the vital issue is not **what** you know but **whom** you know (2 Tim. 1.12). There is nothing dramatic or clever here. As our Lord pointed out, those, who claim to be His people because of what they do, are in for a surprise. Sadly, He does

not know them (Matt. 7.23; 25.12). We get to know someone by walking and talking with them, day by day. That is what the Lord wants with each of His own brothers and sisters. Study and service only produce fruit if they are applied in the life.

It is a useful means of measuring our behaviour to ask, in a given situation, "What would Jesus do?" But the question needs to be pressed a little further by asking "What would Jesus have us do now?" or even further still by asking "Can Jesus do this through me now?" Yet it is important to realise that this relationship is very different from the mystical experience of occult philosophy. In Christ, a believer's identity is assured. This is not 'absorption into the deity' of an eastern religion and great care is needed in matters that are sometimes called 'religious experiences'. Nevertheless, being in Christ is a very real experience and He does live in us. Sharing with Him, as already discussed means walking the valley of shadows with Him as well enjoying the hill top pasture. In Galatians 2.20 Paul writes of being crucified with Christ. In some ways he reaches the most profound yet most simple expression of what being in Christ means in his personal letter to the Philippians, chapter 3 where he writes that all that is of value to him by human standards is now no more than rubbish. He wants to 'gain' Christ and be found in Him. He knows that there are yet greater heights and depths to be discovered so he must press on with the heavenly call ('high calling' A V) because he wants to spend eternity with someone he has found so precious. Some have spoken and written of this 'calling' as if it were like joining a club requiring special skills or ideas before given admission. This 'prize' is not to be obtained by learning some great teaching nor by doing some dramatic work for the Kingdom of Heaven. This is within the grasp of all who genuinely want Christ in the way Paul wanted Him. While some sit with their learned tomes and treatises and others are doing mighty works in His

name, the real business of being a Christian is much like being a good wife. A husband who really adores his spouse will be conscious of the quality of her intellect or the brilliance of her craft skills. But that's not what he fell in love with – it is the compatible companionship that he will treasure most. So with Christ. He is glad when we use our skills for Him but it's walking and talking with Him every day that really makes us one with Him. Paul so wanted to know the Lord and we can emulate Paul but it will not be achieved by being absorbed in this world's ambitions. From now on it will be, not I but Christ that is honoured, loved exalted ... and we shall sing 'O to be saved from myself dear Lord, O to be lost in Thee. O that it may be no more I, but Christ that lives in me.' When our affections are centred above rather than below (Col. 3.1-4) we discover the hidden life in Him. Like marriage it's not a secret society for the hidden few but a shared secret with a widening family. Then at last we shall find that we really belong to Christ and Christ to God. (1 Cor. 3.23 NIV).

Ultimately, the vast enterprise is that of all things being reconciled to Him, in Earth and Heaven and on throughout the universe until all is to be found 'in Christ' and that is the goal of 1 Cor. 15.22, 28. All that was lost in Adam will be regained, yet much more, for our loving Father has not allowed all this suffering for nothing – characters will be so much richer for what now seems to so many, to be a terrible tragedy. Meanwhile the sentiments of an old hymn continue to be our experience, or they should be:

I have a friend so precious, So very dear to me
He loves me with such tender love; He loves so faithfully.

I could not live apart from Him, I love to feel
Him nigh;

And so we dwell together, my Lord and I.

DN

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE, the Christian Retirement Home at Milborne Port near Sherborne and Yeovil was the scene of a very happy day for nearly 40 residents and friends to mark twenty-one years of development. There were two speakers, Joe Knapp from U.S.A. and Peter Couling from Northamptonshire. There were sessions of praise, testimony and thanksgiving. There was ample time for informal fellowship, and sunshine encouraged some to take tea on the lawn. Meals were prepared and served by Corrinne Vaughan, our resident

housekeeper and her daughter (gaining work experience) and everyone was appreciative of their quite wonderful effort. Gainsborough Journal has been revived and copies are available on request. It is hoped to issue this journal three times a year.

Meanwhile there are several vacancies available for permanent residents and there are facilities for short stay visitors also. The home is in a lovely and interesting environment. Enquiries should be made through the Housekeeper at 01963 250684.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

5. King at Hebron

Three days had elapsed since the battle of Gilboa, which had ended the reign and life of Saul. The Philistines now occupied the northern half of Israel and the people had no king and no military deliverer. David, newly returned from Ziklag from one of his forays into Amalekite territory, was still in ignorance of the turn of events. All that he knew was that his friend Achish, the Philistine chieftain of Gath, had gone with his men to join the Philistine forces at war with Saul, and had not yet returned. The relationship between the tribes of Judah and Simeon in the south where David was located, and the northern tribes acknowledging Saul, was so tenuous that those in the south neither knew nor cared what happened in the north. The Philistines were not interested in the barren mountains of the south; their goal was the rich pasture territory of the north and so Judah was relatively unaffected by the war.

On the third day a stranger appeared in Ziklag, clothes rent and travel-stained, bearing every evidence of exhaustion and distress. He was brought to David and asked about his mission and whence he had come. *"I have escaped from the Israelite camp"* he replied, and instantly David's interest was aroused. *"What happened? Tell me"* was his quick rejoinder. Thus it was that David heard the dread news of the defeat and decimation of the armies of Israel, the flight of the inhabitants and occupation of the land by the invading Philistines and the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. That must have been a severe blow to David. Jonathan, the one he loved as a brother, the one who had been so faithful a friend during all the changing circumstances of his life with Saul; who had so willingly renounced his own claim to the throne in favour of his friend David; Jonathan was dead. Who can doubt that in the anguish of that news, David the resolute and hardened warrior, turned his face away from his fellows that they might not see his grief.

The moment passed. "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead" he demanded of the man before him. The truth of the news must be checked. In return he received a circumstantial account of how the young man had "happened by chance" upon Mount Gilboa and came upon Saul wounded to death, and upon Saul's request,

administered a final stroke to end his life. As evidence of the truth of his story he produced the 'crown' and 'bracelets', more properly a kind of chaplet, worn round the head, and an arm-band denoting Saul's kingship. These he had taken from Saul's body and had brought to David, thinking thus to curry favour with the man whom he knew would now become king of Israel.

He had mistaken his man. David had consistently refused to lift up his own hand against the Lord's anointed, waiting the Lord's own time for removing Saul from the scene. He was certainly not going to endorse what this young man claimed to have done. More, he was going to show his disapproval in the sight of all his followers in the most drastic fashion. Because he had not scrupled to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, he should die. David gave the command and the sentence was executed forthwith.

The genuine, original Book of Jasher mentioned in v.18 no longer exists. David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan, recorded in 2 Sam. 1, is a masterpiece of heroic poetry. How much of it was a genuine expression of David's own feelings and how much he intended to win over Saul's erstwhile adherents, is rather difficult to say. Some of the sentiments expressed, if genuinely felt, were more than kind to Saul. To say that (v.23) "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided", by no means reflects the animosity Saul displayed towards his eldest son. It is also very doubtful if Saul really did treat his people so generously as v.24 would imply. Perhaps the fairest appraisal of this eulogy is that David, in the generosity of his heart closed his eyes to the many faults of Saul and the manner in which he had persecuted David, and extolled his good points. The man was dead now, and in the hands of the Lord and David was not going to bear him any grudge.

Now it was time for action and there could be no further fraternising with Philistines at Ziklag. The king of Israel was dead and many would be waiting and expecting David to make a move to take the crown. Various references in the books of Samuel and Chronicles suggest that many in the northern tribes were secretly in sympathy with David though appearing to remain loyal to Saul. Some had joined

David's band during his time in the wilderness. Now was the time to move. But that was not to go unchallenged. Saul was survived by his son Ish-bosheth or Ish-bael meaning man of Baal showing Saul's apostasy. Saul's cousin Abner, an astute commander of the army, took Ish-bosheth to Mahanaim, a town on east side of Jordan, where he was out of reach of both David and the Philistines, and proclaimed him king over Israel in succession to his father. Ish-bosheth was a weakling, mentally and physically and Abner was the power behind the throne. The northern tribes accepted him and he began to exercise a shadow of royal power, whilst David in the south actively prepared to win the allegiance of all Israel.

David selected a capital from which to rule. Jerusalem was still held by the Canaanite tribe, the Jebusites. David enquired of the Lord through Abiathar who had been with him in the wilderness and had been High Priest since Saul annihilated the priesthood some seven years before. David was directed to go to Hebron. So there he went with two wives and six hundred warriors to establish himself. To Hebron came all the responsible men of Judah to pledge their loyalty to David as king.

There were now two kings in Israel, David in the south recognised by Judah and Simeon and Ish-bosheth in the east recognised by the other ten tribes. David made the first move by sending messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, notoriously fierce fighters, to praise them for penetrating Philistine territory to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons. They had given honourable burial and David commended them and promised to hold them in high honour because of their loyalty. He then indicated that the men of Judah had proclaimed him king and left it for them to infer that they would now render him allegiance as they had once given to Saul. David wanted such men on his side.

Meanwhile Abner was not idle and he crossed Jordan with a force, mainly from Saul's tribe of Benjamin and met David's fighters under his nephew Joab. It was at Gibeon in 'enemy territory' for Joab. At Abner's suggestion there was a preliminary skirmish between twelve from each side but this gentlemanly arrangement was frustrated by the fact that all twenty-four were killed. The issue was then settled by the more traditional method; *"there was a very sore battle*

that day". Abner's men were beaten and put to flight. The victory was marred by the untimely death of Asahel, Joab's younger brother at the hands of Abner. Political manoeuvring led to David being installed as King over all Israel but he remained at Hebron for seven and a half years. The war with the northern tribes dragged on with David slowly gaining the ascendancy. *"The war between the house of Saul and the house of David was long drawn out, David growing steadily stronger while the house of Saul became weaker"* (2 Sam. 3.1 REB). David found time during the intervals between battles to take four more wives and by the end of this period had become the father of six sons.

The transformation from a guileless shepherd boy to an Eastern autocrat was well under way. Later he was to add ten concubines and a few more wives to his harem. The Lord's prediction to Samuel when Israel first wanted a king proved true in David's life as well as Saul's and most of the kings who followed later.

A disruption arose in the house of Saul. Abner and Ish-bosheth quarrelled about one of Saul's concubines. Abner was indignant and declared his intention of transferring allegiance to David. As an astute politician he must have realised that the cause of Saul was doomed and he welcomed the opportunity to change to the winning side while there was yet time. He went south with the offer to transfer the northern kingdom to David's sovereignty, so that he would rule from "Dan to Beer-sheba". He took the precaution of consulting the elders of the northern tribes, reminding them that they had expressed the wish for David to become king and that God had promised to save Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies by his hand. (2 Sam. 3.17-18). The Philistines still occupied the northern tribes and Abner's arguments would carry considerable weight. Added to this Abner had the backing of Saul's own tribe, Benjamin, and the package he took to David would be hard to resist. David would be glad to have such a man on his own side, checking the pressure of his nephews, Joab and Abishai. So David arranged a conference and a feast with Abner at Hebron, at a convenient time when Joab was away with the fighting forces, at which a mutually satisfactory agreement was signed, sealed and settled. David was learning the arts of politics. As proof of good faith, Abner was to bring to Hebron David's wife

Michal, Saul's daughter, who he was compelled to leave behind six years earlier. What Michal had to say when she found that her husband had acquired six other wives and six sons the writer of 2 Samuel did not think necessary to record.

David's complacency did not last. Joab returned to Hebron and bitterly reproached David for accepting Abner as an ally. *"You know Abner, the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, and to know all that you do"* (3.25). He knew that the advent of Abner posed a threat to his own position as David's chief man and he was not going to tolerate that. Moreover, he had a personal grudge against Abner for killing his brother Asahel and sought revenge. He left David, probably in a towering rage and sent messengers after Abner to recall him to Hebron. Joab met Abner, took him aside for quiet conversation and assassinated him on the spot.

The act was a serious breach of hospitality. While at Hebron, Abner was accorded the rigid code of the East under David's protection. In ordinary circumstances the assassin would have been immediately put to death but Joab was David's own nephew. He could do nothing about it. Any advantage David obtained from Abner was now lost. Yet there was no one in the north who counted for anything and David would expect to suppress any further resistance.

He contented himself with making it plain that he was nothing to do with Abner's death and that he condemned the act. The deceased politician was given a state funeral with King David as chief mourner and in a speech at the time said "there is a great prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel". There could be more than a suspicion that David was trying to obtain the good graces of Abner's people so soon to be his own subjects.

The news of Abner's death created consternation in Mahanaim. Both king and people knew that their only champion was gone and they were now entirely at the mercy of David. Ishbosheth had virtually given up the contest (4.1) and waited for the outcome. Inevitably there were two more commanders who concluded it was time to change sides. Baanah and Rechab, men of the tribe of Benjamin, used their privilege of access to go to the house of Ish-bosheth during his mid-day siesta and callously assassinated him, cutting off his head, escaping unseen, and making their way to Hebron and to David. They came gloating into his presence.

"Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The Lord has avenged your majesty today on Saul and on his family" (4.8 REB).

David was outraged. He rose from his seat in anger. *"As the Lord lives, who has delivered me from all my troubles ... wicked men have killed an innocent man on his bed in his own house! Am I not to take vengeance on you now for the blood you have shed, and rid the earth of you?"* So Banaah and Rechab suffered death for their crime, and their bodies were hung up and publicly displayed in Hebron.

It is easy to dismiss these successive acts of David as mere diplomacy aimed at securing the favour of the men of Israel who formerly supported Saul but it is much more likely that there was genuine magnanimity here on the king's part. He had no real need to court the favour of Israel; he was superior in military force and he knew it, and they knew it. His undisputed acceptance as king by all Israel was now only a matter of time. His past history of sparing Saul's life when he could quite easily have slain him and thus secure the kingship, preferring to wait until the Lord should give it to him, is on a par with his generosity to the survivors of Saul's house and his supporters. David bore no resentment towards his fallen foes and he had no fear of any future danger from them, and that was because he possessed a fixed faith that because God had promised he should have the kingdom there was no power on earth that could frustrate that design. He was prepared to wait.

He had waited from about sixteen years old when anointed by Samuel as the Lord's choice. He was nineteen when he slew Goliath and first attracted the notice of Saul. He was now thirty-seven and had reigned as king over two tribes for some seven years. The true fulfilment of the promise, that he should reign over all Israel on the throne of the Lord, was about to be realised. With the deaths of Abner and Ish-bosheth there were no other claimants to the throne and no other leader able to challenge the Philistines, who still held the greater part of the country in thrall. By common consent, all the tribes sent their representatives to Hebron to invite David to be their king, and all the elders made a solemn covenant *"before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel"*.

(To be continued) AOH

REDEEMING THE TIME

Although time is of inestimable value, we usually fail to appreciate this fact until it is too late for us to profit by it. Sometimes we try to while away the hours, because they drag wearily along; yet the day will come when we would give anything to recall these wasted seasons and to have the opportunity to fill up the space that we now fail to use to advantage. We should endeavour to redeem the time that is at present within our grasp, before it is gone beyond our reach. Our days are too few to allow us to trifle with them without injurious consequence. Let us be wise today, and not defer until tomorrow, for this fatal precedent will persistently urge till it robs us of every opportunity.

How true are the poet's words, "All men think all men mortal but themselves." It is strange that the passing of so many generations has failed to banish from the minds of men the delusion that life's brief show is something substantial and eternal. They see that the wise and foolish alike die and leave their wealth to others, yet as the Psalmist says, "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever. This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings." Let us not be deceived by this illusion, for the evidence is everywhere around us that each generation passes quickly away, and the memory of it vanishes.

"Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away

They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day."

Every day of our life belongs to God, and we should consecrate each one freely and entirely to His love and service. This does not mean that we should cram every moment with some form of outward activity, however, for there are other things that are nearer to the heart of God: patience, submission, and devotion are in themselves offerings more pleasing to Him. We can turn time to really great profit by bearing contradiction, disappointment, and irritation in the spirit of meekness and long suffering. Though we have meant well and others have misjudged us, we can gain a mighty victory by being magnanimous. When we have stood aside and let the pushful gain the day, we have not been defeated, for the greater will be our future reward. Time which we are trying to use profitably is not lost, when we suffer with gentleness and forbearance an unwelcome and

inevitable intrusion. Indeed these are among the most effective ways of turning time to good account, of improving our every opportunity, and of gaining the greatest advantage from our experiences.

We can at all times show our love and obedience to God by our attitude towards others under trying circumstances, thus offering to Him a much more acceptable sacrifice than attempting to accomplish some great thing. This also will aid our growth in grace far more than any outward activity could do. By regulating our habits, avoiding the pursuit of worldly treasures, amusements, and friendships, we shall not allow time to be exacted from us that should be employed for God. Otherwise we create for ourselves many difficult situations that must necessarily arise as a result of placing others in a position to severely test our loyalty to the things of God.

Do we realize what a vast amount of thought-time we waste when we are alone? We may be strolling along, allowing our uncontrolled thoughts to be directed by the things we see around us, first into one channel and then another. Finally, we suddenly awake to the fact that we have not turned our thoughts to God once during the past hour, in spite of the wonderful opportunity that has been afforded us. We probably could not recall where our thoughts have been, but if we could, we would have to admit that they were not of any value.

There are endless occasions when we just let our thoughts wander aimlessly, instead of directing them into profitable channels. We may be doing something that requires no concentration of mind, or there are intervals during the day when we are entirely free to think as we will. We may lie awake at night: we may be waiting for somebody or something; we may be travelling somewhere; and there is nothing else we can do but think. How much of this valuable time do we redeem? We look back at the end of every day with shame, as we realize the opportunities for devotional worship that we have allowed to slip past us unheeded in our leisure periods.

Even in our conversation and contact with others, there are odd moments in which we can lift our hearts to God, that we may speak and act aright. These are the moments that to him are most precious, and on our part are most effectively

redeemed. For to know God and to have 'Christ formed in us, is the great objective of our calling. We have but a short time to look forward in hope, for the troubled dreams at night will soon be gone, and the shadows melt away before that glorious Millennial dawn when Jesus comes to claim His own. Then with unveiled vision we shall look back

along the rough and painful path we have trodden and from the radiant heights where we have found our rest at last, we shall praise the love of God in Christ, which inspired our hearts to know and love the will of the Lord and to redeem the time while the days were evil.

(Forest Gate Church Bible Monthly)

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
Personal
Bible Study*

10. Chapter 7

There are many lovely stories in the Gospel but those in this chapter reveal Jesus, the Son of God in a very special light. Are they as challenging to us as they were to the religious folk of the first century? These could be called 'Miracles of the Kingdom' because they give so much insight into the Kingdom of Heaven and God's universal compassion.

Vv 1-17 Healing a slave and raising a son.

A centurion at Capernaum showed extraordinary interest and generosity towards the Jews and their religion. Centurions were brave, reliable, steady men of integrity and this is revealed by those we meet in the New Testament. There appears to be an interesting difference between Matthew's and Luke's record – did he go to Jesus or did he send someone – or was it a bit of both? Either way he is an example of humility. To address Jesus as 'Lord' is interesting. He expressed astonishment at this man's faith (and the lack of it at Nazareth). This man had the power of Rome at his command and recognised that Jesus had unique authority and access to the power of the universe. This man had extraordinary faith (in Jesus) and extraordinary compassion for the slave (Gr. *pais* boy). Jesus and His followers met a funeral procession wending its way to the city gate, with at least one musical instrument and one professional mourner. A widow who is now childless and unable to support herself in old age (no social security). A little village of *Nein* still exists not far from Shunem where Elisha raised a 'son' back to life. 'Sat up' is a medical expression as Acts 8.40. It appears that no faith was required. Jesus was moved to the 'depths of his being' and the people were moved to use an OT expression – '*God has visited His people*'. Observe Jesus' attitude; earlier He spoke to a pagan gentile who Jews regarded as

unclean – unfit to speak to or help. Next He touched the bier carrying the dead man, another action that made Him unholy by Jewish rules.

Vv 18-35 John the Baptist's question.

Whatever made John ask that question? He had witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism and the voice from Heaven. It was a question that trusted a fair answer otherwise he might just as well have not bothered to ask. Was it to help his own disciples discover what the Messiah was really like? Had the long imprisonment, caged like a bird in Machaerus castle, affected his judgment? Was he still waiting for the wrathful Judge or 'the Lamb of God'? Is John asking the question; 'who are you?' Jesus gives a lesson on answering questions. He advises us to 'observe the facts' when looking for 'signs of the times' and not to squeeze the facts into our selection of signs. OT prophecies give clues as to what Messiah would be like (eg Isa. 35.5-6; 61.1). Jesus warns not to reject Messiah because He doesn't fit a preconceived mould. He then goes on to demonstrate John's remarkable character. How did Jesus describe John's role in God's purpose and quality of his character? Can we contrast John with leaders in the 1st and 21st century. What might be Jesus' definition of 'great'? Why is the greatest born among women shut out of the kingdom of Heaven? What might John's place be in God's Kingdom? Other translators have followed Phillips in v 32 "*We played at weddings for you but you wouldn't dance, and we played at funerals for you and you wouldn't cry.*" Do we find Jesus' broad view point of social options difficult to accept? Jewish religious leaders "looked for someone who would tell them they were right; they tried to prove wrong anyone that judged them". Is our wisdom judged by its children?

Vv 36-50 Table talk

Jesus broke down the barriers of His time; would He have done so today; racial, national, gender, age, social and political. Should this not stimulate our compassion and intercession for the world's suffering? Does the story of a meal with Simon the Pharisee seem extraordinary to us? Jesus' friends might have been as surprised as Simon was. What were his motives in inviting the 'prophet of Nazareth'? Who is the intruder, how did she get in? Crying in public, immodest unbound hair; what was this woman of the streets thinking about breaking in on a private meal among 'respectable people'? They would be reclining with heads towards the table. Women commonly wore perfume in a little flask around the neck. Jesus understood her heart and his evaluation of her action is most touching. He also understood Simon and demonstrated the prophet's gifts by speaking

aloud of Simon's silent conversation with himself. Do you feel sorry for him, suddenly finding his well meant private hospitality has become a public dispute in his own house? Worse, one of his guests gave him a lesson in how he should receive and entertain people. Jesus taught so much in this incident of true values of living and the danger of superficial thought. He told a fascinating parable but how can a person's love be measured by whether they are forgiven much or little? Do others' good deeds judge me? To be unconscious of our own need has been described as the greatest sin. Her action was the result of forgiveness not an effort to buy it. Prayer: 'Open my eyes that I may look and understand others as Jesus did and so enlarge my heart'

THE GLORY OF GOD **REVEALED**

Great God who hast forever been
Whom thru thy Word we know
As giver of each perfect gift
To creatures here below

In wonders of thy Universe
Thy power is not concealed
For day to day and night to night
Thy glory is revealed

To prophets and those Saints of old
Thy might and power were shown
They owed in awe before thy face
In reverence sought thy throne.

Thou art revealed in thy great plan
Lost Eden to restore
When all mankind shall live again
In peace forever more.

For by thy love thou did'st send forth
Thine only Son to die.
That he might pay the debt of sin
That o'er the world doth lie.

When to the earth that Kingdom comes,
Thy glory shall be shown
In love revealed to all the world
Thy name shall then be known

THE PATHS **TO GREATNESS**

If we true greatness would attain
We'll find no easy way,
And if an easy way there seem
It will not lead us there

The greatness God has called us to
Is not that of the world
Its pomp and pride or vanity
Nor self-aggrandisement.

Those who'd be great the Master said
Would servant be to all
And who'd the mountain top attain
Must pass the valley first.

So let us seek in humble work
The service of our King
Though servant here we seem to all
Our greatness waits beyond.

Martin C Mitchell
From Poems of the Way

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